Advocacy for Policy Change

Brandeis students work to reform Massachusetts law

September 2010
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.

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

Photos: Mike Lovett/Brandeis University
In the spring semester of the 2009-10 academic year I embarked on an experiment with thirteen dedicated Brandeis undergraduate students; an exceptional teaching assistant, Cynthia A. Tschampl, Ph.D. candidate in Health Policy at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management; and the logistical, financial, and intellectual support of both the International Center for Ethics, Justice, and Public Life and the Legal Studies Program at Brandeis University.

“Advocacy for Policy Change” (LGLS 161b) combines an investigation of the ethical dilemmas that arise in the process of lawmaking with hands-on advocacy work with entities seeking to reform laws or to propose new ones. Students choose existing laws they feel could be credibly challenged on ethical or moral grounds, or proposed laws being promoted to redress perceived wrongs.

Working in teams, the students in this pilot version of the course researched their chosen issues and designed and implemented advocacy projects to address particular laws and line items. Each team was mentored by a state legislator and/or a member of an advocacy organization, who helped them understand the lawmaking process, connect with colleagues, and set realistic goals.

There are a few people I must thank individually. This course would not exist without the ongoing support of Professor Richard Gaskins, my mentor and the Director of the Legal Studies Program. Together, he and Dan 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 Judy Meredith, longtime advocate and Director of the Public Policy Institute, helped me to create a course worthy of Brandeis University.

Each student completed a series of assignments related to their project, in formats relevant to advocacy work, such as an “elevator speech” and a short video. (The full list of assignments is on page 5.) What follows in this book are excerpts from these assignments from each project, updates on the bills and line items the teams focused on, and links to more information on the relevant issues or organizations.

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

“Advocacy for Policy Change” is a natural fit for Brandeis University, where students understand the importance of combining academic pursuits with hands-on work. I am looking forward to the continued development of this course.

Melissa Stimell
Associate Professor of the Practice in Legal Studies
Director of Internships, Legal Studies Program
Internship Coordinator, Social Justice and Social Policy Program
The reports in this volume are excerpted from the material required of each student team in the pilot of “Advocacy for Policy Change” (Legal Studies 161b) in Spring 2010. The assignments were designed to develop and demonstrate the students’ understanding of the issues and the advocacy process.

**Storybook Assignment**

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 their stories.

**Research Report**

The research report is an in-depth document containing facts and analysis of the bill or budget item studied.

**Elevator Speech**

A prepared advocate should be able to give someone a general idea of their issue and a plan of action within a few seconds – the time it takes to ride an elevator. Students were instructed to imagine riding in an elevator at the State House with a legislator or aide for this assignment.

**Letter to Legislator**

Another effective advocacy tool is the legislative letter. Persuasive and informative, it communicates constituent concern about a problem to policymakers.

**Script for an in-depth meeting with House Ways and Means staff**

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 a “media mash-up” to present their issues through video.

**Final oral presentation: “Present and Defend”**

Bringing everything together, on Friday, April 30th, 2010, students gave 15-20 minute oral presentations of their legislative advocacy projects.
In the wake of several student suicides due to bullying in Massachusetts and across the country, school administrators and concerned parents are examining the role of communications technology, such as text messaging and social networking sites, in harassment among youths. The Cyber-Bullying Bill seeks to require schools to create programs to educate staff, students, and families about this new form of bullying, which can take place both in and outside of the school.

The Cyber-Bullying Bill

Daniela Montoya-Fontalvo ’11
Rebecca Wilkof ’10

■ The Bill

Final Draft S2404: “An Act relative to bullying in schools”

■ Elevator Speech

A safe school environment for children is essential. Right now students are in a crisis because of cyber-bullying. Over the last couple of years, the rate of cyber-bullying has increased a tremendous amount due to a rise in student access to technological devices.

Were you aware of the fact that an astounding number of young people, 1 in 3 teenagers and 1 of 6 pre-teenagers have been victims of cyber bullying? So many stories of the horrors of cyber-bullying and its rising prevalence have reached the media and this is why we are advocating on behalf of this bill. The problem that was once bullying in schools now follows children home with them to their computers and on their cell phones.

The story of Phoebe Prince, the 15-year-old in South Hadley who killed herself after being continuously taunted on-line, is just one that has left parents, students, and teachers wondering how to prevent this from happening again.

With the use of cell phones, social networking sites, and other technology on the rise, it is so important that each school have a way of educating students on appropriate conduct. It is similarly crucial that parents understand these technologies as well as how to monitor their children’s use of them.

Additionally, each school must have in place methods of reporting, regulating, and punishment in order to stop cyber-bullying from becoming more dangerous and more pervasive.
You can help by supporting legislation in order to get S2313/H483 unanimously passed so that our children will not have to fear constant harassment and intentional harm over the Internet and other technological devices.

Op-Ed Piece

Parents: Watch Your Children’s Backs!

Much of the noise surrounding 15-year-old Phoebe Prince’s death comes as a result of confusion about how a degree of tormenting that lead to suicide could have gone unnoticed and was not prevented by her teachers and school administrators. After all, such relentless persecution could not have happened anywhere else but in school, right? A child is protected at home, so it must have been the blindness of schools that led to Prince’s death.

News of Phoebe Prince—an Immigrant in South Hadley, MA—who committed suicide early this year, has spread around the world. Her suicide has set in motion incredible action including a unanimous bill passed in the Massachusetts State House. The bill aims to prevent the pain Prince endured, namely from cyber-bullying. Awareness of the incident and of the immense problems surrounding Prince’s suicide have been internationally broadcasted. Now, a court case is being held to charge the nine students responsible for actions that resulted in Prince’s death with criminal harassment and civil rights violations.

Unfortunately, the boundaries of bullying have been vastly expanded in recent years with the increase in use of social networking sites, computers, cellular phones, and many other electronic devices. A CTIA and Harris Interactive study shows that four out of five teens carry a cell phone, and there are 17 millions carriers of mobile devices. This marks a 40% increase in use since 2004. The result of this increase is that students are becoming more accessible to bullies since it is now possible to reach a victim wherever they go. Harassment now takes place over social networking sites such as facebook, from cell phone texting, and through online forums. This persecution is more anonymous and fast spreading than ever before. And it is so much more dangerous.

The recent bill passed unanimously by the Massachusetts Legislature requires all schools, both public and private, to establish education programs that will teach students, teachers, and parents about the dangers of cyber-bullying and how to prevent it. The bill requires that all schools have in place disciplinary procedures and reporting processes so that students are conscious of how to communicate problems to administrators and are aware of consequences. The bill requires that school officials- from bus drivers and cafeteria workers to teachers- report bullying to a school’s principal.

In an effort to put parents, students, and teachers on notice that no type of bullying will be tolerated in schools, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education will be responsible for supporting education and awareness programs throughout the state. However, the budget will be small. Additionally, legislators who created the bill have been extremely wary of over-stepping First Amendment rights of free speech in attempting to monitor bullying that happens on personal electronic devices or from home. The bill has been called toothless because of its reluctance to take definitive disciplinary action on those students who torment others through cyber-bullying. There are steps that must be taken outside of the bill’s provisions to support it and ensure its effectiveness.

The goal is to prevent physical and emotional harm from taking place both in school and at home. And therefore it is up to parents to be extremely aware and vigilant once children leave school grounds. A watchful parent must not shy away from the sometimes-confusing technology that their teenager is using. Rather parents must educate themselves so that there is an understanding of their child’s use of technology. Children take their cues from the adults in their lives and so it is essential that parents demonstrate the type of respectful relationships that children must learn.

Parents, in cooperation with teachers and school administrators, are responsible for educating children in the technicalities of reporting bullying and consequences for slander. The Bullies now have a more permanent, hurtful, and vastly more public way of expressing their cruelty. The expectation must be very clear: cruelty will not be tolerated. Parents must actively create an environment of respectfulness and inclusiveness that will be instituted in the community and at school. Peer pressure from students must be on the side of being nice to each other so that children will intervene if they see bad behavior. Furthermore, the school must foster an environment where children should also feel compelled to speak to teachers and school administrators when they are bullied or see bullying without being afraid of being labeled as a snitch. These ideals of respectfulness must be learned at home and parents must lead the total climate change that must be established.

With children so often being more technologically savvy than their parents, it is essential that parents learn the basics of social networking sites and text messaging. It is further crucial for parents to monitor closely their children’s usage of these technologies in order to take an active step toward ensuring that the internet is not abused.

Parents need to look at this issue as a mental health epidemic- our society has become such that parents hide...
their head in the sand when it comes to the technology their children use and children have not learned to speak up for their friends who are being bullied. Parents must take a more active role. The State cannot mandate that the school go about controlling the flow of information at home so parents must not give their children free reign and should supervise their children’s actions.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Daniela

From a meeting with school parents:

“Before attending this event, I didn’t know what to expect. The issue of cyber bullying is a new topic that has quickly gained recognition. As more students are becoming victims to cyber bullying, schools are realizing that their job is not only to teach students the basics of education, but to also treat them how to be good citizens and to act in a moral way. Teachers, guidance counselors and parents attended this event. I feel that the purpose of the meeting, besides being educational, was also done in a sense of urgency.”

From a meeting with Waltham Mayor Jeannette A. McCarthy:

“I was very lucky to have the opportunity to meet with Mayor McCarthy of Waltham to discuss the issue of cyber bullying. Through my research over the last couple of weeks, I have noticed that she has had opinions regarding this issue. Her office was easily accessible and she was very approachable, open to any question that I had regarding cyber bullying and delving into stories from her own experiences as the Mayor of Waltham. She is a very interesting person that has much to say about issues like cyber bullying.”

“In today’s world, a person can do whatever he or she wants with pure anonymity. Mayor McCarthy sees the ability to post anything on the internet while being anonymous as the true prince of darkness. A person can do anything and have no responsibility. These days, children are more technologically savvy than parents and because of this, parents often to not know how to deal with it unless they are equally savvy. Because of this, Mayor McCarthy believed that the issue of cyber bullying must be one that is dealt with at home and at school.”

Rebecca

From a meeting with school parents:

“Many parents were worried that they couldn’t control what happened in schools, where their children spent most of their days. Even if everyone was educated and aware, would there be an official plan of action to put in place the ideas that Alice spoke about? Here, Alice asked for the parents’ ideas regarding what schools should do. This seemed to worry parents even more. What might have been more effective would be a discussion about the cyber-bullying bill. If parents were made aware of the bill, their fears might be assuaged by the knowledge that the State was taking action to protect their children. Many parents I spoke to did not know much about the bill and were skeptical of what the government could do for them. Perhaps the sponsors of the meeting should have included a discussion of the bill in their presentation.”

From a conversation with Superintendent Tony Pierantozzi:

“In a later conversation, I asked him about the cyber-bullying bill and Mr. Pierantozzi expressed some worries about its implementation. He believed that the law would not actually solve anything unless the State Supreme Court took action. He found the language to be an infringement on first amendment rights. Mr. Pierantozzi felt that kids pick up their behavior from parents and a law would not change that. He saw the bill as too “huge and broadly worded, time-consuming, and full of negative language”. He was more in favor of programs that his schools already had in place that encouraged children to build healthy relationships with each other and to confide in a caring adult if they had troubles. “You cannot legislate decency, it needs to be taught day-to-day,” he said.”

Update (September 2010)

The bill was signed by Governor Patrick on May 3, 2010. It is now Chapter 92 of the Acts of 2010.

For more information

Cyber-Bullying

- Cyberbullying.us: http://www.cyberbullying.us/resources.php#handouts
- Digizen.org: http://www.digizen.org/cyberbullying/
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 Hinton State Laboratory Budget

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. 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 Tschampl 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
Boston METCO, a program created and operated by the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, Inc, brings minority children from inner-city communities into suburban public schools with the intention of fostering positive interracial relationships among school-age children.

■ The Line Item
Line Item 7010-0012: “Programs to Eliminate Racial Imbalance – METCO”

■ What is METCO?
METCO was established in the Commonwealth under the Massachusetts Department of Education (MASS DOE) in 1965. METCO is a voluntary desegregation program that sends approximately 3300 urban minority students from Boston and Springfield to 37 receiving districts across the state.

■ The Three Goals of METCO:
1. Provide a multicultural and integrated learning environment for METCO students
2. Increase diversity in suburban public school districts
3. Provide a “closer understanding and cooperation between urban and suburban parents” [METCO inc: http://www.metcoinc.org/About%20METCO.htm]

■ We Are The World: METCO Tackles Diversity
You’ll notice that the goals of METCO do not include education in the traditional sense. That is, they say nothing of higher test scores, better grades or college admissions. Instead, METCO his focused on “education” in a larger sense—the kind of lessons learned from people of different races, religions or upbringings. Though the opportunities presented to urban minority children are fundamental piece in evaluating the program’s success over the last forty years, the program’s real triumphs are in the positive relationships built across racial lines. When families enter METCO, they are paired with a suburban family, called a host family. Through the course of the children’s education, both families will be given opportunities to work together and learn from one another. In the Wellesley school district, elementary and middle school children participate in a program called “Stay Day”. On the first Wednesday of every month, METCO children go home with their host families for play dates. These activities provide the children with a chance to develop friendships across racial lines. METCOs goal in the largest and loftiest sense looks something like this:

Urban minority students form ties and become comfortable living and operating in predominantly white suburbs as the move through the program. These children get a good education and go on to excel in college. After college they are able to get high paying careers that allow them to afford to live in communities like Natick, Brookline and Wellesley, thereby integrating these communities and making them more diverse.

■ Update (September 2010)
The line item was reduced from $18,491,758 in fiscal year 2010 to $17,642,582 for fiscal year 2011.

*Note: due to the blog nature of Nora’s project, the following excerpts are slightly different than the other projects that followed the assignment format. Excerpted from her blog, Certain Glamour (http://certainglamour.tumblr.com).
CORI, an acronym for Criminal Offender Record Information, is a statewide database of individuals’ contacts with the criminal justice system. Originally created to facilitate the operations of the criminal justice system, CORIs are now accessible by over 10,000 organizations in Massachusetts and are used by employers, landlords, and creditors to evaluate candidates. As the system was not intended for this purpose and has far-reaching economic and social consequences, measures such as reducing this access and the amount of time each infraction appears on record are sought in CORI reform.

■ The Bill
Final Draft S2583: “An Act reforming the administrative procedures relative to criminal offender record information and pre- and post-trial supervised release”

■ Elevator Speech
Oh! Hello Representative [FILL IN NAME]. I’m so glad I ran into you because I know you agree that our community is stronger when everybody has employment and financial security. Our neighbors and family members, including your constituents, are in crisis because of the brick walls set up by overly restrictive CORI legislation.

The current CORI system denies equal opportunity to get a job, housing and education. I know that you and your constituents care because rehabilitated individuals deserve a second chance to contribute to our community. We know that CORI reform will begin to fix the problem.

Additionally, CORI reform will save this great state millions of dollars because ex-offenders will be able to get jobs and provide for themselves, rather than collecting unemployment services which is a strain on our tax dollars.

You can lend your assistance by helping to urge Speaker of the House DeLeo to bring the CORI reform bill #3523 to the house floor for a vote.
Op-Ed Piece

Who said you deserve a second chance?

Imagine that you have a daughter in elementary school. She brings home a permission slip so that she can attend a school trip to the Museum of Science. She asks you to volunteer to be her group’s chaperone. Unfortunately, you’re not allowed to attend because of a small mistake you made more than ten years ago. That small mistake has not only prevented you from chaperoning your child’s trip but has also prevented you from getting a job, stable housing, and continuing your education. The crime: a non-violent misdemeanor. The sentence: a lifetime without equal opportunities.

In Massachusetts, CORI, or Criminal Offender Record Information, is a report that details a person’s criminal past. Your CORI is available to a wide range of agencies. In 1994 1 out of 5 employers used CORI reports to screen potential employees. Now, 4 out of 5 employers review CORIs. A CORI includes information about any criminal charge, even if the case was dismissed or the defendant found not guilty. Currently, a misdemeanor crime stays on your CORI for 10 years and a felony for 15 after the last court supervised condition of your sentence. This means that you can be prevented from obtaining housing, a job, loans or even supervising your child’s field trip for decades, depending on the offense.

If you’re Janna Drosco, that’s too long. A 30 year-old mother of two, one of whom is mentally disabled, Janna has been moving her family from apartment to apartment for the last year and a half. She can’t get stable housing or a job that pays enough to support her family. Nor can she afford the medicine that her child so desperately needs. Her crime? An underage alcohol possession conviction over 10 years ago.

With no place to live and no way to get a job and make a steady income, many individuals with CORIs turn to a life of crime in order to survive. Inevitably, they are arrested and incarcerated again and what’s left is a penal system with a revolving door that doesn’t rehabilitate people and costs taxpayers millions.

There are currently 11,000 people incarcerated in Massachusetts. Based on the cost of prisons to the state, i.e. taxpayers, we can estimate that CORI reform will save almost half a billion dollars in 2010 by letting rehabilitated individuals become independent, job-holding parts of our community, rather than forcing them back into a life of crime.

The State Senate passed a CORI reform bill in November 2009 that would decrease the time limits on sealing records for all non-violent crimes. What’s needed now is a vote in the State House. The House budget came out this week for the next fiscal year. The House budget proposes numerous reductions such as a $250 million cut to education programs, a $32.5 million cut to family and children services, and a $17 million cut to public safety. These cuts that the House proposes bring already limited resources and services to bare bones. Some cuts could be avoided with the money that the CORI reform bill would save. This CORI reform bill, which has widespread support from the State Senate and Governor Deval Patrick seems like a no-brainer.

We have friends and neighbors who are rehabilitated, reformed and want to contribute back to the society they may have wronged. By allowing these people a fairer opportunity for a new beginning, not only do we do them a justice, we also allow them to become contributing members of our economy, instead of a burden on it. Unfortunately, time is not on our side. The current legislative session is quickly coming to a close. We must act now. The fiscal and moral future of this state rests with us. We need you to contact Speaker of the House DeLeo and ask him to bring this bill to the floor for a vote in the House. Call his office at (617) 722-2500 or mail a letter to Room 356 State House Boston, MA 02133. If we delay now, we run the risk of losing the opportunity to better our community. Join us in our fight to fix our criminal justice system and help our neighbors. For more information about CORI Reform, please visit the Neighbor2Neighbor website at http://www.n2nma.org/campaigns/cori-reform.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Jake

“After attending the State House with the mission of lobbying state representatives categorized as being “on the fence” I have had the realization that we all can make a difference. As a student entering a world of political professionals I felt intimidated by the task at hand. I asked myself the question: who am I to try to educate and influence people on an issue that I have only been studying for two and a half months? What I realized was that I may be the only hope these representatives have of being educated on the issue at all.”

Liz

“Our first meeting of the day on March, 22 was with Gigi, Rep. Bradley’s Aide. Rep. Bradley is a democrat who represents Cohasset, Norfolk, Hingham, and Hull which
are all somewhat small, rural areas. His biggest area of interest with regards to his policy is education and he is a strong supporter of increased funding for schools. The meeting took place in the Representative’s office. We sat on couches and chairs, around a coffee table, and the atmosphere was informal and relaxed. There were four of us altogether- Jenna, Jake, Gigi, and myself. Gigi seemed entirely uneducated about CORI except that she knew that a bill had passed in the Senate and she had seen a folder in the office labeled “CORI Reform”, but had not yet read it. The purpose of our meeting at the very outset was to educate Gigi about CORI reform, including the overly restrictive nature of the current law, the proposed changes, and what we saw as the benefits to the Commonwealth if this bill should pass. We made sure to emphasize the almost insurmountable barrier to education maintained by the current law because we knew how strong of an advocate Rep. Bradley was for education.”

Jenna

“Before the meeting, once I’d confirmed it, I researched the Representatives that we expected to meet with in order to find any connections that might help us convince them on the bill. I found that Representative Bradley voted “yes” on the sales tax increase bill, so I knew that they would find the financial benefits from CORI relevant. Additionally, Representative Bradley has a large interest in education initiatives so I also made sure to mention that if people want to get educated after being released from prison their CORI often prevents them. Liz, Jake and I had only briefly discussed beforehand what we wanted to say so I think we did a very thorough job of covering all the material we wanted to cover in the time that we had.”

Update (September 2010)
The bill was signed by Governor Patrick on August 6, 2010. It is now Chapter 256 of the Acts of 2010.

For more information

CORI Reform
- Massachusetts Law Reform Institute: http://www.mlri.org
- Neighbor2Neighbor: http://www.n2nma.org/campaigns/cori-reform
With record foreclosures plaguing communities around the state in this economy, foreclosure reform seeks to reduce the instance of the eviction of rent-paying tenants and prevent city blocks of empty, crime-attracting buildings to the benefit of families and banks alike.

The Bill

Final Draft S2407: “An Act to stabilize neighborhoods”

Elevator Speech

I’m sure that you worry when the quality of our neighborhoods is brought down by the crashing of property values and an increase in crime on the streets. Those very things are happening. The state is in crisis because of the record number of foreclosures that are occurring as a result of the recent financial crisis.

Each and every one of your constituents, whether foreclosed on or not, becomes worse off with each foreclosure. Under current laws, the foreclosing party can evict the tenants living in the home for absolutely no reason at all, leaving the building empty. Empty buildings bring down the value of the properties around them and attract squatters, vandals, and criminals, and the people being kicked out of their homes fill the state’s homeless shelters.

HB4595/SB2394, An Act to Protect Tenants from Eviction in Foreclosed Properties, would bring justice back to those who are unfairly evicted from their homes, bringing prosperity back to our streets and preventing an increase in the number of empty properties.

You can help by championing this noble cause. Currently the House Bill is in House Ways and Means and the Senate bill was just voted for unanimously by the Senate. We need to keep the bill moving.

Talk to your representatives and make sure they plan to vote yes on SB2349 when it comes up for a vote in the House.

Op-Ed Piece

Tenant Protection Has to Happen Now!

Have you ever thought about what would happen if you lost your home? Odds are you haven’t. After all, it’s not something that you have to worry about until you start to fall behind on the rent or your mortgage payments, right? Wrong. If you rent your home, you face the possibility of losing it with very little warning at any time, and whether or not this happens has absolutely nothing to do with you.

Here’s the situation: you pay your rent on time, and you think you’re safe. Your landlord, on the other hand, is not paying his or her mortgage payments.
In fact, they're so far behind that they can't catch up. As has been happening all over the state since the financial crisis hit, the bank decides that they're tired of waiting. They foreclose on the property, and now they're the ones who own your building. But banks don't want to be landlords. They don't even want to be property owners. And because they can sell the property faster if it's empty, they will evict you. There's nothing to stop them. Now you're homeless, and you didn't even know there was a problem.

Just because you don't rent your home doesn't mean this doesn't affect you. After these buildings are evicted, they are left empty. Empty buildings lower the property values of the entire area, so if you live near foreclosed property the value of your home has dropped. And empty buildings attract crime. Vandals consider them to be their new canvas, thieves consider the copper wires and pipes within the walls to be hidden treasure, and drug dealers have a new, ready-made base of operations. There's the risk of arson, since people's eyes tend to drift right over an empty building, giving an arsonist the time they need to get a pretty good fire going before anyone even notices. Even worse is violent crime, which also increases with an increase in empty buildings. Everyone is less safe because a large financial institution decided to foreclose on a building and then evict everyone living there.

People say that money talks. What is it saying here? When people lose their homes, they have to go somewhere else. Often that place is a homeless shelter, which is paid for by the state. Thus, an increase in the number of evictions leads to an increase in the number of people taking advantage of these shelters, which means that the state has to spend more money on them. There's only so much cash that the state can throw around, and the more it spends on homeless shelters the less it can spend repairing roads and fixing schools. If you've ever complained about the state not providing some service that you've wanted, extra expenditures like this may be partly to blame.

What can be done to save tenants’ homes, our neighborhoods, and the state’s money? It’s simple: keep people in their homes. Make it illegal for financial institutions to evict tenants without just cause unless they have an agreement to sell the building to a third party. There’s no reason for banks to empty buildings because they think it’s what future owners want, let the real future owner decide whether or not they want it to be empty. Fortunately, this proposal isn’t coming from left field. There’s already a bill making its way through the legislature that proposes this very change. But the end of the legislative session is nearing and we need to act now. So what can you do to help? Support SB2394, An Act to Stabilize Neighborhoods. It was recently voted for unanimously by the Senate and will soon be voted on in the House. Call your representative, and tell him or her that the time is now to protect tenants and make our streets safer. There’s no reason to wait, and doing so will only lead to more people losing their homes. People who have done nothing wrong should not be removed from their homes because of someone else’s mistakes, and we shouldn’t suffer for them either. It’s time to take a stand on tenant protection.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Jarrad

“I was not really sure what to expect at the Bank Tenant Association meeting. I thought it was going to be a low-key, serious meeting, where people share their foreclosure stories with the group and get advice from volunteer lawyers. After all, the majority of the people there would be on the verge of losing their homes, and I could not imagine that they would be in a great mood. I wound up being very wrong. Micaela and I showed up a few minutes late because it was very difficult to find parking. It was obvious why as soon as we walked in: the place was packed. Half an hour after the meeting had started, people were stuck standing in the hallway listening through the open door. At the front of the room were the City Life leaders, and off to one side was a large group of volunteer lawyers. Everyone is less safe because a large financial institution decided to foreclose on a building and then evict everyone living there.

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Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Micaela

From a meeting with Representative Smola’s staff at the State House:

“As we were telling him about the bill, Nick pulled it up on his computer and scrolled through the list of sponsors. ‘Wow’ he said when he saw how long the list was that didn’t consist of a single Republican. When he looked at the literature of the bill, he began asking us pointed questions and seemed surprised when we knew how to answer them. He also seemed surprised when we were able to provide statistics about Smola’s district. For example, we told him that 40% of the population of Worcester County lives in multi-unit buildings and nearly 62% of the population are homeowners. I was
happy that I had taken the time to research these figures the night before, Nick seemed very pleased with our level of preparedness. In fact, he commented on how impressed he was with our knowledge of the issue.”

**Update (September 2010)**

The bill was signed by Governor Patrick on August 7, 2010. It is now Chapter 258 of the Acts of 2010.

### For more information

**Foreclosure Reform**

- Mass Alliance Against Predatory Lending: http://www.maapl.info/
- City Life Vida Urbana: http://www.clvu.org/
- National Low Income Housing Coalition: http://www.nlihc.org/template/index.cfm
Currently, establishing proof of citizenship or immigration documentation status is required to be eligible for in-state tuition rates at public colleges in Massachusetts, barring hundreds of resident, undocumented immigrants from in-state rates every year. The In-State Tuition Bill seeks to change this requirement to proof of having lived in Massachusetts for three years, graduated from a Massachusetts high school, and an affidavit of intention to pursue citizenship.

■ The Bill
S603: “For legislation relative to equal access to higher education and generating revenue for the commonwealth”

■ Elevator Speech
I know you agree that education provides an opportunity to succeed. Our state, however, is in a state of calamity because there are a group of ambitious undocumented students for whom hope of an education has been dashed because they cannot afford out-of-state tuition.

Many of these students came of their parents’ volition and are being punished for a choice they did not make. These students who have lived here for most of their lives and have excelled in Massachusetts high schools have not been privileged with in-state tuition simply because of the stigma that surrounds their status and, as a result, do not have the tools to acquire a job that can support them.

By granting them in-state tuition, the state gains 2.5 million dollars and gains the chance to make a difference in a young adult’s life.

You can help support Senate Bill 603/House Bill 1175 by convincing your colleagues that Massachusetts will not be socially behind Texas, the first state to pass the bill, in understanding the importance of granting higher education to all residents.
undocumented immigrants in this country pay all the usual taxes. On a federal level, 8 million of the 12 million anywhere else.

tuition, particularly when they can't get the in-state price other tax-paying Massachusetts residents the out-of-state students. It doesn't make sense when the state charges state schools admit out-of-state residents, or international schools. This difference in price makes sense when the discount is that residents pay the taxes that subsidize the approximately $4,305 to $9,704. The theory behind this $10,811 to $22,157 per year while in-state students pay they are charged the out-of-state tuition, ranging from 4,305 to 9,704. The theory behind this discount is that residents pay the taxes that subsidize the schools. This difference in price makes sense when the state schools admit out-of-state residents, or international students. It doesn’t make sense when the state charges other tax-paying Massachusetts residents the out-of-state tuition, particularly when they can't get the in-state price anywhere else.

And yes, contrary to popular belief, immigrants pay taxes. On a federal level, 8 million of the 12 million undocumented immigrants in this country pay all the usual taxes through IRS-issued tax identification numbers. They are consumers, they rent and purchase houses, they work hard in the service jobs that bolster the American way of life. They are not entitled to most of the benefits of those taxes, such as Social Security…or, in Massachusetts, in-state tuition rates. Additionally, undocumented students are barred from applying for federal aid, further exacerbating the burden of the higher price they are charged to go to school.

These kids put their dreams on the back burner. They read comments under online news articles decrying them as outsiders and declaring that they can only go to college after every American citizen who applies is accepted first. They get called “moochers,” get told to “go back home,” and read that they shouldn’t take spots in the classroom from our children.” The principle of competition in college admissions is abandoned, and the fact that Massachusetts college presidents testify that immigrant students would be filling empty seats is disregarded. Massachusetts has the chance to make some extra money filling those seats, but instead the door is slammed in the faces of immigrant kids.

Above all, I fail to understand how, in a country that fundamentally does not punish individuals for the actions of others, a minor can be treated like a criminal for the immigration decisions of his or her parents.

Maybe that’s what I don’t understand about “illegal.”

Thankfully, undocumented students and their supporters have worked to end the injustice of being charged unfairly for out-of-state tuition by engaging in what is one of the most important forms of American education: civic participation.

The In-State Tuition Bill simply seeks to treat taxpayers as in-state students when they work towards a higher degree, regardless of documentation status. Everybody who wants to see Massachusetts do right to these kids can write to our state legislators and Governor Deval Patrick and urge them to get this bill passed.

### Excerpts from Campaign Journals

**Vanessa**

*From the bill hearing:*

“I had intended to shake hands with and get to know the students who testified, but the meeting ran longer than we expected and unfortunately, our time was limited. Before we left Cynthia gave a whispered introduction of Morgan and I to Renata Teodoro, one of the students who had testified—this turned out to be essential in building the connection with the Student Immigrant Movement later
on. More immediately, as this was very early on in the semester, the bill hearing served as an excellent primer to the issues surrounding the in-state tuition debate. I hadn’t realized before going just how long this battle has been.”

From a rally of student supporters at the State House:
“The students in attendance also brought posters to demonstrate their positions on the issue, and were invited to read them between speeches. It was a moving experience to hear them call out for justice and education. Additionally, attending the rally showed SIM [the Student Immigrant Movement] that Morgan and I were serious about getting involved, and when we met with them afterwards the atmosphere was much warmer.”

Morgan

From a rally of student supporters at the State House:
“We asked individual students, some our age and others no older than ten years old, what this meant to them. At the beginning, many of the students refused to talk to us so I decided to try to connect using my broken Spanish and suddenly I had broken a barrier. Many thought it was funny or admirable that I was trying so hard and thus granted me an interview. That was the best feeling in the world, to overcome that barrier. It really made me realize how important it is to try to relate to someone, even if you make terrible mistakes, such as my grammar.”

From a meeting with Senator Sonia Chang-Díaz:
“The biggest dilemma Vanessa and I overcame was not making the meeting but actually getting the meeting to go on once we got there. Apparently, her secretary on issues such as these forgot to inform her that we would have a camera with us and, as her press advisor was absent, she was concerned about speaking to a camera. We gave her our list of questions and finally she agreed with the condition that if we were to use the footage for anything else but for our final presentation that we would contact her press advisor for clearance. We, of course, agreed.”

■ Update (September 2010)
The bill was ordered to study by the Senate on July 21, 2010. Effective defeat of bill.

For more information

In-State Tuition
• SIM: http://www.simforus.com
• MIRA: http://www.miracoalition.org