Performing services such as diagnostic testing, chemical and foodborne illness analysis, and early-warning surveillance for biological and chemical terrorism, the Hinton State Laboratory Institute monitors and maintains public health in Massachusetts.

**The Line Item**

Line Item 4516-1000: “State Laboratory and Communicable Disease Control Services”

**Elevator Speech**

Constant protection from communicable disease and preventable illness is part of the foundation of the high standard of living expected by all citizens within the United States. Everyone, whether they be our parents, siblings, extended family, friends, neighbors, and fellow Americans, deserve protection from these diseases.

Inadequate funding to the Dr. William A. Hinton State Laboratory Institute (HSLI) will hinder its ability to distribute the best possible care to the citizens of Massachusetts. The employees at the Bureau of Laboratory Sciences and the Bureau of Infectious Disease Prevention, Response and Services, both of which make up HSLI, perform critical functions that often go unnoticed but keep all of us safe at home.

Insufficient funding will have a crippling effect on HSLI’s capacity to support many of its critical programs and services. These programs are vital to maintaining a high quality of healthcare in Massachusetts. Our friends and neighbors are at risk for many of the diseases researched and studied at HSLI, including H1N1, Tuberculosis, STDs, food-borne illness, and biological and chemical hazards.

**Op-Ed Piece**

*Sacrificing Public Health in the Face of Budget Cuts*

Recently, the Massachusetts House of Representatives released its Fiscal Year 2011 budget outline. Among the many appropriations included, the Hinton State Lab Line Item [4516-1000] suffered a significant decrease in allocated funds. Constant protection from communicable diseases and preventable illness is part of the foundation of the high standard of living expected by all citizens within the United States.
living expected by all citizens within the United States. All of us benefit from the services and testing that are made possible from funding this line item.

The Hinton State Laboratory Institute (HSLI), located in Jamaica Plain, provides essential services to hospitals, clinics, and other health care providers in Massachusetts, in addition to aiding schools, prisons, law enforcement, and firefighters. These services include Tuberculosis testing, biochemical analysis, and infectious and preventable disease control. Everyone, whether they be our parents, siblings, extended family, friends, neighbors, and fellow Americans, deserve protection from these diseases.

HSLI was instrumental in the recent H1N1 outbreak, providing more than 3.7 million doses of the vaccine to citizens of Massachusetts. They also tested over 3,700 samples of suspicious material during the height of the anthrax scare in 2001. Fortunately, no anthrax was found in any of these samples, but without the hard work of HSLI, we may have been faced with a deadly outbreak without the proper resources to combat it. The recent budget passed by the House of Representatives as it stands would not be enough for the Hinton State Lab to continue to provide the necessary services to the residents of Massachusetts. As of now, the House has allocated $13,329,260 to the Hinton State Lab, which may seem like a large sum of money. Compare this amount to the roughly $40 million appropriated for AIDS research alone, and we’ll see that this is not an eye-opening sum. HSLI needs at least 2 million more dollars in annual funding to maintain the services and equipment that they provide.

Without proper funding, there are several very important aspects of HSLI that are at risk of being cut or impacted. For instance, HSLI supports programs in other line items, including Health Promotion and Disease Prevention, as well as Environmental Health. That support will be lost with additional budget cuts. In addition, the safety that all lab technicians and staff require to perform their jobs is at risk due to budget constraints, as well as HSLI’s screening and outreach services. These programs allow HSLI to monitor those affected by diseases such as tuberculosis, to make sure that they are taking their medication and not putting those around them at risk. Without proper education and consultation, those with TB could potentially spread the disease to others, and those who do not have it need to be aware of how to prevent themselves from getting it. Outreach workers go to those who have been tested through HSLI and provide them with their medication and support during their treatment process. Many of these integral people have lost their jobs, and even now, these employees are severely underpaid and overworked. Also, the environmental services provided by HSLI allow for Massachusetts residents to have clean drinking water, safe food, and quality air. With budget cuts, these services will be affected and the health and safety of all Massachusetts citizens will be at risk.

Last year, Representatives Grant of Beverly, Sciortino of Medford, Garbarley of Arlington, Lantigua of Lawrence, Falzone of Saugus, Sannicandro of Ashland, Bowles of Attleboro, Sanchez of Boston, and Malia of Boston, proposed an amendment to the House budget that called for increased funding for the State Lab Line Item. Their proposal would have allowed for an increase of $1,823,732 dollars to the State Lab Line Item, causing the allocation to increase to $15,200,000. Unfortunately, the amendment did not pass, but we applaud their efforts and would call on them to do the same this year. Given the chaotic year of health-related crises, most notably the outbreak of H1N1, and the constant need to provide Massachusetts residents with the best care possible, it is all the more important that increased funding is allocated to HSLI.

One potential solution that we as citizens can advocate for is to push legislators to close the loophole that provides tax exemptions to the film industry. When movies are filmed in Massachusetts, the production gets a substantial tax credit as an incentive for hiring Massachusetts labor. There is little to no monitoring, however, regarding the use of local companies, so many production companies bring set designers, builders, caterers, and other services from out of state, while still benefitting from the tax credit. By closing this loophole, the state could save tens of millions of dollars that could be used to fund public health projects, including providing HSLI with the funding it needs. This would unquestionably help the quality of the services already provided, prevent additional services from future cuts, and could be used to rehire the more than 24 employees who have lost jobs at HSLI in the last four years.

Increased funding for the Hinton State Lab is vital to maintain the health and safety of the residents of Massachusetts. However, given the bleak fiscal climate, it is unrealistic to expect an increase over Fiscal Year 2010 levels of funding, so at the very least maintaining level funding from FY10 is critical. It is our job as citizens to advocate with Massachusetts legislators to support the Hinton State Lab and make sure that the facility is able to maintain its invaluable services. Without proper funding, HSLI’s integral programs will suffer, and in turn will put at risk the health and safety of Massachusetts residents. Whether through letter writing, meeting with legislators, emails, or phone calls, any advocacy on behalf of the Hinton State Lab will promote the very important message to legislators that the Hinton State Lab is a
crucial Massachusetts resource and must not be forced
to cut back on important programs and services due to
budget cuts.

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Ben
From a budget hearing at the Massachusetts State House:
“The hearing carried a pretty standard structure throughout,
with members of the committee asking questions to those
giving testimony, and at times sharing stories explaining
why they cared about a particular issue. The conversation
was very cordial during the hearing; every speaker addressed
the committee with something like “Thank you for taking
the time to be here today and listening to my remarks.”
Likewise, the members of the committee expressed
gratitude for everyone who showed up and spoke, and
at times there were exchanges by both sides saying how
they were happy to have worked on a certain issue with
each other. At times, the politeness felt strained or even
a little awkward [because it might have been too out-of-
the-way friendly], but I soon realized that maintaining this
kind of balance was not just about maintaining the status
quo, it was also an important way to keep the trust of
representatives and senators. My one regret is that I did not
write my name down to read my testimony, because by the
end of the hearing, I felt comfortable there and think I could
have easily made a two minute pitch to the committee.
In the end, there was only one private citizen who spoke
to give testimony, and she discussed the importance of
funding the Department of Mental Health. The committee
had no questions for her, and after she spoke, Senator Fargo
announced that the hearing was now concluded.”

Rebecca
From the press conference for World TB Day:
“I believe that the overall purpose of the meeting was not
only an update on what programs and services are being
offered for those affected by TB, but also a call to action
to continue to support these programs and work towards
increasing the amount of funding that they get. I personally
learned a lot and was able to meet some of the people that I
had spoken with over the phone about my project, including
Dr. Tom Garvey. I also was able to speak with a legislative
aide who had attended the event on behalf of Representative
Sanchez and explain the importance of supporting the State
Lab line item in the Governor’s budget. The event taught
me the necessity for coalitions and building relationships
with similar organizations, as these alliances can often lead
to the greatest changes being made. The more support that
is available for a particular issue, the more likely it is that
action will be taken by legislators.”

Kayley
From a meeting with State House staffers:
“This semester I have spent countless hours researching
and becoming more and more adamant about the
importance of level funding of the Hinton State Lab
Institute [HSLI]. If the state lab loses more money, public
health preventative measures will eventually become
public health crises. As a simple example, if there aren’t
enough funds to continue to teach people with tuberculosis
the importance of not spreading the disease and taking
their medications, many more cases of TB would appear.
This would be detrimental both financially and physically-
it would potentially result in more money being spent and
more deaths. In order to ensure that these public health
measures continue, my advocacy group, Ben Ostrow,
Rebecca Ratner and I, spoke with many policymakers, their
staff and fellow advocates including Cynthia Tschantel
today at the Massachusetts State House.”

■ Update (September 2010)
The line item was reduced from $13,416,459 in fiscal
year 2010 to $13,293,542 in fiscal year 2011.

For more information

Hinton State Lab
• Hinton State Lab page: http://www.mass.gov/dph/bls
• Bureau of Communicable Disease Control: