Advocacy for Policy Change

Brandeis students work to reform Massachusetts law

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Advocacy for Policy Change is supported by generous multi-year commitments from Ethics Center International Advisory Board Member Norbert Weissberg and former Board Member Judith Schneider.

Norbert Weissberg and Judith Schneider at “Present and Defend: Projects from Advocacy for Policy Change,” April 2011.

For more information about the projects in this report, visit www.brandeis.edu/ethics/atbrandeis/advocacy

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Advocacy for Policy Change: Brandeis students work to reform Massachusetts law
Introduction

Melissa Stimell

In the spring semester of the 2009-10 academic year I embarked on an experiment with 13 dedicated Brandeis University undergraduate students and the logistical, financial and intellectual support of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life and the Legal Studies Program at Brandeis University. Together we created “Advocacy for Policy Change” (LGLS 161b).

This course combines an investigation of the ethical dilemmas that arise in the process of lawmaking with hands-on advocacy work. Students are encouraged to think deeply about the complexities of shaping laws for constituents who hold diverse viewpoints about what is right and good for society and how to best progress through the legislative process. Students choose existing laws they feel could be credibly challenged on ethical or moral grounds, and advocate for legislation to redress perceived wrongs.

Now in its fourth year, “Advocacy for Policy Change” continues to be dedicated to the creation of citizen advocates, individuals prepared and motivated to create a just society through legislative advocacy. In 2013 we anointed 22 citizen advocates for such issues as homeless youth, workers' rights, voting reform and the environment.

Working in teams, the students research their chosen issues and design and implement models of legislative advocacy. State legislators and advocacy organizations advise each team to help them understand the lawmaking process, connect with colleagues and set realistic goals. Each student completes a series of assignments related to their project, in formats relevant to advocacy work, such as an “elevator speech,” an op-ed, and a short video. (The full list of assignments is on page 6.) This anthology contains excerpts from these assignments for each project, updates on the bills and budgetary line items, and links to more information on the relevant issues or organizations.

Once again, I must thank several people whose support over the past four years has been invaluable. This course would not exist without the ongoing support of Professor Richard Gaskins, my mentor and the Director of the Legal Studies Program. He and Daniel Terris, Director of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life, took the kernel of a unique idea and made it a reality. Massachusetts State Representative and Brandeis alum Jay Kaufman '68, MA '73, and longtime advocate and Director of the Massachusetts Leadership Academy Judy Meredith helped me create a course worthy of Brandeis University. An expanding list of exceptional teaching assistants from the Heller School for Social Policy and Management made the course a reality: David Duhalde, Andrew Hart, Melissa Ross and Cynthia Tschampl.

This course is part of the Advocacy for Policy Change initiative, designed to encourage citizens to bring moral and ethical insights to the legislative process. This initiative is supported by generous multi-year commitments.
from International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life International Advisory Board member Norbert Weissberg and his wife, former Board member Judith Schneider, to whom the students and I are very grateful. For more about this initiative, see brandeis.edu/ethics/atbrandeis/advocacy.

Brandeis University students are committed to combining academic rigor with hands-on work in pursuit of social justice. Each year a new cohort of students inspires us with their dedication. They impact policy while developing skills that will serve them far beyond one semester. As we prepare for the fifth year of “Advocacy for Policy Change” we look forward to its continued growth, and to supporting the development of another cohort of citizen advocates.

Melissa Stimell
Associate Professor of the Practice in Legal Studies
Director of Internships, Legal Studies Program
Internship Coordinator, Social Justice and Social Policy Program
A Message from Massachusetts State Representative Jay Kaufman ’68, MA ’73

The wonderfully engaged, bright, and energetic students in the “Advocacy for Policy Change” course bring new ideas and new energy to public policymaking.

Grounded in a realistic look at what it takes to advocate for and make significant change in the public arena, they dig into difficult “real world” problems and meaningfully interact with the state’s change agents and would-be (or should-be) change agents.

I have no doubt that their probing questions, insights and ideas have made me a better legislator, and help make for better policy in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

As a Brandeis University alum, I am particularly gratified to have had the opportunity over the past four years to help establish and nurture this valuable course, which continues the Brandeis tradition of active engagement with the pressing issues of the time.

Representative Kaufman (left) hosting the students of “Advocacy for Policy Change” at the Massachusetts State House, February 5, 2013.
The reports in this volume are excerpted from the material required of each student team in “Advocacy for Policy Change” (Legal Studies 161b) in Spring 2013. The assignments were designed to develop and demonstrate the students' understanding of the issues and the advocacy process.

**Storybook**
One of the most crucial components of the advocacy process is the sharing of personal stories. For this assignment, students were directed to connect with individuals impacted by their issues and collect and recount their stories.

**Research Report**
The legislative research report is an in-depth document containing facts and analysis of the bill or budget item that a legislator or staffer can reference during the legislative process.

**Elevator Speech**
A prepared advocate should be able to give someone a general idea of their issue and a plan of action within about 30 seconds – the time it takes to ride an elevator. Students were instructed to imagine riding an elevator or walking a hallway at the State House with a legislator or aide.

**Letter to the Legislator**
Ten handwritten (or typed) letters to a legislator have more impact on him or her than 100 emails. The main purposes of this letter to the legislator are to convey that constituents are watching his or her actions on an issue, and to recommend a legislative course of action.

**Script for an In-Depth Meeting with House Ways and Means Staff**
All bills pass through the House Ways and Means Committee for an analysis of their impact on the state budget. For this assignment, students were to write up an accessible and personalized speech to be given in a 5-10 minute meeting with the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee.

**Campaign Journal**
The campaign journal was an opportunity for students to reflect upon at least two substantive meetings with coalition organizations or policymakers.

**Op-Ed**
The op-ed section of *The Boston Globe* presents a wide array of opinions from community members. Students wrote their own op-ed pieces, sharing their opinions on their advocacy issues in 750 words or less.

**Advocacy Video**
Using either original footage or existing YouTube films, students created “media mash-ups” to present their issues through video.

**Final Oral Presentation: “Present and Defend”**
Bringing everything together, on April 30th, 2013, students gave brief oral presentations of their legislative advocacy projects and responded to questions from audience members.
Similar to Sierra Leone with the notorious “Blood Diamond” conflict, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has also been cursed with an abundant amount of mineral wealth, estimated to be as much as $24 trillion. Because of a weak government coupled with a lack of economic opportunity, the mineral mines are now controlled by illegal armed rebels. These rebels exploit the natural resources of the Congo. They sell the minerals they steal from the Congolese government to smelting companies all over the world. The companies use these “blood minerals” to create the small necessary parts that make up our favorite electronic devices. So when the electronics companies buy these parts from the companies and combine them in our electronics, they are also endorsing the illegal rebel groups. “An Act Relative to Congo Conflict Minerals” aims to discourage the state – and state agencies – from contracting with companies who either don’t track their supply chains or whose supply chains are tainted by human rights abuses. In this manner, the government can ensure that the economic interests of the state are not directly funding the armed militia groups responsible for the murder and sexual abuse of over 5,400,000 civilians.

The Bill
H2898: An Act relative to Congo conflict minerals.

Excerpt from Storybook
Martin migrated from the DRC 11 years ago. The violence and atrocities of the war drove him away from his home. He tells us that some of these people in the armies used to be civilians who joined forces to protect the people in the villages, to protect their daughters and their wives. Now they’re the ones raping the women. And for what? Control of the mines. That’s exactly what’s going on in that part of the country, the soldiers break in the people’s homes, and the first thing they do is loot and rape the women: ‘They don’t just take money, they come in your house and take...everything.’ The women are raped, the children are soldiers in the militia, the men.
once they enter the mines, they work to their death. If you look around, you will see people on their phones and their laptops and you will see there is a connection between us in America and the situation in the DRC. ‘We have a population that is completely defenseless and they need help...from the outside.’ So it’s up to real people to make an effort and end this.

■ Elevator Speech
My name is Gina and this is my colleague Gabrielle. We are working with the coalition group Congo Action Now! and we are advocating for Bill H.2898: An Act relative to Congo conflict minerals. We are concerned that the local electronics companies in Massachusetts are funding illegal rebel groups who enslave and terrorize civilians in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo. That means that the state is indirectly endorsing human rights abuses. That is not something we should have in Massachusetts, a state that has been a longstanding defender of human rights. It was the third state to abolish slavery and the sixth jurisdiction in the world to legalize same-sex marriage, and those are only a couple of many achievements. We can’t have this long history of honoring human rights challenged by our very own electronics industry.

How are electronics companies funding these human rights violations? All our electronics contain certain minerals and the Democratic Republic of Congo has plenty of them. Because of a weak government coupled with a lack of economic opportunity, the mines containing the minerals are now controlled by illegal armed rebels who enslave Congolese citizens who have nowhere else to turn to making a living. These rebels exploit the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo as well as its people. They sell the minerals they steal to smelting companies all over the world. The companies use these “blood minerals” to create the small necessary parts that make up our favorite electronic devices.

We are in support of Bill H.2898: An Act relative to Congo conflict minerals which would forbid the Commonwealth from contracting with companies whose supply chains are tainted by these blood minerals. We are asking you and your committee members to give a favorable report to H. 2898. That way you can help make sure that we are not profiting from the mass murder and sexual abuse of millions and maintain the state’s role as a defender of human rights.

■ Op-Ed
Technology is a big part of our lives. Not a day goes by when we don’t check our smart phones for the latest updates, send a quick email, or have a chat with a friend. Through them we buy things, we plan events, we make friends – we fuel war. Something as harmless as your smart phone, your laptop, or your mp3 player can fuel war. But the problem is that most of the world is blind to this truth because the problem is all the way in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo, half a world away in central Africa.

All our electronics contain certain minerals and the Democratic Republic of Congo has plenty of them. Because of a weak government coupled with a lack of economic opportunity, the mines containing the minerals are now controlled by illegal armed rebels who enslave Congolese citizens who have nowhere else to turn to making a living. These rebels exploit the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo as well as its people. They sell the minerals they steal to smelting companies all over the world. The companies use these “blood minerals” to create the small necessary parts that make up our favorite electronic devices.

That’s where you come in as the consumer. You visit Apple or Best Buy or Amazon and you browse through the products. What you see is a smart phone, but what you don’t see is that it contains coltan that comes from the blood of the young boy who was killed when he tried to run away from the illegal rebels. You see a laptop, but not the suffering civilians it took to harvest the minerals it contains. You see an mp3 player, but not the copper stained with the tears of the woman who was sexually abused in front of her husband.

What is happening in the Democratic Republic of Congo is the deadliest conflict since World War II. The number of human rights violations is shocking. The rebels have sexually abused over 400,000 women, including girls as young as 10 years old. In the past 10 years, the number of deaths has reached the 6 million mark. We are not talking about a conflict buried in history, but a preventable genocide over minerals that is ongoing as you read this story...on your smart phone or laptop.

Also ongoing today is one of the development of various efforts to solve this problem. For example, there is a bill in Massachusetts – H.2898: An Act relative to Congo conflict minerals – that would forbid the Commonwealth from contracting with companies whose supply chains are tainted by these blood minerals. These efforts are ongoing elsewhere as well. California and Maryland have passed laws that forbid electronics companies from buying minerals from the Congo.
Shockingly, the U.S Chamber of Commerce and other companies have filed suit to stop this sort of legislation from being implemented anywhere in the U.S. They argue that it would cost the private sector too much money to comply. They prefer the alternative: an economy that runs on human rights violations. We cannot ignore human rights for the sake of companies’ bottom lines. In Massachusetts, we need to push for change and pass bill H.2898 now!

It may seem like we’re too far away from the chain of events to do anything about it, but we’re not. There is a direct relationship between our consumer demand and the size of the illegal rebels’ pockets. There is also a direct connection between what we want and what the state of Massachusetts will do. That means that there is something we can do, because if we ask for a change – from our electronics companies and our legislators – they will listen. If you are a Massachusetts voter, call your legislators and tell them about your support for Bill H.2898. Right now, the bill is on the floor of the House Committee on Ways and Means. The best way you can help is by calling the House Chair, Representative Brian Dempsey, and asking him to vote favorably on the bill. You can visit this website, to find the legislator of your own district and ask for their ‘yes’ vote as well: http://www.malegislature.gov/People. If enough of us raise our voices against the genocide in the Congo, we will make a change.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Gina

In one of my meetings with Kelley Ready, she mentioned the film showing she and her coalition [Congo Action Now!] organized in the State House. She said it was a riveting success; she had legislators crying and asking her what they could do to help. A couple of those legislators were Denise Andrews and Gloria Fox, two women that left quite different impressions on me. I left class early on Thursday and met Kelley in her office at Heller. We walked to her car and after a real talk that lasted around 30-40 minutes we were at the Mass State House (note: I really appreciate Kelley’s openness, she makes me feel welcome to her visit. She respects me as an equal activist and doesn’t just see me as a student doing a project which allows me to be comfortable with her.)

I remember that I was nervous and could not stop talking, shutting up only after walking through the doors into the meeting room. We waited for everyone to arrive and in the end we had with us one familiar face [a surprise for which I was very grateful]; Germain Indjassa [a journalist from the Congo and masters student at Brandeis University, whom my colleague and I had interviewed a while back]. Everyone else I met for the first time; Rep. Andrews and Fox, Lynda [Martin Walsh’s – cosponsor who introduced the bill – staffer, Mamma Jeanne [President of Congolese Community of Massachusetts], Francis [Vice President of CCM]. Ify Amalu [activist from the Congo, really good relationship with Rep. Fox, I later discovered] and Pat Aron [leading member of CAN, note: her mastery of the facts surrounding the bill left quite an impression!]. We were a large group and once we started staffers and interns kept joining us, pulling chairs and stuffing them around the already stuffed table. The meeting started with introductions and welcomes. It continued with brainstorming activity of what we would call a success in this situation. Ify’s and mine were identical: short term success would mean passing the bill in its current committee [State Admin.] and the long term success would be to have traceability of minerals in companies in Massachusetts. The other definitions ranged from peace in the Congo to outlining a strategy by the end of the meeting; we had quite a variety of different minds. I appreciated the various perspectives on the issue.

Gabby

This interview was very successful because we were wet behind the ears from previous interviews and were able have a more focused and effective conversation about the conflict. Also by this time, we were more confident when asking questions and had our own process for carrying out the interview. Our conversation with Mr. Martin Shitala [Congo Action Now! Member], Father William “Willie” Moka, and Father Emmanuel Bueya was especially enlightening, because they recently moved here from the Congo so their memories of the conflict were quite recent. They also seemed more upset by the conflict and gave us a very human and passionate account, which was extremely helpful in creating a sense of sympathy.

Update

As of April 11, 2013, H.2898 was in the House Committee on Ways and Means awaiting a hearing date.

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Update

As of April 11, 2013, H.2898 was in the House Committee on Ways and Means awaiting a hearing date.
The housing market crash touched every state in the U.S., Massachusetts being no exception. Harsh and myopic foreclosure policies in Massachusetts catalyzed evictions and caused crippling outcomes for (former) homeowners as well as the communities they reside in through the ripple effect of home vacancy. To mitigate this and move communities towards increasing stability, Massachusetts legislators introduced a bill that would allow current homeowners who have been foreclosed upon to remain in their homes at fair market rent until new homeowners can take on the mortgage.

■ The Bill
S.728: An Act preventing unnecessary vacancies in foreclosed homes.

■ Excerpt from Storybook
Ramon Suero, a resident of Dorchester, bought a condominium with a ‘no-money-down’ mortgage from a notorious subprime lender: Option One. Option One gave him a mortgage with a very low interest rate that would balloon in a couple of years after the low-interest teaser expired. When Ramon’s interest rate shot up, he was unable to afford his mortgage and found himself in a financial crisis. This is a classic example of what has happened to thousands of people across the state…If An Act to Prevent Unnecessary Vacancies in Foreclosed Homes were already law, then Ramon would have been able to stay in his home at an affordable rate instead of being forced into eviction through the trickery of Option One.

■ Elevator Speech
Because of the subprime mortgage crisis, evictions have been on the rise and have caused devastating outcomes for homeowners as well as the communities these homeowners reside in. In the last twelve years, Massachusetts experienced a staggering 72.2% increase in vacancies as a direct result of evictions. In response to this dilemma, S.728: An Act to Prevent Unnecessary Vacancies in Foreclosed Homes aims to provide help by allowing people to remain in their homes while paying fair market rent in lieu of their mortgage until new occupants who can afford the
mortgage can be found. This bill keeps honest, hardworking people in their homes and promotes their economic stability as well as their community's. How? First, a vacant home is a blight on the community and may potentially dissuade new residents from purchasing property nearby. Second, vacant homes are targets for use for illegal activity or for being vandalized. Third, a vacant home's price drops significantly, which can cause a decrease in property values throughout the community.

S.728: An Act to Prevent Unnecessary Vacancies in Foreclosed Homes will address all of these problems and strengthen the economic health of communities. The proposed bill allows for the homeowners in foreclosure to continue living in their homes while the bank finds owners who can afford the mortgage, thus benefiting the homeowner and the community. This bill will keep more people in their homes and more communities in Massachusetts economically vibrant. I am asking you to support this bill for the good of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Op-Ed

More than five years after the beginning of subprime mortgage crisis, thousands of homeowners in Massachusetts are still facing eviction. By now, we are all well aware of how this happened. Lenders [banks] tricked homeowners into accepting mortgages that were initially affordable, with very low or no interest rates. After a few years, interest rates shot up and homeowners found themselves with staggering mortgages, which often led to foreclosure and eviction. In the last twelve years, Massachusetts has experienced an astonishing 72.2% increase in eviction-related vacancies, due to the subprime mortgage crisis. The crisis was vast and it was devastating. And it is still happening.

However, several Massachusetts legislators are trying to come to the aid of homeowners by introducing legislation, S.728: An Act to Prevent Unnecessary Vacancies in Foreclosed Homes, which will allow homeowners to remain in their homes while paying fair market rent in lieu of their mortgage until the lenders can find new occupants who can afford the mortgage. This legislation attempts to restore the homeowner's dignity and also promotes economic stability for individuals and communities.

How? A foreclosure crisis such as the one many Bay Staters are experiencing can very easily ripple throughout a community. First, a vacant home is a blight on the community and may potentially dissuade new residents from purchasing property nearby. Second, vacant homes are targets for use for illegal activity or for being vandalized. Third, a vacant home's price drops significantly, which can cause a decrease in property values throughout the community. Additionally, a vacant home earns the bank that financed its purchase exactly $0, although the banks believe evictions are necessary scare tactics to get other homeowners to somehow scrape together the money for bloated payments on their underwater mortgages.

The main opposition to this bill is the Massachusetts Bankers Association (MBA). From the perspective of the MBA, homeowners who face foreclosure are given a sufficient amount of time to pay what is owed and are further given fair warning before they are evicted. The MBA believes that prolonging evictions may encourage homeowners to neglect their financial obligations to banks and further delays the property from being occupied by people who can afford the mortgage. But a vacant property is much harder to sell than one that is currently occupied and the cost of a vacant property is much greater to the banks as well as the community, costing anywhere from $190,000 to $1,000,000. This cost of vacancy outweighs any potential downsides to having continual occupancy.

The proposed bill, S.728: An Act to Prevent Unnecessary Vacancies in Foreclosed Homes does much to protect homeowners and communities and is ultimately a win for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It is imperative that our legislators demonstrate their belief in the value of the Commonwealth and pass this bill.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Jacob

The Jobs with Justice dinner led to a follow-up meeting I had with a campaign advocate and supporter, Bill Okerman. Okerman and I met to further discuss the housing crisis. Speaking with him one-on-one was very helpful because I was able to get his full attention and found that he was very knowledgeable and responsive to every question I had. Okerman introduced an idea to me that I found very interesting: the idea that Jobs with Justice [and similar activist organizations] would have more success if, instead of picketing companies, they targeted the government [through lobbying].

Dylan

(from a City Life/Vida Urbana Bank Tenant Association meeting)

I knew the foreclosure crisis was an issue, but it was not until I could hear some firsthand accounts that I really started to see how this bill could change lives. The people
at the meeting...have been treated unfairly by the banks and need extra protection to get back on their feet. They were not the people who the banks claim they are: some lazy good-for-nothing bums looking for a safety net from the government.

■ Update
As of April 11, 2013, S.728 was in the Joint Committee on the Judiciary awaiting a hearing date.

For more information
City Life/Vida Urbana
http://clvu.org
Comprehensive Sex Education

Comprehensive, medically accurate, age-appropriate sex education for Massachusetts teens

Roberta Bergstein '14
Hailey Magee '15
Emily Troge '14

“An Act relative to healthy youth” provides schools with the choice to enhance their sex education curricula with medically accurate and realistic materials. This bill gives students, parents, and school districts a choice to support teenage health through scientifically proven, age-appropriate sex education. Other states such as Maine, Colorado, and California have adopted these curricula and have seen a sharp drop in teenage sexual activity as well as an increase in safer sex and healthier relationship behaviors.

The Bill
H.450: An Act relative to healthy youth.

Excerpt from Storybook
What’s the problem?
- Teens don’t know the facts because no one wants to talk about sex.
- By denying these kids access to this information, Massachusetts is preventing them from living happy and healthy lives.
- Half of high school students have had sex but less than half used protection.

‘One girl believed that if she got up and jumped up and down after having sex that would reduce her risk of getting pregnant … another believed that PCP/‘angel dust’ was like birth control in that it might reduce the chance of getting pregnant.’ [Diana Detting, Women’s Health Nurse Practitioner]

Elevator Speech
Hi, my name is Roberta Bergstein and these are my colleagues, Hailey Magee and Emily Troge. I am a Massachusetts voter and a student at Brandeis University, a school known for its dedication to social justice. My colleagues and I are working with the Coalition for Choice. We want Massachusetts teens to be healthy and safe, but we can only achieve this goal if we provide teens with the information they need to

Hailey Magee '15, Emily Troge '14 and Roberta Bergstein '14
make smart, responsible choices. We would like to discuss with you H.450/S.209, An Act relative to healthy youth, which will help teens get the information they deserve to make healthy choices that could impact the trajectory of their lives.

Currently in the Commonwealth, 45% of students between the ages of 13 and 19 are sexually active. Of these, about 40% report having unprotected sex because they are not taught the importance of safe sexual choices. This problem exists in the Commonwealth because many teens are not receiving the medically accurate sex education they need to make safe sexual decisions.

This problem is easily fixed by H.450, An Act relative to healthy youth, which provides schools with the choice to enhance their sex education curricula with medically accurate and realistic materials. This bill gives students, parents, and school districts a choice to support teenage health through scientifically proven, age-appropriate sex education. Other states such as Maine, Colorado, and California have adopted these curricula and have seen a sharp drop in teenage sexual activity as well as an increase in safer sex and healthier relationship behaviors.

Something we love about this bill is that it is revenue neutral, and will save the Commonwealth money over time because it is a preventative program. An Act relative to healthy youth is scheduled for a hearing in the Joint Committee on Education on May 14, and we ask that you and your colleagues favorably vote the bill out of committee.

■ Letter to the legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

My name is Roberta Bergstein. I am a Massachusetts voter and a student at Brandeis University. I, along with my colleagues Hailey Magee and Emily Troge, am working with the Massachusetts Coalition for Choice to promote H.450/S.209, An Act relative to healthy youth. As a father of two, you understand that the health of Massachusetts youth is a universal concern; children must be given every possible opportunity to lead healthy lives. Unfortunately, Massachusetts has not done everything in its power to ensure that our youth can make smart, safe choices that will positively impact their health and, ultimately, their future.

Too many Massachusetts teens partake in unhealthy, unsafe sexual behaviors. About 40% of sexually active teens in Massachusetts report having had unprotected sex, often leading to teen pregnancy or the contraction of sexually transmitted infections. Teens partake in risky sexual behaviors because they have not been informed of the dangers of unprotected sex. Teens that unintentionally become pregnant or contract sexually transmitted infections must deal with the consequences of their unhealthy choices for the rest of their lives. Luckily, the solution to this dire problem is simple: comprehensive sexual education has been proven to reduce rates of sexual activity as well as unintended pregnancy among teens.

An Act relative to healthy youth (S.209) would require all Massachusetts schools offering sexual education to utilize comprehensive curricula that are medically accurate. These curricula would detail abstinence, contraception, STIs, HIV/AIDS, safe sexual activity, and the formation of healthy and respectful relationships. I am asking you to speak to your colleagues in the Joint Committee on Education, and urge them to vote An Act Relative to Healthy Youth favorably out of committee after its hearing on May 14. As a Massachusetts legislator, you are in a position to ensure that children and teens are given the information and knowledge necessary to prevent teen pregnancy and the spread of sexually transmitted infections – and, as such, the opportunity to lead healthy lives.

The purpose of An Act relative to healthy youth is to give schools, parents, and children options for living healthier lives. It is not a mandate, and would not require schools to offer sexual education; rather, it would help schools already offering such education to ensure that their curricula are complete and effective. It would also uphold the current provision of the law stating that parents may opt their children out of school sexual education if they so desire. Furthermore, An Act Relative to Healthy Youth is a revenue-neutral bill; it does not require that the government spend additional resources. In fact, as a preventative measure, the bill will save the Commonwealth millions of dollars that would otherwise be spent on welfare and MassHealth programs for unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

As a legislator and a father, the health of Massachusetts youth must be one of your foremost priorities. Please ensure that our youth are kept healthy and safe by supporting An Act relative to healthy youth, and urging your fellow legislators in the Joint Committee on Education to vote the bill favorably out of committee.

■ House Ways and Means Script

Hello Chair Dempsey and members of the House Ways and Means Committee:

My name is Roberta Bergstein and these are my colleagues, Hailey Magee and Emily Troge. I am a Massachusetts voter and a student at Brandeis University, an institution known for its passion for social justice. We
are working with the Coalition for Choice on H.450, An Act relative to healthy youth, which provides our youth with the means to make healthy and responsible choices.

Chair Dempsey, as a father of three, you understand that the health of Massachusetts youth is a universal concern; children must be given every possible opportunity to lead healthy lives. Unfortunately, Massachusetts has not done everything in its power to ensure that our youth can make smart, safe choices that will positively impact their health and, ultimately, their future. Teen's sexual health is of particularly concern because roughly half of Massachusetts's teens are sexually active – and half of those teens do not have protected sex. Clearly, many of our teens are not informed about safe, healthy sexual choices – and, as a result, are at risk for unhealthy relationships, sexually transmitted infections, and unintended pregnancies.

An Act relative to healthy youth, H.450, provides a solution to this dire problem by empowering and informing Massachusetts teens. H.450 states that schools already choosing to offer sex education must utilize curricula that are medically accurate and age-appropriate. This bill gives students, parents, and school districts a choice to support teenage health through scientifically proven, age-appropriate sex education. Currently, many sex education curricula lack vital information about healthy relationships, sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy, and methods of protection. Comprehensive curricula, on the other hand, would include these subjects. Other states that have adopted these curricula, including Maine, Colorado, and California, have seen a sharp drop in teenage sexual activity as well as an increase in safer sex and healthier relationship behavior, proving that students participating in the program absorb the information that is presented. This bill is precisely what Massachusetts needs to reverse rising rates of teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections.

Opponents of An Act relative to healthy youth argue that abstinence-only-until-marriage sexual education programs are more appropriate for high school students than comprehensive programs. However, such programs ignore the fact that 46% of high school students report being sexually active. Discussing contraception does not lead to earlier or increased sexual activity among teens, as a matter of fact, the teen birth rate in Massachusetts was the lowest it had ever been in 2010 [the last year for which data are available] as a direct result of “more and better and complete access to comprehensive sexual education and reproductive health services.” Some oppose the Act because they believe it is a parent's duty to educate their children regarding sexual matters. However, Section I, Clause 5 of the bill gives parents the freedom to exempt their children from school-sponsored sexual education if they so desire.

Some worry that An Act relative to healthy youth would require schools to expend funds finding curricula that meet the criteria stipulated by the state. However, the bill does not require any spending on behalf of the state or schools. So as not to inconvenience already over-burdened and under-funded school districts, H.450 stipulates that the Department on Elementary and Secondary Education will upload a list of approved curricula to its website so that schools are not required to invest additional time or resources in finding appropriate sex education materials.

Furthermore, An Act relative to healthy youth is revenue-neutral; it requires no government spending and will in fact save the Commonwealth money in the long-term. As evidence from Maine, Colorado, and California illustrates, this bill’s implementation will result in less state money being spent on welfare for teen mothers, health care for teens infected with sexually transmitted infections, and Medicaid. State money saved by this bill can be fed back into the education system and continue to improve the opportunities available to Massachusetts youth – who will be able to appreciate these opportunities as healthy, happy members of society.

An Act relative to healthy youth will not only positively impact the health of our youth, but also the health of the Commonwealth as a whole. We ask that you all vote favorably on this bill, and empower schools, parents and teens to make healthy choices. Thank you.

Op-Ed

Let’s Talk About Sex: Why Massachusetts Could Use More Teen Know-It-Alls

The Boston Globe recently released an article explaining that rates of chlamydia in certain Massachusetts districts – Dorchester and Lynn, in particular – have skyrocketed over the last decade. Nationwide, half of all sexually active people will have an STI by age 25. Too often, teens think they’re invincible from such troubling statistics. Many teens think they “know it all” – it’s the trademark complaint of every father, mother, and high school teacher. But of the 46% of high schools students in Massachusetts that are sexually active, many do not receive education that teaches them the harms and risks of unprotected sex. Teens might think they know everything there is to know about sex, but rising rates of teen pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections among teens prove otherwise: teens don’t know it all.

But they should.

Luckily, your legislators in the State House are working hard to ensure that your teens have the opportunity to learn it all. An Act relative to healthy youth
An Act relative to healthy youth (H.450/S.209) is a bill that requires all schools offering sexual education to make that education accurate and complete. It would teach budding teens everything they need to know upon entering our sexually charged world.

What’s not to love? An Act relative to healthy youth is a no-brainer. Accurate and complete sex education is the key to reducing rates of sexually transmitted infections and teen pregnancy. Countless studies have shown that sexually active teens that receive comprehensive sex education are more likely to use protection. In Massachusetts, the teen birth rate from 1989 to 2010 decreased more than 50% as a direct result of “more and better and complete access to comprehensive sex education and reproductive health services.”

Unlike the gun debate or Mayor Bloomberg’s infamous large soda ban, An Act relative to healthy youth is a simple, straightforward people-pleaser. It’s a common sense solution and it gives institutions, parents, and students choices.

The Act is not a mandate. It does not require all public schools to offer sexual education – although, if you ask me, that’s not a bad idea. Rather, it states that schools already offering sex education must make their curricula accurate and complete. School districts that embrace this responsible choice won’t have to waste time or money figuring out what’s comprehensive; the Commissioner of Education will develop a list of approved curricula, updated annually and available for free on the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website.

Furthermore, the Act upholds the current provision of state law allowing parents to exempt their children from sex education. Schools will make the option available, but ultimately the final choice rests with parents.

Finally – and this is key – An Act relative to healthy youth is a money-saver. It doesn’t cost the state or school districts a dime. As a matter of fact, the Act will save the Commonwealth millions of dollars in the long run, because less state money will be spent on welfare and Medicaid services for pregnant teens or teens with STIs. In 2006 alone, the total public cost for births resulting from unintended pregnancies was $182 million. Imagine what the state could do with $182 million. Fund public transportation? Improve the education system? The possibilities are endless. Implementing comprehensive sex education is a smart decision, for the health of our youth and our wallets.

The Joint Committee on Education will hold a hearing for the Act on May 14. If it goes well, the bill will have the chance to be voted upon on the House floor – and you can get involved. How?

1. Call your Representatives. Ask them to urge their colleagues in the Joint Committee to vote the bill favorably out of committee. (Not sure who your Reps are? Visit www.malegislature.gov to find out!)

2. Contact Michael Falcone, Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts Government Relations Manager, at mfalcone@pplm.org. He can help you submit written testimony for the hearing, or come to testify in person at the State House.

Teen know-it-alls are annoying, I know. But the fact remains that teens are going to act like they know it all, whether they really know it all or not. If we can’t change them – and trust me, we can’t – let’s at least give them the information they need to make safe, healthy choices.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Hailey

On our March 5 visit the State House, Roberta, Emily and I scheduled a meeting with Representative John Rogers (D-Norwood), the House Majority Leader, a Joint Education Committee member, and a Brandeis alumnus. We planned on informing Representative Rogers about An Act relative to healthy youth, ultimately lobbying the bill and encouraging him to vote it positively out of committee. Due to Representative Rogers’ prominent stature in the House and his busy schedule, it is likely that our being Brandeis students helped us to secure a sit-down, thirty minute meeting with the Representative.

During the meeting, my teammates and I gave a general overview of the bill and presented Rep. Rogers with our storybooks and Coalition for Choice fact sheets. We explained many of the bill’s major selling points: that it is not a mandate, it is revenue-neutral and will in fact save the state money in the long run, and that parents may choose to opt their children out of sexual education classes if they so desire. We used Michael’s advice and framed the issue as a solely health-related one. Rep. Rogers seemed particularly surprised by the amount of money the state could save on retroactive health services for teen mothers by instead implementing preventative sexual education. Overall, he seemed very much in support of the bill and encouraged us to speak with the more conservative members of the Committee during our next State House visit.

Emily

Our first meeting was with Robert Oftring, legislative aide to Rep. Jim O’Day. An intern, Noelle, who was a senior at a nearby college, accompanied him. They were...
both incredibly knowledgeable about our bill, H450 *An Act relative to healthy youth*, and helpful by providing us with suggestions for our next objectives. As Representative Jim O’Day is a co-sponsor for this bill along with Senator Katherine Clark, the aid and the intern were excited for our involvement, as we provided the student perspective. We were students advocating for this bill, which was a rarity in their lobbying efforts. Of course they had the help from major coalitions such as Planned Parenthood and NARAL, but the student perspective is invaluable to this campaign. Then to our surprise, Representative Jim O’Day greeted us!

**Roberta**

Representative Viera’s aide was very welcoming and she paid close attention to the information we were giving her. Initially, we gave Viera’s aide a fact sheet for the bill in addition to a recent article we had found in the news and she read the fact sheet pretty closely and even asked a few questions. We clarified for her that this bill is not a mandate – the districts have the option whether or not to include a sex-ed program, but if they do they must have a comprehensive program. When we were speaking with her about the bill and the issues that it aims to fix she seemed to agree with us that kids need to be given the appropriate information in order to make informed decisions. At one point in the meeting, she mentioned that she had young daughters and she told us that she wanted her daughters to receive medically accurate and age-appropriate information so that they do not find themselves in any bad situations. We also mentioned our line-item for Teenage Pregnancy Prevention and she was also supportive of this. It was especially helpful to find out that Viera’s aide had daughters because parents of young teenage daughters are concerned about their daughters knowing about their sexual health. The teenage years for a parent can be nerve-wracking because they want the best for their child and in order for their child to have the best they must be properly educated about their sexual health.

**Update**

On May 14, 2013, H.450 had a hearing in the Joint Committee on Education.

**For more information**

- Massachusetts Coalition for Choice  
- NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts  
  [http://www.prochoicemass.org](http://www.prochoicemass.org)
- Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts  
  [http://www.plannedparenthood.org/ma](http://www.plannedparenthood.org/ma)
.1750/S.882: An Act Establishing the Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights modifies Massachusetts state labor laws to guarantee basic work standards and protections for domestic workers as well as a means of enforcing these standards.

**Domestic Worker Rights**

Give domestic workers the same rights as other workers in Massachusetts

**The Bill**

H.1750: An Act establishing the domestic workers’ bill of rights.

**Excerpt from Storybook**

‘I’d love paid sick time. I got sick last Friday and woke up and thought ‘thank goodness it’s Friday and I have the whole weekend to get better!’ Otherwise I’d have to go to work sick and do everything even though I felt bad.” [Ana, domestic worker in eastern MA]

“‘An injury to one group of workers is an injury to all workers everywhere. If we don’t stand together, we fall together.’ Bringing up pay standards and working conditions for one group of workers, such as through the Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights will ‘secondarily bring them up for others… Anyone who works has a basic self-interest that others’ rights are promoted.’” [Gillian Mason, Community Organizer with MA Jobs with Justice]

**Elevator Speech**

Hello, my name is Meredith and this is Maya and we are Brandeis University students and Massachusetts voters. We can all agree that workers deserve equal rights, but unfortunately, individuals participating in domestic work, such as nannies, elder caregivers, and housekeepers, are treated as an inferior class of laborers. Ever since the 1935 National Labor Relations Act, largely influenced by sexism and racism, domestic workers have been excluded from receiving basic workers’ rights and protections under state and federal labor laws. As a result, they are subject to unsafe working conditions, sexual harassment, low pay, and other indignities. To remedy these injustices, bill H.1750/S.882, entitled “An Act Establishing the Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights,” will extend existing...
workers’ rights to include domestic workers. These rights include but are not limited to: meal and rest breaks, overtime pay, and payment of at least minimum wage. As residents of the forward-thinking state of Massachusetts, it is our responsibility to uphold the ideals of equality and fairness in the workplace. We therefore request that the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development issues a favorable report on H.1750/S.882. Thank you for taking the time to consider this proposed legislation.

Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Brian A. Joyce,

My name is Meredith van der Walde, and I am a student at Brandeis University and a voter within your district. Regardless of whether labor takes place in the public setting of a corporation or the privacy of a home, work is work. However, domestic workers, such as nannies, elder caregivers, and housekeepers, have historically been excluded from receiving benefits under state and federal labor laws due to systemic racism and sexism. Domestic workers deserve the same rights and privileges enjoyed by other laborers, yet they suffer an array of injustices, including unsafe working conditions, low pay, and sexual harassment.

Domestic workers form the backbone of the Massachusetts economy. By taking care of their employers’ homes and families, domestic workers enable their employers to pursue their own jobs. Notwithstanding their integral function within society, domestic workers are not treated with the respect and dignity they deserve. Domestic work is undervalued because it has traditionally been performed by housewives and servants, and thus domestic workers’ rights have been ignored.

In order to remedy the injustices that domestic workers have long faced, S.882, entitled “An Act establishing the domestic workers’ bill of rights” has been proposed to extend existing workers’ rights to include domestic workers. The bill is currently being considered by the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development in the Massachusetts State House. This legislation will guarantee domestic workers basic rights, such as meal and rest breaks, overtime pay, and payment of at least minimum wage.

Due to your participation in the Elder Affairs Committee, I want to bring S.882 to your attention, as it will directly benefit the wellbeing of senior citizens who employ domestic workers. While many personal care attendants are already covered by other labor legislation, many are not. By standardizing the industry and improving the health and safety of domestic workers, all employers will receive the highest quality care for themselves and their families. Passage of this bill will thus facilitate better relationships between domestic workers and their elderly employers.

S.882 has never been proposed in Massachusetts before, yet counterarguments to the legislation can be assumed by looking to New York and California’s recent efforts to pass similar legislation. One major argument against the passage of the Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights in New York was that by increasing the cost of domestic work for employers, demand for domestic workers would decrease. Despite concerns from opposition, such as business groups and local Chambers of Commerce, that the number of jobs for domestic workers would decline due to added expenses, demand in New York did not change upon passage of the legislation in 2010. Therefore, while similar resistance can be expected in Massachusetts, it is unlikely that domestic workers will suffer a significant job loss as a result of the passage of S.882.

Increased protection for domestic workers will protect the safety of Massachusetts’s communities and strengthen the state economy by allowing more individuals to participate in the paid workforce. Please help by supporting the bill in the State Senate. Thank you for considering S.882.

House Ways and Means Script

As part of New Deal legislation, the United States federal government enacted the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 to protect the basic rights of employees in the private sector. However, in a concession to Southern lawmakers, domestic workers were deliberately excluded from these provisions because they were often women, often of color, and did work traditionally done by servants or slaves. Today, over 75 years later, domestic workers in Massachusetts and throughout the country continue to be denied the same workplace rights enjoyed by those in other industries. This has caused domestic workers to be treated as an inferior class of laborers, forced to suffer long hours and low pay with no safeguards against hazardous working conditions, discrimination, or sexual harassment. In spite of this mistreatment, domestic workers help support the Massachusetts economy by fulfilling household needs so that their employers can work outside the home. Protecting domestic workers protects the safety of Massachusetts’s communities, ensures the health and well-being of families, and strengthens the state economy by allowing more people to participate in the workforce. Domestic workers therefore deserve the same workers’ rights as other Massachusetts employees.
The proposed bill, ‘An Act establishing the domestic workers’ bill of rights,’ H.1750, seeks to revise Massachusetts labor laws to guarantee basic work standards and protections for domestic workers such as: meal and rest breaks, paid sick time, freedom from discrimination, etc. H.1750 does not create new rights; it merely extends labor protections enjoyed by almost all other Massachusetts workers to include domestic workers as well. The bill demonstrates that domestic work is a professional industry, with hardworking individuals deserving the same rights as those in other sectors of the economy. By standardizing Massachusetts’ domestic work industry and improving the health and safety of domestic workers, H.1750 will ensure that employers receive the highest quality care for themselves and their families.

H.1750 can only be truly realized if both domestic workers and employers understand its intentions. Therefore, in order to provide effective workplace protections for domestic workers, the bill will require clearly stated penalties for violations of the law and provisions for enforcement. The bill is primarily an amendment to existing Massachusetts labor laws and will therefore not require the creation of new infrastructure. As a result, even the community organizations and politicians working on the bill have not yet fully worked out the nuts and bolts of how it will be implemented and what the fiscal implications will be. However, it is known that H.1750 will be enforced by the Massachusetts Attorney General’s office, as are other labor laws in the state. In addition, because H.1750 will reform legislation governing workplace conditions in private homes, it will place the financial onus on employers instead of the Massachusetts state government. The means of implementing the law and processing complaints regarding its violation are therefore already in place and the only projected cost is the possibility of hiring an additional staff member for the Attorney General’s office. Therefore, passage of the bill will not necessitate extensive public spending and represents an affordable, cost neutral improvement to Massachusetts labor laws.

H.1750 has never been proposed in Massachusetts before, yet potential sources of dissent can be assumed by looking to New York and California’s recent efforts to pass similar legislation. For example, California Governor Jerry Brown, who vetoed a similar law in late 2012, worried that a domestic workers’ bill of rights could burden working families who already struggle to afford domestic help. He feared that by mandating employers to pay domestic workers at least minimum wage and provide overtime compensation, the bill could have the unintended consequence of reducing the number of available jobs for domestic workers and ultimately do them a disservice.

It is undeniable that by requiring domestic workers to be paid at least minimum wage, receive overtime compensation, etc., H.1750 will force employers not already offering these benefits to pay more for care services and housekeeping. However, by refusing to recognize domestic work as the professional industry that it is and denying domestic workers the same labor rights as those in other sectors, the profession remains undervalued and unregulated. Once Massachusetts labor laws are amended to include domestic workers, the industry will have standards and be monitored, thereby leading to the highest quality care for employers and increased rights and respect for workers. In addition, after passage of a similar domestic workers’ bill of rights in New York, demand for domestic workers did not suffer and the same outcome can be expected in Massachusetts.

Dissent can also be expected from “third-party agencies” or large corporations that act as a middleman between private families and domestic workers. These agencies could be resistant to H.1750 because it will require them to pay minimum wage and overtime. This higher cost of doing business would cause them to disburse a larger percentage of their profit to their employees and potentially lose money. However, H.1750 addresses these concerns in that the bill will only apply to private employers and will exclude state registered or licensed staffing agencies.

Families that hire domestic workers to work in private homes are legitimate employers and therefore should be subject to the same rules as employers in other industries. These employers already have to follow worker protection laws, so extending labor rights to domestic workers should be within reach. Though domestic workers are viewed as being outside the traditional workforce, their labor keeps the Massachusetts economy functioning by allowing other individuals to pursue their own jobs. Work is work and domestic workers deserve the same rights and respect allotted to other employees. Domestic workers’ exclusion from existing labor laws stems from racism and sexism of the early 20th century – discrimination that has no place in the forward-thinking Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We therefore request that the Committee of Ways and Means issues a favorable report on H.1750.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Maya

In our second trip to the State House, Meredith and I visited the offices of different legislators sitting on the Joint Ways and Means Committee [the committee who will ultimately hear the bill] who had not yet signed on as co-sponsors of the Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights. We
had meetings at the offices of: Senator Robert Hedlund, Senator Barry Finegold, Representative Nicholas Boldyga, and Representative John Rogers. All but our meeting with Representative Rogers was with legislative aides. The meetings each lasted about fifteen minutes, during which we gave our elevator speech framing the many problems facing domestic workers and requesting that the legislator support the proposed bill. We answered whatever questions we could and suggested that further queries be directed to the Massachusetts Coalition of Domestic Workers.

Our last meeting of the day was the most substantive, in which we met with John Rogers, a Brandeis alumnus who represents Norfolk County as a democrat. Rogers is a practicing attorney and was pleased that the Brandeis Legal Studies Department offers students experiential learning classes designed to explore all aspects of the legal system. While he was unfamiliar with the specific issues facing domestic workers and had not yet heard of the proposed bill, he expressed verbal support. Rogers was excited that we were learning about the legislative process by participating in it and encouraged us to take an even more active role in advocating for the Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights by testifying in its hearing to the House Ways and Means Committee. I was happy to finally make our case to a legislator and receive such a positive reception.

Meredith

I attended the Jobs with Justice Annual Dinner at Suffolk Downs in East Boston on Thursday, March 14, 2013. The purpose of this dinner was to celebrate Massachusetts Jobs with Justice’s advocacy efforts throughout 2012 and to raise both activists’ and workers’ morale for the upcoming year. A variety of people attended the event, including those working on behalf of community organizations, low-wage workers, and interested individuals like myself. Upon first arriving, I actively sought out two members of Jobs with Justice with whom I had spoken prior to that evening: Lily Huang, Public Education Campaign Organizer, and Gillian Mason, Caring Across Generations Organizer. Gillian pointed me in the direction of the “MA Coalition for Domestic Workers” table, at which domestic workers and members of the coalition were seated. With Gillian’s help, I was fortunate to meet two domestic workers, both of who were originally from Brazil, and learn a bit about their current livelihoods as housecleaners. I was also pleased to meet Heloisa Galvão, Executive Director and co-founder of the Brazilian Women’s Group. My partner Maya and I had had a phone interview with her about a month earlier, so it was great to actually speak with her in person.

During dinner, prior to the speakers’ presentations and the award ceremony, I found it somewhat difficult to connect with additional individuals other than those I had already met. Lily and Gillian were extremely busy orchestrating the event, and I didn’t want to overwhelm the domestic workers and coalition members I had been speaking with by asking too many questions. Although I didn’t end up communicating with as many people associated with the coalition as I had hoped to, I was able to learn a great deal from a man named Bill Okerman from Needham, MA. The classmate I traveled to the dinner with knew Mr. Okerman from his hometown, and he turned out to be a great resource. Passionate about workers’ rights, Bill was incredibly knowledgeable about the Domestic Workers’ Bill of Rights and shared facts and information with me in order to better my understanding of the legislation.

My favorite portion of the evening, however, took place after dinner when awards were presented. Awards were given to the Campaign for Justice at Verizon, the Massachusetts Stands Up to Walmart Campaign, and the Massachusetts Coalition for Domestic Workers, among others. The room was filled with the sounds of people clapping, cheering, and chanting, and the spirit of coalition members, workers, and dedicated individuals was palpable. Right before I left, a speaker from Jobs with Justice began to shout, “Chant if you are tired of labor exploitation, debt bondage, and wage theft. We’re fired up; we can’t take it no more!” And as listeners repeated after her, it was clear that everyone at the event was passionate, uniting for the common purpose of bettering the lives of low-wage workers in various sectors of the workplace.

Update

As of January 22, 2013, H.1750 is in the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development awaiting a hearing date.

For more information

Massachusetts Jobs with Justice
http://www.massjwj.net
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.

The HSLI line item has seen a 16% decrease in funding over the past five years. This has resulted in a loss of 23 researchers from infectious disease laboratories, significant cutbacks of testing capability within these labs, and substantial reductions in the rapidity with which potential patients are identified and isolated. Hospitals and clinics rely on the HSLI to conduct testing and triage patients who may be suffering from infectious diseases. Continued decreases in allocated funds will eventually force the State Lab to shut down facilities that provide life-saving functions. For diseases like TB, which saw an increase in cases by 10% in 2012, this would mean an avoidable loss of life as well as a large, yet unnecessary cost to the state for each untreated case.

It is for this reason that we propose an increase of $2.6 million to the current allocated budget.

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

Excerpt from Storybook
“When I was wandering the halls of the laboratory, I realized that the lab was nothing like the laboratories that I’m use to at Brandeis. Why are they so run down and not state of the art? Employees were telling me about how the power goes out and how the elevators no longer function properly. I had no idea how the only public health laboratory left in Massachusetts... was functioning under such conditions.” When I asked Dr. DeMaria [Alfred DeMaria, MD, Medical Director of the Bureau
of Infectious Disease at HSLI] about this, he told me the following: “If you have a family and you lose your job and money is tight, you’re going to spend the money to feed the family and heat the house first. Same thing happens here. You’re not going to spend the money on day-to-day things – that’s where you take the cuts: things you can get away with in the short term. But in the long term, you suffer for that because you do not have the kind of facility that can do the work more efficiently and effectively and you suffer in terms of employee morale and productivity.”

Elevator Speech
Hello, my name is Jonathan and this is my colleague Matthew. I am a registered Massachusetts voter, and we are both students at Brandeis University, a school known for its deep engagement with real world public policy issues. We are working with the Medical Advisory Committee for the Elimination of Tuberculosis to increase funding for the Hinton State Laboratory Institute. The State Lab is an often taken-for-granted hidden gem that is responsible for maintaining the health and safety of the Commonwealth. Working behind the scenes, it functions like a weather forecast, except for dangerous hazards like anthrax, tuberculosis, diseased water, and poisoned food. But unlike a weather forecast, the State Lab can do more than just warn us about these threats. It can help to contain their spread, and prevent them from affecting our lives. Consequently, if the institute is doing its job effectively, you wouldn’t even know it. However, the institute has seen its funding cut by 16% and its staff reduced by 18% over the past six years. The State Lab can’t function as well with such limited resources, and it is the Commonwealth that will pay. We are inching closer and closer towards a public health crisis that could incapacitate our healthcare system, and cost the state billions of dollars. We are asking you to co-sign an amendment to increase funding for the institute by $2.6 million. Among other things, this additional money would go towards creating a special team of community health workers who are specifically trained to work with ethnically diverse populations that are at significantly increased risk for diseases like HIV, tuberculosis, syphilis, arboviruses, and EEE. The State Lab keeps us safe from dangerous infection, contaminated food and water, and environmental threats. If we forget the crucial role this establishment plays in maintaining the Commonwealth’s safety and security, and if we continue to limit the funding and resources at its disposal, we will soon face a statewide public health emergency well beyond our comprehension.

Letter to the Legislator
Dear Senator Clark:

My name is Matthew Eames and I am a resident of Reading, Massachusetts and a student studying Health and Health Policy at Brandeis University. As a member of the Joint Committee of Public Health, you work very hard to understand the fundamental importance of prevention for the entire Commonwealth. Prevention is a primary function of the HSLI, an unsung hero that impacts every citizen of Massachusetts. As a Brandeis student, this issue is very close to my heart, when there was a positive case of tuberculosis on campus last fall, the Hinton State Lab was Massachusetts’ only source for all of the necessary prevention and testing procedures.

The Hinton State Laboratory Institute is the only establishment in the Commonwealth that serves as an early warning system for the spread of deadly infectious diseases, environmental biohazards and chemical agents. For example, HSLI was responsible this summer for testing for all of the Eastern Equine Encephalitis (EEE) cases when there was a scare of epidemic in the Commonwealth. When the State Lab Institute is doing its job, people are unaware of its existence simply because they have such a fantastic record of preventing communicable diseases and maintaining environmental hazards. HSLI is like a parent who works very hard to make life obstacle-free for their children; although their work goes largely unnoticed they are always there when help is needed.

Unfortunately, significant funding cuts have hindered the State Lab Institute’s ability to effectively protect the citizens of Massachusetts from these real threats. The current funding is just not enough to support the infrastructure, personnel, and operations of a modern research facility. When fighting disease on a population level, we cannot cut corners by reducing the budget for our only source of protection against a potential epidemic. In order to maintain consistent safety in Massachusetts, we must address the Hinton State Lab Institute’s needs. I did not realize the seriousness of the budget cuts until I saw the buildings firsthand. The labs were nothing like the modern laboratories I’m used to at Brandeis; they were run down and definitely not state of the art. Employees were telling me about how the power goes out and how the elevators no longer function properly. The State Lab Institute even has to use a large portion of this budget to simply pay their rent, which is unheard of in other states for a research facility of this caliber.

Opponents to the increased funding may argue that a public lab for diseases like TB is unnecessary because doctors could just be trained in hospitals or clinics. However, if the physicians did everything that’s
recommended by the preventive health task force, it is estimated that the appointment would last 7 hours. They could also argue that increased funding for a public health lab is unnecessary because private services could handle the same tasks with equal productivity. Prevention efforts at the public level save the state and its residents millions of dollars each year because it means that people do not have to pay thousands of dollars out of pocket to test for a disease such as rabies (costs $6,000 per individual).

The solution is simple. I am asking you to prioritize line item #4516-1000, which calls for a request of an additional $2.6 million, when you meet with the House Ways and Means Committee. The additional budget would be used on specialized laboratory equipment, critical infrastructure improvements, training and education for public health expert clinicians, and contracted community health workers for high-risk, ethnically diverse populations. Thank you for your time and for listening to my concerns for our great state!

House Ways and Means Script
Hello Rep. Dempsey. My name is Jonathan Steinberg and I am resident of Waltham. Every day the citizens of the Commonwealth make their morning coffee with clean water, scramble fresh eggs for breakfast, enjoy the clean air of New England, and go to work or school without having to worry about becoming sick. We live very safe and healthy lives here and it is due in large part to the work of an unsung hero, an institution that works behind the scenes to protect us from dangerous, yet very real threats. Representative, I am talking about the Hinton State Laboratory Institute. It works 24 hours a day, 365 days a year to ensure that residents of Massachusetts can focus on their families and their contributions to the world. We may not recognize it, but it’s because of the people at the State Lab doing their jobs that we can do ours.

Among other important functions, the Hinton State Lab serves as the only emergency preparedness response system in the state regarding the early detection of infectious disease outbreaks. During the recent bird flu outbreak, the State Lab worked around the clock to monitor areas with growing numbers of cases, as well as other high-risk flu “hot spots.” It also provided accelerated turnaround for testing of samples from potential cases, coordinated vaccine dissemination throughout the state, and distributed its staff of trained health workers to communities, hospitals and clinics. This is routine activity for the State Lab.

We need to continue investing in prevention Rep. Dempsey. For the Hinton State Lab to continue being able to perform at such a high level, the state must put preventative health efforts at the forefront of health care. And if the legislators fail to appreciate the importance of prevention, it is going to cost the state, both financially and in lost lives. Tuberculosis for example is still prevalent. Over 300,000 people still suffer from TB in Massachusetts and that number of new cases increased by 10% in 2012. Aside from the deaths that would result from downplaying prevention, each untreated case of simple TB costs the state $840,000, while drug resistant cases can cost as much as $2.1 million.

The need for prevention is clear, but the legislature has not acted accordingly. Since FY2007, the Hinton State Laboratory line item has seen its funding cut by over 20%. Over the same time span, the State Lab has had to release 18% of its staff, and has had to move resources away from many important infectious disease research labs. While the House did maintain level funding from FY2013 at $12.3 million, this allocation is insufficient for the State Lab to adequately serve and protect the people of Massachusetts. Furthermore, in addition to its role in keeping the public safe, it also needs to pay its own rent and utilities, and needs to make long overdue renovations to an aging facility.

It is for this reason that we strongly recommend the House Ways and Means Committee allocate an additional $2.6 million to line item 4516-1000 for the State Laboratory and Communicable Disease Control Services. The additional funding would be used for a number of crucial services that both increase the State Lab Institute’s ability to serve the Commonwealth, and maintain a state of the art and efficient infrastructure that fosters rapidity and accuracy in research and testing.

I can provide you with a detailed breakdown of what the $2.6 million would be used for, but I wanted to highlight three specific uses here. First, a large portion of the money would be used to purchase specialized lab equipment and hire trained staff to aid in the quickness of foodborne illness detection, as well as in the surveillance of recent infectious disease threats such as West Nile Virus and Eastern Equine Encephalitis. Second, it would be used to cover the training and education of quality assurance teams consisting of public health experts in order to help primary care physicians and other clinicians incorporate preventative measures into new models of care, such as medical homes and ACOs. Finally, the additional money would go towards contracting with specialized community health workers with certain cultural and linguistic capacities to perform outreach to often ethnically diverse and under-immunized communities that are at high-risk for infectious diseases like TB and HIV.
Recent funding cuts have challenged the State Lab Institute's ability to function effectively and efficiently. While it has succeeded in remaining afloat in its surveillance and testing capacities thus far, an additional year of insufficient funding may be the catalyst that results in the State Lab Institute's outright failure. In the past, you have fought to reinvigorate the Massachusetts economy by fostering competition, investing in new technologies, and creating new jobs. You understand the importance of having a flourishing and efficient economy, but I must respectfully point out that without a healthy and able workforce, the state economy cannot grow. Approving the budget increase would guarantee the safety and security of the citizens of Massachusetts, and specifically that of the workers that contribute to making this state one of the prime economic centers in the country.

Rep. Dempsey, while the Hinton State Lab is small when it comes to the budget and physical size, the public health services it provides make it way too big to fail. The House Ways and Means Committee must allocate additional funds to keep it afloat and functional. The State Lab is the only institution that protects the residents of Massachusetts to such a high degree and though we may not be aware of the services it provides us, without them our safety and security would be in jeopardy.

Op-Ed
The Hinton State Laboratory Institute: The Hidden Gem of Public Health

Working in the shadows. Spending long nights on the job. Saving millions of people each year. The identity of your work is widely unknown. This sounds like the career resume of a superhero like Batman. However, those qualifications fit another position: the community health workers at the Hinton State Laboratory Institute (HSLI) in Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts. Their research and community outreach protect the entire Commonwealth from infectious disease, environmental biohazards, and bioterrorism threats. Unfortunately, with a decrease in funding by 16% and 18% reduction in staff since FY2009, HSLI is in serious trouble. They can’t afford their rent, the elevators are broken, and the power unexpectedly shuts down: the time for action is now. We must stand as a united Commonwealth to help save the Hinton State Lab Institute. Dr. Alfred DeMaria, medical director of the bureau of infectious disease at HSLI illustrated their importance briefly when he stated “You don’t create a fire department when the fire starts, you have to have a fire department in place to respond to the fire.”

If anyone needs convincing of why the lab needs an increase in funding, I recommend that they take a tour of the laboratory. For being the only public health lab that is responsible for all the clean air, fresh water, and safe food in the entire state, it seemed nearly impossible to me how this laboratory could function under such conditions. Massachusetts is at the forefront of biotechnology, yet this lab that protects very fundamental aspects of everyone’s daily health is decrepit.

Essentially, with the current funding level for the State Lab budget, it will soon be impossible to support the infrastructure, maintain personnel, and even stay in their current location. Over the last few years, HSLI has had to cut corners with the budget by ignoring the upkeep of the building itself, instead focusing on keeping their nurses and staff and maintaining their programs. The biggest problem with HSLI is that they operate under the landowners of UMASS medical school, and HSLI is worried that UMASS will leave HSLI essentially homeless. If HSLI cannot keep up with their operation due to the dwindling budget, then UMASS has no stake in their building and they are expected to leave to a nicer location in Mattapan. When this happens, HSLI will be in serious trouble operating under the Department of Public Health’s control. Because the Hinton State Lab has been losing ground for a number of years, the fact that they still manage to survive is miraculous. It is a tribute to the commitments of the staff members who take less money and work extra hours in comparison to their peers at private laboratories. Their employees are truly amazing because having a facility that does not work as efficiently and effectively as possible leads to suffering in terms of employee morale and productivity, yet they do an amazing job at keeping Massachusetts residents safe. It’s also a tribute to their supporters in the community who have gone to extreme measures to back HSLI and help them keep some of their resources and try to increase their budget.

The Hinton State Lab relies on its local supporters for community outreach and to spread the word on its role in Massachusetts’ public health efforts. As community members, we must work hard to inform our legislators on the importance of HSLI on all levels. From the prevention of deadly infectious diseases like tuberculosis to rabies testing, which saves individuals thousands of dollars annually, the Hinton State Laboratory Institute is a hidden gem that deserves the appreciation and support of the entire Commonwealth.

Tell your local legislator to champion line item #4516-1000, the increase of the HSLI budget by $2.25 million.
Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Jonathan

This meeting [with Representative Denise Garlick] was probably the most educational for me. It was the first substantial meeting I had with a legislator. We went with the class to the Statehouse the day before to meet with Rep. Kaufman and get acquainted with the establishment. The next day Matt and I went back to the Statehouse with Cynthia [professional advocate lobbying for HSLI] to begin advocating for our line item (4516-1000 – State Laboratory and Communicable Disease Control).

The goal of the meeting was to convince Rep. Garlick to make that line item one of her priorities to the House Ways and Means Committee. Cynthia informed us that once the governor released his budget proposal, each representative is allowed a short time to meet with the House Ways and Means Committee chairman (Rep. Dempsey). In the meeting they may prioritize three line items and plead their case for increased or level funding.

I realized that advocates like us play a crucial role in this process. We needed to be diligent in setting up meeting after meeting with legislators to try and gain support for our cause. We needed to be patient when legislators said they could not fully commit to prioritizing our line item at that time, but we also needed to be persistent in following up and continuing to educate them.

In the meeting, I got my first taste of what the legislative perception of the Hinton State Lab was. While Rep. Garlick was definitely a supporter, she admitted that the first thing that legislators think of when they hear about HSLI is the drug lab scandal from 2010. While we know that the situation was blown out of proportion and wrongly shamed HSLI’s name, legislators don’t have the time to educate themselves on everything so they often become “slaves” to the media. Cynthia though did a great job informing Rep. Garlick about the truth behind the drug scandal, and how the integral functions that HSLI performs are unrelated to the drug lab.

I was also very pleasantly surprised that Rep. Garlick engaged Matt and I. I thought coming into the meeting that Cynthia would be doing the talking and Matt and I would be observing, but it was clear to me from then on that both Cynthia and the legislators expected us to be participating advocates as well. Rep. Garlick asked us what we brought to the table and how we could be integral members of the advocacy team. She suggested that we personalize the issue, and use anecdotes such as the TB case at Brandeis or a comparison of the Brandeis and HSLI labs.

Matthew

This 15-minute meeting was unlike any other meeting with a legislator because it meant so much more; I am a constituent of Senator Clark’s district and I could witness firsthand how much legislators care for people living in their district. I was able to express my concerns and opinions to Senator Clark’s aide, and her aide was learning so much about TB and Hinton State Lab Institute. Then, when I was finally able to talk to Senator Clark, she reacted to my presence by shouting “I LOVE the Hinton State Lab Institute!” which sparked a great conversation about its importance, its struggle in the legislature, and how to keep fighting. She really appreciated our efforts and our determination to fight for a cause that we really cared about. Senator Clark is on the board of public health so she was well-informed on the issue and a huge supporter of the line item, and she told us that while HSLI is struggling with budget cuts, we have to keep making these visits and spread the word to other legislators. This meeting really inspired me to put in extra for the rest of the semester: make that extra phone call, deliver that extra message, and volunteer that extra hour. I realized that if I put in more effort personally, I can leave a personal, and lasting, impression on the future of HSLI.

Update

As of May 30, 2013, line-item 4516-1000 received a recommended FY2014 appropriation of $12.3 million by the Massachusetts State Senate – effectively the same funding as FY2013.

For more information

The Medical Advisory Committee for the Elimination of Tuberculosis

http://www.mamacet.org
Paid Sick Time

Establishing earned paid sick time for Massachusetts workers

Natalie Foster ’14
Seo Young “Gloria” Park ’13

“A n Act establishing earned paid sick time” is a bill that seeks to protect the rights of hard workers in Massachusetts to seek medical care and take care of their sick loved ones during times of illness. The bill systemizes ‘earned paid sick time’ and ‘earned unpaid sick time’ to allow employees to earn 1 hour of sick time for every 30 hours worked to ensure that employees would not be fired, threatened, and punished for missing work.

■ The Bill
H.1739: An Act establishing earned paid sick time.

■ Excerpt from Storybook
Jessica’s story: Jessica is a 22-year old recent college graduate who worked at a restaurant as a waitress. Due to increase competition for post-graduate jobs, she had to sustain herself by working at the restaurant to pay off her college education loans, which exceed $80,000. When she was feeling ill, she could not afford to miss a day’s worth of work because this was her only source of income. “People are in desperate need of money. Even if I am sick, I need the money and go to work to pay off my loans and bills.”

“It’s always good to work at a place where people respect you and treat you right. For employers who don’t, I can’t imagine it’s a successful enterprise. What a miserable operation you’re running that you can’t prioritize treating your employees well.” (Elizabeth Toulan, Massachusetts Paid Leave Coalition)

■ Elevator Speech
Hi, our names are Gloria and Natalie, and we’re currently students at Brandeis University. We want to talk to you about ensuring fairness for hard workers. Every day, there are workers who have to leave their sick children home alone because they cannot afford to miss their work. Such lack of protection of workers has resulted in almost one in six workers to be fired for taking time off to seek medical care for their illness or sick loved ones. One solution to this problem is an Act Establishing Earned Paid Sick Time, which if passed, would allow workers to earn 1 hour of...
sick time for every hard 30 hours worked. Whether workers receive paid or unpaid sick time depends on the size of the companies — for small companies with fewer than 6 employees, employees will receive unpaid, job-protected sick time. This legislation will also reduce the spread of infectious diseases in the workplace. We sincerely ask you to support the earned paid sick time (S900/H1739) bill by reporting favorably of this bill to the Health Care Financing Committee. Thank you for your consideration!

Letter to the Legislator
Dear Representative John Lawn,

My name is Natalie, I’m a student at Brandeis University and currently live in Waltham. I am lobbying for An Act Establishing Earned Paid Sick Time (H1739/ S900), a bill that would provide hard workers with the support and protection they deserve. Everyday in Waltham and throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, hard workers are being forced to make the decision of leaving their sick kids at home or sending them to school sick because they cannot afford to take time off of work. As a father of five, I’m sure you can understand the pain and anguish that these people must feel knowing their child is sick and miserable yet there is little to nothing that they can do. Currently, the lack of protections has resulted in one in six workers being fired to take time off to deal with illness. If this bill becomes law, the concern of not receiving sick time can be alleviated. It will establish a regulation that workers will earn one hour of sick time for every thirty hours worked up to a certain number in a tier structure based on the size of the company; for example, a company with six to ten employees can individually earn up to 40 hours of paid sick time per year. Ultimately, this legislation will serve as a guarantee that workers have certain rights and workers can stay employed, remain financially secure and supplement the well being of their families.

While some business owners are in support of this bill, many express disapproval of this bill due to the pressure to increase payment for workers. However, without setting a consistent baseline of health for companies to ensure worker protection, nearly one million workers in Massachusetts are at risk of losing their jobs and wages because they have to stay home to take care of themselves or their loved ones. These hard workers represent 36 percent of the workforce in Massachusetts. Without these labor protections, individuals come to work sick and unable to perform fully on the job. The decreased production should be a concern for employers and puts co-workers and customers at risk of getting sick. Lastly, this bill will create a $26 million average annual net benefit for employers. The bill will reduce worker turnover, contagion and lost productivity. With a bill that has strong moral and financial implications, we sincerely urge you to consider in favor of this legislation.

As Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Public Health, we ask you to consider the magnitude of success this bill could have in the field of public health. When people are unable to receive timely medical care and come to work sick, their health as well as that of their co-workers and customers can be compromised. Please speak with your fellow legislators on the Joint Committee of Workforce and Labor Development to encourage their support of this important bill.

House Ways and Means Script
We want to talk to you about ensuring fairness for hard workers. Every day, there are workers who have to leave their sick children at home alone because they cannot afford to lose wages by missing work. Almost one in six workers has been fired for taking time off to seek medical care for their illness and sick loved ones. In fact, 36% of working Massachusetts residents, or approximately one million employees, lack access to earned paid sick time. Such inability to obtain timely and prompt health care due to lack of earned paid sick time can often lead to negative consequences such as worse general health, greater reliance on emergency departments, loss of productivity, and spread of contagious diseases in the workplace.

One solution to this problem is an An Act establishing earned paid sick time (S900/H1739), which allows workers to earn 1 hour of sick time for every 30 hours worked. Based on the size of the company, employees can earn up to a certain number of paid or even unpaid sick time. Employees may use their earned sick time to seek medical care for their own illness or for a family member, attend preventative medical appointments, and seek support in cases of domestic violence. This bill not only protects workers’ rights, but it improves the employer-employee relationship by creating conditions for workers to be treated fairly.

Numerous studies have demonstrated the significant economic benefits to both businesses and employees by providing paid sick time. According to Institute for Women’s Policy Research in May 2012, businesses in Massachusetts are expected to expend $198 million annually to provide new paid sick time for employees due to lost productivity, increased wages, benefits, and administrative expenses. This cost of the law for employers is equivalent to a 19 cent per hour increase in wages for
employees receiving new leave, or about $6.54 per week. Costs of implementation will largely accrue to employers with 10 or more employees, with annual costs of $186 million for businesses in this category. Annual costs of $12 million are anticipated for businesses with between six and nine employees.

In return for its expenses, providing new paid sick time is expected to yield benefits of $225 million annually for employers, largely due to savings from reduced turnover. The anticipated savings for employers are expected to be $0.22 per hour in wages, or about $7.41 per week for covered workers. By comparing costs to employers and anticipating benefits for employers, Massachusetts’s employers will have an expected annual net benefit of $26 million. This bill would cost the state no extra money. Enforcing this bill would be more of a commitment between employers and employees. The state would only have to get involved if employers were not following the mandates of this bill. Through the implementation of this bill, it would fall more on the employers’ shoulders to front the money and pay for the extra hours; however, they get money back in the end. The only way this bill can work is if employers are willing and able to respect and uphold this mandate; if they do the State will not have to pay any money nor will it get involved. Moreover, workers and their families will enjoy lower expenditures for health care services totaling $24 million annually as a result of decreased emergency department use and reduced norovirus outbreaks in nursing homes. This improvement in family economy security as a result of wage replacement and stable employment can in turn stimulate the local economy, making an overall positive impact on businesses, workers, and the communities in Massachusetts.

Current opponents of this bill, who are mainly business owners, fear that granting sick time to workers would lead to billions of dollars wasted in production, reduction of jobs, and pushing employers into other states. Such disapproval had propagated false rumors regarding the provisions in this bill, such as inclusion of the paid sick time covering independent contractors, who would in fact not be covered under the proposed law. Many have exaggerated the costs for businesses to implement the bill by arguing that in order to fulfill the mandates, they will have to cut other workers’ times or make other cutbacks to afford the sick time payment. One vocal opponent is the National Federation of Independent Businesses (NFIB) who in early 2012, argued that by mandating such legislation, there would be an influx of cost forced on employers in Massachusetts. They predicted that implementing this bill in Massachusetts would cost nearly 16,000 jobs by 2016. This data was obtained using the new employer costs based on the bill’s requirements and the new spending on healthcare-related goods and services due to increase in paid sick leave taken by employees. Furthermore, the group predicted the cumulative real output loss to be $8.4 billion across businesses of all sizes by comparing total cost of the bill to a baseline forecast if the bill does not get implemented.

Observing the effect of the 2006 implementation of mandated paid sick time legislation in San Francisco disabuses these fears. Employers are often afraid of their employees abusing the right to sick time, and taking time off when they actually don’t need to. However, a 2011 research report shows that in San Francisco, six out of every seven employers did not report negative profitability effects from the paid sick leave, and most said that new legislation had proven easy to implement. Addressing the concern of employees taking advantage of paid sick time, a recent study showed that Massachusetts workers take an average of 2.5 earned sick days a year. Employees in San Francisco also exhibited the trend even after implementation of the bill, as workers used only three days of paid sick leave of the available five or nine sick days. One quarter of employees in San Francisco used zero, and parents with paid sick days were also 20 percent less likely to send a child with a contagious disease to school than parents without the benefit. Both numbers in Massachusetts and San Francisco confirm that workers treat sick time as an insurance policy, only to be used for emergency situations.

We wanted to ask you to support an Act to Establishing Earned Paid Sick Time by your favorable report on this bill to the Ways and Means committee. If you would like, we can also provide you with the research studies mentioned in our conversation for thorough inspection. We sincerely ask for your consideration to protect workers’ rights and improve the workplace atmosphere, general health of our state, and our economy. Thank you!

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals
Gloria

During our second field trip to the State House, we talked to legislators on the labor and workforce development committee who were not yet co-sponsors of the Earned Paid Sick Time bill, including Representative John Rogers. He sat down with us and listened intently to our elevator speech and our arguments on economic benefits of the bill. I also gave him the printed research report on the Mass Paid Sick Leave Coalition website that thoroughly detailed how the study showed that employers in Massachusetts would have a net benefit of $26 million with passing earned paid sick time. During our 30-minute conversation,
he was very impressed by how much passion we exhibited on advocating for the bill, because through this personal encounter, the issue was made more convincing to him.

Moreover, it occurred to me that he was afraid to upset the business owners, as he was sympathetic to giving all workers the equal right to have paid sick time but was worried about voting in favor of it. I then mentioned that one of the state legislators most opposed to this bill in San Francisco said, “this is the best thing that’s happened to the economy in San Francisco” when the bill passed and led to economic growth. Representative Rogers responded to this incident very well, saying that “sometimes legislators need to be brave and make unpopular choices to do the right thing, and I sure had learned from my mistakes on this.” I then encouraged him to do the right thing, since the economic aspects of the bill are promising. Overall, I thought that we responded to his personal concerns regarding the bill very well, and he received our message positively.

I think the meeting went well, because he was so receptive to us. Again, he genuinely wanted to learn and I think being able to advocate for his support of the bill was a valuable experience. It’s nice to know that he was willing and ready to listen to our ideas and opinions and was going to consider voting favorably for this important bill. I think we possibly could have followed up with him. While we did not make a lasting connection, it could have been beneficial for us and for the bill to call or email and check on his stance and offer to provide any further answers for him.

Natalie

This meeting was at the State House and was with Representative John Rogers. Our meeting was held during our visit to the State House. The meeting was attended by Representative Rogers, myself, and Gloria Park. On that same day, we were meeting with people on the Joint Committee of Labor and Workforce Development because they represent the first committee that An Act Establishing Earned Paid Time will be going through. There are 11 cosponsors of the bill who were already on the committee, so we were aiming at speaking to people that were not already avid supporters, and Representative Rogers was one of them. We spoke with him for about 20 minutes about the bill and the importance of the bill. He was very understanding, kind, and really interested in what we had to say. He was on the fence about supporting the bill, so it was a beneficial meeting to try and persuade him to see all the benefits this bill brings.

While I would not say we made a lasting connection, there definitely was a sense of a connection while we were talking. He was very respectful in hearing our side and seemed genuinely interested in learning about the bill and why it mattered. We talked a lot about the business pros and cons, and he seemed impressed by our knowledge and grasp of this bill.

Update

As of May 14, 2013, H.1739 was scheduled for a hearing on June 25, 2013 by the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development.

For more information

Massachusetts Paid Sick Leave Coalition
http://masspaidleave.org
Update the Bottle Bill

In the past three decades, numerous new bottled beverages – sports drinks, bottled water, and juices – have come onto the market, but the Bottle Bill has not been updated to reflect these changes. Since its passage in 1983, the Bottle Bill has very effectively increased recycling throughout the state by placing a 5-cent deposit on covered containers, which include: beer, malt, carbonated soft drinks, and mineral water. More than 80% of these containers are recycled as a result. In the past three decades, numerous new bottled beverages – sports drinks, bottled water, and juices – have come onto the market, but the Bottle Bill has not been updated to reflect these changes. Only 22% of these containers are recycled – a rate that must be increased or else Massachusetts will continue its dangerously wasteful ways. The solution to this problem is simple: S.1588: the update to the Bottle Bill. It would expand the 5-cent deposit to these newer containers.

The Bill
S.1588: An Act updating the bottle bill.

Excerpt from Storybook
“We need this Update to fix a loophole in the Bottle Bill that has existed since its passage in 1983. When Governor Ed King tried to make the first official purchase of a bottle under the Bill, he chose a bottle not covered by the Bill. Made of the same materials, it was simply not included in the original bill, it should have been. Here’s our chance to make things right!” [Bob Hedlund, Massachusetts State Senator]

“This is just a matter of updating the law that has been so successful.” [Cynthia Creem, Massachusetts State Senator]

“There are bottles filling up landfills...bottles that are going to be there well beyond any of our lives.” [Alice Wolf, Former Massachusetts State Representative]

By placing a 5-cent deposit on every bottle in the state excluding dairy products, infant formula, and FDA approved medication, the Update to the Bottle Bill will:
- Transform the more than 1 billion unrecycled bottles into an upwards of $14 million to reinvigorate the Clean Environment Fund, which will
fund recycling programs and maintain our beautiful state parks

- Strengthen our economy by adding an estimated 1500 jobs to the recycling and waste management sector, while reducing the harmful strain on our landfills
- Improve public health by reducing litter and keeping our environment safe for ourselves and our children

**Elevator Speech**

Hello. My name is Michael and this is my colleague Flora who is a voter in Massachusetts. We are both students at Brandeis University, a school well known for its deep engagement with real world public policy issues, and we are working with MASSPIRG to help ensure a thriving, vibrant future for the citizens of the Commonwealth.

Bill: H.2943/S.1588 “An Act updating the bottle bill,” would reduce the more than 1 billion bottles – enough to fill Fenway Park – that litter our beautiful state; from the historic city of Boston to the pristine shores of Cape Cod to our Western hub of activity in Springfield. This update to the 30-year old law expands the five cent deposit on beverage containers and brings Massachusetts into modern times where the beverages we enjoy no longer come just in soda and juice bottles. Of course, all of these bottles are made of the exact same plastic as currently covered bottles are! This update to the Bottle Bill would reduce the strain on waste services, create 1500 recycling jobs, and keep Massachusetts clean and thriving for ourselves, our children, and the many visitors who frequent the Commonwealth. More than 77% of Massachusetts residents, 200 cities and towns, 350 businesses small and large, and 95 state legislators support this bill. Please join this momentum and vote to give the Bottle Bill a favorable report and help keep Massachusetts vibrant and sustainable!

**Letter to the Legislator**

To Representative Kenneth I. Gordon,

Every time I visit home on my drive back from Brandeis University, I pass by the various businesses on Cambridge Street. Bustling with activity from local families stopping at Schoolhouse Ice Cream for dessert or buying books at the Used Book Superstore, I have not noticed until recently all the litter that accumulates near the parking lots. Although there are many recycling bins and redemption locations at supermarkets, why do these bottles still linger? Why there is no additional incentive for people to recycle water bottles like there is for soda?

I believe that our beautiful Burlington deserves the best and therefore should have the proper incentive to increase recycling to decrease litter in our town.

While there are many recyclable bottles that can be redeemed for money, not all bottles are covered equally since some can be redeemed for the five cent deposit while others may not. Nearly three decades ago Massachusetts had passed a Bottle Bill in order to increase recycling in the state and it effectively raised recycling rates for those bottles to over 80%. Now is the time to pass the sequel, S.1588: An Act updating to the bottle bill. The bill aims to include new types of drinks that were previously not included in the original bottle bill so that people can get the benefit of redeeming it for a five cent deposit. New inclusions would include water, juice, sports drinks, and more. Some may say this is a tax but consumers can receive a full refund, which is not something that generally happens with taxes. In addition, another issue that has arisen is that this will upset the bottle and soda companies but many have publicly come out to show support for the Bottle Bill including large corporations like Coca-Cola. Moreover, all unclaimed funds will go to the Clean Environment Fund, which will support recycling programs throughout the state and fund needed environmental clean up projects. Revenue generated by the bill will produce thousands of jobs in the recycling industry and create a litter free state we can all be proud of.

Please speak to your colleagues in the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy and ask them to give the Bottle Bill a favorable report. Together, we can make sure Massachusetts has a clean and sustainable future.

**House Ways and Means Script**

Mr. Dempsey, we all have a responsibility to the welfare of Massachusetts. As an elected representative committed to social justice, you understand that this should be top priority for our state. Given your past work on an “Act Relative to Green Communities,” it is clear you care about these issues. There exists a great problem in Massachusetts dealing with waste and public health. Every year, there are over 1.1 billion bottles not being recycled, which could and should be. That is enough bottles to fill Fenway Park and cost the taxpayers over $7 million annually. The state is running out of landfill space and something must be done to curb this problem. Fortunately there is a clear solution, the update to the bottle bill, S.1588. It would add sports drinks, iced tea, water, and juices, among many other commonplace beverages. These bottles would now include a 5-cent deposit that consumers can redeem at any
official redemption center, reverse vending machines, or retailer from whom the consumer bought the bottle. As a testament to the impact of an updated bottle bill, 80% of bottles currently included in the bottle bill are recycled while only 20% of non-covered bottles are. The bill can effectively promote recycling, but for it to be optimally efficient to this end, it must be expanded.

The entire Bottle Bill regime will cost the state nothing, as it is the bottling industry and the consumers that finance it. The state merely collects unclaimed deposits and regulates the system in regards to deposit rates, handling fees (payments from bottlers to redemption centers/retailers to offset the cost of processing redeemed bottles), and ensuring fraud does not take place. Also, fraud is an easily solved problem by placing barcodes on Massachusetts’ bottles that are unique to the state; ensuring out-of-state bottles cannot be redeemed.

There are clear financial benefits to the state passing the update to the bottle bill. Even though recycling rates will greatly increase following the bill’s passage, unclaimed deposits will certainly exist. These deposits will generate revenue for the state government that is to be used to revitalize the Clean Environment Fund. Under the original Bottle Bill the Fund was created to support recycling programs and solid waste management. The update to the bottle bill would recreate the Fund and utilize unclaimed deposits to finance it.

Moreover, the update to the bottle bill will bolster the state’s economy in regards to employment numbers. The Massachusetts Sierra Club and MASSPIRG estimate a net increase of 1500 jobs would result from the bill. This is because of the increase in recycling rates the Bottle Bill will prompt. The extra recycling will place much greater demands on the state’s recycling infrastructure, necessitating more jobs. In fact, 4,684 jobs were added to Michigan’s economy after a new bottle bill was passed in that state while New York added 3,800 jobs to its economy following the creation of a similar law. Considering Massachusetts’ 6.7% unemployment rate, those 1500 or more jobs would be an excellent way to start lowering that number.

Opponents to the Bill raise two chief objections: that the Bill represents a new tax on consumers and that it will raise the costs of these beverages. Both assertions are completely false. The Bottle Bill cannot be a tax when consumers simply have to return their bottle to a redemption center or retailer, to get every cent back. As for rising costs of beverages, an extensive study conducted by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection in 2011 revealed prices are negligible between bottle bill and non-bottle bill states. Those against the bill also believe it is unnecessary because curbside recycling programs already exist. However, inner cities and rural areas do not have the most effective curbside programs and consumers are not always near home or a recycling bin when they have a bottle. The Update to the Bottle Bill incentivizes those consumers to find a redemption center rather than simply toss their bottle in the garbage and exacerbate the waste issues in Massachusetts.

Nevertheless, the Bottle Bill is just one of many acts needed to address the various environmental issues affecting Massachusetts. It will be an excellent complement to past legislation such as your own “Act Relative to Green Communities.” Although the Bottle Bill has a very different aim, both acts benefit the environment of Massachusetts. The latter improves the state’s environment by reducing litter and allocating funds to strengthen the commonwealth’s waste and recycling infrastructure. This not only improves the state’s ecosystem but also enhances the state’s economy via energy savings, job creation, and new environmental standards.

With 95 cosponsors between the House and Senate along with more than 100 environmental organizations, 200 cities and towns, and 350 businesses endorsing the bill, it is clear support for it is high. Additionally, a recent poll conducted by the MassINC polling group indicated that 77% of the public supports the update and thus the democratic will is on the side of this valuable piece of legislation. Our request Chairman Dempsey is quite simple; when you have the chance to vote on the Bottle Bill, please vote in favor of it. If you believe in the merit of the bill, please speak with your colleagues, especially those on the Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture, to garner even more support for it. The update is a simple solution to a complex problem and it is an effective and long overdue remedy to issues we can no longer afford to ignore.

Op-Ed

The energy in sugar I receive from a bottle of juice will be used up in a day but the container that the bottle came in will outlast my lifetime by centuries. Unrecycled, this bottle will wander the streets and sewers aimlessly until it settles itself in a nook in nature. There, it will rest as nature slowly works to break down its resilient material as it resists the endless forces of weather and season.

But why is this bottle going to rot in nature while another bottle gets to go to the recycling plant just because it held juice instead of soda? Given that these two bottles were made equal in a far away plastic facility, why should their fates differ?
The stark truth is that there should be no difference between these two bottles. When the first Bottle Bill was passed in 1981, the only beverages that were applicable for the five cent redemption were soda, beer and other alcoholic beverages. With changing times and different market standards, now a large part of the bottled beverage industry includes water, juice, and other drinks that were not popular at the time of the original Bottle Bill. Given that social standards are the only difference between these two kinds of bottles, shouldn't social policy reflect the needs of the people?

Some Massachusetts residents have thought that the Bottle Bill is merely a tax and have rejected it on premise. This is a false assumption since it is truly revenue neutral. The bill itself is revenue neutral but for all the unredeemed bottles, the funds then become part of the Clean Environment Fund. This money is set aside to be used on projects in towns around Massachusetts in order to fund solutions to solve specific problems. Remember, when the same nickel is given and then taken back, it’s not a tax on the Commonwealth!

By passing the Update to the Bottle Bill, MA aims to equalize the fate of these two plastic bottles. This bill aims to add a five cent deposit on all plastic bottles that would be eligible for recycling so that people would be incentivized to bring them to their local deposit center. This not only revitalizes recycling programs in the state but also lets the state regain revenue in economically harsh times. In addition, there will be job creation since there will be an increased demand at both the recycling plants and the redemption centers. Another benefit is that this will combat global warming overall since this will decrease the amount of PET plastic needed to be made.

With over 80 sponsors and 70% of the MA constituents, the Update to the Bottle Bill is clearly a popular choice. But it still needs more support to get it passed in this legislative session. Take charge and contact your representatives and senators. Stand strong knowing that you are in the majority with MA residents who want to see a change in our state. Make sure that this bill finally gets its day in court and the speaker does not silence its voice! Let’s make the stories of soda and water bottles in this state equal and environmentally sustainable!

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**Excerpts from Campaign Journals**

**Flora**

Throughout our various trips to the statehouse we had made contact with various aides and one of the meetings that really stood out to me was meeting Representative Mark J. Cusack’s aide and discussing the concerns of his constituents with him. As a Democratic Representative of Braintree, he had special interest representing his town as well as economics since he currently serves on the Joint Committee on Revenue and Transportation. This experience showed me how representatives always have to consider multiple factors while making a decision and it is sometimes very difficult to balance an immediate need with a long-term concern.

When we first walked into Representative Cusack’s office, we were greeted by his aide who told us that the representative was busy in a meeting. We sat in the office and were able to have a decently long conversation over the representative’s concerns with the Bottle Bill. The initial issue that had arisen was that since the transportation budget was going to take up such a large portion of the current economic expenditures, the representative did not want to pass something that would additionally stress the economy. We were able to quickly dispel this myth and discussed at length about why the Update to the Bottle Bill will be revenue neutral and in fact bring money back into the economy. In addition, we discussed all the job creation opportunities that will come with the increased level of recycling in the state that will demand more jobs at redemption and recycling centers. Another issue that has concerned Braintree recently is litter on the streets and many people being confused about where and how to recycle. A solution that we had mentioned was that the money from the unredeemed bottles would go towards the Clean Environment Fund that could be used to fund those projects. In the end, the aide was more convinced by the intentions and the abilities of the Update to the Bottle Bill but was still somewhat skeptical. A large part of his decision seemed contingent on other issues and bills that were being considered.

This was a meaningful advocacy experience for us because we say that we actively changed someone’s mindset on the Bottle Bill from being apprehensive to open to the idea. This not only shows that advocacy efforts can be effective but also that policymakers are open to changes on their stance when they see there is a pressing need. If I can redo this experience I would be open to attempting to lead the conversation more towards the environmental and social benefits rather just the economic benefits given that was the concern of the aide it was understandable to why that was crucial to focus on in the conversation we had with him.
**Michael**

On Saturday, April 6th I attended “The Battle for the Bottle Bill,” an event held to rally supporters of the Bottle Bill. It was hosted by Massachusetts comedian Jimmy Tingle and included numerous special guests including MASSPIRG Executive Director Janet Domenitz, Bottle Bill sponsors including State Senator Bob Hedlund, Ken Donnelly, and Sean Garballey. It took place at the Regent Theatre in Arlington, Massachusetts. The Regent is a small theatre—but all 150-200 seats or so were packed. It was a very entertaining and informative event. Tingle offered stand-up comedy, the various guest speakers were interviewed, and lots of cheers went up in support of the Bottle Bill.

Although I knew much of the information about the Bottle Bill before the event, I heard some very interesting stories about the Bill’s history and got some new perspectives on the Bill. Sen. Hedlund told an amusing yet insightful story about how when the Bottle Bill was first passed, Governor Ed King tried to make the first official purchase of a bottle covered under the law. Unfortunately, he chose a bottle not covered by it and thus it had no 5 cent deposit. This perfectly illustrates the inconsistency in the current Bottle Bill and how the proposed Update is merely closing a loophole. I have used this story while advocating at the state house (such as when speaking with Rep. Timilty’s aide) and while talking to friends and members of the public about the Bill. Moreover, I asked the three State legislators at the meeting if Governor Patrick’s suggestion to use Bottle Bill funds to help close the budget gap has impacted the Bill in the State House. They informed me that suggestion was struck from the budget when the Senate released their version of it. This omission of the Bottle Bill from the budget disheartened me but at the same time made me realize how important my and my fellow advocates’ efforts are. Even with so much support around the state and in the legislature, obstacles still exist and I realized I need to work harder—into the summer and beyond if needed, to get this essential legislation passed. I also intend to find footage of the event (once it is posted online) and incorporate it into an advocacy video and future campaign events.

Additionally, I finally connected with Janet Domenitz—I had a brief conversation with her about Flora’s and my campaign for the Bottle Bill. I also met an activist from a nearby town and spoke with him throughout the event about better ways to organize and campaign for the Bottle Bill, as well as other solutions to the environmental crisis we face.

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**Update**

As of May 24, 2013, S.1588 was adopted by the State Senate as an amendment to the budget.

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For more information

MassPIRG

http://www.masspirg.org/issues/map/update-bottle-bill
Low voter turnout has been an issue for decades nationwide. In Massachusetts, voter turnout in the 2012 Presidential and U.S. Senate Elections was 64.9%. The barriers to voter registration in the United States have been estimated to deter voters and decrease turnout by as much as 10 percent. Across the country, an estimated 3 million voters could not or did not vote because of registration problems. To combat this problem in Massachusetts, S.313: An Act establishing online voter registration, proposes the creation of an online voting system, which would allow citizens to complete an affidavit of registration online. The bill also involves the creation of an online look-up system, where voters can check to see if they are registered to vote in a district. To guard against voter fraud, citizens’ signatures from the Department of Motor Vehicles would be used.

**The Bill**

S.313: An Act establishing online voter registration.

**Excerpt from Storybook**

Sara Brady, Policy Director of MassVOTE, is an outspoken advocate of electoral reform and supports the online voter registration bill as a means of driving young people to register to vote. Sara affirms that in the technology-centric world in which we live, we should be taking advantage of all resources with online voter registration. Sara says: “It’s about making it more accessible and more convenient for young people. If you’re able to pay your taxes online, go grocery shopping online and pay your credit card bill online, you should be able to register to vote online.”

“I went to my local town hall to register in person immediately after I turned 18. I was left confused by the process and it was unclear how I was supposed to register.” [Josh Kelly, registered Massachusetts voter]

Gabe Distler, a Brandeis student, is registered to vote in Massachusetts where he attends college, but is considering switching his registration to Florida, where he has a
permanent residence. Gabe was interested in looking up his registration status online and seeing whether the information is accurate; however, since Massachusetts does not have an online lookup system, he was unable to do this. Gabe says: ‘If so many other states have online lookup systems, I see no reason why Massachusetts should not be taking advantage of the technology and doing the same.’

■ Elevator Speech
Hello, our names are Ricky Rosen, David Goldberg and John Pizzi, and we are members of a student body at Brandeis University that is dedicated to social justice and reform. We wanted to speak with you about civic engagement, the bedrock of our democracy; when civic engagement falters, we cease to be a democratic nation. Voter turnout in the United States averages 55 percent, but in 2012 alone, three million voters could not vote because of registration problems. To help citizens, 41 states have instituted online registration look-up databases, 15 states have implemented online registration systems and 9 states are in the process of doing so. Massachusetts is not yet one of these states.

Right now, Bill S.313, An Act establishing online voter registration, has been filed in the Senate, which would create an online database through which citizens in Massachusetts can register to vote. Online voter registration is a proven way to increase voter registration in states that have enacted it. In Oregon and South Carolina, 25,000 new voters registered online as soon as the system was launched. In addition, online voter registration would save money compared to traditional paper processes. In Washington and Delaware, online voter registration saved $125,000 and $200,000, respectively, in the first year that the system was enacted.

Massachusetts needs to join the other states that have adopted online registration means for its residents and for its democracy. We urge you to support a favorable committee vote on this bill.

■ Letter to the Legislator
Dear Representative Stanley,

As Brandeis students dedicated to social justice and reform, we are writing to ask you to support Bill S.313: An Act establishing online voter registration. This bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Election Laws, but originated as part of a larger election reform bill, SD.1562. Since this bill was unable to pass, it was divided into a multitude of smaller bills; among them is S.313: An Act establishing online voter registration.

Voter turnout is a critical component of civic engagement. In the United States, voter turnout in federal elections averages 55 percent. However, in the 2012 presidential election, three million voters could not vote because of registration issues. To help citizens, 41 states have instituted online registration look-up databases, 15 states have implemented online voter registration systems and 9 states are in the process of doing so. Massachusetts is not one of those states.

Bill S.313, An Act establishing online voter registration, sponsored by Senator Katherine Clark, proposes the creation of an online voter registration system. The bill also involves the creation of an online look-up system, where voters can check their registration status and registration location [state and district].

States that have enacted online voter registration systems are quickly proving that it is an effective method to increase voter registration, increase the accuracy of voting records, streamline the registration process for election officials, and save state dollars. In California, 600,000 new voters registered with the online voter registration system. In Oregon and South Carolina, 25,000 new voters registered online the day the system was launched. Online voter registration would also save money compared to paper processes. Right now, paper voter registration costs Massachusetts millions of dollars due to the costs of printing, staff, distribution, system management, and support. Online voter registration would eliminate most of these costs and save Massachusetts money in the long run. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, in Washington, the Secretary of State’s office saved over $125,000 in the first year, while Delaware saved $200,000 in the first year that online voter registration was enacted.

The major argument against this bill is that it would generate voter fraud. However, in order to guard against this, the bill stipulates that the information on the registration form would be cross-checked with the Massachusetts Department of Motor Vehicles, including the citizen’s signature.

Massachusetts needs to join the states that have adopted online voter registration for its residents and for its democracy. This is an important bill that will benefit the Commonwealth. Currently, you are petitioning another bill on election laws under H.644 with Representative John J. Lawn from the 10th District. We hope that your desire for progressive election reform will extend to Bill S.313: An Act establishing online voter registration. Thank you for your support.

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Representative Dempsey, the barriers to voter registration serve as a major cause of low voter turnout in the United States. In order to address this challenge, 24 states have either implemented online voter registration systems or are currently introducing these bills this year. An Act establishing online voter registration (S.313) was filed this year in the Massachusetts Legislature by Senator Katherine Clark, with the support of dozens of Representatives, Senators and coalition organizations such as Common Cause Massachusetts and MassVOTE. The bill proposes the creation of an online voter registration system, which would allow citizens the opportunity to complete an affidavit of registration online. The bill also involves the creation of an online look-up system, where voters can find out if they are registered to vote in a given district.

The online voter registration bill would produce an enormous increase in voter registration in Massachusetts, as has been the case in states that have implemented similar online voter registration systems, including California, Oregon, and South Carolina. The bill would also increase the accuracy of voting records, and appeal to young people, a demographic that has historically low voter turnout.

This bill also addresses another major concern with the current voter registration process in Massachusetts: it is incredibly costly. According to the Director of the Elections Division of the Massachusetts Secretary of State’s Office, Michelle Tassinari, paper registration in Massachusetts costs the state millions of dollars each year in printing, distribution, and staff expenses alone. Massachusetts is not the only state that has costly paper voter registration processes. A study by the Pew Center found that paper voter registration in Oregon cost more than $9.7 million during the 2008 election, which is a cost of $4.51 per active registered voter.

The reason that paper voter registration is so expensive is because of how elaborate the process is. According to the Massachusetts Secretary of State’s Office, voter registration involves a wide range of costs in every step of the process. First, there are costs for printing and postage for state notices to registered voters, confirmation notices sent to newly registered voters and confirmation notices sent to voters who updated their registrations with address changes or other new information. There are also staff costs for each part-time and full-time clerk who works for the county on voter registration. In addition, there are facility and support costs, which include the cost of office space, information technology support, and telephones for staff members. Furthermore, there are the costs of receiving and distributing completed registration forms to counties, the costs of managing the system which provides each county with a list of registered voters, and the cost of providing a toll-free call service for citizens with election registration questions.

How much does online voter registration cost in comparison? First of all, the start-up costs for an online voter registration database are inexpensive. According to a report by the Brennan Center for Justice, it cost Arizona, Washington and Oregon $130,000, $279,000 and $200,000, respectively, to set up the database. This is essentially the same amount that would be spent in one election cycle to print paper voter registration forms, however, the cost of setting up the database would only need to be incurred once. These costs could be eliminated with moderate grants from the federal government.

Nevertheless, studies have shown that these start-up costs have been recovered within a few years, mainly as a result of the need for less staff. According to the Brennan Center for Justice, in Washington, the Secretary of State’s office saved over $125,000 in the first year. In addition, Maricopa County in Arizona (which has a population larger than that of 23 states) spends only 3 cents to process an electronic registration, compared with 83 cents for a paper form. The county estimates it saved more than $450,000 in registration costs in 2008 alone. Delaware also saved more than $200,000 in the first year that online voter registration was enacted.

Where are these savings coming from? Besides the start-up costs, online voter registration would not incur many of the costs associated with paper registration. Staff, printing and distribution costs would be all but eliminated. In addition, according to MassVOTE, processing online registration costs 95 percent less than entering handwritten forms.

That being said, opponents argue that the system would produce voter fraud. They insist that people could register under fake names or send it multiple registrations by gaining access to the database. However, in order to guard against this type of fraud, the bill stipulates that the information on the registration form would be cross-checked with the Massachusetts Department of Motor Vehicles, including the citizen’s signature. In addition to this, one of the few costs associated with the online voter registration database would be system maintenance and security to prevent voter fraud. Senator Katherine Clark, the bill’s official sponsor in the Senate, states this bill “is no more susceptible to voter fraud than paper voter registration, if anything, it’s safer.”

Opponents argue that the system would confuse people who are unfamiliar with this technology. However, the bill targets teenagers and young people already familiar with the internet. In addition, the bill could institute a toll-free hotline for citizens with questions, just as the Elections Division provides for paper voter registration methods.
We would like you to consider the benefits that this bill would have on voter registration and voter turnout. We also urge you to consider that in this age of financial uncertainty, this bill would save Massachusetts millions of dollars in the long run. We request that you support this bill in your meetings with the Ways and Means Committee. Thank you for your time.

Op-Ed

Modernizing Massachusetts: Bringing Voter Registration into the 21st Century

Purchase airplane tickets. Trade stocks and commodities. Hire a personal assistant. Order fast food. Take courses at MIT. Pay your credit card bill. In some states, you can even get married online. In the world we live in today, there is truly no limit to the pervasiveness of the Internet . . . except when it comes to voter registration.

In Massachusetts, just about the only thing that you cannot do online is register to exercise your Constitutional right to vote. With every other aspect of everyday life in Massachusetts moving into the 21st century, it is simply unacceptable that the state’s electoral system remains stagnant.

Right now, it is fairly painless to register to vote in Massachusetts – provided that you have a half hour, a working printer, an awful lot of patience and a strong desire to fulfill your civic duties. All that you need to do is visit the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts’ website and download the voter registration form [if you can find it amidst all of the clutter]. Once you wait approximately six minutes for the download to be completed, you must open the form, but as a .doc file, not a PDF since you need to edit it. After you fill it out, printing it should not take longer than a few minutes, depending on how much toner you have. Then, you need to find an envelope and stamp [unfortunately the state will not reimburse for this] and take a trip to the post office to mail it. Within about twenty minutes, your registration should be in the mail, and you should receive notice of the registration within a few weeks. That doesn’t sound very tedious, does it? It’s no wonder that teenagers juggling Advanced Placement classes, sports teams, play practice and social lives decide to just skip the process altogether.

What many other states have realized, though, is that you should not have to jump through hoops to register to vote. Voting is not a privilege – it is the right of every American citizen, and the state has the duty to make the process as convenient as possible. For this reason, 15 states have implemented online registration systems and 9 states are in the process of doing so – and these states have seen results. Online voter registration has led to an increase in voter registration and voter turnout in Oregon and South Carolina. Oregon and Delaware have also saved thousands of dollars by implementing an online voter registration database.

The age group that online registration would most affect is teenagers, the laziest demographic of them all. Fewer than half of the eligible 18 to 21 year old citizens are currently registered to vote in Massachusetts. But for a teenager who spends most of his or her waking life deciding whether to devote the next three minutes to an article on BuzzFeed or a video on YouTube, the ability to register to vote online sounds incredible.

To clarify, Bill # S.313, An Act establishing online voter registration, would not enable citizens to cast their vote in the Presidential election by liking a status on Facebook. It is simply offering Massachusetts residents the opportunity to register to vote online, a privilege which 24 other states have already granted their citizens. But there is no rush: it is much more important to be able to order Domino’s Pizza online than to register to vote.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Ricky

Along with my group members, David Goldberg and John Pizzi, I stopped by Senator Finegold’s office at the State House to speak with him about Bill S.313, an Act establishing online voter registration. We sought out Senator Finegold, in particular, since he is the Chair of the Joint Committee on Election Laws, and he was the sponsor of the omnibus election bill. Senator Finegold’s bill contained many components of election reform, including early registration for teenagers, extended voting periods, and online voter registration, all of which were divided into separate bills. We decided to drop by the Senator’s office, because we had finished a meeting with Senator Katherine Clark, the sponsor of Bill S.313, and had some time to chat. We figured that Senator Finegold would be a tremendous source of guidance and could advise us on what the next step should be in the advocacy process for the bill. Unfortunately, the Senator’s secretary let us know that the Senator was not in, and so we spoke with his Legislative Director, Stephanie Viola, instead. Stephanie met with us in the conference room of the Senator’s office and asked us to fill her in on the progress we had made on advocating for the bill. We told her that we were working with Common Cause Massachusetts and MassVOTE on the bill, and that we had reached out to several legislators to garner support. We then asked her how we could help the Senator and other Representatives in favor of election reform.
legislation. Stephanie urged us to testify at the legislative hearing for the online voter registration bill and to keep in touch with her to provide her with updates. We exchanged our contact information, and after the meeting, Stephanie emailed us thanking us for the work that we were doing.

John
I chose to meet with Senator Finegold, because my bill was originally part of an omnibus bill in the last legislative session and dealt with extensive election reform. Since last session, my bill has been removed as a standalone bill to grant it a better chance of passing. Senator Finegold’s omnibus bill is included in this session but will be difficult to pass in its entirety based on what the Senator’s staff had to say. The staff said that there are many factors and the Senator is ambitious. The location of the meeting was the Senator’s office at the Massachusetts State House. Those present included the Senator’s staff, Ricky Rosen, David Goldberg, and myself.

Overall, the substance of the meeting was highly informative. We learned of the Senator’s serious intent to pass his omnibus this legislative session and the staff members indicated a clear vote of support for Bill S.313 by the Senator. [In other words, my advocacy efforts were unnecessary.] We discussed the significant pros to our bill as well as what the opposition to our bill has for main talking points. The most significant opposition point that we learned in this early stage was a concern for city clerk jobs. The Senator’s staff said that many citizens are concerned there will be a significant amount of clerk job loss if bill S.313 is passed. They expressed a counter-point that the bill does not call for the abolishment of clerk jobs as they will still be necessary to monitor voter records and accept any situations where paper registrations are completely necessary. Overall, I think that this meeting was one of the best all spring semester. It was clear, professional and informative. Meeting with the Senator himself would be the only thing that could have gone better.

David
The first meeting I attended was a meeting with Stephanie Viola, the Legislative Director for Senator Barry Finegold’s office. I did not meet with her individually, but our whole group met with her to discuss our bill about online voter registration. When we told her what our bill was about, she was already very familiar with it, as Senator Finegold had supported the omnibus bill during the last session. So in that sense, we had very little lobbying to do, as she was already an advocate for our proposal. The meeting lasted around 15 minutes and was very casual, and we felt good about how it went. At the time of our meeting, she was in the process of finalizing the dates of the hearings relevant to our bill, so she promised to email us later with those dates. ...

The ‘Deis Dems and the Brandeis Libertarian-Conservative Union co-sponsored a coalition event with Common Cause and MASSvote at Brandeis on April 10th. The event lasted around an hour and was led by Tyler Creighton, Pam Wilmot, and Sara Brady. We had all already been in email contact with Tyler and Sara, so this was a good time to meet each other and put a face to the name. All of the speakers gave presentations about the specific parts of each aspect of the omnibus bill. During his presentation on the online registration aspect, Tyler mentioned how he had been in contact with us and how we had good information regarding the bill. There were around 15 other people not part of our class who attended this meeting as well.

Update
As of May 21, 2013, S.313 was scheduled for a hearing by the Joint Committee on Election Laws.

For more information
MassVOTE
http://www.massvote.org

Common Cause Massachusetts
http://www.commoncause.org/ma
Support for Homeless Youth

Provide housing and support for homeless youth in Massachusetts

Sarah Schneider ’13
Emmily Smith ’13

In 2009, there were nearly 6,000 homeless high school students alone in Massachusetts who were categorized as unaccompanied. Such youth are unaccompanied because they are “acting day-to-day without guidance of a parent or guardian.” These youth are at a high risk for a wide variety of health and safety concerns including malnutrition, depression, exposure to violence, exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, and even death. House Bill 135: An Act providing housing and support services for unaccompanied homeless youth, seeks to address this issue by funding a range of housing options including emergency shelter, temporary placements, “kinship” placements, and transitions to independent living. Additionally, funds would support medical and mental health services, case management, educational and employment assistance, and other social support services. Up to five million dollars will be allotted to solve these problems in the hope that investing in this act will give thousands of youth better opportunities and the skills they need to contribute to a better future for their own lives and the state of Massachusetts.

The Bill

H.135: An act providing housing and support services to unaccompanied homeless youth.

Excerpt from Storybook

“I didn’t go to school because when I was going to school I was wearing the same thing over and over again and kids were making fun of me…I didn’t want to be like ‘I’m homeless, what am I supposed to do?’ I ended up getting fired from my job because I didn’t come in smelling good because I was spending my money on food. If we can at least get pointed in the right direction and do it for ourselves, that would mean the world to us.” [James, unaccompanied homeless youth]
“I want to be heard. I am...a young black homeless child without family...once you reach the age of 18 all of a sudden you become a toddler becoming able to ride a bike on your own. They expect you to do XYZ, but don't even give you the help...where is our pre-school to teach us as human beings that are going to make mistakes to be independent without a guide? I am looking for your help.”

[Jody, unaccompanied homeless youth]

■ Elevator Speech
Hello, I’m Emmily and this is Sarah, and we are Brandeis University students working with Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless to advocate for H.135: An Act providing housing and support services to unaccompanied homeless youth. In order to address the health, safety, and stability needs of all youth in the Commonwealth, the needs of homeless youth must be addressed. Unaccompanied homeless youth not only struggle to find a place to sleep at night, but they also do not have families to love and support them, and there are nearly 6,000 high school students alone in Massachusetts in this position. Imagine spending each day worried about where you will sleep or what you will have to eat; these youth are not focused on their hopes or plans for the future because they don’t even know what’s going to happen to them tomorrow. H.135 will provide these youth with the safety, stability, and opportunity that should be offered to all youth in the Commonwealth by helping them find homes and other support services. You can provide opportunities to these youth by supporting this bill and asking the chairs of the Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities to give this bill a favorable report. Thank you!

■ Letter to the Legislator
Dear Representative Stanley,

It was a pleasure meeting your aide Mark on February 27th, 2013 and speaking with him about the unaccompanied homeless youth bill, H.135. Here are a few points we would like to emphasize about the bill:

As a parent of two children, I imagine you understand the stability, health, and safety needs of youth, and would wish all youth to have the same opportunities and hopes for the future that your children have. In order to support youth, I ask that you support H.135: An Act providing housing and support services for unaccompanied homeless youth.

It is estimated that 6,000 high school students alone in Massachusetts are homeless and have no family to support them. Homeless youth spend their time and energy focused on finding shelter, food, clothing, and meeting their basic needs. These youth are unable to plan for the future because they have to focus on surviving day to day. 75% of homeless youth drop out of school, 29% more homeless youth report significant alcohol use, and almost half of homeless youth have attempted suicide. When youth are focused on meeting survival needs rather than learning or growing in a safe and stable environment, they lack an equal opportunity for achieving personal success, and as a result are unlikely to give back to their communities in the future.

This Act will provide housing and support services to homeless youth throughout Massachusetts based on the recommendations of a commission exploring the issue of unaccompanied youth homelessness. The bill would give youth the stability and support they desperately need by providing a variety of housing services including emergency and transitional housing and “kinship” home placements. H.135 would also provide services such as mental and medical health services, educational, vocational, and case management services.

Five million dollars would provide these much-expanded housing options and services to youth. As a legislator with vast experience in the world of Ways and Means, I imagine you agree that five million dollars is a small sum in the vast, thirty-four billion dollar state budget. Furthermore, the educational and vocational outcomes possible for these youth with assistance could result in long-term savings to the state. 75% of inmates in Massachusetts are high school dropouts, and the state spends about $45,000 per inmate. Additionally, educational achievement is strongly correlated with financial success. Imagine how much Massachusetts could save if it invested in youth today, rather than having to support them tomorrow.

I ask that you talk to the members of the Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities and ask them to give H.135 a favorable report. Please stand with Representative O’Day and Senator Clark, the sixty-six co-sponsors of the bill, and youth across the state in your support of this bill.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

■ House Ways and Means Script
There are currently over 6,000 high school students in the Commonwealth who face homelessness. Bill H. 135, An Act providing housing and support services for unaccompanied homeless youth, is working to help these youth. This bill would find housing and support options for youth up to the age of 24 who are homeless and do not
live with a parent or guardian. The goal of this bill is to provide housing and residential stability and decrease the risk of harm that these youth face every day. This bill is asking for $5 million in funding to implement housing and services. The bill is asking for continuous housing for these youth in conjunction with wraparound support services. These continuous housing options include but are not limited to: emergency shelters, where one can stay for a period of time after they leave their previous residence; and “kinship” home placements, where youth can live in a safe environment with a family, sometimes with other family members who are not their parents.

The bill will also fund access to medical services, which include: medical help such as doctors and emergency room visits, the ability to go to a dentist, and the ability to get mental health services. Additionally, there will be funding to receive counseling; the counseling programs will encompass different options such as individual, family, and group sessions, and the youth can decide on which of these options that they want to utilize. There will also be opportunities for the youth to access education and employment services, including access to schools and other educational services as well as employment services that can help youth find stable jobs and educate them in the field they will be working, such as trade schools. The youth will also be able to work with case managers. These programs will also include those that will educate youth on independent life skills, which will give them the skills they need to live on their own in a safe and stable way.

There is a special committee created by the FY’ 13 budget that is working with different groups within the House, non-profit organizations, and the youth that are affected. This Committee is due to release a report at the beginning of this year with specific programs and services along with the funding requirements.

These housing options and programs will be able to access funding in all areas of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts including urban, suburban, and rural locations. These options will be able to help the more than 6,000 high school homeless unaccompanied youth that are in the Commonwealth now that do not have access to stable safe homes.

Op-Ed

Providing Homes for Unaccompanied Youth: ‘It’s Not Rocket Science’

James was fourteen when he became homeless. He wandered around the city in the evenings trying to find somewhere to sleep and was once kicked out of sleeping under a bridge and threatened by the police not to return.

James tried to get an apartment but was unable to afford it despite having a job. Classmates made fun of him for wearing the same clothes every day, and he was fired from his job because of his lack of cleanliness. James states that, “My experience being homeless definitely, definitely was the most horrible experience for me.”

It is the 21st century, and yet in our society there are still youth living on the streets. There are youth who resort to sleeping under bridges at night because they have nowhere else to go. This is not to speak of the other violent and traumatic situations youth are placed in because they do not have safe places to stay at night. Many struggle to make it through as a result of these challenges; up to half of homeless youth have attempted suicide, many having made repeated attempts. This is a problem that we can take action to solve by following the lead of youth advocates and legislators in Massachusetts.

It is imperative that we hear the call of unaccompanied homeless youth and provide them with housing and support services that can provide them with the safety, stability, and health outcomes that they so desperately need. There are nearly 6,000 homeless high school students alone in Massachusetts who do not have families to support them. Imagine all of the youth that you know, and then imagine if there were at least 6,000 of them, 6,000 struggling to find food and a place to stay at night. Imagine their resilience in the face of hardship, but their inability to focus adequately on their future career goals or plans for the future. Imagine 75% of them dropping out of school without a high school diploma, and 29% of them being more likely to resort to significant alcohol use now that they’re homeless. Now imagine a society in which our shared values push us to speak up for these youth and provide them with the fundamental housing and services that we would wish any youth we know to have.

These youth are our future, and based on the recommendations of the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, we can efficiently implement programs that provide these youth with homes and support. With the passage of H.135: An Act providing housing and support services for unaccompanied homeless youth, we can make the bright dreams of these youth a reality. This bill would create a range of housing and support services for these youth such as emergency and transitional shelter, “kinship” home placements, mental health and medical services, as well as educational, vocational, and case management services.

This issue is a no brainer, so please call your legislators. Give your State Representative and State Senator a call to find them go to www.wheredoivotema.com and ask them to actively call attention to this issue and ask that H.135 be passed to ensure the health, safety,
and stability of our state’s youth. As one youth advocate said, “it’s not rocket science.” It is common sense that we care deeply for these youth, care about the wellness of our communities, and can do much more to support their needs. Please join us in calling legislators to support our youth.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Sarah

Less than a week after the Committee meeting, we attended Legislative Action Day (LAD) at the State House on February 27th. This was an incredibly inspiring and informative event that demonstrated strong support from a variety of organizations and individuals for Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless’s advocacy items. LAD was held in the Great Hall of the Massachusetts State House, a large room that allowed for hundreds of people to gather and hear speakers present. Kelly Turley again led the event. Representative James O’Day spoke as a leading legislative advocate for this bill, and it likely was useful for the legislative aides who attended the event to see such outspoken support from a legislator.

A variety of service providers testified to the challenges faced by homeless individuals and the need for increased support services. Of these speeches, Ayala Livny, Program Manager of Youth on Fire, gave a particularly poignant explanation of what it means to be homeless as a youth and the challenges that these youth face. Furthermore, youth and homeless adults themselves spoke, which was an extremely moving part of the event and presented the faces of real people affected by these issues. This event was exceptionally useful for hearing real stories from unaccompanied homeless youth, making advocacy for H.135 seem particularly pertinent. Following the event in the Great Hall, we went to an art exhibit in Doric Hall featuring artwork from unaccompanied youth and their allies. Seeing stories expressed through art was also very moving and a clever way of harnessing art to present the problem of youth homelessness. Later in the afternoon, we met with an aide for Waltham Representative Thomas Stanley to speak to him about H.135 and pass on information from MA Coalition for the Homeless about various advocacy items. LAD turned out to be one of the most educational, well-organized, and moving events of the advocacy journey.

Emmily

This was an amazingly powerful event. This event started with speakers from the legislature and the coalition speaking about the issues revolving around homelessness in the Commonwealth. There were also speakers who were dealing with homelessness and their struggles, there were even those who spoke about their experiences with emergency assist and the RAFT programs. This was informative because I had only really known about shelter and the new emergency shelter requirements, these horrible also. This let me learn more about the different options out there. As the event progressed there were speakers from different organizations that worked with homeless youth specifically such as Ayala from Youth on Fire and a representative from YARN. They spoke about the importance of youth specific shelters and support services. These speakers really gave a sense of how these shelters and services would help these youth and achieve the bill’s goals. In conjunction with this there were youth who spoke about their experiences with homelessness and the need for these services. To wrap up the event there was an art show in the State House displaying work from these youth, they were able to speak with us about their artwork. This event was an amazing experience, till this point I felt like I was working on this project in an abstract way it had not truly hit home how deep this problem was. Sitting in this even hearing these adults and youth speak was overwhelming it was hard to hear that the government that you put so much faith in had failed these people and was still failing them. It was very empowering to be there and take part of the movement to break the cycle of homelessness.

Update

As of January 22, 2013, H.135 was in the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities awaiting a hearing date.

For more information

Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
http://www.mahomeless.org
Both in the extraction and the burning processes, coal is deadly to humans and to the environment. One coal plant is estimated to cause $156 million in health damages annually, through asthma, heart attacks, and brain damage. In Massachusetts, a 2010 report from the Clean Air Task Force showed that pollution from coal plants causes 250 deaths, 211 hospital admissions, and 471 heart attacks every year. Coal is also one of the largest contributors to climate change in MA. In 2009, coal contributed to about 50% of our carbon emissions from the electric sector. Climate change puts Boston and many other Massachusetts coastal communities particularly at risk from sea-level rise. Bill H.2935 calls for regulations that will essentially phase out coal in the Commonwealth by 2020, while also helping the workers and communities transition successfully. As many coal plants will already be shutting down in the foreseeable future, this bill will help ensure a smoother transition.

The Bill

H.2935: An Act to transition to a clean energy Commonwealth.

Excerpt from Storybook

“Burning coal ...fundamentally alters the climate, resulting in countless human deaths and imperiling the civilization itself. 100 million human beings are expected to die from burning fossil fuels by 2030...Clean energy like solar and wind allow us to continue powering our homes and businesses without requiring our brothers and sisters around the world to die. It’s win-win. We still get energy and they still get to live. It’s time to get moving.” (Craig Altemose, Executive Director of Better Future Project)

“After moving to Easthampton, I found that my asthma was coming back. I’d had it as a child and I grew out of it for a long time...When I found out that there was this coal plant nearby...I kind of felt that it was affecting me directly. I have a two year-old nephew and a niece on the way, and I worry for them...because the asthma rates here are higher than normal. Coal has got to go.” (Kim Finch, Easthampton resident)
Elevator Speech

Good morning, my name is Vivian and this is Tali; we are students from Brandeis University interested in policy change.

We all share a responsibility for maintaining healthy communities. Unfortunately, coal plants are posing health risks that include increased asthma rates and mercury toxins. Currently there are two plants operating in Massachusetts threatening the health of residents in Holyoke and Somerset. The Brayton Point power plant, located in Somerset, is the largest single source of toxic air pollution in Massachusetts. These plants are dilapidated, unprofitable and are likely to cease operations by their own accord in the near future.

We are asking for your support with Bill H. 2935: An Act to transition to a clean energy Commonwealth, as a solution to protect citizen health while maintaining the fiscal security of the community. Before this proposal there was no aid to laid-off coal plant workers. The Act allows the affected community to adopt community-transitioning funds, which establish worker retraining programs concentrated in clean energy jobs. This bill acts as a plan for a steady and accountable phase-out of coal-fired electric plants by 2020.

This is a critical bill to the future stability of the Commonwealth and will serve as a progressive template for transitioning to a clean nation tomorrow. We ask for your support today to approve this at a committee vote in order to ensure a cleaner, healthier future.

Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Chan,

As students from your alma mater, Brandeis University, interested in social justice and policy change we share a concern for the health and well being of local communities. We are currently working on a piece of legislation to move Massachusetts towards being coal-free and moving towards cleaner energy by 2020. More specifically, we are writing to ask you to support H.2935 An Act to transition to a clean energy Commonwealth, which is currently in the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy. As a member of this committee your input on this matter is critical to our bill’s progression.

We all share a responsibility for maintaining healthy communities. Unfortunately, coal plants are posing health risks that include increased asthma rates and mercury toxins. Currently there are two plants operating in Massachusetts threatening the health of residents in Holyoke and Somerset. The Brayton Point power plant located in Somerset is the largest single source of toxic air pollution in Massachusetts. These plants are dilapidated, unprofitable and are likely to cease operations on their own in the near future.

The bill is the solution to both protect citizen health and maintain the fiscal security of the community. It allows the affected community to adopt community-transitioning funds which establish worker retraining programs concentrated in clean energy jobs. This bill acts as an agenda for a steady and accountable phase-out of coal-fired electric plants by 2020. Detractors are concerned about the loss of local jobs and tax base of the facility, however, these plants are likely to close on their own in the near future and workers would have to be relocated regardless. With this bill in place there will be a blueprint of what to do next for workers and the community. Furthermore, this bill is revenue neutral and would not require any additional taxes on Massachusetts residents.

This is an important bill to the future stability of the Commonwealth and will serve as a progressive template for transitioning to a clean nation tomorrow. As a supporter and sponsor of many various energy-efficiency and environmental bills including H.2919, H.2920 and H.677, we hope that you will be interested in continuing positive environmental justice efforts. We ask for your support to H.2935 in order to ensure a cleaner, healthier future.

Thank you for your time and concern.

House Ways and Means Script

We all value healthy communities, and share responsibility for keeping them healthy. However, polluted air and a polluted environment in Massachusetts threaten our healthy communities. Areas around coal-fired power plants are suffering the consequences of exposure to polluted air. In Holyoke, which houses the Mount Tom coal plant, the asthma rate is twice the statewide asthma rate. Richard Purcell, a Holyoke resident, explained how he had had childhood asthma that went away by age 10. He served for decades in the U.S. Army, and upon return bought a house in Holyoke. He soon found that his asthma mysteriously returned, and though at first thought it was caused by Gulf War syndrome, his doctor later confirmed that it was probably caused by the local coal plant. Richard is just one example of the many Massachusetts residents – including many children – whose daily lives and health are affected by our coal plants. These people are sick because of how we choose to get our energy. And as Richard noted, these coal plants are placed in poorer communities, the communities that need the most help. But instead, people who are often living from paycheck to paycheck have to worry on top of that about paying for their asthma meds, which can be $250 per month.
Another issue is that our coal plants are contributing to climate change, as coal is the top contributor to climate change in America. Climate change threatens our social and economic well being through threats such as increased drought, water and food insecurity, sea level rise, and increases in spreadable diseases. In Massachusetts right now, we have three operating plants: Brayton Point in Somerset, Mount Tom in Holyoke, and the Salem Harbor Plant, which is already scheduled to shut down.

But we as a Commonwealth can move beyond coal. Our bill, An Act to transition to a clean energy Commonwealth [H. 2935], will help phase out coal plants in Massachusetts by 2020. The bill proposes a blueprint for a methodical transition from burning coal to using cleaner energy sources. It further requires worker retraining and funding to help the transitioning communities. The bill asks the companies to produce a plan that the Department of Energy Resources (DOER) would then use to establish a statewide plan for shutting down coal in Massachusetts by 2020. The bill would not mandate that the plants close, but rather it provides the tools to the DOER to pull the trigger if they see it as necessary. The bill further requires worker retraining in the clean energy sector, and establishes a community transitioning fund – paid for by the plants based on their carbon emissions – to help finance the transition in the communities.

Given that these plants are over 50 years old, and that most plants have a 30 year lifespan, it seems likely that they will be unprofitable in the near future anyways. In September 2012, the Mount Tom plant reduced its workers from 60 to 25. New England Public Radio quotes Rick Sullivan, the Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs, as saying “You know, if you’re looking at the energy crystal ball we can safely say that sometime in the near future these facilities will in fact be offline.” It seems that regardless of whether this bill is passed or not, the plants may shut down on their own in the near future. This bill ensures that the transition for the workers and the communities is smooth, and that there is assistance with this process.

This bill would be revenue neutral and would not require any additional taxes on Massachusetts residents, though it would put additional responsibilities on the agencies. A report from the National Academy of Sciences suggests that each plant has “hidden” health and environmental costs of $156 million on average, and therefore we can expect to reclaim some of these hidden costs by shutting down the plants. However, it is important to note that the local communities would suffer an initial loss of state revenue from property taxes of the plants. In Somerset, the Brayton Point coal plant provides $13 million in taxes annually, and Mount Tom provides $614,000. The main arguments against this bill are that it would hurt the communities economically and would lay off workers, and we acknowledge this as an important and very real concern. However, as we have demonstrated, the plants are likely to close on their own in the near future. Having this bill in place would ensure that when this happens, there are funds in place to help smoothly transition the town and retrain the workers. And eventually, when the properties are transitioned, the towns can earn the revenue back.

It is important to understand the true gain of this bill, which is setting Massachusetts up to move beyond coal towards a cleaner environment and healthier communities. In the last session, this bill had 14 co-sponsors; now it has 54. The time is now for Massachusetts to take a stand and help lead the nation in moving away from deadly energy sources and to promote healthy communities. We therefore ask you to support this bill to help it succeed in creating a cleaner, healthier Commonwealth.

Op-Ed

A coal stack emitting what looks like smoke. Smog, mercury, and soot in the air. A child coughing upstairs because of asthma. This is not how you would wish to live. And yet, thousands of Massachusetts residents face this reality everyday because they live near coal plants. And this is why coal has got to go, and why you should support Bill H.2935, An Act to transition to a clean energy Commonwealth.

For example, take Richard Purcell, a Holyoke resident who lives near the Mount Tom coal plant. In 1991, Richard was discharged from the U.S. Army after nearly 15 years of service, and he bought a house in Holyoke. But then a strange thing started to happen. He started to get asthma-like symptoms, which he hadn't experienced since he was a child. Concerned, he went to his doctor, thinking it was Gulf War syndrome. It was there that he learned the truth: that he was suffering from asthma again because he was now living so close a coal plant.

Besides the Mount Tom plant in Holyoke, remaining plants in Massachusetts include Brayton Point in Somerset [one of the largest polluters in New England], and a plant in Salem [slated to shut down in 2014]. These coal plants are causing the surrounding communities’ health to suffer. The asthma rate in coal communities is twice the state average, and it is also the number one cause for children to miss school. Pollution from coal plants can lead to smog, and doctors liken inhaling smog to getting sunburnt in your lungs. And, a single coal plant is estimated to cause $156 million in health care costs for those affected by the toxins...
emitted from coal. Sound like an environment that you would want to live in? I didn’t think so.

If we look beyond the immediate effects of coal plants in the communities, we see an uglier picture. Coal is one of the greatest contributors to climate change. Climate change, among other things, threatens to increase severe weather patterns, flooding and drought, food and water shortages, and a higher rate of disease transmission. Even when we look to where the coal comes from, we see destruction. Half of our coal in Massachusetts comes from mountaintop removal, which blows off the tops of mountains to reach the coal underneath. This devastates the surrounding communities by polluting their drinking water, and it generates tons of waste. The other half of our coal comes from Colombia, where the mining is linked to human rights violations. Coal is destructive at every point in its lifespan.

But fear not. There is another way. There is a bill in the state legislature entitled, “An Act to transition to a clean energy Commonwealth,” [H. 2935] which would set Massachusetts up to move towards cleaner electricity by 2020, and which creates a blueprint to transition away from the coal plants. It calls for the Department of Energy Resources to create a shutdown plan, and establishes a community transition fund that the plants contribute to, which the communities can use to help mitigate effects of closing down the plants. Plus, there’s retraining for the employees in the clean energy sector. These plants are becoming unprofitable; last September, Mount Tom laid off 40 workers. And a little over a month ago, Mount Tom announced it would go off the grid for a year in 2016 – with no plan for the community or employees in place for the year. This bill provides a plan to transition away from coal responsibly and account for the effects on the communities and workers.

Look around you. Feel the air in the breath you are taking. If your air is clean, and doesn’t raise your risk for asthma, appreciate it and don’t take this for granted; thousands do not have the luxury of clean air. And join the fight so that Massachusetts residents no longer have to suffer from polluted air in their backyards. Talk to your representative, and tell them that YOU want to move beyond coal.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Tali

The second most important meeting we had concerning the bill was during our second time at the State House. Vivian and I had a scheduled meeting with Senator Downing, the Senate Chair of the Joint Committee that our bill is in, and we wanted to ask for a favorable report. When we walked in, I noticed a cabinet covered with stickers, many of which were environmental, energy, and food related. We first met with a member of his staff, who was relatively a new employee at the State House. I think it was helpful to speak with her before we actually met with Senator Downing, so that we could warm up our elevator speech pitch and be ready to talk to the senator. Furthermore, we got to hear what questions she brought up, and it made me feel more confident that we could answer them – our research paper had prepared us well.

Once Senator Downing arrived, we moved into his office, introduced ourselves, and began our elevator speech (which I think went really well). Following this, we had a pretty in-depth conversation with him about the bill, his questions and concerns, and the underlying values that we were discussing. I was impressed with how knowledgeable he was about the bill and energy issues in general. He seemed to know quite a lot about this issue. In particular, he brought up the example of the Salem Harbor plant, which recently shut down half of its operations and is slated to shut down completely by 2014. The argument about the tax revenue to the town by shutting the coal plants down became more real when it was discussed by a decision-maker who has to consider the issue from all possible angles. The overall sense I got from him was that he was generally very supportive of the bill and issues, and understands the importance of clean energy both for health and environmental reasons. Yet he just felt that we all needed to understand the effects on the towns, and ensure that the plan that the bill sets up to mitigate them – through the community transitioning fund and the worker retraining program – will be sufficient assistance to the town. We also all agreed that coal is becoming unprofitable, that they are shutting down on their own anyways soon, and that we need a plan. It was more in the details, rather than the overall idea, that he was concerned about, and these are concerns that I definitely understand.

I think overall, this was a very good meeting. It lasted for nearly 30 minutes, and was at times an intense discussion of values, of how the environment affects people, and on climate change. At the end, we also started discussing other environmental issues, such as a bill that he filed to get the state to divest its funds from fossil fuel companies (which Seattle has successfully committed to doing). As I am working on the Brandeis Divestment Campaign to divest our endowment, we were further able to relate on this issue. I felt that we had a genuine discussion and that our voices were heard, especially by someone in a powerful position in the Joint Committee of our bill. Our other meetings lasted no more than ten minutes, and while the aides definitely listen, this was the most personal and genuine discussion I had.
**Vivian**

Tali and I met up with Senator Downing in his office at the statehouse during our first advocacy trip. We chose to visit Senator Downing because he is the Chair of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy, which is the committee our bill is in currently.

Senator Downing was very approachable and he was surprisingly well informed about this bill (which cut our elevator speech short). He immediately told us that he was in favor of clean energy practices. He also told us some history of the bill that we didn’t even know, so we learned a lot from him. Our meeting was very conversational, back and forth. He ultimately played it safe and told us that it was too early to tell whether or not this bill would be able to go forward. After Tali and I walked out of his office and down the hall to coordinate which representative we were going to meet up next, Senator Downing walked up to us (in the hallway) and gave us the names of a few representatives we should meet up with, namely, Representative John Keenan from Salem. Salem, as you know has a plant that is slated to shut down the summer of 2014. Senator Downing explained that Representative Keenan was originally against the bill because the “Salem plant fiasco” caused him so much stress, however since that chapter of the Salem coal plant has closed, Senator Downing said that Rep. Keenan would be more willing to listen to more information about this bill. With Downing admitting this, this was very humanizing and it made the Senator seem like a real person.

**Update**

As of January 22, 2013, H.2935 was in the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities, and Energy awaiting a hearing.

**For more information**

Beyond Coal Campaign

http://sierraclub.org/coal/massachusetts