The Hinton State Laboratory Institute (HSLI) provides services to the Commonwealth of Massachusetts that are integral to its health and prosperity. The HSLI’s sole purpose is to keep the Commonwealth and her citizens safe from infectious diseases, bioterrorism threats, viral epidemics, foodborne illness, insect-borne diseases, and other biological and chemical toxins. It accomplishes these tasks by maintaining high quality testing facilities, providing critical resources to health centers, and training health professionals to properly treat diseases and prevent avoidable transmission. An increase of $2.84 million to the HSLI is requested.

■ The Line Item

Line item 4516-1000: State Laboratory and Communicable Disease Control Services

■ Storybook Excerpt

HSLI tests populations that would not otherwise have coverage. We provide STD tests for school-based clinics. There are no other outside labs that are able to or can provide such a wide range of tests.

■ Elevator Speech

Our names are Sisana Farley and Dylan Schlesinger and we are two Brandeis students advocating for the Hinton State Laboratory Institute [HSLI], line item 4516-1000. Have you or anyone you know ever been sick and needed an immediate medical test? This is one of the many jobs that HSLI does. HSLI has a total of 17 labs, and is the first response to chemical and bioterrorism threats, statewide epidemics such as tuberculosis, and testing for all Massachusetts residents. Everyone is Massachusetts is affected by the testing and daily duties performed by this lab. For example, last year, HSLI was one of the first responders to the Boston Marathon Bombings. Despite the high number of tests...
performed, and the wide range of HSLI’s services, the lab is in critical physical condition and in dire need of repair. The poor conditions of the lab affect the speed of test results, due to maintenance problems with older equipment and poor electrical connections.

However, this can all be improved with additional funds. The recommended budget increase of $3.5 million will go towards Quality Assurance, specialized laboratory equipment that accelerates results, qualifies for federal funding, specialized services for contagious tuberculosis cases, in addition to other vital projects and preventions. Please support the Hinton State Laboratory Institute. Disease doesn’t discriminate.

### Letter to the Legislator

We are writing to express support towards line item 4516-1000, which will provide an increase in funding for the Hinton State Laboratory Institute (HSLI). HSLI is responsible for protecting residents of Massachusetts from threats such as bio-terrorism, lead poisoning, insect-borne disease, epidemics, rabies, HIV, hepatitis, and Sexually Transmitted Infections.

We are writing for your support for increased funding to the budget because HSLI directly affects the citizens in your district. The equipment has decayed over time and renovations to the facility are crucial. HSLI provides testing to all residents of Massachusetts, works first response to any chemical threat, and constantly works to discover new vaccines to severe diseases.

Lab Director Dr. DeMaria’s personal experience with HSLI strengthens the importance of all that Hinton does: HSLI tests populations that would not otherwise have coverage. Immigrants are often left out of health care reform, and 80% of Tuberculosis cases are foreign. We provide SDT tests for school based clinics. There are no other outside labs that are able or can provide such a wide range of tests.

The facility currently has one working elevator, dysfunctional air conditioning, inoperative security systems, and office spaces crammed with about twenty epidemiologists [when the space was meant for five]. HSLI does so much for the state of Massachusetts yet works in such conditions... we need to change this.

Your support to line item 4516-1000 will make a difference. Please respond to the address below. Thank you for your consideration. Action needs to be taken to secure HSLIs funding, and ultimately lives.

### House Ways and Means Script

The failure to provide a well-equipped and secure public health lab leaves Massachusetts’s residents at risk for public health epidemics, disease, and biohazards. The Hinton State Laboratory Institute, which is responsible for monitoring and testing for these concerns, is in desperate need for additional funding to continue its function. Although, the budget for HSLI has increased since FY 2014, it is not enough. We request additional funding for line item 4516-1000 to address Hinton’s serious technical and facility deficiencies.

HSLI provides a variety of services to the residents of Massachusetts. In brief, the Hinton State Laboratory Institute houses 17 laboratories. These laboratories test for communicable diseases, hazardous materials, and statewide epidemics. The Hinton State Laboratory Institute protects against known diseases and threats, such as: HIV, TB, Measles, Lyme Disease, Toxins, newborn diseases, AIDS, rabies, and many other issues. The lack of funding increases the probability of ineffective prevention, putting all of Massachusetts in danger.

The Hinton State Laboratory Institute is in extremely poor condition. Electrical problems affect the functionality of the lab. For example, HSLI uses Laboratory Information Management System (LIMS), which frequently requires maintenance. This laboratory management software program that tests samples, inventory and stores data, is dependent on electricity. If a patient has a time sensitive or unknown pathogen or disease, and electricity in the lab fails to work, the patient’s odds for survival decrease. However, when LIMS crashes due to electrical failure, lives are put at risk. The LIMS system is one of the many areas of the Hinton State Laboratory Institute that needs to be updated. If approved, additional funds requested would update the LIMS system to a more effective version, which will ultimately save lives and time.

Flawed conditions of the lab extend to laboratory equipment. With updated technology, outcomes will be predicted at a faster rate. Specialized equipment would allow Hinton to rely less on the state budget and qualify for federal aid. States around Massachusetts have received federal funding for “reference labs” which test ‘uncommon materials’, such as biohazards, chemicals, infectious diseases. The current physical layout makes it difficult to consider Hinton’s potential as federal reference lab. However, if the requested funds were approved HSLI would be a “top candidate”. Therefore, we recommend funds for a feasibility survey to initiate steps toward a federal reference lab.
The Hinton State Laboratory protects Massachusetts daily, yet to safeguard HSLI’s research and results, we request funds for quality assurance jobs and tests. Additional quality assurance positions were in fact, recommended by recent inspectors. This recommendation provides the residents of Massachusetts with an increased level of protection.

HSLI works closely with the testing, treatment and prevention of tuberculosis. In 2013, there were seven cases of multi drug resistant tuberculosis; this is a dramatic increase from no recorded cases in 2012. In Wisconsin, one untreated case of tuberculosis resulted in $4.7 million in damages and clean up. It is understood that the Massachusetts budget is tight, however, the additional $3.49 million requested will protect all of Massachusetts, and is lower than the result of one untreated case. By supporting the recommended increase, it saves the state from paying more in the future.

Unfortunately, one of the concerns HSLI faces is the Annie Dookhan scandal. Let it be known, the drug lab in question remains separate from the Hinton State Laboratory Institute. The scandal takes away from the crucial work HSLI does. Last spring, HSLI was a first responder to the Boston Marathon Bombings. The Hinton State Lab is “one of only ten Level 1 Chemical Threat labs in the nation” This means HSLI can test an “expanded number of chemicals, including mustard agents, nerve agents, and other toxic industrial chemicals”. This lab is crucial to keeping Massachusetts safe against all threats, foreign and domestic.

HSLI is aware that the budget increase of $3,490,000 is a large financial contribution. However, without this increase, the Hinton State Laboratory Institute will fail to provide crucial and much needed services. The financial request is a necessary investment for a safer Massachusetts.

The financial contribution now is significantly lower than the cost of a statewide epidemic. The desired funds will go towards: increasing the productivity of HSLI, updated laboratory equipment, proper security systems, hired public health experts, and specialized services for contagious tuberculosis cases. Please support Hinton State Laboratory Institute, to save lives and secure its reputation as a national forefront testing facility.

Your public support of line item 4516-1000 would be greatly appreciated and would reiterate the importance of HSLI. Additional funding maintains the security and integrity of the lab. The system in place does not have the proper funding. The solution is to increase funds for equipment, quality assurance, outreach, maintenance, and training. Disease does not discriminate; proper funding keeps our community, friends, and family healthy, support line item 4516-1000.

Op-Ed

I was on a bus to visit relatives when an older woman one seat up was coughing up blood into her handkerchief. After the formerly dainty white cloth hued red, she wiped her mouth, touched the seat, and everything else in sight.

I chose to get off the bus at the next stop. Tuberculosis is an airborne and global disease that is rapidly becoming drug resistant. In Massachusetts alone there have been seven multi-drug resistant cases in the past year. In the previous year, 2012, there were no reported cases. This shows the rapid increase of tuberculosis cases, which will inevitably be serious problem for Massachusetts.

Everyone thinks tuberculosis no longer exists. However, it is still present in everyday life. Travel gives people a greater exposure to TB. Boston prides itself on being a multicultural city, but with that comes contact with more diseases and threats. At Brandeis alone, there have been three cases of TB in the past three years.

Although I don’t know for sure, it is highly possible the elderly woman had tuberculosis. About one third of the world has TB, and despite not being common in America there is a 10% chance for you to acquire it. The Hinton State Laboratory Institute (HSLI) is one of Massachusetts’s first means of protection against TB. HSLI provides tests, treatments, and outreach to tuberculosis patients. However, it is not enough. Massachusetts currently does not have the tools and resources it needs to successfully prepare and combat a TB outbreak. For this reason I encourage Chairman Sanchez’s amendment for an additional $2.84 million for line item 4516-1000, which supports an increase in TB funding, awareness, and preparedness. Line item 4516-1000 will provide the Hinton State Laboratory Institute to with the resources and staff needed to effectively prevent tuberculosis and concerns such as HIV/AIDS, lead poisoning, mosquito borne disease, and protection from chemical and bioterrorism.

In Wisconsin, the aftermath of one Tuberculosis case was $4.7 million. That’s more than the cost to safeguard all of Massachusetts against TB. If we are just waiting for an outbreak to admit the problem then this appears to be the perfect plan of attack. However, if those seven cases of TB were not found in time the cost would be $32.9 million…. Fiscally speaking, that is an irresponsible gamble to make.

If you had TB wouldn’t you want specialized tuberculosis clinics for active and contagious TB cases, testing to ensure that outbreaks do not become epidemics, and epidemic outreach to high risk areas, and training to identify TB? With $3.5 million, HSLI will ensure that these changes take place and protect Massachusetts.

Let’s face it. Tuberculosis is scary. It can spread through breathing and at least 300,000 people in
Massachusetts alone have already contracted it and don’t even know. But there is hope through the HSLI’s budget increase. The additional 3.5 million dollars will ensure that Massachusetts is safe against TB. This relatively small increase is far less than the cost that will inevitably occur if there is a TB outbreak.

My abhorrence for blood and my “germaphobe” nature aside, the older woman is facing serious health concerns. What you can do is contact your local legislature, or senators to advocate for the Hinton State Laboratory Institute. There is no way to politely and honestly tell to someone who is coughing up blood, “Oh you’re probably fine.” They’re not. There needs to be an increase in teaching and awareness for tuberculosis because there is need to change. Right now, Massachusetts is riding the bus with TB. They are sitting next to her and even sharing her handkerchief. Before long, Massachusetts will be sick and we will not have the proper precautions in place. It is only a matter of time.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Dylan

I started learning the moment I began working on this line item. Having little education in health or the sciences (i.e. film and English major, legal studies and theater minor), I had no idea what the Hinton State Laboratory Institute was or why I should even be advocating for the program. Soon enough, Sisana and I uncovered all that Hinton has to offer, such as the constant testing and prevention of statewide diseases. Not to mention, a heavy focus on tuberculosis, which was seen on our campus last year when a student contracted the disease. In addition, Hinton’s first response team responded to the Boston Bombing to ensure the bomb wasn’t a dirty bomb (i.e. tested for poisonous gases or harmful toxins).

Learning all of this information has inspired Sisana and me to inform as many people as possible about Hinton. We have worked very hard on this line item. I feel very satisfied with the work we’ve done as well as all of the valuable information I have gathered. This course has given me the tools needed if I ever wanted to advocate another issue as well as the knowledge of how to pass a bill and the steps needed to make that happen. I am extremely satisfied with the knowledge and experience gained from this course and advocating for line item 4516-1000.

Sisana

Through my visits with representatives, legislatures and legislative aides, I have improved my public speaking and learned about the line item and bill process at the Massachusetts State House. In addition, I realized that while it is important to have a prepared speech, some of the most successful visits occurred when there was extra research done to the specific district we were going to. For example, in districts with large immigrant populations it is more effective to hone in on the contagious nature of tuberculosis with foreign communities, while communities such as Newton, were more interested in how insect borne diseases.

Awareness was the most important advocacy tool. Many legislators had a misconception of the Hinton State Laboratory and its association with the crime lab tainted by Annie Dookhan. Furthermore, they were not aware of the rising number of Multi Drug Resistant Tuberculosis cases. As the semester progressed, I learned the key to effective advocacy was to fill in the gaps of already existing knowledge.

Update

As of September 12, 2014, a budget of $14,145,385 had been allocated to line item 4516-1000. This falls short of the $16,630,000 requested by the Hinton State Lab.

For more information

Hinton State Lab
http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/departments/dph/programs/state-lab