



Advocacy for Policy Change

Brandeis Students Work to Reform
Massachusetts Law

November 2021



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR
ETHICS, JUSTICE AND PUBLIC LIFE
Brandeis University

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initiative to expand to all 50 states and to enhance ENACT’s digital platform.



◀ *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

To learn about ENACT: The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation, and to sign up for updates, visit go.brandeis.edu/ENACT

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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.”

This course combines an investigation of the ethical dilemmas that arise in the process of lawmaking with hands-on advocacy work at the state level. 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 best to progress through the legislative process. Students choose existing laws they feel could be credibly challenged on ethical or moral grounds, and advocate for state legislative change.

Now in its 12th year, “Advocacy for Policy Change” is dedicated to the creation of citizen advocates: individuals prepared and motivated to create a just society through legislative advocacy. In 2021, we anointed 30 citizen advocates for such issues as voting access, overdose prevention, worker rights, healthcare equity, juvenile justice, and immigrant rights.

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 the 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 six.) This anthology contains excerpts from these assignments, updates on the bills, and links to more information on the relevant issues or organizations.

These students persevered through a fully remote semester necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Students adapted their work to account for changed legislative priorities and new methods of civic engagement. Their final “Present and Defend” took place via Zoom and incorporated members of the Brandeis community and our ever-expanding network.

Once again, I must thank several people whose support over the past 12 years has been invaluable. This course would not exist without the ongoing support of Professor Emeritus Richard Gaskins, my mentor and the former director of the Legal Studies Program. He and Daniel Terris, now Director Emeritus of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life, took the kernel of a unique idea and made it a reality. Ethics Center Board member and former Massachusetts State Representative Jay Kaufman ’68, MA ’73 helped me to create a course worthy of Brandeis University. An expanding list of exceptional teaching assistants made the course a reality: Kaitie Chakoian-Lifvergren, David Duhalde,

Andrew Hart, Misti Jeffers, Roz Kabrhel, Benjamin Kreider, Christian Lopez, Charlotte Powley, Melissa Ross, Doug Smith and Cynthia Tschampl.

This course is part of a national program based at Brandeis University launched in 2015, called ENACT: The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation. Since the fall of 2016, ENACT Faculty Fellows have been teaching their own ENACT courses at colleges and universities in or near state capitals across the United States. ENACT has become a major voice in addressing challenges to American democracy by engaging young people around the country in civic activism built on knowledge, cooperation, justice and integrity.

Students in ENACT courses, like those in “Advocacy for Policy Change,” learn how to work with state legislators, legislative staff members, and community organizations to advance policy. With the guidance of David Weinstein of the Ethics Center, assistant director of ENACT, we have developed a robust national network of faculty, students and alumni that includes an online platform for resource sharing and collaboration. ENACT Faculty Fellows in public and private universities, four-year and two-year colleges, a military academy, HBCUs, HSIs and a TCU, are collaborating with each other. ENACT students and alumni across the country are engaging on issues, and supporting each other in these courses and in their careers.

ENACT’s development and growth was supported by a generous multi-year commitment from International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life International Advisory Board member Norbert Weissberg and his wife, former Board member Judith Schneider. ENACT’s continued expansion has been supported by a multi-year grant from the Teagle Foundation’s “Education for American Civic Life” initiative, which has enabled ENACT to complete its expansion to all 50 states. The students, Faculty Fellows and I are very grateful for their support.

Brandeis University students are committed to combining academic rigor with hands-on work in pursuit of social justice. Each year a new cohort of advocacy students develops skills that will serve them far beyond one semester. We look forward to supporting the next cohort of inspirational citizen advocates in “Advocacy for Policy Change” at Brandeis University and with the expansion of ENACT. For more about ENACT see go.brandeis.edu/ENACT.

Melissa Stimell
Academic Director, ENACT: The Educational Network
for Active Civic Transformation
Director, International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life
Professor of the Practice in Legal Studies
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A Message from ENACT Distinguished Legislative Mentor Jay Kaufman, '68, MA '73



**Jay Kaufman visiting
“Advocacy for Policy Change”
in 2014.**

Our democracy is at a crossroads. The global pandemic, racial injustice, climate change and political polarization have made it clear that we live in uncertain times. Our norms and institutions don't seem so normal or so stable, and we are left to wonder about how we are to govern ourselves.

What a demanding and exciting time for the wonderfully engaged, bright, and energetic students in Professor Stimell's "Advocacy for Policy Change" course. They get to look at policies and policy-making, both as they are and as they might be.

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. They grapple with competing policy ideas and engage with lawmakers and advocates alike.

"Advocacy for Policy Change" continues the Brandeis University tradition of active engagement with the pressing issues of the time. As a Brandeis alum, I am particularly gratified to have had the opportunity to help establish and nurture this valuable course and, for many years, to work with the students and to serve as their liaison to state government. Their probing questions, insights and ideas made me and my State House colleagues better legislators, and they helped – and continue to help – make for better policy in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Building on the course's success on campus and in the halls of the state legislature, we committed to taking the model to scale, creating ENACT: The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation with the goal of bringing to all 50 states the university/state house intersection we've known for more than a decade at Brandeis and Beacon Hill. In 2021 we reached this goal. There are now students, faculty, citizens and legislators in every state engaging in critical thinking about policy and policy-making, and collaborating with one another online and in person.

If ever there were a time for better public leadership and citizen engagement, this is that time. The network of students, faculty, activists and legislators we are building in ENACT in Massachusetts and around the United States is more important than ever, and I am excited to be a part of its continued growth and development.

Jay Kaufman is a member of the International Advisory Board of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life. He served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1995 through 2018, and is capping a career by launching Beacon Leadership Collaborative, a non-profit organization providing leadership education, mentoring, and professional development support for those in and aspiring to public life.

Required Project Components

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 2020. 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 the 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.

Next Steps

At the end of the semester students determined where their bill was in the legislative process and recommended next steps for advocates. They considered potential implementation issues, future advocacy collaborations, potential lobbying problems, and any substantive problems with the bill itself.

Final Oral Presentation: “Present and Defend”

Bringing everything together, on May 4, 2021, students gave brief oral presentations of their legislative advocacy projects and responded to questions from audience members.

Expanding Access to Voting

Reducing barriers to voting by implementing same-day voter registration, expanding early voting, and allowing registered voters to vote by mail.

Members of the Project:

Breylen Ammen '21

Tamar Moss '21

Eliza Welty '22



Breylen Ammen



Tamar Moss



Eliza Welty

S.459/H.805, often called “The VOTES Act,” would reduce barriers to voting by implementing same day voter registration, expanding early voting, and continuing no-excuse mail-in voting which was temporarily implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each of these provisions reduces the burdens of voting and will help Massachusetts achieve equity in its electoral process. The bill also calls for more comprehensive audits to ensure election security. Lastly, it mandates that wardens of jails and prisons inform eligible inmates of their voting rights and certify that inmates who request ballots receive them, are able to vote in private, and that their ballots are returned to be counted. This bill would enable historically underrepresented communities to better participate in our democracy by making it possible for many currently-eligible voters to actually exercise their right to vote. The VOTES Act is an opportunity for Massachusetts to demonstrate that elections can be both secure and representative of the populace, at minimal fiscal cost to the state.

■ The Bill

S.459/H.805: An Act fostering voting opportunities, trust, equity, and security (“The VOTES Act”)

■ Elevator Speech

My name is Breylen Ammen, I am a resident of Lincoln, Massachusetts, and I am a student at Brandeis University majoring in politics and environmental studies and minoring in economics. My name is Eliza Welty; I’m a Brandeis student majoring in politics and I’ve organized communities in support of multiple issues and candidates in Massachusetts. My name is Tamar Moss; I live in Waltham and I am an environmental studies major and a social justice and social policy minor.

The foundation of a fair democracy is an inclusive system of voting. Massachusetts has always been a leader in America on this issue, and the VOTES Act is an opportunity to continue to lead at a time when voter suppression efforts are rampant across the country. If passed, the VOTES Act would bring us closer to fulfilling the ideal of democracy: that everyone has equal access to electoral participation.

This bill would enable historically underrepresented communities to more fully participate in our democracy by making it possible for many currently-eligible voters to actually exercise their right to vote. A study by the Public Religion Research Institute and The Atlantic found that “Black and Hispanic respondents were twice as likely as white respondents to have been unable to get time off of work for voting.” For college students who attend schools far from home, finding the time and transportation to get to their polling place may also be an insurmountable hurdle.

The VOTES Act addresses these issues by expanding early voting, allowing anyone eligible to vote by mail, and implementing same day registration. As we saw when some of these measures were temporarily implemented because of COVID-19, these steps make voting more convenient for everyone and help boost overall turnout. These improvements can be made without sacrificing election security or significantly increasing costs. The state just established these policies for elections through June 30th. Why don’t we make them permanent?

Please consider co-sponsoring the VOTES Act and asking your colleagues on the Joint Committee on Elections Law to vote it out favorably. Thank you.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

The current voting system in Massachusetts does not provide equitable ballot access, disproportionately shutting out students, people of color, and those from low-income communities. The voting provisions established during COVID-19 helped address this problem temporarily; the VOTES Act would build upon that success and improve the system permanently.

“This reform is very important to help empower individuals that already face barriers to the ballot box.”

– Alex Psilakis, Policy and Communications Manager, MassVOTE

“The main reason why I ended up voting...was because of the ease of voting with mail-in ballots and using the extended early voting for the primary. I think the same was true for most of my friends, who, without the new rules during Covid, probably wouldn't have...voted.”

– a Massachusetts student

“When you make it easier to vote, you reduce some of the hurdles, and the end result is hopefully a more representative, equal, and larger electorate.”

– Zachary Albert, Brandeis University politics professor

■ Op-Eds

Breylen Ammen

A Chance to Expand Democracy

It is statistically more likely for you to be struck by lightning than it is for one person to commit voter fraud in the US.¹ And yet, on Thursday, March 25th Georgia passed a bill that places heavy restrictions on peoples' ability to vote under the guise of election security. The Peach State is hardly the only state to pass legislation restricting voting rights this year. Rather, this has become quite a trend during the past months; legislation restricting access to voting has been proposed in 43 states.² Yet Massachusetts is one of the only states where legislation that expands voting access is being considered. If passed, the VOTES Act (S.459/H.805) would, among other things, allow everyone the option of voting by mail and would implement same-day registration.

Massachusetts has a history of being a leader in America on progressive issues. The VOTES Act is an opportunity to take on the mantle of leadership once again by moving against the wave of voting restrictions across the country. That said, the changes the VOTES Act will make are not experimental;

they have been successfully enacted before. Universal vote-by-mail has already been temporarily implemented successfully in Massachusetts in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Same day registration has already been successfully implemented in 21 states and Washington DC.³ Furthermore, despite the Republican viewpoint that mail-in ballots help Democrats win elections, this is simply false.⁴

Aside from providing the opportunity to set a progressive example, this bill will have the positive impact of better allowing people to participate in Massachusetts' democracy. These changes would help many historically underrepresented groups in Massachusetts access our democracy. Given that I am a college student, however, my focus is on the impact of the VOTES Act on me and my peers.

As students with inflexible class schedules, there are some days when taking an hour off to vote would jeopardize our grades. Not only this, but taking the time to vote can sacrifice class time that students and their families have paid an enormous amount for. I am lucky; I have not been faced with a decision between school and my vote, but there have been many times in my academic career that I would have, had my classes been on Election Day. This isn't the only barrier students face when voting; many students have no form of transportation to the polls other than those they have to pay for, such as Uber. This means that in Massachusetts some students must miss school, risk their grades, and incur expenses to cast their vote. This is too much to ask of students who are often lacking in money and time.

Universal vote-by-mail erases these issues. Students like myself would be able to fill out our ballots when it works for our schedule, and it would take less time because we would not have to travel to the polls and wait in line. Given that the cost of mailing a ballot is covered by the state, it is also completely free. I know of at least one of my peers who would not have voted in the 2020 election (even if we were not in the midst of a global pandemic) had mail-in voting not been temporarily implemented.

Same-day registration improves access to the vote in a different way - by allowing students who recently moved to their university to participate in elections much more easily. Without same-day registration, folks who have moved - even within the state of Massachusetts - are at risk of losing their ability to vote due to their registration not being updated to reflect their new polling place. This actually happened to one of my close friends in 2018, which was a massive disappointment for him. Additionally, registration is just not at the forefront of people's minds 20 days before an election, which is the last day that you can register under the current law. Forgetting to register to vote nearly a month before an election should never disenfranchise anyone.

We know that these election reforms can be done. We know

¹ Weiser & Ekeh

² Gardner et al

³ NCSL

⁴ Thompson et al

that they do not compromise election security, and we know that they will make voting more accessible and convenient for everyone, not just students. Passing the VOTES Act should be a top priority for the Massachusetts legislature. You can play a role in advancing democracy in Massachusetts and aiding in the passage of this urgently-needed legislation by calling or emailing your legislators to voice support for this bill.

Legislator contact information can be found here:

[Find My Legislator](#)

Brylen Ammen is a senior at Brandeis University studying politics, environmental studies, and economics.

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Tamar Moss

We Must Keep Voting Accessible in Massachusetts

Voter suppression efforts are running rampant. The current backlash to suppress voting access is unjustified, undemocratic, and racist. Our president even deemed Georgia's new law "Jim Crow in the 21st Century." Massachusetts must take action now to ensure everyone's right to vote is protected and accessible.

Georgia's tight run-off elections showed us how increased turnout can change the tide of an election, and ultimately we saw an impressive flip of the Senate. However, Republicans found the increased voter turnout—largely attributed to Black voters—threatening. Georgia's new law, which makes voting more difficult, is clear backlash against the increased voter turnout in 2020. The right to vote is the foundation of our democracy, and Georgia's new law suppresses this right.

Georgia is not alone in its voter suppression efforts. In fact, 361 bills have been introduced in 47 states that would restrict voting access. The vast majority of the bills were proposed by Republican legislators, and they target measures that make voting particularly easier for communities of color and other left-leaning groups. The motives behind these bills are pretty clear. This unacceptable trend towards voter suppression gives our state the opportunity to once again step forward as a national leader on equity issues.

Though Massachusetts may present itself as the bedrock of our national democracy, not everyone here can exercise their democratic right. Many students, like myself and my

peers, often have a hard time voting. We may find ourselves in class all day on Election Day without time to make it to the polls. Before the pandemic, voters who were too busy or did not have transportation to the polls simply could not vote. People who move frequently may forget to register to vote after they move, and later find they have missed the local deadline to register and cannot cast their ballot.

The COVID-19 pandemic seems like it has made everything harder, except for voting! The Commonwealth passed temporary voting provisions that allowed anyone to vote early or by mail. This meant that those of us who were too sick to vote in person or were concerned about being around other people during the pandemic could still vote.

These changes promoted our nation's democratic values. There was 76% voter turnout in Massachusetts for the 2020 elections, which was 16% greater than the turnout in 2016, and the highest it has been since 1992. "When you make it easier to vote, you reduce some of the hurdles, and the end result is hopefully a more representative, equal, and larger electorate," said Dr. Zachary Albert, a politics professor at Brandeis University.

The COVID-19 voting reforms were popular too. A Massachusetts student said, "the main reason why I ended up voting...was because of the ease of voting with mail-in ballots and using the extended early voting for the primary. I think the same was true for most of my friends, who, without the new rules during Covid, probably wouldn't have...voted." Massachusetts Secretary of State William Galvin found that in the 2020 primary election, 41% of Massachusetts voters chose to vote by mail and 23% chose to vote early in-person.

Since these changes are so popular, why not keep them around? Well, the VOTES Act (S.459/H.805), would do just that. The proposed bill would make voting permanently easier in Massachusetts by implementing same day voter registration, expanding early voting, and continuing no-excuse mail-in voting.

Some argue that these voting provisions are too costly. However, the changes to the 2020 election process cost the state only \$7 million. Out of a \$45 billion state budget, isn't \$7 million to ensure we all have access to this pillar of democracy well worth it?

Others have spread false claims that mail-in ballots lead to voter fraud. This rhetoric aligns with Trump's "Big Lie" that the Democrats stole the election. However, the association of mail-in ballots with voter fraud is purely myth. The actual rate of voter fraud in the U.S. is less than 0.0009%. A person is more likely to get struck by lightning than forge a ballot.

We must keep voting accessible for all, and the VOTES Act is a great way to do it. Call your Massachusetts legislators today to ask them to support the VOTES Act.

Tamar Moss is a student at Brandeis University, studying environmental studies and social justice and social policy.

Eliza Welty

Mass. Lawmakers Must Pass the VOTES Act

Georgia made headlines recently for criminalizing bringing food and water to people waiting in line to vote. But while this provision is particularly striking, it is just the tip of the iceberg of anti-voting measures being enacted or considered across the United States. The ideal of democracy is that everyone has equal access to electoral participation, and yet, 361 bills that aim to restrict voter access have been introduced in all but three states. Massachusetts lawmakers need to lead in the other direction and prove that ballot access can, in fact, be expanded, and elections will remain safe and secure. They can do that by passing the VOTES Act.

Before the pandemic, countless eligible voters, who were disproportionately people of color and students, were effectively prevented from casting their ballots in Massachusetts. With limited absentee and early voting, people who couldn't leave work or school on Election Day were unlikely to have another option. This was an unfair system that cannot be part of our much-anticipated post-COVID world.

This is where the VOTES Act comes in. Massachusetts lawmakers have the opportunity to expand early voting, allow universal vote by mail, and implement same day registration. Each of these steps, as well as the smaller provisions in the bill, would have incredibly important tangible and intangible benefits. First and foremost, they would open up our democracy to enable historically disenfranchised people to more fully participate. Just as importantly, Massachusetts can demonstrate that voting equity and secure elections are not mutually exclusive.

The most common defense from Republicans attempting to prevent Black and Brown people from voting is that we need to clamp down on voter fraud. In the aptly titled project, The Myth of Voter Fraud, the Brennan Center explains the extreme rarity of fraud and how stories and lies about fraud are fundamentally just tools for voter suppression. But in the world of Donald Trump's Big Lie and the increasing number of bills to restrict voting access, we need as many examples as we can get to prove that those arguments bear no resemblance to the truth.

We know that these provisions will not increase fraud in the Commonwealth. Expanded early voting and universal vote by mail were temporarily implemented for the September and November 2020 elections. Massachusetts recorded almost three hundred thousand more votes than in 2016, and still, a post-election audit found only nominal errors. This audit reassures me, and it should reassure all voters and lawmakers in Massachusetts, that our elections are well-run and secure, even with increased ballot access. Passing the VOTES Act is safe, continues the Commonwealth's legacy as a leader, and could even have positive effects on voting rights across the country.

And if these reasons aren't enough, these temporary measures were popular! Massachusetts achieved seventy-six percent voter turnout during this presidential election, adding almost 300,000 votes to its previous record of 3.3 million, which had been set during 2016. I have personally spoken with people in Massachusetts, most of whom were students, who were only able to vote last year because of these temporarily expanded options. They and thousands more like them will lose that opportunity if lawmakers fail to act. This is bigger than a few anecdotes. A large majority (sixty-four percent) of Massachusetts voters in the 2020 presidential general election opted to use either the mail-in or early in-person voting options that were made available because of COVID-19. These changes helped so many of us cast a ballot! Voters in Massachusetts and elsewhere clearly enjoyed and made use of those easier options and we should be allowed to keep them.

If you agree that passing the VOTES Act is in the best interest of Massachusetts, as well as the country at large, call your state senators and representatives and ask them to support and prioritize S.459 and H.805.

Eliza Welty is a politics and legal studies student at Brandeis University. She has interacted with countless voters through her work on many candidate and issue campaigns in Massachusetts.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

My name is Breylen Ammen and I am a constituent of yours from Lincoln, MA. I am writing to you along with Tamar Moss and Eliza Welty, fellow students at Brandeis University. We are all passionate about expanding voting rights in the Commonwealth and are supporters of S.459, "An Act fostering voter opportunities, trust, equity and security," also known as "the VOTES Act." First, we want to thank you for cosponsoring this piece of legislation, for enabling us to speak with your staffer, Evie Hobbs, about the bill, and for your leadership on climate action.

The voting policies implemented for the past September and November elections due to the pandemic allowed many of our friends and other students with whom we have spoken to cast their ballots. These are students in your district who are eager to have their voices heard, but would not have been able to without the expanded voting opportunities. It is crucial to pass the VOTES Act, to ensure that our peers can continue voting with ease.

There are stark inequities within the current voting system. A study found that Black and Hispanic people are twice as likely as white people to experience barriers to voting. Increasing access to voting has become even more timely, as 43 states are currently attempting to suppress voting access. This goes against our country's democratic values. As you know, the VOTES Act would permanently solidify the current provision that allows any voter to submit a mail-in ballot. It

would also expand early voting and allow same day registration. This would help address the current inequities in ballot access, especially for people of color, people with lower incomes, and students. Furthermore, the VOTES Act would be an opportunity for Massachusetts to once again step forward as a national leader on equity issues.

Across the country, people attempting to suppress voting access are relying on false arguments about voter fraud and election security. Multiple studies have found that these concerns are unfounded, including a Massachusetts audit which discovered no fraud associated with the new voting procedures adopted in 2020. Thus, there is no rational basis for limiting voting access, and the VOTES Act should be passed as soon as possible.

We are asking that you help ensure the Ways and Means Committee favorably reviews the VOTES Act. In addition, we would be grateful if you could speak with Senator Finegold and ask that this bill receive a swift hearing in the Joint Committee on Election Laws.

Thank you,

Breylen Ammen, Tamar Moss, and Eliza Welty

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Breylen Ammen

On meeting with Representative Daniel Ryan

My biggest takeaway from this meeting is the importance of understanding how funding works for a given bill. I was under the impression that the state would/could not give out unfunded mandates to towns, so I was unconcerned about the bill exacerbating economic inequities between towns. I was also unconcerned about the lack of specific language on who pays for these changes when I read the bill, because I assumed that if passed, it would simply be funded in full by the state in the same way the 2020 election was, with towns basically sending in receipts for what they spent on the election and the state reimbursing them. It was tough to find financial information about this bill, but in hindsight we should have tried even harder to better understand all the details about its funding because we then could have advocated for it much more effectively in this meeting.

Tamar Moss

On meeting with Representative Daniel Ryan

First of all, the Representative was very friendly and personable. He seemed happy to talk with us. He said that he had not delved into the bill yet, but he seemed very supportive. This made me realize that even though a legislator is not yet a cosponsor, they may still be very supportive of a legislative effort. He was optimistic about the bill passing, but thought that legislators may get caught up in the fine details of the bill, such as provisions to increase funding for local clerks,

which could delay the bill from being passed. He seemed to think that the temporary voting measures for the pandemic were popular and necessary. It was heartening to hear that if the VOTES Act does not get passed this year, Representative Ryan wanted to make sure that more temporary measures will bridge the gap.

On all meetings

Meeting with legislators, speaking with a representative from the MassVotes coalition, and attending the GBH webinar about voting rights left me with a much more robust understanding of the VOTES Act itself, the opposition it may face, and the legislative process in Massachusetts. I was most surprised by how friendly and happy the legislators were to speak with us. ... It seemed that the legislators appreciated that young people were engaging with politics. The Zoom setting of our meetings with legislators impacted my perception of them. We could see a little bit of what their homes looked like, which made it feel more like they were regular people than it would have had we met in a formal office setting. I found the range of beliefs and support for the bill to be particularly interesting. While some legislators were very concerned about the costs and stress on clerks that would accompany same-day voter registration, others saw it as no problem at all. ... I feel so grateful for the opportunity to take this class, as it gave me hands-on experience with the legislative process.

Eliza Welty

On meeting with Representative Daniel Ryan

As the chair of the Joint Committee on Election Laws, we were excited to meet with Representative Ryan which we were able to do virtually on April 1 at 1:30 PM. Our goals for this meeting were slightly different than our others: we, of course, wanted to lobby him to support and prioritize the bill, but as the chair of the most relevant committee, we also wanted to get as much information about the status of the bill as we could. Fortunately, Representative Ryan was even more willing to tell us about his colleagues' opinions on the bill than I was expecting. He told us that he and his committee had been mostly focused on the time-sensitive home rule petitions for Boston and Holyoke, as well as extending the pandemic election provisions through June, but that they were beginning to figure out the details for passing larger voting reforms. His goal at the time of our conversation was to have a hearing on the bill before the third week of April and then try to get it to Governor Baker's desk by early June. Since the first step of that plan was not able to happen, it may be more likely that they will resort to Ryan's fallback plan. He explained that his hypothetical backup was to pass a more short-term bill extending the pandemic provisions through the end of the year and then passing the full VOTES Act later in the session.

It was a little bit disappointing that [the Joint Committee

on Election Laws]... had not yet started to focus on the VOTES Act in earnest and could not provide a concrete plan for the path forward, but it was understandable given the unique legislative calendar [due to COVID-19]. Furthermore, it served as an important reminder that sometimes other paths to similar goals will be easier to achieve, and that smaller steps can be celebrated as progress. We asked Representative Ryan to continue prioritizing the bill and convincing his colleagues on the Joint Committee on Election Laws and thanked him for the work his office had already done. In addition to discussing the VOTES Act, I learned a lot about the behind-the-scenes operations of committees and the Joint Committee on Election Laws specifically. He explained the process behind passing home rule petitions, establishing committee rules from session to session, and working with his colleagues in the Senate and in the leadership team.

■ Next Steps

The VOTES Act is on a very positive trajectory. The national spotlight is currently on voting rights in the wake of the 2020 election. Even members of the Massachusetts Legislature who expressed concerns about costs agreed that the changes it would make are positive. The bill has numerous cosponsors (39 petitioners in the Senate, 87 in the House), including several members of the Joint Committee on Election Laws: House Vice-Chair Adam Gomez, two other Senate members, and three House members. The bill does not currently have any scheduled hearings, however, we are hopeful that a hearing will be held by the end of ... [May], based on what we heard from Senator Ryan and Common Cause.

The immediate next step we would take if we were to continue to advocate for this bill would be working to ensure that the hearing does, in fact, happen and that the bill is reported favorably out of the Joint Committee on Election Laws. We are also interested in talking to one or more town clerks. Despite reaching out to both the Lincoln and Waltham town clerks, we were unable to get a meeting, so continuing to pursue a meeting with a clerk to find out more about the perspective of clerks on this bill would be a top priority.

We would also try to meet with as many members of the Joint Committee on Election Laws as possible to convince them to support the bill. It would probably make sense to try to meet once again with Senator Creem or her staff and get in touch with MassVote and Common Cause to get a better idea of who in particular we should focus our efforts on, and if there is anything else that would be helpful for us to do, such as work on gathering testimony from fellow students for the hearing.

Throughout the life of the bill, we would keep in touch with the coalitions working on the bill to get a better understanding of what is being done by others and to make sure that our advocacy efforts work synergistically with theirs. Once

a hearing is scheduled, we would be sure to attend.

Provided the bill is reported out favorably by the Joint Committee on Election Laws, the next step would be to work on ensuring that the necessary funds are secured in the Joint Committee on Ways and Means. Funding is essential for this bill because without state funding, towns could be left with inequitable financial burdens that limit the implementation of the proposed changes, particularly in lower-income areas. We are already off to a good start, with Senator Cindy Friedman and Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante, the House and Senate Vice Chairs of the committee both of whom are cosponsors, along with numerous other members of the committee. At this point, we would start meeting with members of the committee to ask for their support on the bill, and if they already support it, to ask that they talk to their colleagues about supporting it.

Presuming the bill is reported out favorably by the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, the next big step is working to ensure that it has sufficient votes to pass in the House and Senate (although mostly the House). If it does get to this point it is very likely to pass, however, we would still try to get an idea of which legislators needed a bit of a push in the right direction and try to meet with them.

■ Update

As of October 2021: The bill was reported favorably by the Joint Committee on Election Laws and referred on July 21, 2021 to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means, who reported the bill favorably with an amendment (S.2545) on September 30. On October 6, the bill passed in the Senate with a vote of 36-3 and went to the House, where it was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means on October 14.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.459: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S459

H.805: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H805

Organization or Coalition support:

MassVOTE: massvote.org

Common Cause Massachusetts:
commoncause.org/massachusetts

Establishing Supervised Drug Consumption Sites in Massachusetts

Mitigating many of the harms associated with drug use by establishing at least two supervised consumption sites in Massachusetts within the next 10 years

Members of the Project:

Lexi Foman '21

Dawson McNamara-Bloom '22



Lexi Foman



Dawson McNamara-Bloom

S.1272/H.2088 would authorize a 10-year pilot program establishing two or more supervised consumption sites (SCS) in Massachusetts. SCS are facilities staffed by licensed health professions where people who use drugs can use pre-obtained substances under legal protection in safer, more hygienic conditions. Staff at the facilities do not directly assist with drug injection or consumption, but provide services such as sterile injection supplies, safe disposal of used supplies, monitoring for overdose, and administration of rescue medications in the case of overdose. Some facilities also provide services such as basic medical care and wound care, education about safer injection practices, counseling services, and referrals for additional health and social services, including addiction treatment. These sites save lives by preventing overdoses, they reduce transmission of bloodborne illnesses like HIV and Hepatitis C, and they prevent abscesses and skin infections that are completely avoidable with proper hygiene and skin preparation.

■ The Bill

S.1272/H.2088: An Act relative to preventing overdose deaths and increasing access to treatment

■ Elevator Speech

My name is Lexi Foman / Dawson McNamara-Bloom and I am a student at Brandeis University. We are speaking with you today because we share a common goal: improving the lives of Massachusetts residents. Each person in this Commonwealth deserves to be treated with compassion and respect, especially the most vulnerable among us. Unfortunately, we are failing to do enough for people who use drugs. Every 11 minutes, someone in the United States dies from an opioid-related overdose. While the opioid epidemic has devastated our country, it has hit especially hard here in the Commonwealth. The rate of overdose in Massachusetts is double the national average and HIV transmission from injection drug use is almost three times higher than the national average. These numbers are staggering but avoidable, and we need to do significantly more to mitigate the harms of drug use.

Supervised consumption sites are sanctioned facilities run by medically trained staff that provide sterile injection supplies, safely dispose of used supplies, monitor for overdose, and administer lifesaving rescue medications when needed. These sites save lives, reduce transmission of HIV and Hepatitis C, and prevent infections that are completely avoidable with proper hygiene and skin preparation. Supervised consumption sites won't completely solve the opioid epidemic, but they will help combat its most devastating effects. Will the representative/senator support the Act to prevent overdose deaths and increase access to treatment in the committee/Senate/House?

■ Excerpts from Storybook

“[Supervised consumption sites] would give people an opportunity to use drugs in a less dangerous way and to move toward rehabilitation, to move toward developing positive relationships with other people.”

– *retired social worker*

“It is harder to treat the problems [of the opioid epidemic] because people are hiding [when they use drugs]. So apart from a lot more overdoses, there are also people having to resort to things like using puddle water instead of having what they need, and people not going to get an abscess treated until it has gotten to the point where they need to be hospitalized.”

– *clinical measure specialist & care coordinator,
Boston Health Care for the Homeless*

■ Op-Ed

Lexi Foman

They're Not That Radical: Breaking Down the Controversy Around Supervised Consumption Sites

Three years ago, a friend of mine who was studying public health told me in passing about a harm reduction measure they had just learned about: supervised consumption sites (or SCS for short, also known as supervised injection facilities or SIF) where people can go to use drugs in safer, more hygienic conditions. When I first heard about SCS, they seemed to be nothing short of radical. My mind flooded with doubts and hesitations: Sure, they might have some positive effects, but wouldn't they cost the government – and taxpayers – a ton of money? Wouldn't they draw more drug users and drug-related crime to the areas around a site? Wouldn't they discourage people experiencing addiction from seeking treatment?

I held my preconceptions about SCS until October 2020, when I decided to spend the semester researching the harm reduction measure for a bioethics course. I quickly learned that everything I had immediately assumed about SCS was completely wrong. Since then, I have spent hundreds of hours learning everything there is to know about SCS: their efficacy, their impacts on the communities around them, their financial implications, their effects on addiction treatment, and more. Every data report from an existing SCS, analysis by a public health professional, and survey from drug users that I have seen has demonstrated conclusively that SCS are not only beneficial, but are necessary to combat the most immediate and devastating effects of the opioid epidemic.

The debate around SCS is complex, but I promise you don't need a public health degree to understand it. I'm going to break down some of the biggest questions and misconceptions about SCS.

First, what actually are supervised consumption sites? SCS are sanctioned medical facilities staffed by licensed

medical professionals where people can use pre-obtained substances in safer, more hygienic conditions. SCS staff do not directly assist with drug injection or consumption, but provide services such as sterile injection supplies, safe disposal of used supplies, monitoring for overdose, and administration of rescue medications in the case of overdose. Some SCS also provide services such as basic medical care and wound care, education about safer injection practices, counseling services, and referrals for additional health and social services, including addiction treatment.

SCS might seem radical, but they actually aren't a novel concept. There are currently over 120 legal SCS operating worldwide, mostly in Europe, Canada, and Australia. There are currently no legal SCS in the United States, but several states across the country—including Massachusetts—have introduced legislation to establish SCS.

You might be thinking that the only benefit from SCS would be fewer fatal overdoses (which, of course, should be enough of a benefit by itself). It's true that SCS are extremely effective at preventing and reversing fatal overdoses—in fact, there has never been a fatal overdose at any SCS in the world—but they provide a lot of other resources, too. SCS also serve as syringe service programs (also known as needle exchange programs) where people can get free, sterile injection supplies and dispose of used supplies properly. In this way, SCS help prevent bloodborne illnesses, such as HIV and Hepatitis C, that can spread through shared needle use. Staff at SCS also educate drug users about hygienic injection practices such as skin sterilization, which help prevent dangerous but completely avoidable abscesses and skin infections. SCS have the potential to provide even more resources, from fentanyl testing strips to connections to other social and medical services.

One of the main arguments against SCS is that they will prevent drug users from seeking treatment, and will actually encourage people to keep using drugs. In reality, it is not only untrue that SCS discourage drug users from seeking treatment, but they actually make it more likely for drug users to seek and enter treatment.

Another claim raised by opponents of SCS is that they are bad for the surrounding neighborhoods and will attract more drug users and drug-related crime. Evidence from SCS around the world, however, has shown that the total number of drug users has actually decreased in cities with SCS after their establishment, as has drug-related crime. And SCS have other benefits for surrounding communities, such as significant decreases in public injection, public overdose, and the littering of used injection supplies.

A potential obstacle for establishing SCS in Massachusetts is the finances it would take to establish and operate them. It will, of course, cost money to establish the sites. That being said, SCS will actually save money over time.

By reducing the number of overdoses, bloodborne illnesses such as HIV and Hepatitis C, and avoidable abscesses and skin infections, SCS will lower overall healthcare costs in the long run.

Put simply, SCS are necessary. Existing harm reduction measures, such as syringe service programs, aren't doing enough on their own. People are still crouching behind dumpsters and injecting with water from dirty puddles. People are still huddling in public restrooms and injecting with toilet water. People are still using drugs alone and rushing to avoid being caught by police. People are still overdosing at astonishing rates. If we want to have any hope of combating the opioid epidemic that is ravaging our country, we need to take immediate action to combat its most urgent and devastating effects. Supervised consumption sites have to be our first step.

Lexi Foman is a senior at Brandeis University in Waltham, MA. She is studying politics; women's, gender, and sexuality studies; legal studies; and social justice and social policy. She is passionate about social justice advocacy and plans to pursue a career in civil rights or human rights law.

Dawson McNamara-Bloom

Supervised Consumption Sites Make Dollars and Sense

In January, Governor Baker unveiled his proposed budget for Massachusetts' 2022 Fiscal Year. This iteration of the budget proposes pulling over a billion dollars from the rainy day fund, around half of its remaining balance. The budget directly allocates hundreds of millions of dollars to programs designed to fight the opioid epidemic which has been ravaging our most vulnerable communities. Other estimates have shown that the state indirectly spends over four billion dollars a year as a result of this epidemic. The results thus far have been uninspiring, with Massachusetts ranked fifth in overdoses per capita, and disproportionately high in a number of other tragic categories. It's time for bolder, creative action that creates net savings for the state while saving lives at the same time.

Supervised consumption sites (SCS) is one solution deployed in other countries that has proven effective at cutting down overdose deaths and injection-related infections and viruses. This second part is especially important for us, considering the fact that Massachusetts has a disproportionately high rate of HIV transmission through injection drug use. The basic premise is that SCS allow participants to use already-obtained substances under medical supervision that is ready to intercede if any adverse effects or overdose symptoms begin to present. With overdoses, time is of the essence and faster responses generally yield better results for the patients. These sites also provide educational materials and dispense sterile injection equipment. There are numerous peer reviewed studies showcasing their efficacy in

preventing overdoses, decreasing the transmission of blood borne illnesses, and even in connecting people who suffer from addiction with treatment options.

The sites would also save the Commonwealth millions of dollars every year. According to one study conducted by the Institute Clinical and Economic Review (ICER), a group dedicated to achieving the most cost effective, efficient medical system possible, a Supervised consumption site in Boston would save over four million dollars a year! This prediction is in line with estimates from other major cities that also are projected to save millions of dollars should they choose to deploy SCS.

The main net savings would come from decreases in money spent on health emergencies that arise from riskier drug use. All of these predictions rely on the SCS being placed in locations where they can be effective and serve the communities that need them most. Analysis from underground SCS that are currently operating in the United States show that the majority of their participants are those living under the poverty line and are sometimes homeless. These individuals often have nowhere else to use these substances and often resort to public locations. Creating a safer, private location with medical supervision would only serve to benefit the community.

According to the ICER study, one well placed supervised consumption facility in the City of Boston could save millions of dollars from decreased ambulance usage, emergency department visits, HIV and Hepatitis C transmission, and skin and soft tissue infections. These afflictions are costing MassHealth, the Medicaid program in the Commonwealth, millions of dollars every year. This estimate only factors in the medical cost savings associated with these facilities and intentionally doesn't factor in the more difficult to calculate savings from reduced policing of drug crimes and the subsequent prosecution and incarceration costs, or benefits from a decrease in syringe litter and public space drug use. The evidence is clear that in addition to their life-saving benefits, supervised consumption sites would also provide a net benefit to the Massachusetts budget.

Currently pending in both chambers of the Massachusetts Legislature is a bill titled "An Act relative to preventing overdose deaths and increasing access to treatment," which would create a 10-year pilot program of at least two of these facilities in the Commonwealth. Beyond the many moral reasons for supporting these facilities, the revenue-saving aspect of these facilities make them essential to Massachusetts' future. Call your state representative and senator today and urge them to support this bill.

Dawson McNamara-Bloom is a fourth year student at Brandeis University in Waltham Massachusetts. He studies politics and history and is an advocate for those society often neglects.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Stanley,

Our names are Lexi Foman and Dawson McNamara-Bloom and we would like to express our support for “An Act relative to preventing overdose deaths and increasing access to treatment” (S.1272/H.2088). We are writing to you today because we share a common goal: improving the lives of Massachusetts residents. Each person in this Commonwealth deserves to be treated with compassion and respect, especially the most vulnerable among us. Unfortunately, we are failing to do enough for people who use drugs. We are residents of Waltham and seniors at Brandeis University. We know that the opioid epidemic is an issue you are passionate about and we thank you for your past support for legislation focusing on the opioid epidemic, including education, more funding for treatment and recovery beds, and limiting access to opioids.

While the opioid epidemic has devastated our country, it has hit especially hard here in the Commonwealth. Over the past five years, we have lost over 10,000 people to drug-related deaths in Massachusetts. HIV transmission from injection drug use is almost three times higher in the Commonwealth than the national average. We have a disproportionately high death rate, especially for a state that prides itself on its excellent medical system. These numbers are staggering but avoidable, and we need to do significantly more to mitigate the harms of drug use. We can and must do more to help the most vulnerable among us. “An Act relative to preventing overdose deaths and increasing access to treatment” seeks to mitigate many of the harms associated with drug use by establishing at least two supervised consumption sites in Massachusetts within the next ten years.

Supervised consumption sites are sanctioned medical facilities run by medically trained staff that provide sterile injection supplies, safely dispose of used supplies, monitor for overdose, and administer lifesaving overdose-reversal rescue medications such as Narcan and naloxone when needed. Supervised consumption sites also allow staff to educate participants about skin cleaning practices to prevent skin infections and abscesses, as well as connecting them to addiction treatment and other health and social services. These sites save lives by preventing overdoses, they reduce transmission of bloodborne illnesses like HIV and Hepatitis C, and they prevent abscesses and skin infections that are completely avoidable with proper hygiene and skin preparation.

This bill is controversial because it is surrounded by misconceptions. Some worry that establishing supervised consumption sites would normalize drug use, generating even greater drug use as a result. In reality, evidence shows that users of supervised consumption sites are more likely to voluntarily enter addiction treatment. Another concern is

that sites would attract greater drug use and crime to the area around them, but evidence shows that drug use and crime actually decrease in the surrounding area of a supervised consumption site.

We are passionate about this bill because we understand what is at stake here. Massachusetts residents are dying from drug-related overdoses at staggering numbers. They need access to sterile equipment and overdose-reversing medications if they can hope to live long enough to seek addiction treatment. Supervised consumption sites will not completely solve the opioid epidemic, but they will help combat its most devastating effects. We hope you will learn more about this bill and we would love to be a resource for you on this issue in any way we can. Please consider cosponsoring this legislation so your colleagues know you stand with those suffering from addiction. Please do not hesitate to contact us via email or phone with any questions, comments, or concerns, or if there is anything we can do to assist you.

Thank you,

Lexi Foman and Dawson McNamara-Bloom

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Lexi Foman

On meeting with Representative Thomas Stanley

On Thursday, April 15, Dawson and I met with Representative Thomas Stanley and his staff member, James Zanghi, via video call. Of all of the meetings Dawson and I have had with legislators, our meeting with Representative Stanley was one of my favorites. Representative Stanley, who is my representative, was very kind, friendly, and genuine. Dawson and I began by telling Representative Stanley and James generally about the bill and about supervised consumption sites and it was clear that both of them were engaged and listening closely. Representative Stanley...asked us a few questions about the bill, which we were able to answer for him. At the end of the meeting, before we could even ask Representative Stanley about co-sponsoring the bill, he told us that he would happily sign his name as a co-sponsor. James sent us an email a couple of days after our meeting to tell us that Representative Stanley had requested to be added to the bill and he is now listed as a co-sponsor.

Dawson McNamara-Bloom

On meeting with Anna Darrow, Legislative Aide for Representative Hannah Kane

Later that day we had an opportunity to talk to Anna Darrow, an aide for Representative Hannah Kane. Opioid addiction knows no political party and we felt that it was vital that we reach out to people across the political spectrum to hopefully draw broad support for this bill. Unfortunately, the Representative wasn't able to join us for this meeting, but we still lobbied her aide, Anna. We gave our best pitch trying to find a common ground by approaching this as a moral issue rather than a political one, but we didn't appear to be making any headway. This isn't to say we felt dismissed or anything, we just didn't feel like Anna thought there was any way that her boss would support this proposal. So I decided to try a different approach.

Having read the Representative's campaign site, I knew that she was a budget hawk and that she was a big fan of eliminating wasteful spending. So I pivoted our case and outlined the fiscal argument for supervised consumption sites. I walked Anna through the economics of the proposal, showcasing how a little spending on the front end would result in massive savings on the backend. She seemed much more receptive to this argument and promised me that she would present it to her boss and provide her with the necessary information prior to the hearing on this bill. Anna circled back to say that she felt that we were ahead of our time and that politicians would regret not supporting this measure in the future. I ended the meeting by thanking her for her time and telling her that if she really felt that way she could help get her boss on board so that history remembers Representative Kane as a leader in this field.

■ Next Steps

We are both incredibly hopeful and optimistic about the future of this legislation. There is a huge amount of enthusiasm in both chambers of the Massachusetts Legislature, with people who have never supported this proposal in the past stepping up as cosponsors. We both intend to continue advocating for this bill to ensure it makes it through the committee stages and onto the floor of both chambers. We hope to attend hearings once we have the opportunity to and participate however possible.

The biggest obstacle we foresee this legislation facing is that Governor Baker has come out against it. Even if it makes its way through both chambers of the legislature, it is unlikely to be enshrined in law until a new administration is installed. Whether that is in 2022, 2026, or further down the line is yet to be determined, but that is certainly a huge roadblock to the success of this bill as of now. This session, it is imperative that the fight continues to start generating momentum for

this bill. The conversations and education processes occurring right now surrounding SCS will ensure that when there is a governor more receptive to this issue in office, a bill that makes it to their desk can be signed into law.

A second obstacle we foresee for this legislation is that it is currently in a barebones form. At this stage of where the bill is, advocacy is mostly just about trying to open legislators' minds to supervised consumption sites in general. The end result will need to be significantly longer and more detailed, absolve the state of liability issues, and explicitly lay out a more concrete directive to the Massachusetts Department of Health outlining the vital services these facilities must provide. The bill in its current form is designed to be ambiguous and to open the debate on bringing supervised consumption sites to Massachusetts. When the day comes that it is signed into law, it will look very different but will still fulfill the promises of this draft.

Finally, the last obstacle that we foresee for this bill is its uncertain legal future. Given the results of the 2020 election, we do not expect that this issue will be met with the same resistance it did under the previous presidential administration. President Biden has signalled a clear pivot toward supporting harm reduction programs and his Cabinet is stacked with proponents of supervised consumption sites. Given this, we expect (and hope) that going forward, the federal government will treat SCS the same way it treats recreational marijuana in states that have legalized its use and will permit them.

Even given these challenges, we are still hopeful that these sites will be opened in the United States as a whole and in the Commonwealth in the not-too-distant future. SCS are desperately needed and we cannot afford to continue putting them off.

■ Update

As of October 2021: The bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery, where it has been since March 29, 2021.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.1272: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/SD1358

H.2088: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/HD3167

Organization or Coalition support:

SIFMA Now!: sifmanow.org

Ensuring Fair and Stable Work Schedules for Massachusetts Employees

Establishing measures to promote security and fairness in scheduling and compensation for employees in Massachusetts

Members of the Project:

Jess Cocomazzi '21

Arthi Jacob '21



Jess Cocomazzi



Arthi Jacob

Bill S.1235/S.1236, also known as “The Fair Workweek Bill,” seeks to provide stable work schedules for Massachusetts retail, hospitality, and food services employees. It aims to address the instability in workers’ schedules that frequently occurs in these industries, such as last-minute schedule changes and irregular work hours, by requiring employers to give 14 days advance notice of employees’ schedules. It would also require that employees be allowed to make specific scheduling requests, receive compensation for last-minute schedule changes, rest a minimum of 11 hours between shifts, and get offered any additional available hours of work before new employees are hired. These simple yet effective changes can help provide workers the scheduling stability and income stability that they all deserve.

■ The Bill

S.1235/S.1236/H.1974: An Act relative to the scheduling of employees (The Fair Workweek Bill)

■ Elevator Speech

Arthi: Hello, my name is Arthi and I am a Brandeis senior majoring in economics with minors in philosophy and legal studies, and I have a deep passion for labor justice. I think we can all agree that if you work hard, you deserve some security and stability in your life. Right now, unstable scheduling practices like shift changes or cancellations cause financial insecurity, hunger, homelessness, and poor health.

One-third of workers receive less than one week’s notice of their shifts, making it hard to provide stable childcare. This causes harm to children’s well-being, including significant psychological distress, poor sleep, and unhappiness. This problem disproportionately affects workers of color, particularly Black and Latinx workers, and is exacerbated by the Covid-19 crisis.

Jess: Even something as simple as requiring employers to give two weeks’ notice of scheduling can increase stability in an employee’s workweek and overall quality of life. S.1235 and H.1974, also known as the Fair Workweek Bill, would require employers to give 14 days advance notice of employees’ schedules. It would also require that employees be allowed to make specific scheduling requests, receive compensation for last-minute schedule changes, rest a minimum of 11 hours between shifts, and get offered any additional available hours of work before new employees are hired. These simple yet effective changes can help provide workers the scheduling stability and income stability that we all deserve.

So far, one state and at least six cities have passed their own versions of the Fair Workweek Bill, including New York, Chicago, San Francisco, and Philadelphia. These laws have been proven to create better and more productive work environments while also helping increase revenue and reduce turnover rates.

Arthi: The Fair Workweek Bill is critical for advancing workers’ rights, especially now when workers are doing some of the most important work in keeping Massachusetts safe and running during the pandemic. We ask that you speak personally to the Joint Committee on Workforce and Development to have them bring this bill up in a speedy manner and when the time comes, we hope you vote this bill favorably out of committee.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

“Having [notice] two weeks in advance is helpful. Before, we have argued [with management] about [advance notice because]...management has given [only] four days [notice before schedule changes]. If it [was] changed to two weeks then that would be great. People will have more time to adjust their schedules around work.”

– *Brandeis Dining Services Worker*

“[Scheduling] seems inconsequential, but that job is everything. It’s your opportunity to have financial independence, but it’s also your daily routine and something you shouldn’t have to ask respect for [regarding your time]... The Fair Workweek Bill will absolutely improve employee experiences... [it will allow people] to plan things in advance so that they can schedule their life.”

– *Massachusetts Worker and College Student*

“Having to hire and train new employees is something that’s expensive for businesses, and a lot of what I’ve heard about in HR recently is focused on reducing turnover rates and expenses... providing a more stable work schedule for employees would help to reduce turnover rates.”

– *Recruiting Coordinator*

■ Op-Ed

Jess Cocomazzi

Why Do We Deny Basic Rights To Our Most Essential Workers?

The Covid-19 pandemic has created insurmountable challenges for everyone across the country and around the globe. One group of people, however, has become the unsung heroes throughout it all. These are the grocery store workers who keep our shelves stocked, restaurant employees who now deliver meals or provide curbside pick up, janitors and hotel maids who ensure that all establishments are clean, and so many others. These essential workers have kept the country running for the past year, yet Covid has hit them the hardest. The state of Massachusetts should do whatever it takes to support these workers, starting with providing stability in workers’ schedules.

There is no better time than now to pass S.1235 and H.1974, also known as the “Fair Workweek Bill.” Massachusetts’ retail, hospitality, and food service workers deserve advanced notice of their schedules, appropriate shift breaks, and compensation for any abrupt schedule changes. These are small, inexpensive, and easy changes that can make a huge difference in an employee’s life.

It may be hard for those with a salaried or full-time job to envision how vital this bill is. However, one only has to imagine how stressful and frustrating it would be to have no control over your day-to-day life. As a college student, I

like to be prepared. I schedule all my club activities, work shifts, meetings, and free time around each of my classes for the week. Suppose my professors changed class times every week and only notified students of those changes two days beforehand? In that case, I’d constantly be worrying about missing already scheduled meetings or club commitments and would always be stressing over the constant changes in my routine. Not to mention, if my professors made me be “on-call” for class time or scheduled classes back to back, I would barely be able to survive the week. This may be a relatively minor example, but it represents the more significant struggles that Massachusetts workers face every day. There is absolutely no reason to deny Massachusetts’ most essential workers the right to have stability in their lives.

Currently, workers have no choice but to abide by the inconsistent scheduling practices of their employers. They are forced to work both the closing and subsequent opening shifts, endure last-minute shift changes or cancellations, and work multiple “on-call” shifts. All of this makes it incredibly hard for people to plan anything around their work schedules. It can also result in inconsistent paychecks and overall income volatility. Many people working two or three jobs do not have the luxury of knowing last-minute when they will have to work. They have to consider their commute, child-care, healthcare appointments, all while ensuring that they make enough money for the week. This becomes significantly more challenging when their schedules can change at any moment.

The Fair Workweek Bill aims to address the insecurities caused by unstable scheduling practices common in businesses across the state. An October 2019 Shift study reported that unstable scheduling practices led to increased “hunger hardship” and “housing hardship” for vulnerable people employed as hospitality and service workers. Moreover, marginalized groups such as Black Americans and women are most negatively impacted by these practices. ... [Furthermore, members of groups underrepresented in management roles may not feel that they can speak up or request shift changes from their employers.] Again, those who are most dramatically impacted are people of color and those working more than one job while supporting children.

Those who want to deny such basic rights for workers claim that the Fair Workweek Bill would hurt business and that unfair scheduling practices are only present in small companies with careless employers. However, evidence suggests that stable scheduling actually benefits businesses by reducing turnover rates and increasing worker productivity and revenue. Common sense makes it very clear that this bill would be beneficial for both employees and employers. The Fair Workweek Bill serves to benefit workers at no one else’s expense. So, if you’re opposing the bill, then you’re essentially supporting the continuation of exploitative employer practices for no justifiable reason.

In an interview with Senator Sean Garballey of Massachusetts, a co-sponsor of the bill, he laid out all of the ways that the bill ensures that employers will not have to compensate their employees unnecessarily. He stated, “If you work at a grocery store and there’s a huge blizzard, and you’re unable to come in for work, then, of course, there is no expectation for your employer to compensate you for that change.” The bill has taken into account all of the unintended consequences to businesses and, therefore, produces no harm for employers.

Many Massachusetts legislators may not be experts on the Fair Workweek Bill and might not understand that it has taken into account employer concerns. That is why the everyday person like you, who is reading this, needs to call your legislators and convince them to vote in favor of this bill. The more people who bring it to legislators’ attention, the more they will realize just how important and beneficial this bill is to everyone in the Commonwealth! It’s time to give Massachusetts’ most essential workers the stability they so rightly deserve.

Jess Cocomazzi is a senior at Brandeis University studying American studies and legal studies.

Arthi Jacob

Do We Really Care About Essential Workers?

In the midst of a global pandemic, media and politicians have taken great care to name and praise the sacrifice and tenacity of America’s frontline workers. It should be understood, however, that these workers do not just include health care professionals, but also grocery store workers, waitstaff, custodians, and other low-income or hourly-wage earners employed in the hospitality and service industries. This latter group of laborers are made up of some of America’s most vulnerable people, many of whom may be uninsured, financially unstable, and who are disproportionately women and people from marginalized ethnic or racial groups.¹ The attention these workers have received during the pandemic, while well-deserved, is markedly performative.

Despite great care taken to reinforce the idea that these workers are critical to the backbone of America’s economy and society, it seems that interest groups and legislators are reticent to take necessary steps to protect, empower, and improve the lives of these workers. A significant and timely example of this is around Fair Workweek legislation. The Fair Workweek Bill simply aims to improve stability in the scheduling of workers by enforcing fair scheduling practices. Unfair and unpredictable scheduling, which is what most hourly wage earners cope with, may include: 1) having to work both the closing shift as well as the subsequent opening shift, 2) shift changes and cancellations that occur at the very last

minute, 3) an increase in demand for workers to be “on call,” and 4) the inability to control or have a say in the construction of one’s schedule. These are all sources of instabilities in scheduling and, subsequently, sources of instability in the lives of hospitality and service industry workers.² In October 2019, a Shift study found that the practice of unstable scheduling led to increased “hunger hardship” and “housing hardship” for many vulnerable people employed as hospitality and service workers.³

In the state of Massachusetts, “An Act relative to the scheduling of employees,” (bill S.1235 and H.1974) represents the interests of the Fair Workweek campaign within the legislature. It necessitates two weeks advance notice of schedule changes, empowers employees by ensuring employers offer additional hours to their existing staff before hiring new people, and allows employees to access unemployment benefits when employers do not follow fair scheduling practices.⁴ The bill has made its way through various committees, such as the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development, but there has been no further action taken by the end of every Senate session for the past four years.⁵ This is likely the product of lobbying efforts against the bill, led by business interests in particular. There is a common misconception that this legislation would be detrimental to the structure and success of small businesses because it would place more burdens and restrictions upon the employer. Studies conducted disprove these assertions, however, with one study suggesting that, through enforcing two weeks advance notice, there would actually be an increase in sales, employee morale, and labor productivity in small businesses.⁶ This is because it fosters a less hostile work environment, where employees feel respected and cared for by their employer and the business that they sustain through their labor.

The reality is that politicians and interest groups oppose legislation such as “An Act relative to the scheduling of workers,” not because they have legitimate opposition to the content of the bill and real worries about the harm it may cause, but because they desire to continue harmful, exploitative labor practices. Such practices make it easy to extract capital out of vulnerable populations. The Fair Workweek Bill could be the most sensible legislation in existence, but it will always receive pushback because it advances an agenda that seeks to empower the working class. Passing real, material changes is much harder than reposting a picture of a smiling constituent or tweeting empty words like “solidarity,” “respect,” or “grateful.” As a society, we must

¹ Hund-Mejean & Escobari, 2020.

² Hund-Mejean & Escobari, 2020

³ Thompson, Nov. 2019, Pg. 1-3.

⁴ Bill SD. 412, Senate, 192nd, 2021, Pg. 5-6.

⁵ Bill S.2208 190th, 2017-2018.

⁶ Thompson, Apr. 2019, Pg. 2.

make it clear to our representatives that we see through their performativity and pressure them to support legislation such as “An Act relative to the scheduling of workers,” as it will directly assist those most at risk during this pandemic and because all people deserve stability and security, regardless of where they work. Write to your representatives, meet with them, and contact organizations such as Massachusetts Jobs with Justice to join the fight to provide equity to workers.

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■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Stanley,

My colleague Arthi Jacob and I, Jess Cocomazzi, are writing to you to discuss the movement for a fair workweek. Both Arthi and I are currently students at Brandeis University with a passion for and experience in labor justice.

As students, Arthi and I know what it is like to have hectic and uncertain schedules. As a State Representative for Massachusetts, you must feel similarly about the stress that a fluctuating workweek can cause. There is no doubt that Arthi and I both feel less stressed, and therefore more productive, when we can have steady and reliable routines. However, for many workers across Massachusetts, this is often not the case. Unfortunately, it is common for workers in retail, hospitality, and food services industries to have last-minute shift changes, an increased demand to work “on-call” shifts, and an overall lack of say or control in constructing their weekly schedules. This instability increases stress and financial hardship for

workers. It also disproportionately affects people of color, and even more so women of color, who often have to balance work schedules with childcare.

The Fair Workweek Bill (S.1235 and H.1974) introduced in the State House for the current legislative session is designed to combat these problems. Arthi and I have done a fair amount of research on the bill and view it as a crucial step towards improving labor relations. Many major cities such as New York City, Chicago, and Philadelphia, as well as the state of Oregon, have already passed their own versions of Fair Workweek legislation. The Massachusetts bill ensures that employers provide 14 days advance notice of schedules to their employees and requires workers to be compensated if there are any last minute schedule changes. The Fair Workweek Bill will give workers the predictability and stability in their lives that all people deserve.

While opponents of the bill often fear that it will create a significant burden for employers and increase labor costs, this is not necessarily the case. It has been proven that the bill would have no adverse financial effects on businesses, despite the assertions that it would affect overhead cost. The bill has actually been shown to improve labor productivity and increase sales while reducing turnover rates. The Stable Scheduling Study, included in our legislative report, found that stable scheduling yielded a five percent increase in labor productivity and a seven percent increase in sales. Because evidence suggests that the Fair Workweek Bill can improve profitability and worker productivity, there is no justifiable reason to oppose the legislation.

Arthi and I are coming to you as people who have directly experienced and know others who have experienced the harmful effects of unstable scheduling practices. Arthi herself has had to balance a job with school, internships, and, at times, a second job. She herself has attested that, when a manager is being uncooperative in respecting one’s time and schedule, legislation such as this is needed to protect employees. This is the third time that the Fair Workweek Bill has been introduced in the Massachusetts State House. We expect that it will go to the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development as it has in the past. We request that you write a letter supporting the bill to both Stephan Hay, Vice-Chair of the House Members on the Labor and Workforce Development Committee, and the Committee’s Chair, Patricia Jehlen, asking them to vote it out of committee favorably.

Thank you,

Jess Cocomazzi and Sarah Arthi Jacob

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Jess Cocomazzi

On meeting with Representative Thomas Stanley

I think that overall, Arthi and I were able to make a strong impression on Representative Stanley. Towards the end of the meeting, we told him that we would be talking with Representative Garballey, a co-sponsor of the bill in the house. Representative Stanley said that he was good friends with Representative Garballey and that he would support any legislation he was a part of. It was very interesting to learn just how significant personal relationships in the State House can be for passing legislation. That is why I think it is always important to be friendly and respectful to all colleagues no matter if they are on opposite sides of the political field because you never know when you will need their support.

However, Representative Stanley also complimented us on our knowledge of the bill and passion for it and stated that we had helped convince him to vote favorably for the bill. It felt really good to meet with someone ...[and] be able to convince them to support it. Since this meeting was our first besides our initial meeting with bill sponsors, we were a little taken off guard at the beginning when Representative Stanley went right into things. However, as we dove into the bill's subject and why it was necessary, we realized that we understood the information well and were just passionate about advocating for the bill. I think it turned into a really informative conversation where we could address all of Representative Stanley's concerns and convince him to support the bill. After the meeting, we followed up with a thank you and a copy of our storybook and legislative report so that he had the data that we were talking about.

It was really interesting to witness how representatives support one another and how they take the time to listen to people voice their concerns. It helped me to feel confident in requesting more meetings from my own legislators in the future.

On meeting with Senator Paul Feeney

The key takeaway for me from the meeting with Senator Feeney was that it is not hard to make meaningful connections with legislators and that they genuinely want to listen to you. After the meeting, we sent him our legislative report and storybook, and he told us to keep his staff updated on our work on the bill and send over any more resources [we had]. It felt really encouraging to have him say that he was impressed and now wanted to look further at the bill and do his own research on it. Also, while the meeting was short, it didn't need to go on any longer. We told him everything we could about the bill, and he said he would most likely support it but also wanted to do his own research on it. I believe that if everyone knew how easy and helpful meeting with legislators

could be, they would feel like they have more of a say in our government. [This experience] established a renewed respect for state government in me.

Arthi Jacob

On meeting with Representative Thomas Stanley:

Through our call with Representative Stanley, we learned a lot about the importance of personal connections between different legislators. Because Representative Stanley knew Representative Garballey, and Representative Garballey had sponsored "An Act relative to the scheduling of workers" and had presented the bill, Representative Stanley already had more interest in the bill and believed in its importance, as he trusted the judgement of Representative Garballey. We also learned the importance of really understanding and believing in the importance of the material you are presenting. Our passion for the bill and dedication in presenting it made it much easier to convince Representative Stanley to extend his support, as we were able to quickly dismiss his concerns in an educated manner.

On meeting with Representative Sean Garballey:

Representative Garballey gave us some useful counterpoints to the rhetoric the Association for Businesses and Retailers Association was pushing. He stated that it was important to stress that if employers are not using predatory and exploitative tactics on their employees, this bill will not harm them. All it aims to do, and all the language of the bill achieves, is to hold bad employers accountable and support vulnerable employees. When we asked what constituents can do to get the bill passed in a timely manner, he stated that talking to senators and representatives was the most important strategy. As a follow up, we sent Representative Garballey the legislative report and storybook we had drafted in support of the bill so that he could use it for his own advocacy work regarding the bill and the movement for a fair work week.

■ Next Steps

The "Act relative to the scheduling of workers" is currently in the Committee on Labor and Workforce Development. For the bill to progress, it must be voted out of committee, which has been the task or action step listed in our previous communications with legislators. We believe that the main reason it continues to stall in committee is because of pushback from such lobbies as the business association, the retailer's association, and the associated industries of Massachusetts. These lobbies have concerns regarding how the bill will affect the cost of doing business, employer-employee relations, and overall revenue. However, the

legislators we spoke with feel like the time is finally right to pass this bill. They had stated that before, labor groups were focused on pushing for a \$15 minimum wage in Massachusetts, and since that was accomplished, they will now be able to turn their attention towards the Fair Workweek Bill. It is also encouraging to hear that all of the legislators we spoke to, including Senator Feeney, who is on the Committee on Labor Workforce and Development, have said that they would vote favorably for the bill.

It will be essential to inform both legislators and businesses that passing the Fair Workweek Bill does not mean that it will immediately go into effect, leaving employers scrambling to change their policies to adhere to it. There will be implementation phases for the bill that will allow businesses to adjust to the different provisions. In some cities that have passed their own fair workweek legislation, 14 days advance notice of schedules was not required until two years after the bill's passage. Hopefully, informing businesses of this will make them feel less wary about the administrative nightmare that could come with passing a bill like this so fast.

The most important advocacy plan that this bill requires is ensuring that people are calling their legislators, informing them of the bill, and asking them to vote favorably for it. If we were to continue to work on this bill, we would tell everyone who was interested to call their legislators now and tell them why they should support the bill. This action is essential because many legislators might not know about the bill or might have predetermined assumptions about the bill and its effect on businesses. To hear from real people that this bill could forever change their lives would be very powerful and persuasive to legislators. Additionally, educating legislators on the different provisions of the bill, how it would help workers and their families but also promote productivity and revenue in businesses, can help sway them as well. Not all legislators have the time to read every detail about a bill. They might think that the Fair Workweek Bill would be horrible for businesses because there would be many employees not coming in to work, requiring employers to hire new people constantly. Without reading the bill, they would have no way of knowing that this is not a problem businesses will have

because there is actually a provision in the bill that requires existing employees to be offered additional available hours before hiring new ones, which benefits both employers and employees.

Lastly, what students like us and anyone else can do to help support this bill is just spread the word about it. This could be on social media, through organized protests, or by getting many people together to call legislators and ask them to support the bill. The more people who know about this bill, the more people will realize that unstable scheduling is a common practice among businesses and that it is exploitative and must be stopped. If you have a stable, high-wage job, you may not be thinking about those who don't. So, hearing compelling stories about the stress that unstable scheduling causes and reading about the benefits to both employees and businesses that fair scheduling creates will help them understand that this is a movement that will not be stopped until workers are given the justice they deserve and that it's as easy as picking up a phone and calling your legislator, to make sure that they do.

■ Update

As of October 2021: The bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Labor and Workforce Development, where it has been since March 29, 2021.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.1235: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S1235

S.1236: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S1236

H.1974: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H1974

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Jobs with Justice: massjwj.net

Increasing Access to Menstrual Products

Establishing free and readily available disposable menstrual products for those in public K-12 schools, temporary housing facilities, and state prisons

Members of the Project:

[Alison Cantor '22](#)

[Alison Hagani '22](#)

The “I AM Bill,” or H.2354 and S.1445, addresses the inaccessibility of period products in Massachusetts by requiring menstrual products be provided at no cost to individuals who menstruate in three critical sectors of Massachusetts: state prison facilities, temporary housing assistance, and all schools serving students from grades kindergarten through grade 12. If the I AM Bill is passed, these products would be free and publicly available, allowing individuals who menstruate to receive products without needing to request them. The I AM Bill would ensure greater access to period products in key community outlets, effectively challenging the stigmas around menstruation and ultimately benefiting the health and wellbeing of menstruators across the state.

■ The Bill

S.1445/H.2354: An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products in prisons, homeless shelters, and public schools

■ Elevator Speech

Hi, our names are Ali and Alison. [Ali mentions she is a MA voter]. We are student advocates from Brandeis University with experience in gender policy. As students, we know all too well that our success is inextricably linked to our personal wellbeing. In order to stay healthy, people need to be able to access products that allow them to maintain their hygiene. One example of a necessary hygiene product is toilet paper. When you use a restroom and realize a tad too late that there is no toilet paper, you are struck with absolute horror because the ability to wipe oneself is a basic need. We would argue that an even more embarrassing feeling arises when an individual enters a restroom, realizes they are menstruating, and must leave the restroom, while bleeding, to find a product. Unfortunately, the right to menstruate safely remains subject to a detrimental double-standard. The Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization for Women’s “State of Menstrual Access” survey exposes pervasive period poverty and a systemic lack of access to menstrual products. For example, 56% of responding nurses reported observing students missing class to obtain products. 25% of temporary housing facilities report that their shelter does not provide any menstrual products. This poses severe medical and social ramifications. Lack of access can lead to educational absenteeism for students or sexual coercion in order to obtain products for incarcerated individuals. People who menstruate continue to lack the access that upholds their safety and reaffirms their dignity. We believe, as I’m sure you do, that safety and dignity are things that every Massachusetts resident/person is entitled to.

Luckily, you and the Commonwealth have an opportunity to respond to this injustice. The “I AM Bill,” or H.2354 and S.1445, addresses period poverty in Massachusetts by requiring that menstrual products be provided at no cost to individuals who menstruate in three critical sectors of Massachusetts: state prison facilities, temporary housing assistance, and all schools serving students from grades kindergarten through grade 12. If the I AM Bill is passed, these products would be free and publicly available, allowing individuals who menstruate to receive products without needing to request them. Other states have already passed legislation mandating free menstrual products in schools, including New York, Illinois, California, and New Hampshire. Help us make Massachusetts the FIRST

state to address this issue for all three of the aforementioned populations. This bill would allow the Commonwealth to improve public health by relieving menstruators of unnecessary physical and psychological stress. Please support the I AM Bill at its public hearing before the Joint Committee on Public Health in the upcoming months and speak to your colleagues within the legislature about this bill's importance. It is essential that all citizens of the Commonwealth, including menstruators, receive the essential resources they need to be safe and to thrive.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

“In Massachusetts, we have the opportunity to disrupt cycles of inequity caused by lack of access to menstrual products by passing the I AM Bill. The I AM Bill can help end period poverty in the state of Massachusetts. Not passing this bill will mean denying dignity for menstruators throughout the Commonwealth and upholding systems of patriarchy and oppression.”

– Bria Gambrell, Co-Director of Mass NOW

“As a pediatrician, I take care of many young adolescents going through puberty. [Individuals who menstruate] often don't want anyone to know when they get their period... and are often concerned about whether they will have hygiene products readily available when they need them. Legislation to address this is important because it would normalize menstruation.... If young menstruators could easily see and access products, I think that this would help them feel less self-conscious about their bodies. It would also help those around them realize that there is nothing shameful or wrong about this normal part of a person's life and health.”

– Pediatrician

■ Op-Ed

Alison Cantor

Menstruation is Now Political: Massachusetts Needs to Pass the I AM Bill

Do you think that menstruation should be a political issue? No matter where you are on the political spectrum, you need to be aware (if you aren't already) that menstrual hygiene management is a dire public health issue that needs to be dealt with right now, during this pandemic.

Our federal government has demanded that the basic needs of low-income folks be centered in the country's political agenda. Rightfully so, personal protective equipment (PPE) and relief checks were dispersed at a mass scale to help people stay afloat with their rent and food costs. This is a fantastic start, but what about the money needed to buy menstrual products? Periods don't stop during a pandemic.

“Period poverty” is the phrase used to describe a lack of access to menstrual products and it is a pervasive issue throughout the nation, including in Massachusetts. The statistics behind Mass NOW's 2019 [“State of Menstrual Access”](#) survey alone should convince you that period poverty is an issue. The survey was distributed to school nurses, shelter administrators, and Department of Correction personnel across Massachusetts. It found that 25 percent of temporary housing facilities reported that their shelter does not provide any menstrual products. In addition, 56 percent of school nurses reported observing students missing class to obtain menstrual products.

The lack of access to menstrual products is causing students and other individuals mental, emotional, and physical stress. Students have already missed too much class time during the pandemic, and yet, they will have to miss more class time because they do not have access to menstrual products.

Students and workers need to be able to enter school and their workplace without the fear and embarrassment of having soiled clothing. Menstruators are having to risk infection by using menstrual products longer than recommended. Toxic shock syndrome is a possible consequence when a single menstrual product is used for too long. It can cause extreme physical discomfort, anxiety, and can be financially taxing to treat.

Luckily, advocates and legislators have come together in the state of Massachusetts to address this problem through the I AM Bill. The I AM Bill is a common sense solution to this crisis. It is the duty of constituents to remind their representatives about the significance of these statistics and how their support could positively impact the lives of many individuals and families by passing this bill.

The I AM Bill is completely feasible as it would encompass the efforts of initiatives enacted in several specific areas of Massachusetts. In 2019, [Boston Public Schools](#) launched a pilot program to provide menstrual products to students. [Brookline](#) also took the lead and announced in 2019 that it would be the first town in the United States to require tampons in public restrooms. The urgent need for these new programs and policies has skyrocketed as students and other individuals return to school and the workplace while struggling to afford menstrual products.

The desperate need to increase access to menstrual products has been taken up by many other states. A [New York Times](#) [article](#) written by Emma Goldberg from January 2021 states: “In recent years, six states have mandated that menstrual products be provided in schools, and 13 states have mandated that they be provided in prisons and jails.” This shows a clear demand to increase access for menstrual products nationwide.

Massachusetts can demonstrate its commitment to equity

and be a leader in the nation by passing this comprehensive bill that will not only cover students but also people living in temporary housing facilities and county jails. A statewide law to increase access to menstrual products will help everyone, no matter their background.

People of all socioeconomic statuses were living with the fear of not having enough toilet paper during the beginning of the pandemic in the United States. This same kind of fear is something that many menstruators have dealt with for as long as disposable menstrual products have been used. If passed, the I AM Bill would help anyone who menstruates, regardless of whether or not they can afford menstrual products. Menstrual products can and should be available in restrooms, just like we expect there to be toilet paper and hand soap.

If you reside in Massachusetts and agree that this bill is integral to promoting equity for all, please email or call your legislator and tell them you are in support of the I AM Bill, ([H.2354](#) if they are a representative and [S.1445](#) if they are a senator). Legislators need to hear why this bill is important to you in order to get them to act. We all either are menstruators or know a menstruator, and we need to support each other to break the stigma that contributes to this public health crisis.

Alison Cantor is an undergraduate student at Brandeis University studying sociology and social policy.

Alison Hagani

What Covid-19 Response Teaches Us About Menstrual Access

If we can afford to meet the pressing public health needs of our citizens, why do we selectively choose not to? In the wake of the pandemic, facilities across Massachusetts instantaneously scrambled to meet the hygienic and sanitary needs of those in the Commonwealth. As I returned to Brandeis University in fall of 2020 for my junior year, I remarked at the seemingly miraculous and abundant availability of free personal protective equipment (PPE). However, these measures are not miraculous; they highlight the capability of state action in responding to public health needs. However, with prompt action demonstrated as possible, what justifies continuous inaction in the face of voiced menstrual needs? Now more than ever, the Massachusetts State Legislature must acknowledge ongoing menstrual inaccessibility and respond through the swift passage of the [I AM Bill](#).

I know what you may be thinking: the PPE summoned in the past year is in direct response to the catastrophe of the pandemic, which, among other consequences, [has resulted in millions of deaths](#). However, it is essential to consider the parallels between PPE and menstrual products. Firstly, both have a great proportion of the population in regular need. Secondly, accessible products are greatly needed for the health and safety of citizens. Lastly, both have a clear solution.

If you are thinking that menstrual needs are not as

widespread as COVID, consider the fact that [more than half the population menstruates](#). [Massachusetts NOW's 2019 "State of Menstrual Access" survey](#) found that 56% of responding nurses at Massachusetts K-12 public schools observed students missing class to obtain products. Furthermore, 25% of Massachusetts temporary housing facilities reported that their shelter does not provide any menstrual products, while providing condoms, razors, and other materials.

Currently, menstruators are expected to provide their own products wherever they go. This differs drastically from other sanitary essentials, such as toilet paper. I mean, imagine you walk into a bathroom only to have been expected to bring your own toilet paper. A personal responsibility to provide toilet paper would be considered an injustice as the accessibility of public health essentials, like toilet paper, respond to and validate our right to feel safe and empowered in our own bodies, wherever we may go. The products vital to menstruation are no exception.

The personal onus placed on menstruation is unjustified and detrimental when it comes to public health. Lack of access can pose [medical and social impediments](#), as menstruators risk their safety by keeping products in for too long. Lack of access can also lead to [education absenteeism and sexual coercion in return for products in prisons](#). [A report from the Justice Department](#) also concluded that "the already dangerous power dynamics of prisons were significantly worsened by a toxic mindset that menstrual products could be withheld from prisoner," with officers sometimes denying products to prisoners who refuse sex. [A report from *Thinx and Period*](#) found that a substantial number of students do not want to be at school when they have their period due to feelings of embarrassment or lack of access. The fact that most menstruators are women makes inaccessibility an issue of sexism and institutional gender violence. Additionally, we cannot neglect how menstruators of color and lower incomes are disproportionately impacted by inaccessibility.

Luckily, the Commonwealth has the opportunity to respond and demonstrate their commitment to individuals who menstruate. [The I AM Bill](#), also known as [H.2354](#) and [S.1445](#), is the way forward. This [vastly cosponsored](#) bill would confront menstrual access in Massachusetts by requiring that menstrual products are provided at no cost in three public sectors: 1) state prison facilities, 2) institutions of temporary housing assistance, and 3) all K-12 public schools. Through the I AM Bill, menstruators will have their public health needs affirmed and consequently be more empowered in their bodies – both of which are basic human rights.

Various other states, including [New York](#) and [New Hampshire](#), have already affirmed these basic rights by passing legislation mandating menstrual products in all public schools. Not only must Massachusetts follow these states' example, but we also have an opportunity to lead. In

passing the I AM Bill, Massachusetts can be the first state to address this issue for all three of the aforementioned populations, creating a precedent that empowers vulnerable populations in temporary housing and prisons.

The need for increased menstrual access can no longer be willed away by superfluous defenses about budget shortcomings or a lack of data. Such factors did not undermine the need for PPE or the ongoing availability of toilet paper. It is clear that continued menstrual inaccessibility results not from a lack of need and lack of information, but from a lack of priority. The time is up for inaction. Constituents of Massachusetts, I urge you to contact your legislators and implore that they cosponsor and help pass the I AM Bill. The safety and public health of menstruators rely on it.

Alison Hagani (she/her) is a third year at Brandeis University majoring in sociology and women's and gender studies.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

As college students who reside in your district of Waltham, we admire your support for education equity and your commitment to improving the safety of your constituents such as ourselves. The I AM Bill, also known as S.1445, seeks to improve gender equity and the public health of the Commonwealth's most vulnerable populations. If passed, the bill would increase access to menstrual products in Massachusetts in three public sectors of society: 1) state prison facilities and county jails, 2) temporary housing assistance, and 3) all public schools serving students from kindergarten through grade 12.

We know you serve as a member of the Joint Committee on Housing and we appreciate your service. As a member of this committee and as a father, you understand how important it is that children, teens, and adults feel safe and have their basic needs met. While this has extended to ensuring clean facilities or other normalized vehicles of public health, the right to menstruate safely continues to be neglected. In 2019, the Massachusetts chapter of the National Organization of Women distributed the "State of Menstrual Access" survey to demonstrate the detrimental effects of the systemic inaccess to menstrual products. The survey found that 56% of responding nurses reported observing students missing class to obtain products. This means that students are missing valuable class time. The survey also found that 25% of temporary housing facilities report not providing any menstrual products.

This is not acceptable as individuals living in temporary housing facilities are already struggling to make ends meet. They may be forced to use a menstrual product for longer than recommended in order to attend work and this puts them at risk for infection. As this exemplifies, individuals who

menstruate continue to lack access that upholds their safety and expands their opportunities.

There is an urgent need for the I AM Bill to be implemented as the COVID-19 pandemic has created a massive financial strain on so many individuals and families. People who are struggling financially need to have support in order to cover all their basic needs and this includes the cost of menstrual products. The implementation of the I AM Bill would allow students in K-12 public schools and temporary housing facilities in Massachusetts to focus more on their studies and work, and less on the stress of lack of access to menstrual products. In addition, incarcerated individuals would benefit by no longer needing to navigate the unequal power dynamics in prison in order to obtain menstrual products.

Many individuals may try to undermine the I AM Bill through unsubstantiated arguments on its fiscal implications. In reality, Massachusetts has already recognized the importance of providing funds for menstrual products in temporary housing facilities. A 2020 Partnerships for the Growth Bondings Bill authorized no less than \$500,000 for temporary housing facilities to use towards menstrual products.

Despite this success, students and incarcerated people throughout Massachusetts are still suffering from period poverty as this money awaits its active distribution. Fortunately, the Joint Committee on Public Health has been assigned to the bill and its fiscal note would provide clarity on this matter. We are confident that this fiscal note, coupled with data on the social and medical costs of menstrual inaccessibility for individuals, will demonstrate the commonsense necessity of this bill. In addition, many states and even cities, including Cambridge and New York City, have implemented similar policies.

Like many other basic human rights, Massachusetts must become a leader in menstrual equity by becoming the first state to pass this comprehensive bill. In order to do this, we are asking you to play an active role by ensuring your colleagues on the Joint Committee on Housing are aware of this bill and of the ways in which it will enhance the opportunities of individuals who are homeless. In addition to cosponsoring the bill, we ask you to urge your colleagues on the Joint Committee on Housing to speak to their fellow legislators on the Joint Committee on Public Health to vote in favor of the I AM Bill. We are also asking that you testify in support of the I AM Bill at its public hearing. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. You are more than welcome to write back to us.

Gratefully,

Alison Cantor and Ali Hagani

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Alison Cantor

On meeting with Representative Andy Vargas and Legislative Aide Emrah Fejzic

I think the meeting went really well because Representative Vargas seemed genuinely interested in providing us with new information and he seemed excited about our advocacy as students. We asked if he could speak to his fellow legislators on the Joint Committee on Public Health to see if they would cosponsor. We also asked him to tell the legislators on that committee who are already cosponsors to consider giving oral testimony at the public hearing for the bill. I also stated how this bill could make Massachusetts a leader in the country because other similar policies and initiatives have happened, but a comprehensive bill like the I AM Bill is unique.

The meeting taught me how important it is to create relationships with legislators because [Representative Vargas] said the advocacy we are doing is what allows bills to actually get passed. In addition, I never had thought about the different funding sources of the bill that could go beyond money from the state government. This taught me that despite the reluctance of a legislator to support a bill based on its possible cost, there are creative ways to fund a bill and it does not have to be a barrier that prevents a legislator from being a cosponsor.

Alison Hagani

On meeting with Senator Jo Comerford

The timing of the meeting was serendipitously perfect. My meeting with Senator Comerford was one day after the bill was filed in the Joint Committee on Public Health. This meant I was one of the first I AM bill advocates to ascertain Senator Comerford's stance and next steps. Upon asking her about urgency and prioritizing the bill, the Senator immediately committed to suggesting the bill for an early hearing. She even contacted her aide to cement this priority while I was on the call. We then talked about ways the bill can be most successful in committee. Senator Comerford mentioned the importance of large constituent support at the hearing. I mentioned how I would encourage legislative testimony at the future meetings, which she greatly supported.

The meeting was relaxed and substantive, which made it my favorite meeting. Senator Comerford demonstrated her passion for the bill, relating to her daughter's experience as a student and her wife's observations as a public school teacher. Senator Comerford also left the door open for further contact and connection.

■ Next Steps

Our bill has so many incredible milestones ahead of it! For one, it will soon receive a public hearing in the Joint Committee on Public Health. This will be an opportunity for constituents to share their insights around the bill, particularly on how its passage would affect them. With Senator Comerford committed to giving the bill a priority hearing, we anticipate this hearing to be relatively soon. For next steps, we would assist in mobilizing a successful and packed public hearing. Such a strong showing of support would undoubtedly help elicit a favorable vote out of the Joint Committee. This public hearing is also formative to establishing a positive reputation for the bill, which includes how well supported it is. Specifically, we would rally both our peers and legislative cosponsors to testify in support. Legislative testimony would especially establish support and credibility for the legislation among colleagues.

Going forward, we would also intentionally rally more bipartisan support for the bill. As the bill moves down the pipeline into law, a lack of bipartisanship could be a barrier preventing House and Senate leadership from prioritizing its passage. Democrats predominantly support the bill. While this might not produce significant obstacles for the bill, especially given a Democratic majority in the legislature, we believe it would be even better to frame the bill and menstrual access as a bipartisan issue.

This bill needs as much support as possible from both legislators and community members because there are several possible obstacles that complicate its passage and implementation. The bill states that the products will be "provided at no charge" and that "such products shall be available in a convenient manner that does not stigmatize any persons seeking such products." Providing the products without stigmatization may be difficult because this would require that a building either has a gender neutral restroom that serves all menstruators or provides products in both female and male bathrooms. Both proposals are met with resistance by those who do not fully understand the safety and dignity of trans and nonbinary individuals.

Other possible issues with implementation regard decisions about which kinds of products would be provided (which brand, what sizes, pads or tampons or both), how often they will need to be restocked, and who will stock them in the first place. To arrange which products to use, menstruators within the state may need to be consulted on their preferences. To achieve this, those implementing the bill can also speak to entities in Massachusetts that already provide menstrual products in their restrooms, like Boston Public Schools or all of Brookline's facilities with public restrooms. Concerning who will restock the products, this job may fall upon custodial staff and this may lead to a raise

in their pay. A pay upgrade would need to be discussed as this could affect other budget costs. In addition, the question of who or what will pay for the menstrual products (and the implementation of possible dispensers to distribute them) has not been answered. Some areas of Massachusetts may be able to raise funds for the supply while others may struggle to fundraise and may need more state or federal assistance. This will be clear relatively soon, once the fiscal cost of this bill is established.

With more time, we would continue to work with the Massachusetts Menstrual Equity (MME) Coalition, particularly to help them build an even stronger base of supporters. We know this will be essential to the bill's passage as it goes along. As Ali founded a Coalition around a bill in Connecticut, which Alison is a coordinator of, we know how crucial it is for our Coalition to participate in and promote key legislative action items when the legislature is slow to act on our bill. With more time, we would help the Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition grow its ranks, especially among students and housing/prison reform advocates. We might even propose a strategy that our Coalition in Connecticut uses. We would advise that they try to find "Campus Leads" at universities across the state who will rally their peers to help aid the bill's passage. Since college students are often politically involved, this is a productive base to tap into.

To achieve this campus presence, the Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition could connect with clubs at colleges and high schools in Massachusetts that advocate for menstrual equity. Beyond this, the Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition could mobilize participation from those at legal aid nonprofits or housing facilities. These partnerships would provide the MME Coalition with the opportunity to mobilize students and advocates. While we

understand the sensitivity of this approach, we also believe it would be empowering for those directly affected by period poverty to advocate for this bill to legislators. It is incredible that legislators are speaking to students from colleges in Massachusetts about period poverty. We think it would be even more powerful if legislators could talk to those in the sectors that the bill seeks to help, such as K-12 public schools, temporary housing facilities, and prisons. Then, legislators could especially hear how this bill could specifically improve the lives and safety of those most affected by menstrual inaccess in the Commonwealth.

■ Update

As of October 2021: The bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Public Health, where it has been since March 29, 2021.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.1445: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S1445

H.2354: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H2354

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Menstrual Equity (MME) Coalition:
mmecoalition.com

Mass NOW: massnow.org/iam

Providing Health Coverage for Children with Disabilities

Expanding comprehensive health care coverage for children and young adults with disabilities, regardless of immigration status

Members of the Project:

Cynthia Menna '22

Jessica Tai '22



Cynthia Menna



Jessica Tai

Thousands of children and young adults with disabilities are unable to access comprehensive health coverage in Massachusetts. Immigration status is the only barrier preventing them from qualifying for MassHealth CommonHealth, a comprehensive health insurance program for individuals with disabilities or complex health conditions. Bill S.763/H.1310 seeks to expand the eligibility requirements for MassHealth CommonHealth to include children and individuals aged 20 and under, regardless of immigration status. Under this bill, children without formal immigration status who have disabilities would have access to essential services like intensive home and community-based behavioral health care, as well as medical supplies like wheelchairs and specialized formula.

■ The Bill

S.763/H.1310: An Act to ensure equitable access to health coverage for children with disabilities (“The Cover All Kids with Disabilities Bill”)

■ Elevator Speech

My name is Cynthia Menna (and I am Jessica Tai), and we are students at Brandeis University. We believe it is crucial that all people have equal opportunity to access healthcare and live healthy lives.

There are massive inequities in the US healthcare system, which have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It is crucial that we address this issue to ensure that everyone has equal opportunity to access proper care and therefore live healthy lives.

Thousands of children and young adults with disabilities can only access safety net programs with strict limitations on covered benefits. Immigration status is the only barrier preventing these children from qualifying for MassHealth CommonHealth a comprehensive health insurance plan.

By removing the citizenship requirement for MassHealth CommonHealth eligibility, the Cover All Kids with Disabilities Bill would expand coverage to children and young adults with disabilities who would otherwise be eligible if not for their immigration status. This would be a key step forward in improving health care access for all children.

We therefore ask you to sign on as a co-sponsor for “An Act to ensure equitable access to health coverage for children with disabilities,” thus ensuring every young person receives coverage for their essential disability services.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

“The most stigmatized, and clearly most subject to, ‘no, those people don’t deserve anything,’ is undocumented people.”

Families with undocumented members are likely low-income and are unable to afford expensive medical bills, in addition to the costs of living. These vulnerable families deserve basic needs, like food, stable housing, and healthcare.

“[Health] insurance is essential when you have a child with a disability... a child will not survive without it.”

– Dr. Dolores Acevedo-Garcia, Professor at Brandeis University & Director at the Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy

“The CMSP, which is the Children’s Medical Security Plan, is not comprehensive whatsoever. For example, children would receive... \$200 annually for prescription medication, but that \$200 could be the cost of two 2 inhalers. If you have a child taking multiple medications, well then what happens?”

– Yaminah Romulus, Policy and Project Coordinator at Health Care for All

■ Op-Ed

Cynthia Menna

Massachusetts Healthcare Falls Short: Immigrants are Left Behind

For millions across America, the COVID-19 pandemic has shattered any remaining perception that the United States has a fair, effective, and equitable healthcare system. Throughout the past year, we’ve heard numerous reports that COVID-19 disproportionately impacts Black and Brown people due to the structural racism woven into the fabric of our society and health systems. We have also watched as millions of people have lost their jobs, and with them, the health insurance they depended on. During this pandemic, our healthcare system has failed time and time again to care for those who need it most. However, this is not new. The problems within our healthcare system did not begin with COVID-19, and they will not disappear once the virus is gone. This doesn’t have to be the case though. We can use this pandemic as an opportunity to push for healthcare reform and begin to patch our broken system. An effective starting point is ensuring that everyone has access to comprehensive healthcare. One bill that directly addresses this is being proposed in the Massachusetts State Legislature right now: the Cover All Kids with Disabilities Act.

In Massachusetts, there are currently thousands of children and young adults with disabilities who are woefully underinsured, as they can only access health safety net programs with strict limitations on covered benefits. Immigration status is the only barrier preventing them

from qualifying for MassHealth CommonHealth — a comprehensive coverage program for individuals with disabilities or complex health conditions. Currently, the safety net program these children qualify for is called the Children’s Medical Security Plan (CMSP), but it fails to cover the wide scope of services that certain physical and/or behavioral health conditions require, such as intensive home and community-based behavioral health care or medical supplies like wheelchairs and specialized formulae. Expanding eligibility requirements for MassHealth CommonHealth would help children across the state live healthier lives. It would help a 9-year-old living with spina bifida finally get a standard wheelchair. It would help a different child living with irritable bowel syndrome have a supply of the ostomy bags and care supplies needed for daily function, without having to rely solely on donations from the community. These are real cases, and there are hundreds, if not thousands more like them.

When it comes to new healthcare proposals like these, the question people often ask is, “Well, how are we going to pay for this?” This is a valid question, especially considering that no federal funding could be used to fund this bill. Due to the target population’s lack of formal immigration status, all funding would have to come from the state of Massachusetts. However, this cost issue is actually indicative of a larger problem in the United States. The United States spends significantly more money on healthcare than any of our peers, yet our health outcomes are not any better than those in other developed countries. In some aspects, we actually perform even worse.

The short answer as to why we spend so much money on healthcare is that we have extremely high prices for healthcare services in the United States. The answer as to why prices are that high is much longer, as there are numerous possible factors. These factors could include anything from the consolidation of hospitals leading to less competition, to the inefficiencies in our healthcare structure leading to a significant amount of administrative spending. This discussion could be an entirely separate op-ed. However, the point of bringing this up is to emphasize that our cost problems will not go away without comprehensive healthcare reform that fundamentally changes how our healthcare system is structured. That type of institutional reform would likely take years, if not decades. In the meantime, we still have vulnerable populations suffering because they are not receiving the care they need to survive. We cannot keep telling them that they are simply not in the budget. We have to make our government work for everyone and develop solutions to support our fellow Massachusetts residents.

As such, I urge everyone who lives in Massachusetts to call their legislators and let them know that they should support and co-sponsor the Cover All Kids with Disabilities Act, also known as S.763/H.1310. This bill is relatively new, so

a large show of support will ensure that it gets off the ground. If you're unsure who your representatives are, do a quick search here: <https://legmap.org/>

Cynthia is a student at Brandeis University pursuing a B.S. in health: science, society, and policy and a minor in international and global studies.

Jessica Tai

Their Care Is Essential, But Why Isn't Massachusetts Treating It As Such?

The past year has been longer than anyone could imagine. After all, who could have predicted a global pandemic debilitating normal life as we once knew it? As we continue to mourn the lives lost, both physical and metaphorical, America must move forward in a direction that prioritizes all human lives. The disparities in COVID-19 hospitalizations and deaths have exposed the inequitable systems that exist in America. These inequitable systems preserve a healthcare field that prioritizes the lives of certain individuals over others. This past year, government programs and health insurance companies have covered coronavirus-related hospital costs. However, the grace period for covered costs is coming to an end, which could mean hundreds and thousands of dollars in out-of-pocket costs. Such costs aren't feasible for most Americans, much less vulnerable populations such as children with disabilities who don't have a formal immigration status. American society denies access to essential health services all because of one's immigration status as if being a human being in need isn't enough justification. Can you imagine a life where society doesn't deem you worthy of being cared for?

This is the harsh reality for thousands of children across the United States, where the lack of a formal immigration status prevents them from accessing health care. Children with disabilities who don't have a formal immigration status fall within this category of those severely impacted by lack of access to comprehensive care. Access to affordable care is essential to everyone, but exponentially more so for those with a disability. In Massachusetts, the state legislature is taking steps to ensure that children with disabilities who don't have a formal immigration status are given access to not just health insurance, but comprehensive health insurance. The Cover All Kids with Disabilities Bill addresses the needs of children with disabilities who don't have a formal immigration status. If this bill were to pass, this new law would change eligibility requirements for MassHealth CommonHealth to nullify its citizenship status requirement. Thousands of children and young adults with disabilities in Massachusetts are currently only able to access health safety net programs that have strict limitations on covered benefits. Their immigration status is the only barrier preventing these individuals from being

eligible for MassHealth CommonHealth. The current plan they are eligible for, called Children's Medical Security Plan (CMSP), fails to cover a comprehensive list of services that certain physical and/or behavioral health conditions demand.

These children with disabilities do not get home health services. They are not able to visit the emergency room. They do not receive coverage for inpatient hospital care. They are limited to a \$200 cap on prescription drugs. They are limited to \$200 on durable medical equipment. For children with disabilities, the lack of covered services and monetary limitations on both prescription drugs and medical equipment equates to a lack of care. Their needs are severely under met, yet the state has the ability to provide this vulnerable population with the care that they need.

It's time for Massachusetts to prioritize the lives of some of its most vulnerable populations. Massachusetts residents, leverage your voice to make a difference to these communities. Call your legislators and demand they support the Cover All Kids with Disabilities Bill (S.763/H.1310). Showing support for this community is the first step in getting these children with disabilities who don't have a formal immigration status the essential care they need.

Jessica Tai is a student at Brandeis University, double majoring in health: science, society, and policy; and psychology. She is pursuing a career in health policy, focusing on reducing health inequities in America.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Ayers,

My name is Jessica Tai, and my colleague Cynthia Menna and I are writing to express our support for the Cover All Kids with Disabilities bill (H.1310/S.763). I am a resident of Quincy and I, along with my colleague, study public health at Brandeis University. We believe it is crucial that all people have equal opportunity to access healthcare and to live healthy lives. As the COVID-19 pandemic has made evident, a strong public health infrastructure is necessary to ensure that all individuals have access to care when they need it the most. We urge you to support H.1310, "An Act to ensure equitable access to health coverage for children with disabilities," which would enable these individuals to live a fuller and healthier life.

As the founder of the Quincy Helping Hand Program and your own disability access automotive conversion business, we know that you are a strong advocate for the disability community. Since 1991, the Quincy Helping Hand Program has successfully aided thousands of Quincy and South Shore residents in obtaining essential medical equipment that improves the lives of disabled individuals.

However, the needs of the disability community are still severely under-met, and many struggle to receive proper access to care. This particularly holds true for children with

disabilities who lack a formal immigration status, as they often come from low-income families and thus cannot afford the necessary medical equipment, prescriptions, or care they so desperately need.

Currently, there is no sufficient health coverage plan to help families cope with these difficulties. These children can only access safety net programs with strict limits on covered benefits. The strict limits include a \$200 cap on both medical equipment and prescription drugs, and zero coverage for home health services, emergency room visits, inpatient hospital care, and ambulance or medical transportation. The only thing preventing them from qualifying for MassHealth CommonHealth, a comprehensive health coverage plan specifically designed for individuals with disabilities or complex health conditions, is their immigration status.

The Cover All Kids with Disabilities Bill would expand coverage of MassHealth CommonHealth to include children and low-income young adults with disabilities regardless of immigration status. This would improve the lives of thousands living in the state of Massachusetts, as it would mean that they could finally receive the care they need.

While some may argue that a bill like this is simply not in the state's budget, it is crucial that we make room for it. Health experts say that a lack of coverage results in children needing more acute, emergency or hospital-based care, and staying in the hospital longer than necessary in the future. Ultimately, this type of urgent care is more expensive, and in the long-term, it is actually more cost-efficient for the state to provide preventive care.

Therefore, we urge you to take decisive action and cosponsor the Cover All Kids With Disabilities Bill, H.1310 and S.763. Thank you for your time.

For more information, please contact us or Healthcare For All Massachusetts.

Best,

Cynthia Menna and Jessica Tai

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Cynthia Menna

Meeting with Tom D'Amario, Communications Director and Chief of Staff for Representative Kip Diggs

During this meeting, Jessica and I met with Tom D'Amario from Representative Diggs' office over Zoom. We knew that our bill would eventually make it to the Healthcare Financing Committee based on what happened last session to a similar Cover All Kids bill. As Representative Diggs is ... on the Healthcare Financing Committee, we wanted to put the bill on his radar and encourage him to cosponsor the bill.

Overall, I think this meeting went really well, especially considering the circumstances. This meeting was over Zoom,

but Tom was located in a public library, with interns walking around and Representative Diggs taking calls at a different desk. Despite the busy environment and poor wifi, it felt like we were still able to connect with [Tom], particularly about healthcare. He had an interest specifically in Health Connector plans in Massachusetts ... and we established a strong foundation for our conversation.

When we started to talk about the Cover All Kids with Disabilities Bill, he brought up how MassHealth already takes up 34% of the entire state budget. Therefore, [Representative Diggs] would only support it if we received more money from the federal government – and that is something we're expecting due to COVID-19.

There were no promises of Representative Diggs co-sponsoring, but Tom said that he'd definitely bring it up to him. Additionally, he really drove home the point of how important it was for people like us to be in contact with our legislators and follow bills that we care about. He even remembered the students in our class working on the sex education bill and said he was very impressed with all of our work.

Based on that, Jess and I learned that we really can have a lasting impression on staffers, and that what we are doing really does matter. On a more technical note, we also learned how to navigate a discussion even with so many distractions in the background. It was important to be patient when something else was happening, like Tom saying goodbye to the interns, and then [be ready to focus] on what we were talking about when he returned.

Jessica Tai

On meeting with Senator John Keenan and Legislative Director Morgan Simko

Cynthia and I started the meeting by giving our pitch for the bill. Senator Keenan reacted very favorably, and he stated that he was previously unaware of this bill going through the legislature. He had very few questions about the bill, but spoke about how he viewed children as “the innocent” victims caught up in the immigration debate. He promised that he would co-sponsor the bill, and he did end up doing so!

From this meeting, I learned how helpful it is when speaking to a legislator when you are their constituent. Senator Keenan represents Quincy, MA which is where I am registered to vote. He was happy to connect about this particular point, and we spoke about various aspects irrelevant to the bill. Senator Keenan also expressed his gratitude for people meeting with him and advocating for bills that may otherwise go unknown. He urged us to continue our advocacy and speak with other legislators.... This meeting with Senator Keenan showed how willing legislators are to listen to the problems of their constituents and their desire to be “the hero.”

■ Next Steps

As of May 3rd, 2021, S.763/H.1310 continues to move through the 192nd congressional session. S.763 has 7 total sponsors, and H.1310 has 15 sponsors. Both bills have been referred to the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing and are pending decisions. Last session, a different version of the Cover All Kids Bill had also reached the Health Care Financing Committee. However, the significantly large cost of the bill meant it was killed there. Therefore, it is crucial that we focus our efforts on convincing those on the committee to support the current Cover All Kids with Disabilities Bill. Meetings with legislators can positively influence their view of the bill, as seen by Senator Keenan's sponsorship of S.763. We had met with Senator Keenan in March to discuss the Cover All Kids with Disabilities Bill, which he had not heard of at that point. After our conversation, he ended up co-sponsoring it.

It is necessary to continue meeting with legislators, especially those who sit on the Health Care Financing Committee. By meeting with legislators, they are able to become more educated on the topic and understand the merits of the bill. While co-sponsors and sponsors are still able to vote against a bill in their committee, having more co-sponsors helps indicate how many individuals agree with the proposed changes or at least believe there is an issue to be solved. Furthermore, speaking with legislators who have already co-sponsored the bill is important, as you can encourage them to speak with other committee members about this bill and its necessity. Individuals can also aid during the hearing on the Cover All Kids Bill by testifying. By gathering stories of patients and providers impacted by the lack of coverage these individuals receive, legislators can better comprehend the extent of this issue. Real stories appeal to the moral character of these legislators, but also indicate how lack of coverage for a subpopulation can slow down the healthcare field. Having more individuals testify is also another means of showing that there is public support for this bill.

Health Care For All Massachusetts (HCFA) is currently awaiting information from MassHealth that would provide more detailed statistics regarding how many people this bill would impact and potential costs. Once this information is obtained, it is important to inform the legislators of these details. This is particularly crucial for legislators who were on the fence about supporting the bill, as the statistics might ultimately sway their opinions. These details will also help when speaking with the public or other organizations about the bill. For example, social media advocacy would really benefit from statistics. Saying this bill could improve the lives of X number of people would be really impactful and could motivate other Massachusetts residents to call their own legislators.

As of right now, HCFA's strategy for this bill does not

involve public attention. Instead, they have been quietly pushing the bill through the legislative process. A potential next step is to try the exact opposite: use public attention to indicate the widespread support for the bill. While it is unclear what public opinion of the bill may be, bringing attention to the bill can get others involved in advocating for the bill. Widespread support for the bill can lead to individuals reaching out to their legislators and testifying at hearings.

If the bill were to die in committee or be voted down in the Senate/House, it would also be beneficial to conduct further studies into how other states, such as CA, NY, WA, OR, and IL, have been able to provide care for their immigrant populations, regardless of immigration status.

By looking into the finances and insurance models, HCFA would be able to build a stronger case for the passage of this bill in Massachusetts.

■ Update

As of October 2021: The bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing, where it has been since March 29, 2021.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.763: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S763

H.1310: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H1310

Organization or Coalition support:

Refugees Welcome!: refugeeswelcomehome.org/undocumented-health-care

Health Care for All: hcfama.org/immigrant-health

United We Dream: unitedwedream.org/2020/03/healthcare-access-for-undocumented-folks-in-the-time-of-covid19

Promoting Comprehensive, Inclusive, and Medically Accurate Sexual Health Education

Improving standards, updating content, and mandating continual revisions to sex ed curriculum taught at Massachusetts schools

Members of the Project:

Sabrina Bell '21

Tori Sanchez '22

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in the state of Massachusetts has not updated the school health curriculum since 1999. Schools that teach about sexual health are currently not bound to many regulations, often making their education outdated, exclusionary, and insufficient. The Healthy Youth Act requires all schools that teach sex ed to teach it in a way that is age-appropriate, medically accurate, and inclusive to all students regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Additionally, it would require the Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework to be updated at least once every 10 years to ensure that students will never again be receiving outdated information from two decades prior.

■ The Bill

S.318/H.673: An Act relative to healthy youth (“The Healthy Youth Act”)

■ Elevator Speech

Sabrina: My name is Sabrina Bell and I am here with my colleague Victoria Sanchez. The Massachusetts health education guidelines have not changed in nearly 22 years. This means that today’s high school students, including the 44% of seniors who have been sexually active and the 7% of students who have experienced physical dating violence, are likely receiving outdated, exclusive, and downright dangerous information that does not emphasize consent or healthy relationships.

Tori: In order to keep the youth of the Commonwealth safe, it is important that we require that schools offering sex ed teach it in a way that is comprehensive, age-appropriate, and medically accurate. As a former student who experienced dating violence during my junior and senior years of high school, I wish I had known the signs to look for. So we are asking you to co-sponsor the Healthy Youth Act and commit to testifying in support when it reaches (the committee/floor) so that we can make our state a safer place for all young people.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

“In middle school, [teachers] told me gay sex gives you STIs.”

– a former Massachusetts public school student

“The emphasis of this bill on consent, what healthy relationships look like, and being LGBTQ-inclusive [would have an incredible impact]. If we get [students] before misinformation gets them, or before stigma and social isolation get to them, then they’re going to have a lot healthier trajectory overall, over their whole life course.”

– Jamie Kluffs, Director of Communications & Strategic Initiatives at the National Association of Social Workers

“Teaching harmful curricula harms young people. The Healthy Youth Act, at minimum, will mitigate the school districts that are teaching harmful curricula, provide teachers with more support, provide young people with more accurate information, and sort of wipe the slate clean and empower parents [who are often a child’s primary sexual health educators] to be able to have an additional resource to support [their children].”

– Kim Kargman, Organizing Manager at Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts

■ Op-Ed

Sabrina Bell

Massachusetts: Address Your Ancient Sex Ed Guidelines the Way You Addressed COVID-19: Promptly

Sexually Transmitted Diseases are like COVID-19: your chances of getting them decrease when you use proper protection. But while we all know how to properly wear a mask at this point in the pandemic, there are some people who never learned the right way to put on a condom. Since Massachusetts has no legislation addressing the type of sexual education that is taught in schools, students could very well be missing out on this pertinent information. Additionally, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has not updated its sex ed guidelines in over two decades. Even if a student does attend a school where sex ed is taught, they are likely not receiving the most up-to-date facts. With the pandemic not stopping young adults from engaging in sexual activity, now would be the perfect time to pass the Healthy Youth Act, a proposed bill that would ensure that Massachusetts schools teaching sex ed do so in an age-appropriate, medically accurate, and comprehensive way using recent information.

Massachusetts is the only state in New England without sex ed legislation, and one of six across the country without it. The other states are Alaska, Idaho, Nebraska, South Dakota, and Wyoming. There is no reason for Massachusetts to be more similar to states thousands of miles away rather than the states that it neighbors. But the Healthy Youth Act would push Massachusetts beyond the standard that New England and the majority of the country has set. These states only mandate the teaching of sex ed or human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) education, whereas the Healthy Youth Act broadens the scope of what is taught to include topics like healthy relationships and consent.

With no legislation to dictate what schools teach for sex ed and the ways that they teach it, Massachusetts is withholding valuable information from students. All students are affected by this, but there is a group that is overwhelmingly left out of sex ed curricula: people who are LGBTQ. According to a statistic presented at the Healthy Youth Act Legislative Briefing on March 30th, 81% of LGBTQ students reported that they did not receive information applicable to them or their sexualities. Under the Healthy Youth Act, all students, regardless of how they identify, would learn information that is relevant to them.

It may seem like having sex ed covering more topics would encourage students to have sex, but that is simply not the case. Typically, students taught comprehensive sex ed wait longer to have sex, and when they do, they do so with increased safety and fewer partners than students with either no or limited sex ed. If parents do not want their child in a

sex ed class, they have the ability to withdraw their student from all of part of that instruction. This is because the Healthy Youth Act is not a mandate. The Healthy Youth Act does not require that schools teach sex ed – only that if they do teach it, they teach it in a specific way.

Another crucial part of the Healthy Youth Act guarantees that Massachusetts will never go another 20+ years without updating its curriculum. To ensure this, a commissioner would reassess and make updates to the curriculum at least once every 10 years.

Young adults are not going to stop engaging in sexual activity and having relationships, so it is best that we teach them all the information they need to know in order to make the right decisions for themselves. You can help to pass the Healthy Youth Act by locating your legislators and asking your senator to support Bill S.318 and your representative to support Bill H.673, both formally known as “An Act relative to healthy youth.”

Sabrina Bell is a former recipient of subpar sex ed and a current senior at Brandeis University.

Tori Sanchez

Massachusetts: I Can Legally Drink and the Health Curriculum Is as Old as I Am

At 21 years old, the sex ed curriculum in Massachusetts is as old as I am – it has not been updated since 1999! Students across the Commonwealth are at risk of receiving inaccurate, dangerous, and discriminatory sex ed. Queer students often fail to see themselves represented, and many curricula across the state rely on fearmongering tactics.

In the state of Massachusetts, rates of STIs have been steadily increasing, and our youth are most at risk. Without comprehensive sex ed, many students don't realize that getting an STI is not the end of the world, and do not know where to turn to or what treatment even looks like. Comprehensive sexual education actually *delays* sex in many young adults, drastically reduces the rates of STIs and unwanted pregnancy, encourages healthy relationships, and keeps the youth of our Commonwealth safe.

The Healthy Youth Act (S.318/H.673), a common sense bill, has now been filed for the 11th year. This bill states that *if* a school district is going to teach sex ed, it needs to be medically accurate, age-appropriate, and comprehensive. The bill does not mandate that schools teach sex-ed, or even what curriculum to use if the district does choose to teach it. Furthermore, the bill clearly states that parents must be allowed to opt their children out of any or all parts of the curriculum. The Healthy Youth Act also focuses on preventing domestic abuse and youth dating violence by starting conversations about consent (in an age-appropriate way) from a young age.

Many parents dread having “the talk” or any conversations about sex – I know that my mom would have loved to be able to fall back on schools to teach me about the “birds and the bees” or why all the boys in my class were suddenly very stinky. Awkward conversations aside, medically accurate, age-appropriate, and comprehensive sex ed saves lives by prioritizing the wellbeing of youth in the Commonwealth.

Protecting our youth through comprehensive sex ed is better late than never – [call your legislators](#) and urge them to support the Healthy Youth Act today.

Victoria Sanchez is a junior at Brandeis University majoring in politics and double minoring in legal studies and anthropology.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Lawn,

Our names are Sabrina Bell and Victoria Sanchez. We are students at Brandeis University and we are incredibly concerned about the wellbeing of the youth in the Commonwealth. We know that as a father, you understand the importance of schools providing students with the information that they need to succeed in life. In the state of Massachusetts, the sexual education curriculum has not been updated by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education since 1999. This means that many of today’s students are not receiving the most up-to-date and accurate information. Students are seeking out their own information through unreliable sources and spreading that knowledge to their peers.

To combat the spread of sex ed misinformation, the curriculum needs to be modernized. The Healthy Youth Act would do exactly that. The Healthy Youth Act requires all schools that teach sex ed to teach it in a way that is age-appropriate, medically accurate, and inclusive of all students regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity. Additionally, it would require the Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework to be updated at least once every 10 years to ensure that students will never again be receiving outdated information from two decades prior.

We understand that the Healthy Youth Act seems to have a lot of opposition, but this is not actually the case. 90% of Massachusetts voters believe that comprehensive sex ed should be taught in school. Additionally, there is no evidence that teaching comprehensive sex ed will “sexualize” our young people. In fact, it has been proven that states with comprehensive sex ed have lower rates of abortion, teen pregnancy, and STIs. However, we also understand that sex ed might be something that some parents do not wish to have their child partake in.

This is why we would like to highlight the fact that the Healthy Youth Act allows parents to opt their children out of

any or all parts of the curriculum. Many people have been concerned about the fiscal implications of this bill on school districts, but this bill does not mandate that schools teach sex ed. This means that for schools that already teach sex ed, there would be little to no cost associated with the change in curriculum, and schools that do not teach sex ed would not have the burden of implementing a new curriculum unless they chose to do so.

We are asking you, as a longtime Democrat in the Massachusetts Legislature and a father of five, to stand with the 90% of Massachusetts voters who support this bill, and to protect your children by committing to testify on behalf of the Healthy Youth Act when it reaches your committee or the House floor.

Sincerely,

Sabrina Bell and Victoria Sanchez

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Sabrina Bell

On the Healthy Youth Act legislative briefing

It was amazing to see so many people working towards the same goal: passing the Healthy Youth Act in this legislative session. Katia [Santiago-Taylor from the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center] had so much energy and so did Megara Bell, the Director of Partners in Sex Education. I had never heard of her before but I loved hearing from her. She asked a question along the lines of “what do you think is the most important thing for students to learn in a sex ed class?” and the chat was flooded with excellent answers. I felt honored to be in the virtual presence of other people who feel passionate about changing sex ed in Massachusetts. If the semester was not coming to a close and Tori and I needed to meet with more people in the coalition, bringing up this meeting in an email would be a great way to make a connection because there were so many people there.

I was feeling rather burned out from the semester as a whole but attending this legislative briefing renewed my dedication to the bill. In addition to getting a boost of energy, Megara also presented a slideshow with statistics that I ended up using in my op-ed assignment. ...I found the meeting to be informative and a unique experience that I am grateful for.

Victoria Sanchez

On all meetings

This has not been an easy year to conduct advocacy work; making meetings with legislators proved to be difficult as we were often left with no responses and had to send multiple follow-up emails to actually solidify any meetings. Furthermore, COVID-19 has left much to be desired in the world of advocacy, but I think that one of the things that I

miss the most is being able to go into the State House and walk into any legislative office to speak with the legislator or their staff. My teammate and I sent 11 meeting inquiry emails to different legislators (not counting follow-up emails) to try and set up meetings, and we ultimately only got 3 meetings with legislators' offices.

COVID-19 has made things difficult for everyone, but it has reminded us that part of advocacy work is being resilient, and now with vaccines rolling out, maybe we will be able to see the golden dome of the State House again soon. Contradictory to the challenges that the pandemic has presented us with, COVID-19 has also created a way to make advocacy work a little bit more accessible. The coalition meetings are fully virtual and thus are easily accessible to anyone, including students like myself, parents who may not have child care, or anyone else that has struggled to get to a meeting in person in the past. I mention this because while I am eager to get back to in-person advocacy work, I hope that some aspects of accessibility brought on by the pandemic will continue.

■ Next Steps

Our first step in future advocacy for the Healthy Youth Act would be to maintain contact with the coalition. Since attending the legislative briefing on March 30th, we have now been receiving related emails from Katia Santiago-Taylor, Policy Director at the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center. On May 5th, Katia sent out an email about the Worcester Youth Deserve Sex Ed task force. This email also reminded us about the next coalition meeting that is taking place on the 7th. These meetings happen during the first Friday of every month. Since we learned so much from the legislative briefing, it would be worthwhile for us to attend the coalition meetings as well.

During Present and Defend, someone asked us if we were in contact with any unions. Perhaps that would be a good group for us to target next – specifically unions in schools. The assignments for Advocacy for Policy Change have left us with a substantial set of tools to communicate with people. We could use our elevator speech if we were talking to people (either in person or via Zoom), our storybook if we were sending an email, and we could easily rework our letter for a specific legislator and send it out to them. Our videos could also be another resource and even if our op-eds do not get published in any newspaper, we could find a way to utilize those. If someone is really interested in the Healthy Youth Act, we could even give them our legislative research report!

Everyone we spoke with who has been involved with the Healthy Youth Act before stressed the importance of getting testimony in favor of the bill. Victoria Halal of Senator Jehlen's office told us that there has not been as much vocal

opposition as of yet due to the entire legislative process being behind schedule from COVID-19. But when the opposition undoubtedly shows up, even if it is in a smaller number than in years past, we want to have a lot of testimony to highlight the importance of this bill. Throughout the course of the semester, we have already reached out to people and asked them to contact their legislators and provide testimony when the time comes. This is absolutely something that both of us could continue to do outside of the virtual classroom.

Ultimately, the most important next step is to stay involved. It is absolutely crucial that both of us continue to check in the coalition, Senator DiDomenico, and the contacts we have made thus far throughout the semester. One of the largest hurdles to advocacy work is burnout. So while it is important to pace ourselves in effort to preserve our enthusiasm, it is equally important that we continue to fight for the Healthy Youth Act because comprehensive sex ed is long overdue in the state of Massachusetts.

■ Update

As of October 2021: The Committee on Education reported favorably a new draft of the Healthy Youth Act to the Committee on Senate Ways and Means on July 19, 2021. The new draft is bill S.2495.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.318: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S318

H.673: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H673

Organization or Coalition support:

Planned Parenthood Massachusetts: plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-massachusetts

NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts: prochoicemass.org

Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC): barcc.org

Preventing Fatal Overdoses and Increasing Safety Measures for Drug Use

Establishing supervised consumption sites to combat fatal overdoses and other harms associated with drug use

Members of the Project:

Arman Entezar '21

Eitan Levy Keating '21

Massachusetts continues to treat addiction as a criminal issue rather than the public health issue that it is. Bill S.1272/H.2088 lays the groundwork for meaningful, lifesaving measures for the communities of Massachusetts. The bill creates a 10 year pilot program that would establish and test supervised consumption sites in at least two Massachusetts communities. These sites would provide victims of the opioid crisis a safer environment to not only avoid a fatal overdose but also to receive education and guidance on the path to recovery. This bill provides immediate relief to victims and communities affected by the opioid crisis, lays the groundwork for future expansion of new means to combat the opioid crisis, and drastically reduces the harm that drug consumption causes users and local communities throughout Massachusetts.

■ The Bill

S.1272/H.2088: An Act relative to preventing overdose deaths and increasing access to treatment

■ Elevator Speech

We can all agree that it is important for a state to do its best to help people stay safe in a world that is full of many dangers, and to use resources to protect citizens from these external threats and save lives.

However, despite this sentiment, the opioid epidemic in Massachusetts has become a catastrophic health crisis with 1,952 fatal opioid-related overdoses in 2019 alone.

This must be addressed, and supervised consumption sites provide the most reasonable and realistic solution to combat this issue, by acting as a space for victims of the opioid epidemic to consume illicit substances in a safer and supervised environment, while ensuring a drastically reduced risk of fatal overdose and offering increased opportunities to recover from addiction.

Despite several historical attempts, there has been little success in combating these addiction-related deaths, and if you want to help reduce these needless fatalities, it is important that you help enable those facing addiction to have a better chance for a healthy life. To do this you can support H. 2292 and S. 1272 and have discussions with fellow senators and representatives about how to help this legislation move forward.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

Importance of Change on the Ground:

“The number of overdose calls I have had to respond to has definitely been an unexpected part of the job. It’s extra hard because I almost always get the feeling that it isn’t their first or last overdose....It definitely feels like there are a number of policy responses that could reduce the number of [overdose] calls, but they haven’t been done yet and it isn’t like the drugs are going away”

– an emergency medical technician

■ Op-Ed

Eitan Levy Keating

Why the Opioid Epidemic is a Today Problem

We currently live with a news cycle that is always focused on the next thing, and thrives on presenting stories on issues that mainstream media can continue to use and loop back to. In the past several years, this tactic has been on clear display, with news outlets thoroughly reporting on racial injustice, political espionage – and of course in the past year, the coronavirus pandemic – in a way that allows the media to build a narrative that keeps readers and listeners engaged. I mean, who doesn't want to hear a report about how people wearing masks with sunflowers are 36% less likely to be depressed?

The drawback of this news cycle is that while it does help shine a spotlight on issues that spark interest or outrage among the general public, many issues with complicated nuances and less headline appeal tend to be left out of the public discourse and are allowed to grow more devastating than most would imagine.

No issue exemplifies this “left behind” status better than the exponential growth of the opioid epidemic in Massachusetts and throughout the United States. According to the San Francisco Chronicle, an astounding 621 people died of drug overdoses in San Francisco in 2020, which is far greater than the 173 reported deaths from COVID-19 during the same time. Yet from the amounts of news coverage of these issues, almost nobody, including myself, would imagine this discrepancy to be accurate. COVID-19 has been the most discussed issue over the past year largely due to how lethal it is, and yet silently in the background, in cities like San Francisco, the opioid epidemic was in fact responsible for more deaths while being discussed less than mass shootings at NRA conventions.

This contrast in the attention paid to different issues highlights how as a society, we tend to focus on existential threats and neglect to mitigate the damage from issues such as substance abuse in a way that facilitates any form of meaningful and lasting change. Ever since the United States has strayed from the message that we are in a “War on Drugs,” there has been a failure to attempt to address the issue of addiction in a lasting way. This is in no way my attempt to advocate for any sort of “War on Drugs” as it was known in the past, but rather a way of questioning why the U.S. has been so inadequate in its attempts to treat what most people recognize as a health crisis in a way that has facilitated any lasting improvements in public health. In the mid 1900's, when car accident deaths spiked, the U.S. passed rules to install seat belts and eventually air bags, which have helped save thousands of lives as a result. So if we are able to save lives and facilitate safer use and recovery, why should we hesitate to do it?

As it turns out, in the current legislative session, Massachusetts has legislation that aims to do just that, and through the establishment of “supervised consumption sites,” there is a possibility to help thousands of people to live forever. Okay, not quite forever, but it sure is likely to help many people live a whole lot longer.

This is something we should support, but it seems that beyond a lack of coverage on this issue, there are also many misinterpretations regarding the intent of this legislation. It is intended to help those facing addiction to more safely use drugs while receiving increased access to resources, allowing them the possibility of achieving complete recovery and return to living healthy, substance-free lives. Doesn't seem like such an idea should be considered controversial in the public eye. Yet many cities throughout the U.S. are hesitant to commit to any such solution. This hesitancy is devastating, a fact that is exemplified by the fact that deaths caused by synthetic opioids have skyrocketed in Massachusetts in the past decade to above 2,000 this past year. This failure to act is especially concerning when we recognize the fact that these sites have the potential to save the state money annually, and there are already global examples from countries like Norway, Denmark and Portugal, which have had great success in mitigating opioid fatalities through the establishment of their own supervised consumption sites.

There are many cities in the U.S. that could follow this lead, and for those who disagree with the strategy, perhaps we should think about it in these terms. Europe is having greater success than the U.S. in terms of the “war on drugs” – are we just going to let that happen?

Whether your goal is saving lives or showing those dang Europeans that “anything you can do I can do better,” the best route stays the same, and these sites could have a massive impact on the welfare of our country.

Mainstream media may not be behind this issue, but word of mouth and personal advocacy is the oldest form of media, and I would urge anybody living in Massachusetts to get involved in this issue and to support this legislation. Let's make it so fewer Americans die of overdoses, and help them live until they eventually die with the rest of us from heart disease in a mountain of 60-year-old student loans. Call your local legislators and tell them to support Senate bill S.1272 or House bill H.2292, and together we can make this dream of dying later on from something hopefully less sad a reality.

Eitan Levy Keating is a senior at Brandeis majoring in business and global studies and minoring in economics and law. He has had a strong interest in drug policy for a long time and has consulted drug policy experts and legislators alike to refine his view; all opinions expressed here, however, are his alone.

Arman Entezar***Enough Opinions. People are Dying.***

Imagine that a pandemic is sweeping through the world and individuals politicize the tragedy to the point to which there is no effective response. Sound familiar? As the light at the end of the tunnel for the Covid pandemic nears and vaccine distribution ramps up, it's important to reflect on what a horrible job this country has done in addressing serious, life-threatening issues. You would think that this event would bring the country together on issues that threaten and take lives away, yet we seem more divided than ever.

Right now, the state of Massachusetts and the country as a whole is facing another epidemic which is claiming lives this very second. In 2019 alone, more than 50,000 people in the U.S. lost their lives to the opioid crisis that is sweeping through our country, and this number is rising. The primary issue, like with many problems in this country, is that people can't seem to even come together on the most basic of facts when trying to solve a crisis. For example, with Covid, people cannot agree on whether this is a real life-threatening pandemic or just the common cold. Here we are now, a year after the first cases of Covid appeared, with more than half a million deaths. So with this in mind, how are we letting another crisis claim countless lives everyday? The issue of drug use in this country has always been hotly debated, but individuals need to look past prejudices against the "high school stoner" and realize that American lives are being lost every day and we are not doing anything about it. We need strong, decisive action now.

Growing up in a very conservative community, I was constantly told that drug users only have themselves to blame for their situation, an idea that many Americans seem to hold. As my research on the opioid epidemic grew, so did my awareness of the fact that this epidemic, like many things, is a product of poor regulation of large corporations, specifically big pharma. In the early 1990s, large pharmaceutical companies began the production and release of prescription opioids, mainly aimed at easing the pain of cancer patients. Of course, in the pursuit of higher profits, these companies decided to market and normalize the prescription of opioid-based painkillers to non cancer-related pain. This was done knowing that little research had been done about how addictive these opioids could be, yet the corporate bigwigs touted that there was little to no risk of addiction.

Fast forward 30 years and thousands are dying. More than 80% of those addicted to heroin and fentanyl state that their addiction began because of a prescription opioid. So at the issue's core, lack of government oversight, and corporate greed in the '90s has now created one of the worst epidemics this country has ever seen. Many of the people dying are victims of dangerous and addictive drugs prescribed to them

by their doctor, and now as their life spirals out of control, there are those who want you to believe that we shouldn't help them, that they're just "druggies." That, to me, is a sad sign of the climate we live in today.

I think our communities need to come together, recognize the problem, and use their own voting and advocacy powers to support solutions that actually work. In Massachusetts, close to 2,000 people died from opioid-related overdoses in just one year. These numbers require solutions that work. Right now, there is a piece of legislation in the Massachusetts Senate and House (S.1272/H.2088) that would establish a program which would provide a place where individuals can more safely use opioids and other drugs, while they combat their addiction.

These supervised consumption sites will stop the deaths that are happening every day by providing powerful reversal drugs that can stop overdose deaths. Finally, these places can serve as a springboard for education on how these victims can start their road to recovery. Unlike past efforts, these sites actually provide tangible change and stop deaths.

That is the most important end we can hope for: stopping deaths. We've seen that our country is failing, so we need new and better action, and I think this is a good first step. Whatever you feel is the solution, we need action now, and the biggest request I can make is that you simply realize that these people need help. If saving lives and healing our communities means something to you, I urge you to contact your local senator and representative and urge them to support bill S.1272/H.2088.

Arman Entezar is an undergraduate at Brandeis University currently in his senior year studying history, business and legal studies.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

I believe we both can agree that it is the duty of the state government to ensure the wellbeing of its citizens and provide the best resources available in order to assist them in living safe and healthy lives. However, despite this sentiment, the opioid epidemic has become a catastrophic health crisis in Massachusetts, with 1,952 fatal opioid-related overdoses in 2019 alone – one of the highest death rates in the country. This issue is specifically relevant to the citizens of Essex County, as Essex County currently outpaces the overdose and death rates of Massachusetts as a whole and had nearly 300 opioid-related overdose deaths in 2018. There has to be serious and decisive action to help relieve the citizens and communities of Massachusetts, and save lives.

While there is no magic solution that can end this epidemic overnight, there are means to drastically and effectively combat the crisis. Supervised consumption sites

provide the most reasonable and realistic solution to combat this issue. These sites would act as a space for victims of the opioid epidemic to seek help and sanctuary from their ongoing struggle, which could take their life at any moment.

At these sites, individuals are provided sanitary materials in a stable and safe environment, ensuring a drastically reduced risk of fatal overdose, and offering increased opportunities to recover from addiction. These sites are effective, as they provide users with a controlled environment and quicker access to resources like naloxone, which can act as the most effective means of reducing the chances of an opioid-related fatality. Further, the professional staffing of these sites helps ensure that users are provided the resources, support, and education that are currently unavailable to many attempting to detox and recover from their addiction. They can have the opportunity to be put on their first steps towards recovery and a life free of the daily tribulations of addiction.

When this issue is discussed, concern often arises regarding whether legislation of this nature will encourage increased opioid consumption and normalize drug use within Massachusetts. However there are several examples of successful integration of supervised consumption sites, without any such trends occurring. As a response to the harm opioids were causing local communities, Oslo, Norway opened a supervised consumption site, and for several years the data has been encouraging, as there have been immensely reduced overdose rates and a remarkable zero overdose deaths to date. Portugal went a slightly different route by decriminalizing small-scale possession and creating an expansive network of needle exchanges and drug treatment centers, which has resulted in their opioid overdoses dropping to 18 in just two decades from just below a staggering 400.

Despite several historical attempts, Massachusetts has had marginal success in combating these addiction-related deaths, which have continued to climb in the past several years. If you want to help reduce these needless fatalities among the citizens of Essex County and throughout Massachusetts, it is important that you support H.2088 and S.1272: “An Act relative to preventing overdose deaths and increasing access to treatment,” and have discussions with your fellow senators and representatives about how to help this legislation move forward through the legislature in order to start changing lives.

Sincerely,

Eitan Levy Keating and Arman Entezar

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Arman Entezar

On meeting with Legislative Aide Joanna Rosen and Legislative Director Aneesh Sahni from the office of Senator Brendan Crighton

This meeting mirrored our first in many ways. We were informed we would be meeting with Senator Crighton’s staffers, Joanna Rosen and Aneesh Sahni. This meeting held similar importance to the first in that Senator Crighton is a member of the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery. Having him sponsor the bill would be a big stride in its progress. The meeting had a similar structure, yet I think it was done more smoothly and tactfully than the first. Firstly, our elevator speech was a lot more fluid than the first time, and I think this set the meeting off on a confident note.

What was truly different was something Eitan did, which I thought helped make the meeting quite successful. He talked about the Senator’s district, and how it was specifically struggling with the opioid crisis at a higher rate than others. This immediately caught the staffers’ attention, and in my opinion made them more intrigued and have a higher propensity to engage. They then talked about how the Senator has many issues he is dealing with, so meetings like the one we just had are very important so that he can prioritize better.

Once again we thanked them in an in-depth way for the meeting, and they even requested informative materials, which we agreed to send over (our storybook). This meeting I felt was a clear and direct improvement on the previous, and simply felt like a better version of the first.

Eitan Levy Keating

On meeting with Legislative Aide Caitlyn Letourneau and Deputy Legislative Director Gabe Adams-Keane from the office of Senator John Velis

We targeted a meeting with Senator Velis because he currently acts as Vice Chair on the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery, which is the first committee this legislation must go through on its journey through the legislative process. Prior to entering this meeting, I researched Senator Velis’ district (Second Hampden and Hampshire) and came to the meeting prepared with information on why not only was this bill relevant, but why it was specifically important to his constituency.

In presenting our case, Arman and I went through the EPIC format, pausing for questions when they arose. Because I had researched the senator’s district, I was able to present information that was specifically tailored to his district, which I thought made the presentation much more effective. I explained how the senator’s district, like much of Western Massachusetts, in fact suffered more severely from

opioid addiction than the rest of the state. I then explained that meant they had worse opioid addiction than a state that already had some of the worst opioid addiction in the country, which made them a prime location for the implementation of a supervised consumption site.

Upon finishing our presentation, Arman and I discussed some of the logistical aspects of the bill and how implementation could be effective. It became rather clear that both Caitlyn and Gabe were very supportive of this legislation, and they expressed that Senator Velis, as the Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery, was very passionate about these issues and would likely be very supportive in committee.

■ Next Steps

There are several next steps in relation to this bill, mostly regarding the dissemination of information to the general public. With this bill being assigned to committee, it is now more important than ever to get individuals to be passionate about this bill and contact the necessary representatives to express their support. In order to make this happen, it is important that the general public is more informed about the problem, the goals of the sites, the feasibility of creating these sites, and safety and finances of this bill. In order to make this possible, it is important that people are exposed to the proper resources and data to show why these sites are sensible.

Further, it is also important that willing professionals in the field of opioid policy as well as those working on the frontline, such as doctors and EMTs, be brought into the public and testify in front of committees to help express the needs for this legislation and to quell concerns about possible problems with it. In doing so, the public would have an added layer of confidence that these sites could actually benefit public health and improve the community and are not some sort of wild experiment with no track record or professional support.

Professional testimony is especially necessary as these sites are completely new to the United States on a legal or state-sectioned level, and because of this lack of sites to reference within the United States, there is enhanced concern regarding what effects these sites will actually have on local communities. This is where testimony from people like Professor Traci Green could prove extremely valuable, as she has done research on and been directly exposed to state-sanctioned supervised consumption sites throughout Europe, as well as unofficial sites in Boston and in other parts of the United States. It seems as if it would be highly beneficial if she were to testify and share her comparative research.

Leading into my conversation with Professor Green I had my reservations about supervised consumption sites, but through the conversation and the way she described the

differences in how we handle opioid use locally compared to how they manage it in much of Western Europe, I found myself thinking that these sites could be highly beneficial to the state of Massachusetts, and I believe if state senators or committees were to have a discussion with Professor Green it would likely impress this reality upon them as well.

In addition to testimony from professionals on this subject, it is very important to get individuals involved in this movement who are fighting this epidemic on the frontline and who have been personally affected by this issue. Statements of support from those who have had to prevent overdoses with naloxone and those who have suffered from addiction and potentially even survived overdoses would be particularly powerful because it would make this issue much less abstract and much more serious to committee members and to anybody willing to listen. One problem with the legislative process is that often things are judged from an outside perspective without any personal testimony by those whom the legislation is attempting to help. By seeking individuals personally afflicted for testimony or statements of support, it seems likely that this legislation would gather additional support from citizens and politicians alike.

Reflecting on the questions and feedback we received in our “Present and Defend” presentation, it seems that another step that would be invaluable in pushing this legislation through would be to release a short fact sheet to the general public including basic data and simple descriptions of the function and history of these sites. This fact sheet would be a slightly less visual storybook, and would help the public have a basic grasp of the issue so they could express concerns in a more informed way.

It would seem that the largest issue going forward with these sites in the eyes of the public would likely be the “not in my back yard” sentiment that many seem to hold in relation to this issue. To address this, it seems like a good idea to emphasize that data shows that these sites have been detrimental to neighborhoods in which they have been placed and there is no reason to believe that they would be in Massachusetts. Further, by localizing the campaign and showing how this issue affects specific neighborhoods, and by using personal testimonies by those affected by this issue as previously mentioned, it would be easier to leave positive impressions on individuals regarding the potential benefits of these sites. This issue becomes further intensified because the bill mandates a minimum of two sites, and opposition will often hone in on the equity problems of some areas having these sites and others not. An emphasis on the bill’s requirement for consent from local communities for a site is necessary.

The movement for supervised consumption sites is necessary in order to begin reversing the harms of the opioid epidemic. Clear and strong advocacy is necessary, as many

lawmakers have mindsets and predispositions to oppose anything that seems to allow individuals to use drugs legally. Education is at the core of proper advocacy, as informing people of the simple facts, figures and arguments for supervised consumption sites can ultimately bring people together on the issue. Action is needed now, and most everyone can come together on the value of saving lives.

■ Update

As of October 2021: The bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery, where it has been since March 29, 2021.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.1272: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/SD1358

H.2088: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/HD3167

Organization or Coalition support:

SIFMA Now!: sifmanow.org

Reducing Plastic Bag Use

Protecting the environment by regulating the number of single-use plastic bags retail establishments can distribute

Members of the Project:

Michael Burch '22

Sammy Guttell '22



Michael Burch



Sammy Guttell

Bill S.525/H.902 is an act that will reduce the number of single-use plastic bags consumed and utilized by Massachusetts state residents through retail establishments. It addresses the problem of plastic bags harming the environment by cutting down on the estimated two billion plastic bags that residents of Massachusetts are estimated to use each year (Sierra Club, 2020). This law will ensure that fewer plastic bags end up in our oceans, landfills, and environment. There will be a 10 cent fee for each plastic bag that a customer uses, half of which goes to the business and half of which goes to the local municipality. Plastic bag restrictions that include a fee are extremely effective: they have been found to reduce over 90% of plastic and paper waste in communities that have them.

■ The Bill

S.525/H.902: An Act relative to plastic bag reduction

■ Elevator Speech

Hello, my name is Michael Burch (and I'm Sammy Guttell). We both reside in Waltham where we study health policy and environmental studies at Brandeis University. We are here to discuss "An Act relative to plastic bag reduction."

Every individual, both now and in the future, deserves to live in a clean environment. Currently, in Massachusetts, this is threatened by plastic bag consumption. A plastic bag is used for an average of 12 minutes but can take up to 1,000 years to biodegrade, whereas a paper bag only takes about a month to decompose. The decomposition of plastic turns these bags into thousands of small microplastic particles, which enter our lungs, animals, and bodies of water. 141 communities across our state have decided to combat this problem and preserve our environment. However, these restrictions only apply to approximately 60% of Massachusetts. This patchwork system of plastic bag restrictions does not do enough to combat the problem. A law at the state level is necessary and urgent to combat this growing threat to our environment.

"An Act relative to plastic bag reduction" is that law; it will decrease the amount of single-use plastic bags, which also solves the problem of patchwork legislation varying from community to community. This law will ensure fewer plastic bags end up in our oceans, landfills, and environment. Plastic bag restrictions that include a fee are extremely effective: they have been found to reduce over 90% of plastic and paper waste in communities that have them. There will be a 10 cent fee for each plastic bag that a customer uses, half of which goes to the business and half of which goes to the local municipality. I encourage you to speak with Representative Carolyn Dykema, the Chairperson of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture, and ask her to report the bill out of committee favorably. We also ask that you recommend this bill to your colleagues to support once it is out of committee.

■ Excerpt from Storybook

“There have been no complaints from customers about not having the option to use plastic bags. Paper bags are a little more expensive, but not enough to affect businesses. We are happy to do our part to help the environment.”

– *manager of a market in Brookline, Massachusetts*

■ Op-Ed

Michael Burch

The Existential Threat You've Forgotten About

Picture this: you are on beautiful Crane Beach up in Ipswich without a care in the world. (Yes, the re-opened beach, this upcoming summer!) The sun is shining, the water is glimmering, and the seagulls are gliding through the air, looking for their next meal. As you are looking out at the water, you notice something. A plastic bag is floating through the air while another one is half-submerged in the water. How many times have you been engulfed in nature, only to have a plastic bag ruin the picturesque moment? If you said never, your nose just grew a little bit.

It has been hard to focus on anything other than COVID-19 over the past year. However, the state of Massachusetts is slowly reopening and there is light at the end of the tunnel. Massachusetts is full of hope in anticipation of returning to “normal.” How hopeful should we be, though? We are in the middle of a massive climate crisis that has lasted much longer than COVID. The only difference? There is no foreseeable light at the end of the climate crisis tunnel. It is estimated that by 2027, Earth will enter the threshold of irreversible damage. One factor that we can control today is plastic bag usage. Yet no one seems to care! Maybe we have gone numb to the problem, as it has been a constant worry in the back of our minds for years – at least, those of us who aren't busy denying that it is indeed a problem. Massachusetts is supposedly one of the most progressive states in the country, and yet we have done little to combat the solvable problem of reducing plastic bag usage. “An Act relative to plastic bag reduction” (S.525/H.902) would put an end to the patchwork system of plastic bag laws that cover only 60% of our state, while greatly helping the environment with new plastic bag restrictions.

In Massachusetts, we pride ourselves on being one of the most environmentally conscious states in the country. When it comes to plastic bags, it seems like it is all talk. Residents of Massachusetts use an estimated two billion plastic bags per year! As long as we are all good citizens and recycle the bags, who cares? Well, we are not doing great... or even good. According to Waste Management, only about 1% of plastic bags in the United States end up getting recycled. So where do the other 99% go? I think we know where many end up: the environment.

It takes minimal effort and money to create plastic bags, which is why they are commonly used. However, we use plastic bags for an average of only twelve minutes each. Sure, this is fine, if you ignore the fact that they take up to 1,000 years to break down. They then photodegrade and become harmful particles that can contaminate our water, poison animals, and make soil infertile. Now, you might be thinking “Aw, who cares? It's just a few plastic bags.” Well, your kids might care when they cannot experience nature without encountering pollution. Or when you can't go to the beach without seeing a plastic bag floating in the ocean. Does it hit a little closer to home now? S.525/H.902 solves this problem by reducing the number of plastic bags being used, which reduces the number of plastic bags in our environment.

You may be thinking of common arguments against plastic bag restrictions. “Restrictions could hurt businesses because plastic is cheaper than paper!” This is one of the most common but least accurate concerns raised. The truth is that businesses will likely make up for the extra expenses incurred through the 5 cents they will now charge for each paper or reusable bag. Also, individuals will likely bring their own reusable bags with the new restrictions. The manager of a small market in Brookline, a community with a bag ban, had this to say: “Paper bags are a little more expensive, but not enough to affect business. We are happy to do our part to help the environment.”

I don't blame you for not thinking about this massive problem to our environment that is part of an existential threat to our species' survival. You've probably grown numb to it, as it has been around for years. “An Act relative to plastic bag reduction” has also been around for a while, but has never become law. It is facing another challenge this year with COVID bills getting the majority of attention. Unfortunately for us residents of Earth, climate change does not wait for pandemics to end. It just marches on towards 2027, when the harm done may be irreversible. I urge you to contact your legislator and encourage them to favorably report “An Act relative to plastic bag reduction” out of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture.

Michael Burch is a student studying politics, law, and health policy at Brandeis University.

Sammy Guttell

We're Supposed to Replace Our Bad Habits with Good Ones; This Pandemic Did the Opposite

Last March, I walked into the Waltham Market Basket with my two reusable bags, my mask, and my shopping list. I went around the produce section, shopping for the best deals, and ended at the bakery, where I bought myself a treat or two. I went to check out with the cashier, telling them as I always did, “Don't worry, I can bag for you!” The cashier looked up

at me with my reusable bags in hand, and told me, “Reusable bags aren’t allowed in stores anymore – you will have to bag with paper or plastic.” “Another COVID-induced change that I will have to deal with,” I thought to myself.

On March 25, 2020, Governor Baker issued a statewide ban on reusable bags based on public health concerns around the COVID-19 virus. For the 139 cities and towns that had their own local regulations on single use plastic bags, this executive order suspended them until further notice. The progress of regulating and decreasing the amount of plastic we use as a state was halted. On July 10th, Governor Baker rescinded the order he had issued in March, allowing for the use of reusable plastic bags.

Yet in those 5 months, something changed in me and many other people. Many people like me were building good habits by using reusable bags and had now lost their pattern. We fell back into the bad habit of using store-provided plastic and paper bags. All the progress made towards transitioning our state towards a greener future was lost.

In the age of COVID-19, a primarily respiratory disease, the regulation of plastic bags is even more important. Microplastics cause respiratory degradation when ingested enough – which in turn makes people more susceptible to diseases such as COVID-19, which has killed more than 2.9 million people worldwide, including more than 17,000 citizens of the Commonwealth. Plastic bags contribute to this microplastic problem as they can take up to 1000 years to decompose. Even then, the decomposition creates microplastics which enter the soil, water, and animals in that environment. In turn, we ingest these microplastics by eating the crops, water, and animal products. Plastic bags are not just an urgent environmental problem, but a serious public health one as well.

The patchwork of different restrictions and regulations on plastic bags in each of 139 cities and towns is not enough for us. Over the past seven years, legislation has been proposed to create a statewide regulation on plastic bags. Looking back on a year during which air pollution and plastic microparticles played a role in so much death and suffering, this legislation is imperative.

“An Act relative to plastic bag reduction” (S. 525 and H. 902) was introduced by Senator Eldridge and Representative Ehrlich in this year’s legislative session. The act tackles the use of plastic bags across Massachusetts, providing a solution that does not place extra burdens on small businesses or marginalized communities. The act does not take away your freedom to choose what bag you use. It merely incentivizes you to buy reusable bags, saving you money in the long term.

The bill will require a 10 cent fee for each plastic bag used by customers. Half of this fee will go to the business itself and half will go to the local administration to be used

for environmental projects. This bill does not hurt small businesses. If your business has fewer than three locations, it is exempt. If your business uses fewer than 15,000 bags per year, it is exempt.

Climate change is real – the effects are not always far away in distant lands, but here, right at home. Plastic is not good for the environment. It’s not good for our health. We cannot let plastic production continue at this scale or we will risk further respiratory illnesses and microplastic particles becoming widespread throughout our state. Call your representatives now and tell them to support “An Act relative to plastic bag reduction.”

Samuel Guttell is a junior at Brandeis University. His interests include environmental policy, history, and geography. He also plays for the varsity soccer team at the school.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Vitolo,

My name is Sammy Guttell, and my colleague Michael Burch and I are writing to express our support and enthusiasm for “An Act relative to plastic bag reduction” (H.902). While I am originally from Brookline, and my colleague, Michael, is originally from Connecticut, we currently reside in Waltham, where we study health policy and environmental studies at Brandeis University. We want to start by thanking you for your co-sponsorship of “An Act relative to plastic bag reduction,” which aims to help the environment by reducing the number of plastic bags allowed to be consumed. This bill is extremely important to Michael and me, and we appreciate your enthusiasm for helping the environment. We share that same enthusiasm because we believe that every individual, both now and in the future, deserves to live in a clean environment. While we understand that this bill may not seem like a top priority right now, given the COVID-19 pandemic, we hope you appreciate the urgency behind this bill as we cannot wait any longer to address the real and timely challenges facing our environment.

We know that you are a former energy consultant, so we understand that protecting and preserving the environment is near and dear to your heart. Unfortunately, the environment is being threatened, and the joy we experienced as kids exploring nature may be taken away from future generations. There is nothing worse than hiking through the woods and seeing a plastic bag floating through the air, or being at the beach and seeing a plastic bag sitting in the water, ruining the picturesque setting. In our state, an estimated two billion plastic bags are used per year by residents. Once these bags do eventually break down, which can take approximately 1,000 years, microparticles are released into the atmosphere that can harm both animals and humans.

“An Act relative to plastic bag reduction” is the solution

to this problem. This bill regulates the number of single-use plastic bags that retail establishments are allowed to distribute. This means that fewer plastic bags will end up back in our environment. This bill also helps to make current plastic bag restrictions more effective in towns that already have them. Even though 141 towns and municipalities across the Commonwealth have plastic bag bans in place, towns are not legally allowed to impose a fee. Without a fee, plastic bag regulations are found to be only 60-80% effective in many parts of the United States. With a fee, they are over 90% effective! “An Act relative to plastic bag reduction” will ensure that fewer plastic bags end up in our oceans, landfills, parks and environment.

Although opponents argue that plastic bags are actually better for the environment than paper bags, this is simply untrue. Plastic bags are used for an average of 12 minutes each but can take up to 1,000 years to break down, whereas paper bags only take about a month to decompose. The decomposition of plastic bags creates microplastics, which have been known to enter our lungs, enter our food through their digestion by animals, and enter our oceans. Studies have shown that up to 25% of supermarket fish contain microplastics.

Opponents also argue that replacing plastic bags with more expensive paper bags will harm small businesses. Plastic bag bans actually help businesses, as they will receive half of the 10 cent fee they are required to charge for paper bags, covering any costs they might experience from this change. We talked about the ban with the manager of a market in Brookline, who stated, “There have been no complaints from customers about not having the option to use plastic bags. Paper bags are a little more expensive, but not enough to affect business. We are happy to do our part for the environment!”

Every day that this bill is not passed is another day that too many plastic bags will end up in the environment. This bill is of paramount importance to us and we believe it deserves the utmost urgency to preserve and protect the environment for future generations. I encourage you to speak with Representative Carolyn Dykema, the Chairperson of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture, and ask her to schedule a vote and report an “An Act relative to plastic bag reduction” favorably out of committee in the next month.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Sammy Guttell and Michael Burch

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Michael Burch

On meeting with Chief of Staff David Melly and Legislative Aide Ben Kaplan of the office of Representative Carolyn Dykema

Overall, our advocacy efforts went extremely well, and Representative Dykema’s staff enjoyed and appreciated the arguments and ideas we had in support of the bill. A lesson I learned during this meeting is to expect to learn in the middle of advocating, even when you think you are the one who is going to be doing the educating. I thought that the staff would be moved by our arguments, and they were, but I gained much information from the meeting as well. I learned more information on the bill, I learned the next steps Sam and I have to take to shore up our arguments and convince critics of the bill, and I learned about the biggest challenges currently facing the bill. ...I learned to be ready to absorb and look for information in these meetings.... [The staff members] are insiders to the process and had insights that Sam and I had not even begun to think about.

On meeting with Joshua Newhall, Legislative Aide for Representative Norman Orrall

Overall, our advocacy went [amazingly well], as Mr. Newhall stated that he would recommend the legislation to Representative Orrall, who had [concerns about the bill] in the past. The biggest lesson I learned in this meeting was that prior research is crucial. I looked at Mr. Newhall’s LinkedIn before the meeting and noticed he went to Eastern Connecticut State University, which is near my house. I made sure to bring up where I lived, as I knew it would lead to conversation about our shared connection to the area and it worked. In addition, our research led to a game plan that was unstoppable. We knew the opponents’ main arguments.... We answered questions that Mr. Newhall had before he even asked them and we alleviated his greatest reservations about the bill so much that he stated he would recommend it to the Representative. Overall, our due diligence paid off. In summary, the lesson I learned is that due diligence and research can really pay off and change an individual’s opinions about specific legislation.

Sammy Guttell

On meeting with Joshua Newhall, Legislative Aide for Representative Norman Orrall

Josh told us at the end that he didn’t think this bill was bad, and that he personally would support it. He went on to say that we had presented it very well, and he was going to recommend the Representative take a second look at it. We were extremely excited to hear this, as it was our first “try” at advocating and changing minds, and it seemed to have worked!

After this meeting, we felt confident in our knowledge of the bill and confident in our advocacy techniques as we had defended the bill from both the right and the left in our first three meetings. Burch and I learned that we truly could make a difference – we did have power and we were pretty knowledgeable in the area surrounding our bill. I think the confidence we gained from this meeting really set the standard for the rest of the meetings. I wish we could have had more meetings like this.

On meeting with Evie Hobbs, Legislative and Communications Aide for Senator Michael Barrett

I think we really made an impression, or at least advocated our point assertively. We were able to explain each of our points refuting the main arguments (small business burden, underprivileged community burden, non-standardized laws across state). I think throughout each of our meetings, we were confident, [and with] each meeting we learned new ways to present our arguments and tailor them to the person...we would be meeting with.

■ Next Steps

“An Act relative to plastic bag reduction” has been introduced to the legislature every year since 2011. However, in speaking to multiple legislators close to the bill, they feel as if the bill has its best chance yet to pass this year. The majority of the hold-ups in the past have had to do with the language of the bill, and they feel that they have finally gotten it right. With 23 cosponsors in the House and another four in the Senate, this bill has momentum on its side. This stat does not mention that during our advocacy meetings, we were able to get Representative Norman Orrall’s (ranking minority member on the Joint Committee of Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture) staff to recommend the bill to him, despite the Representative opposing the bill in the last session. Unfortunately, with the COVID-19 pandemic still being prevalent, the majority of the bills getting the bulk of the legislature’s attention are COVID-related. In this reflection on our next steps in the advocacy process, we will discuss potential scenarios the bill may face, what happens if it fails, and our role in making sure that single-use plastic bags are restricted in the beautiful state of Massachusetts.

An Act Relative to Plastic Bag Reduction Scenarios

We feel optimistic that this is the session that “An Act relative to plastic bag reduction” will become law. We are confident that the bill will be reported favorably out of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture. It has been reported favorably out of this committee every time it has been assigned there. If it is reported favorably out of committee and brought to a vote,

we believe that it has support in both chambers. There are Democratic majorities in both the Senate and the House, and we believe that the party supports the bill. With that being said, it is important to remember that this bill has not passed for years despite having a Democratic majority in both chambers. This has been because of small discrepancies and points of conflict in language. However, legislators feel as if this year there will be no snafus with the language.

There are a few scenarios that could occur this session. The first is that the bill could be reported out of committee favorably, then brought to a vote by the speaker of the house, and voted into law. The second is that the bill could be reported out favorably, but never brought to a vote because of the priority being given to COVID-19 bills. The third is the bill fails to make it out of committee, which is unlikely because the chairs of the committee support the bill (as we learned through our advocacy meetings). The fourth is that the bill could be reported out favorably, reach the floor, but not receive the votes to pass. The last is that the committee could send the bill to study.

■ What if the Bill Fails?

If this bill fails, it would be a serious blow to plastic bag legislation. Legislators close to the bill believe that this is the year it will pass. If it does not, this would kill a lot of the momentum that this bill has picked up from its improvements from year to year. However, I am confident that Senator Eldridge and Representative Ehrlich would try to improve the bill next session, as they have stuck by this bill together since 2013. It is likely that the only thing that could delay this bill is language.

Even if this bill fails, there is serious momentum across the country supporting environmental legislation, and this bill certainly falls into that category. If it fails, it is likely that there will be even more urgency from coalitions currently supporting this bill. It is also likely that more coalitions will join the fight, as we are approaching year ten without this bill becoming law. I truly believe that coalitions and legislators will not stop fighting for this bill, as the longer it is not passed, the greater the problem will become.

■ Our Role

We could walk on nature trails, in parks, or through cities to pick up plastic bags and recycle them. However, this might not be the most effective way to solve this problem. We have decided the best thing we can do for this bill is to continue advocating for it and educating legislators on the specifics of the bill. In all of our meetings, we have found that legislators and their staff know the bill somewhat. However, we discovered that we could easily smooth over their biggest reservations about the bill just by educating them on the

specifics of it. With that being said, it may be hard to meet with every staff member or legislator in Massachusetts. But we feel the more legislators we meet with, the more the word will get out that this is a bill that will benefit all residents of the state. We have been extremely effective and successful in our meetings thus far, and we feel that this is the most impactful way we can help the bill.

■ Conclusion

When we shared our interests at the beginning of the semester, we believed that we would be assigned a bill that we would support. What we were not expecting was a bill that we would love. This class has taught us so much, but the greatest thing we have taken away from it is our passion for advocating, and for “An Act relative to plastic bag reduction.” We have put a substantial amount of effort into our advocacy meetings and our work. However, this would not have occurred had we not fallen in love with the bill. The reason we have been such effective advocates is because we are passionate about the bill, which has driven us to put in a lot of work before our meetings to make sure that we can answer any question that could be asked. Although the bill may be put off this session in favor of COVID-19 legislation, we are confident that “An Act relative to plastic bag reduction” has bright days ahead of it.

■ Update

As of October 2021: The bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources and Agriculture, where it has been since March 29, 2021.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.525: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S525

H.902: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H902

Organization or Coalition support:

Environmental League of Massachusetts (ELM):
environmentalleague.org

Sierra Club Massachusetts: sierraclub.org/massachusetts

Making Menstrual Products Affordable and Accessible to All

Providing free menstrual products to individuals in homeless shelters, prisons, and public schools

Members of the Project:

Ana Hatfield '21

Summer Quinn '22

Bill H.2354, also referred to as the “I AM bill,” seeks to address menstrual inequity in Massachusetts. The institutions the bill supports are not equipped with the menstrual products needed by the people they serve. The I AM bill will provide menstruating individuals within these institutions with non-stigmatizing, free access to the menstrual products they need.

■ The Bill

S.1445/H.2354: An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products in prisons, homeless shelters, and public schools

■ Elevator Speech

Hi, my name is Ana Hatfield (and I'm Summer Quinn). We are both current residents of Waltham, where we are studying legal studies at Brandeis University, and we are here to discuss the I AM bill.

Non-menstruating individuals enter bathrooms knowing their needs will be met, but this is not the experience of menstruators. For example, basic healthcare products such as tampons and pads are not provided in most public restrooms, while toilet paper and paper towels are. Imagine entering a restroom and finding there is no toilet paper. How would you feel about your needs not being met? For this reason, access to menstrual products is a necessity that should be prioritized to ensure health equity.

In a country that strives to reinvent itself as the best possible version with each generation, we should seek to help an often-marginalized group of our citizens: individuals who menstruate. There is a great deal of stigma surrounding menstruation, and this is especially felt by those who are socially and economically disenfranchised. According to a survey conducted by the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization for Women (Mass NOW), 56% of school nurses reported students missing class to obtain menstrual products, and 25% of responding shelters reported that their shelter does not provide menstrual products.

Bill S.1445 (H.2354), also referred to as the I AM bill, is an act to increase access to free disposable menstrual products in three major areas: 1) public schools, 2) homeless shelters, and 3) prisons. By providing proper hygiene products in these public locations, we are helping to promote gender and health equity. The I AM bill will provide menstruating individuals within these underserved institutions with non-stigmatizing, free access to the menstrual products they need. This bill quantifies who handles product distribution within these public institutions and uses gender-inclusive language because not only women menstruate. Menstruators within these institutions will no longer have to choose between necessities or have to bear the financial burden that purchasing menstrual products imposes.

We ask you to co-sponsor and fight for the passage of S.1445 (H.2354) in the Massachusetts Legislature this year. We also urge you to ask your colleagues to hold a speedy hearing in both the Joint Committee on Public Health and the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing. New York, California, Illinois, and New Hampshire have all passed menstrual legislation that provides menstrual products in public schools but have yet to combat the issue in homeless shelters and prisons. In passing the I AM bill, the great state of Massachusetts will lead the way for the rest of the country in the fight for menstrual equity.

The I AM bill is vital in providing menstruators with the essential healthcare products they need.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

“I think the bottom line is, it’s more costly if we don’t pay for menstrual products. There are health implications, education inequities, and cycles of poverty that will continue. Investing in period products is interrupting that cycle of poverty and helping propel people towards self-sufficiency and reducing health and educational disparities.”

– *Sasha Goodfriend, Co-Director of Mass NOW*

“There are so many cultural implications of this bill and just how much it means to me as a menstruator. I think so many other people feel like their needs are actually being legitimized. They feel like they are being taken seriously. I think that it is such an under-discussed problem that this bill means so much in terms of a cultural shift.”

– *former member of Brandeis University’s PERIOD Chapter*

“The long-term implications of this policy really looks like taking space from the budget and ensuring that this is continuously and annually included in every single budget without question.”

– *Bria Gambrell, Co-Director of Mass NOW*

■ Op-Ed

Ana Hatfield

A Pandemic Fight for Menstrual Equity

Imagine going to the bathroom and finding out that there is no toilet paper! At the sight of this, you are extremely confused and annoyed. How are you supposed to use the restroom when there is no toilet paper? A person requires toilet paper to comfortably use the bathroom and carry on with the rest of their day.

Now, imagine you are a menstruator, and you enter a public restroom. You find toilet paper but no tampons or pads. This time, you are not confused, surprised, or annoyed. You didn’t walk into this public restroom expecting the facility to provide you with any menstrual products. But why? As menstruators, we have never expected for a bathroom to supply us with tampons because they are rarely ever offered or provided to us within these public spaces. For a menstruator, menstrual products are as much of a necessity as toilet paper is, but the two are not provided similarly. You can hold in your pee, but you can’t hold in your blood. We should be able to expect to be provided with products, but this isn’t the case at all. This is demonstrated by the fact that practically every public restroom you enter will be stocked with toilet paper, but very few of them will offer menstrual products for free. Without a tampon or pad, a menstruator cannot carry on with their day. Yet this is the experience of many individuals.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown us the importance of healthcare equity and hygiene products. In addition, the pandemic has brought to light the many economic, social,

and racial inequalities that have run rampant in the United States for many generations. Many of these inequalities are felt most by socially or economically marginalized individuals, exemplified by the powerful Black Lives Matter movement.

Healthcare inequity has been a major topic of conversation surrounding COVID-19 and the recent social uprisings. We know that people of color are more likely to get sick or die of COVID-19 than their white counterparts, as they often experience barriers to healthcare access.¹ Similarly, menstruators of color are also disproportionately impacted by period poverty due to the fact that people of color are disproportionately affected by incarceration and poverty in general. Periods don’t stop for a pandemic, yet menstrual products have become more and more inaccessible for individuals who are struggling to stay financially afloat.

Underserved communities bear the brunt of menstruation’s burden. These communities include institutions such as prisons, homeless shelters, and public schools. Many of the individuals served by these institutions either do not have the means to purchase sufficient menstrual products for themselves or they are not given adequate access to menstrual products. This leads to many individuals being forced to choose between necessities. No one should ever have to choose between a gallon of milk and tampons, yet this is a choice many menstruators are forced to make at least once a month. A menstruator will spend upwards of \$2,000 in their lifetime on menstrual products, not including other costs related to period care, medical assistance, medication, or extra laundry and replaced clothes.² The lost time and distraction that the bleeding and pain causes has to be taken into account, too!

H.2354/S.1445, also known as the I AM bill, seeks to remedy this issue. This legislation will provide free menstrual products to individuals in homeless shelters, prisons, and public schools within the state of Massachusetts.³ In addition, the products will be provided to the individuals in a non-stigmatizing manner. Any individual who menstruates will have access to these products, because not just women menstruate! This legislation will help open up a broader conversation on health inequity and work to fight the pervasive stigma currently surrounding menstruation. As menstruators, we are constantly trying to hide the fact that

¹ CDC. “Community, Work, and School.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, 11 Feb. 2020, <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/health-equity/race-ethnicity.html>.

² “The True Cost of Your Period.” *Pandia Health*, 24 Oct. 2018, <https://www.pandiahealth.com/the-true-cost-of-your-period/>.

³ Livingstone, Jay and Barber, Christine. An Act to Increase Access to Disposable Menstrual Products in Prisons, Homeless Shelters, and Public Schools, H.2354, 192nd Congress. (2020-2021). <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/HD651>.

Jehlen, Patricia. An Act to Increase Access to Disposable Menstrual Products in Prisons, Homeless Shelters, and Public Schools, S.1445, 192nd Congress. (2020-2021). <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/SD748>.

we are on our periods, but there is no reason why such a natural bodily function should make us feel so ashamed and embarrassed.

Individuals within public schools, prisons, and homeless shelters need our support, and as a state we need to fight for equity. Many of these individuals have been othered and face countless difficulties in their day-to-day lives, and we must join the fight to support them. The pandemic has exacerbated these issues, and this is why it is so crucial that the I AM bill passes this legislative session.

H.2354/S.1445 will allow Massachusetts to be a leader in the national fight for menstrual equity. I urge you to contact your local legislators and request that they support the I AM bill in the Massachusetts Legislature this session. This bill will be vital in opening up a conversation on menstruation and supporting the individuals in our community who need us most.

Ana Hatfield is a student at Brandeis University, graduating in December 2021 with a B.A. in business and economics and a minor in legal studies.

Summer Quinn

Warning: This Could Get Bloody

Meeting the basic human needs of those living in Massachusetts is as much about humanity as it is about equity.

I'm guessing you have either experienced your period or you, like most people, are connected to someone who has (mother, sister, wife, daughter, friend, co-worker, etc.). Why is this important? Because individuals who have or will menstruate make up almost [51% of the U.S. population](#) – and some of their basic needs have gone overlooked for far too long! Why should you care? Remember a moment ago when you thought of your connection to someone who does or will menstruate? Well, they're the reason you should care.

When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, our government reacted by making sanitary products such as hand sanitizer and face masks accessible in public locations. Now we need the Massachusetts government to step up and provide these menstrual products – also basic sanitary products – in public institutions for those who need access the most.

Many menstruators have to confront the panic that comes with being in a restroom and seeing blood in their underwear and not having access to a hygienic product. For those unfamiliar with this situation: imagine entering a restroom and there's no toilet paper! Think about the panic! The scrambling! The awkward request to the stall next to you to see if they can pass you some! That's what it's like for the menstruating portion of the population. Most menstruators have had an experience when their period started

unexpectedly. If proper sanitary products were as available as toilet paper, there would be no issue. But for many, these products are not accessible or are not affordable. Enter the I AM bill ([H.2354/S.1445](#)), which is an act in the Massachusetts state legislature that would increase access to free disposable menstrual products in public schools, homeless shelters, and prisons.

While this may not seem like a big deal, it is. According to a survey conducted by the [Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization for Women](#) (Mass NOW) in 2019, many school nurses and shelter workers reported they do not have a sufficient supply of products to meet the needs of the menstruators they serve. Additionally, 56% of school nurses reported students missing class to obtain menstrual products, and 25% of participating homeless shelters reported that their facilities do not provide any menstrual products. However, these facilities do provide products such as razors and condoms.

Menstruation is a normal bodily function, but we don't talk about it. I get it, it's bloody (I warned you upfront). But we need to talk about it, and we need to make sure these basic sanitary products are available in public institutions where they are hardest to obtain.

Just like access to food and shelter, consistent access to sanitary products is meeting basic human needs. In fact, [New York, California, Illinois, and New Hampshire](#) have each passed menstrual access legislation that provides hygiene products in public schools. However, states are failing to combat the issue in homeless shelters and prisons. In passing the I AM bill, the great state of Massachusetts would lead the way for the rest of the country in the fight for menstrual equity by having the most inclusive and comprehensive state bill to date.

The I AM bill would provide menstruators with non-stigmatizing access to the healthcare products they need. It would allow these individuals to no longer have to choose between which basic needs to prioritize by removing both financial and health burdens. Menstrual hygiene management is a public health concern. And by providing sanitary products to communities in need, we are protecting everyone's health.

Sasha Goodfriend, Co-Director of Mass NOW, said, "I think the bottom line is, it's more costly if we don't pay for menstrual products. There are health implications, education inequities, and cycles of poverty that will continue. Investing in period products is interrupting that cycle of poverty and helping propel people towards self-sufficiency and reducing health and educational disparities."

The speed of government can be slow, and that's why I am asking you to reach out to your state representatives and senators to ask them to not only co-sponsor H.2354/S.1445, but to also fight for it this legislative session and urge their

colleagues to do the same. Getting your period is hard. Getting your period without the proper sanitary products is unimaginable.

Summer Quinn is a junior at Brandeis University, majoring in politics and American Studies and minoring in legal studies. Summer is a residential community adviser, a legal studies undergraduate departmental representative, and a member of the Brandeis Women's Tennis Team.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

My name is Summer Quinn, and my colleague Ana Hatfield and I are writing to convey our support for S.1445, also referred to as the I AM bill. We currently study legal studies at Brandeis University and are residents of Waltham, Massachusetts. We are writing to urge you to fight for and cosponsor the I AM bill, which is an act to increase free access to disposable menstrual products in prisons, homeless shelters, and public schools.

We know that you served as the Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities, therefore we know you understand the importance of adequate access to menstrual products. In addition, as a father of two daughters, you have experienced first-hand how vital these products are to those who menstruate.

When non-menstruators enter public restrooms, all of their needs are met. They are given access to toilet paper, hand soap, and paper towels. However, when menstruators enter public restrooms, many of their basic needs are noticeably absent. They are not given access to essentials such as sanitary napkins, tampons, and pantyliners. When one group is marginalized, this creates a rippling effect across the greater community. As a society, we need to address this equity issue to ensure marginalized groups are given access to the products they need. Such an effort will promote health justice and equity.

According to a 2019 survey conducted by the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization for Women (Mass NOW), 56% of school nurses reported observing students missing class to obtain menstrual products. 25% of responding homeless shelters also reported that their shelter does not provide any menstrual products, though many provide items like condoms and shaving razors. This sends the message that the needs of menstruators are less important. Furthermore, institutions that do currently supply menstrual products do not possess an adequate amount. These products are a necessity that we must provide to those who cannot acquire them themselves.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further demonstrated the dire need for health equity. The I AM bill will be a

critical conversation starter. It would be more harmful to us as a society to not support this legislation, as there are profound health implications that come along with it. This legislation would confront the stigma that currently surrounds menstruation. The I AM bill not only seeks to provide menstrual products to these groups that are often marginalized, but also opens up a broader conversation regarding economic, health, and racial inequity. The implementation of the I AM bill would likely vary depending on the particular institution and location, but regardless, the bill defines who handles the menstrual products and ensures stigmatization does not occur.

This bill does not include a financial note, but based on various resources, the implementation of the bill would likely cost between one and three million dollars. This would include startup costs, such as the installation of product dispensers, so this cost would decrease after the first year. In passing the I AM bill, we need to ensure that the institutions involved feel financially supported by the state and that education will accompany the distribution of the products. Toxic shock syndrome and other health conditions can accompany the use of menstrual products, which can be very harmful to one's body.

In passing S.1445, the Massachusetts Legislature would be interrupting the cycles of poverty and inequity that have been entrenched in the United States for so long. Underserved individuals would no longer be forced to choose between necessities such as food, and menstrual products. The I AM bill would help remove the financial burden that menstrual products impose on menstruators. The longer this bill goes unpassed, the longer these individuals are forced to live without the products that are essential to their livelihood.

The I AM bill will allow Massachusetts to be at the forefront of the national fight for menstrual equity. No other state has passed such comprehensive and progressive menstrual legislation, and Massachusetts has the opportunity to lead the nation. We ask you to cosponsor and fight for the passage of S.1445 in the Massachusetts Legislature this year, as its passage will greatly benefit your constituents. We also urge you to advise your colleagues in expressing support.

Sincerely,

Summer Quinn and Ana Hatfield

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Ana Hatfield

On meeting with Bryan Barash, General Counsel for Senator Harriette Chandler

The first very substantial advocacy meeting Summer and I had was our advocacy meeting with Bryan Barash, General Counsel for Senator Harriette L. Chandler [on Zoom]... Senator Chandler is the Vice-Chair of the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing and serves as a member of the Joint Committee on Public Health. In making meetings with legislators, Summer and I chose to focus on individuals who were not already cosponsors of the bill and who served on either the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing or Public Health, so Senator Chandler was perfect.

To start off the meeting, Summer and I gave our elevator speech as Bryan listened attentively. After that, he informed us that the Senator [had intended to sign on as a cosponsor of the bill].... In addition, he informed us that the Senator had recently written a companion bill, SD.2224, which would require that free menstrual products be made available in all state buildings. This was super helpful information, as we were unaware that such a bill even existed. Bryan asked that we advocate for that bill in addition to the I AM bill, and we assured him we would, as it's a great idea. The Senator promised to sign on to the bill as a cosponsor, as it covers subject matter the Senator supports, as she has been a longtime advocate for all things related to gender equality. At the end of the meeting, we sent Bryan and the Senator a copy of our storybook to pass around to their colleagues.

On meeting with Senator John Keenan

The final meeting that I found most impactful was Summer's and my Zoom meeting with Senator Keenan.... Senator Keenan is a member of the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing, where the bill was stopped last year. Right from the get-go the Senator was extremely lively and more than happy to speak with us. Like our other meetings, we started things off with our elevator speech. After that we discussed the bill, and the Senator conveyed his support for it. According to him, the bill just "makes sense," and the Senator plans on keeping an eye on it.

Once we finished up talking about the bill, Senator Keenan began to ask Summer and me about ourselves. He asked why we're advocating for this bill, what we're studying, where we're from, and even our internship plans for the summer. ... The Senator was genuinely interested in us and who we are as people. He even told us stories about his travels. It was an extremely personal meeting, and this was something that we had yet to experience to such an extent. It was also our longest meeting, lasting at least 20 minutes.

Senator Keenan additionally thanked us endlessly for the advocacy work we have been doing and drove home the importance of it. The Senator informed us that there are so many bills to keep track of, and that this bill may have never hit his radar, but now because of us, it has.

In the end, he assured us that he would support the legislation if it made it to the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing and that if we need anything we should feel free to reach out. We finished out the meeting with big thank yous and sent our storybook his way.

This meeting was very impactful not only because we were able to convey our passion for the legislation and acquire support for it from the Senator, but also because we were able to form a personal connection.

Summer Quinn

Meeting with Senator John Keenan

The meeting began with Ana and me giving our elevator speech to the Senator. During the meeting, Senator Keenan was actively engaged and energetic, not only showing his passion for the legislation, but emphasizing the importance of advocacy work. Senator Keenan noted that he had not previously sponsored the legislation, not because he was opposed to it, but instead because he was unaware of it. [Thousands of] bills are filed each session and it is incredibly difficult for senators and representatives to keep tabs on each bill. For this reason, the Senator was excited that Ana and I had brought the legislation to his attention and eagerly announced his support for it.

From this meeting, I learned the importance of advocacy and lobbying. The Senator had not heard of the legislation until we met with him, which shows the importance of advocacy work. If it were not for us, it is likely the Senator would not have learned of the legislation until it reached a hearing in his committee. Additionally, Senator Keenan spent several minutes asking Ana and me about our passion for the I AM bill and our legislative journey. It was nice to see a legislator genuinely interested in the individuals he was talking with.

This meeting was important because we were able to directly affect the legislation and make a personal connection with a state senator. After we finished the meeting, we sent a thank you email which included our storybook for Senator Keenan to share with his colleagues. We recently also shared our TikTok in support of the bill with the Senator.

On the overall experience

Since 9th grade, I have lobbied on Capitol Hill several times, covering social justice topics such as reproductive rights, criminal justice reform, gun violence prevention, and climate change. Because of my prior advocacy experience, I was

comfortable discussing the I AM bill with Massachusetts legislators. However, through our various meetings over the semester, I have been reminded of the importance of advocacy work. Thousands of bills pass the desks of senators and representatives each legislative session, and it is impossible for them to be experts on all of the bills they vote on. ... Additionally, it is important to be prepared for questions when lobbying. Because the staffers and legislators we met with [were often hearing of] the I AM bill for the first time during our elevator pitch, they naturally had questions after we concluded our speech. Understanding the fiscal information and implications such as implementation that are attached to the bill was vital in answering these questions.

■ Next Steps

If able to continue our advocacy work in support of the I AM bill, we would do a few things. We would focus on following the bill through various committees, beginning with the Joint Committee on Public Health where the bill currently sits. We have already met with four legislators that serve on the committee, including the senate vice-chair and representative vice-chair and chairperson. There are 17 individuals on the committee, so we would make meetings with the remaining 13. In said meetings, we would continue to deliver our elevator speech and answer any questions they have for us. Additionally, we would share our storybook and advocacy video with these legislators. At the end of the meetings, we would ask them to fight for the I AM bill and hold a speedy hearing in the Joint Committee on Public Health.

Assuming the bill is voted favorably out of the Joint Committee on Public Health, we would then shift our focus to legislators in the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing. We are making the assumption that this is the next committee the bill would move to based on the bill's process during the 191st legislative session. So far, we have met with five members of this committee, including the senate vice-chair and the representative chairperson. There are 20 individuals on this committee, so we have the opportunity to convey our support for this bill to the remaining 15 members. Again, we would deliver our elevator speech and then share our storybook and advocacy video with them. In the end, we would call for them to fight for the bill and hold a speedy hearing in the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing.

In addition to Statehouse advocacy, we would focus on the destigmatizing menstruation. The first way we would do this is through social media. We would make a TikTok account and produce videos similar to our advocacy video. By utilizing a fast-growing social media platform, our goal is to reach individuals who would not otherwise be informed of the I AM bill or discuss menstruation. These TikToks would advocate not only for the I AM bill, but also for the normalization of periods. They would help get the conversation started and

make the bill more widely known. Within our TikTok page, we want to compile a story series in which various menstruators can share their experiences. This would allow for non-menstruators to better understand the toll menstruation takes and the barriers menstruators face. This would again move toward dismantling the stigma that currently surrounds menstruation, as it will show both menstruators and non-menstruators that periods are not something we need to be ashamed of or hide. The series would seek to empower menstruators everywhere. The videos would follow the EPIC format by engaging the audience, presenting the problem, illustrating the solution, and concluding with a call to action. In addition, we could utilize Instagram and continue to produce infographics and curated posts similar to our storybook. These visuals would capture the eye and encourage viewers to get involved.

We would also love to continue our work with Mass NOW and the Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition. To start this off, we would share our TikToks, infographics, and Instagram posts. They could then share these sources on their Instagram and website, which have a lot of traffic and viewers. Additionally, we would love to hold a rally in conjunction with Mass NOW similar to their demonstration on National Period Day in 2019. This demonstration was held in Boston City Plaza, a well-populated area, allowing them to have their voices heard. Holding another rally similar to this one would help us make strides in normalizing menstruation and gaining support for the I AM bill. This rally would focus on supporting underserved menstruators and destigmatizing periods. Lastly, we would speak with Sasha Goodfriend and Bria Gambrell from Mass NOW to see how we could best support the bill and menstruators across Massachusetts.

Overall, our plan is to continue to advocate for the I AM bill by meeting with more legislators, utilizing social media to continue the conversation around destigmatization, and working with Mass NOW to further our advocacy efforts. By meeting with members of the appropriate committees, we will be able to have a larger impact on the I AM bill and its legislative journey. Social media posts will help the normalization of periods, especially for younger generations that utilize these platforms the most. Our goal in this is to make menstruation a normal topic that menstruators and non-menstruators are unafraid to discuss. Lastly, working in conjunction with Mass NOW will allow us to more effectively support both the I AM bill and menstrual equity as a whole within Massachusetts. The combination of these three efforts will contribute to the passage of the I AM bill and the destigmatization of menstruation.

■ Update

As of October 2021: The bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Public Health, where it has been since March 29, 2021.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.1445: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S1445

H.2354: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H2354

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Menstrual Equity (MME) Coalition:
mmecoalition.com

Mass NOW: massnow.org/iam

Raising the Age to be Tried as an Adult

Raising the age at which for individuals can be tried as adults from 18 to 21 years old

Members of the Project:

Jared Bivens '21

Kevin Truong '21

Under Massachusetts law, anyone 18 years or older is tried as an adult. Bill S.920/H.1826 proposes to phase in an increase in the age to be tried as an adult to 21, in one-year increments. People younger than 21 would be part of the juvenile justice system. The bill also would implement training, education, and rehabilitation-oriented measures that will help this younger population exit the justice system, re-enter the workforce, and live a well-adapted, law-abiding life. People younger than 21 have not fully developed neurologically, and when subjected to the adult criminal system, have increased rates of recidivism and negative outcomes.

■ The Bill

S.920/H.1826: An Act to promote public safety and better outcomes for young adults

■ Elevator Speech

Good afternoon, Representative Cusack. My name is Kevin and with me is my colleague Jared. I currently reside in Braintree while Jared is living in Florida right now, and we are both seniors at Brandeis University double majoring in business and health policy. We are advocating for the recent Raise the Age bill because we believe in second chances for those who have committed wrongdoings, especially for our local youth. Do you remember being a teenager and making mistakes and decisions that you perhaps look back on with regret as an adult? Jared and I definitely do, but unlike some, we weren't convicted, tried, or held to the same standards as adults are held. We can't overlook the fact that so many teenagers who are 18-20 are not fully neurologically developed, and trying them as if they are is cruel and unfair. To respond to this problem, we should continue to support the Raise the Age movement, specifically bill H.1826/S.920: "An Act to promote public safety and better outcomes for young adults."

This bill will include 18–20-year-olds in the juvenile justice system, rather than trying them as adults. This will drastically reduce recidivism rates and initial offense rates. We've seen direct evidence of this from a very similar age group. In 2013, Massachusetts legislators passed bill H.1432, which dictated that 17-year-olds be tried as juveniles. Opponents argued that this would reinforce the sentiment that youth's behavior is only attributable to their youth, and that they are not responsible for their behavior. Soon after it was passed, however, juvenile crimes decreased 34%, according to a report from Raise the Age MA FAQ. There is strong evidence suggesting that including this age group, which has not fully psychosocially developed, in the juvenile justice system will reduce juvenile arrests rates significantly.

What we are specifically asking you, Representative Cusack, is to continue upholding and advocating for bill H.1826/S.920 in its public hearings within the Judiciary Committee. In doing so, supplying testimony from the supporting public opinions would bode extremely well for this bill's progress through the Massachusetts legislative process. Jared and I absolutely were not perfect when we were younger, and we assume you weren't, either. It's time 18 to 20-year-olds are disciplined in a manner that will benefit their futures for the long haul rather than potentially jeopardize them.

Thank you for your time.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

“Let’s just say a 17-year-old is going through this rehabilitating process and [receiving substantial services and resources]... Yes, it may cost a little more in the moment but you save on the other end by helping that person train to get better... employment opportunities, for example, and really better their own selves as human beings. ... I think that’s the big picture; the cost of sending kids to adult prisons and leaving them to fend for themselves is much more damaging than people think.”

– Representative James O’Day, bill sponsor

“There is a clear distinction between the types of crime and reasons for committing them between their late teens and late 20s. Younger kids around the age you’re discussing commit, for lack of a better word, stupid crimes, and they don’t intend on doing them before they leave the house. They’re out with friends and want to be spontaneous and do it for fun.”

– a Massachusetts sheriff

■ Op-Ed

Jared Bivens

Whether it’s stealing a candy bar from Walmart, indulging in a drink or two before the age of 21, or skipping school to go to the beach with your friends, everyone has been young and made decisions that perhaps weren’t the most responsible (and probably had a blast too). Although it may have seemed like a good idea at the time, in retrospect it clearly wasn’t – hindsight is 20/20, after all. Making poor decisions is a defining part of being a teenager/young adult, or maybe I’m just saying that because I am one.

Either way, everyone makes bad decisions when they’re young. Research has shown that the frontal cortex, the part of your brain in charge of decision-making, is not fully developed until the mid 20’s. It’s not just teenagers being “careless.” We are still developing physically and neurologically. Unfortunately, the state of Massachusetts treats anyone above the age of 17 as an adult with respect to the justice system. If you are over the age of 17 and commit a crime, you will be sent to the adult justice system, real jail, instead of a juvenile detention center, or “juvy.” Juvy is more rehabilitative; it is designed to smoothly reincorporate offenders back into society to be employed, educated, and productive members of society.

Before 2013, anyone above the age of 16 was sent to the adult justice system. Then, a bill was passed which raised the age to 17. Following this change, youth recidivism decreased by 34%! This is likely a result of the rehabilitative programs in and function of the juvenile justice system. The adult justice system, on the other hand, is more punitive; it acts more as

a deterrent for crime and is not oriented as much towards turning criminals into healthy members of society – and can often have the opposite effect.

It is for this reason that we want to raise the age to be tried as an adult to 21 through a series of incremental increases from 17 to 18, 18 to 19, 19 to 20, and 20 to 21 so that anyone younger than 21 would be sent to juvy. Having the age set at 18 is irrational. There is no significant brain development that happens on the night of your 18th birthday that magically develops your brain to that of a 35-year-old. Yet, we are still treating these 18 to 20-year-olds as if that is the case – as if they are middle-aged, fully developed, and grounded individuals. News flash: they aren’t! Not only is this harmful to the individuals indicted, but it is also harmful to society. All of these youths who are being sent to jail instead of juvy are spending more time being punished and less time being taught how to become functional members of society. We the taxpayers are spending money supporting these kids in jail instead of on teaching them how to support themselves!

Why treat an 18-year-old like a 40-year-old? Doing so is irrational, nonsensical, and just plain wrong. This has gone on too long. It’s time we start focusing on improving our practices instead of being fixated on “discipline” and “personal responsibility.” What we’re doing is not working, and we have the power to change it. Think back to when you were a young adult. Really think. Were you perfect? Did you not ever make a youthful error in judgement? If you answered yes, congratulations, you are one of the few and I commend you. If you’re like the rest of us, imagine being sent to jail for your silly teenage mistakes. Not only would it be terrifying, but it would also have a serious impact on your ability to have a career and build a life for yourself.

So, help us help our youth! Please call your representatives and tell them why we should raise the age: because we care. It’s time for a change; be a part of that change.

Jared Bivens has been a student at Brandeis University since 2017. He has a business background but has taken a recent interest in politics and is currently trying to get his peers more involved in policy change and bettering the community. He is an active advocate for bill H.1826/S.920 and is in constant communication with relevant legislators and organizations. He looks forward to being involved in future criminal justice reforms.

Kevin Truong

How is it that teenagers of today’s society are still held to the same standard of accountability as adults that are 10, 20, or even 30 years older than them? Let’s take a step back here and really think about how 18 to 20-year-olds are being tried and prosecuted as if they are double their age! Especially with the recent racial injustice tragedies bringing light to

the negative effects over-policing has on Black communities, it is crucial that this age group be charged as juveniles as their brain maturity continues to develop, so that they can avoid the potentially harmful long-term effects of going to adult prisons at such a young age. Today's world still offers so many resources and so much support to adolescents with the sole intention of bettering their futures and lifestyles. Yet, it is crazy to think that all of an 18 to 20-year-old's accomplishments and achievements in life could instantly be snatched away because of one bad decision. We were all 18 once in our lives and I'm sure we can all recall making at least one or two regrettable decisions. To hold those of this age range to the same standards as adults as a disciplinary measure is a very unsettling thought. As a 22-year-old man I am not too far removed from this age group, and even I can say that this personally seems beyond terrifying because of the potentially hostile and dangerous environment that we know prisons to be.

Young people, like all of us, require a certain amount of structure in order to learn essential life skills. I am certainly not arguing that adolescents should be exempt from experiencing consequences for their actions. However, this population is being put through the same trial and prosecution processes as those who are double or even triple their age. It can be terrifying for an individual who is 18 to 20 years old to be placed in an environment like an adult prison, which could actually leave the teenager in a worse position than when they entered the prison. To subject young people to this environment seems cruel, especially when they are not yet fully matured and may be incapable of distinguishing between a good and bad decision. For those of you who are parents, would you want your teenage child to be sent to an adult prison? Do you think this is a place where they can best experience rehabilitation for their wrongdoing? I don't even have to be a parent to sense that this option may not be the healthiest for a teenage child.

The Massachusetts Legislature passed bill H.1432 in 2013, which raised the juvenile age to include 17-year-olds because the state felt as though the brain maturity for this age group was too underdeveloped to punish them as adults. This meant that they would be tried as juveniles and placed in detention centers for rehabilitation purposes. According to a study by the Citizens for Juvenile Justice coalition, juvenile crimes decreased by 34% in Massachusetts over the several years following the passage of this bill. On the other hand, 18-year-olds were seen as fully matured and adults, who would be punished accordingly. These kids are seen and treated as full adults for life starting the day they celebrate their 18th birthdays, suggesting that there was some big brain development after they were 17 the night before.

What's the crazy part about this, you may ask?

Citizens for Juvenile Justice continues to research how

the adolescent brain develops. They suggest that the brains of emerging adults are not fully complete until they are well into their 20s at least! This really is a curveball, because 18 to 20-year-olds are still being treated and tried as adults despite clear data showing that the brains of people in this age group are still years from being fully developed. If recidivism rates declined after bill H.1432 included 17-year-olds in the juvenile system, shouldn't 18 to 20-year-olds also be included in this system, considering the adolescent brain of this age group is not fully matured either? It would only make sense.

It's time we start thinking about these kids' futures and realizing how a hostile environment, like adult prisons, could affect them long term. We must begin disciplining 18 to 20-year-olds in a manner that could benefit their futures in the long haul rather than potentially jeopardizing their futures. Offering support for bill H.1826/S.920 is the perfect avenue to advocate for this movement, as it keeps emerging adults out of hostile adult prisons and away from its effects. As citizens, we must continue to supply testimony to this bill's sponsors and petitioners so that they can continue holding public hearings and advocating for this bill. This would bode extremely well for this bill's progress through the Massachusetts legislative process.

Kevin Truong is a senior at Brandeis University, double majoring in business and health: science, society, and policy. He extended his interests to politics and has spent the past several months actively advocating for bill H.1826/S.920: Raise the Age. He continues to reach out to relevant legislators and coalitions to help raise awareness.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Cusack,

My name is Kevin Truong and I am working with my colleague, Jared Bivens, to advocate for the Raise the Age bill. We are both Brandeis University seniors majoring in health policy, and I am one of your constituents from Braintree. We wanted to take a moment to ask you: Do you remember being an emerging adult in your late teens and making mistakes and decisions that you might look back on with regret? Jared and I definitely resonate with this because we fell in that age range just a few years ago, and we already see the ways in which we have grown and matured since our time in high school and our early college years. However, unlike some, we were not convicted, tried, or held to the same standards as adults because of adolescent decisions. Teenagers who are 18 to 20 are not fully neurologically developed, yet they are still tried as if they are. As responsible citizens, we cannot overlook the fact that young people are currently being treated as adult offenders, and this must be addressed immediately. To respond to this problem, we hope you will continue to support the Raise the Age campaign, specifically bill H.1826/S.920.

Bill H.1826/S.920 would include 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds in the juvenile justice system and they would be tried accordingly. This would reduce recidivism and initial offense rates drastically. We have seen direct evidence of this from a very similar age group. In 2013, bill H.1432 was passed by Massachusetts legislators. It mandated that 17-year-olds be treated as juveniles. Opponents argued that this would reinforce the sentiment that youths' behavior is only attributable to their youth, and that they would somehow receive the message that they are not fully responsible for their overall behavior. However, according to a study conducted by the Citizens of Juvenile Justice organization, juvenile crimes decreased by 34% in Massachusetts over the next five to six years after this bill was passed in 2013. We have no reason not to believe that this would similarly impact the 18 to 20 year-old age group, as well.

What we are specifically asking you, Representative Cusack, is to continue holding public hearings within the Judiciary Committee for bill H.1826/S.920 and advocating for it in those hearings. In doing so, supplying testimony from the supporting public opinions would bode extremely well for this bill's progress through the Massachusetts legislative process. Both Jared and I definitely were not perfect when we were younger, and we assume you weren't, either. It's time 18 to 20-year-olds are disciplined in a manner which will benefit their futures for the long haul rather than potentially jeopardize them.

Thank you so much for your time and we look forward to hearing from you soon!

Sincerely,

Jared Bivens & Kevin Truong

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Jared Bivens

On meeting with Representative James O'Day and Legislative Aide Alexis Vaillancourt

Meeting with not only a legislator, but the person essentially in charge of our bill, was a little bit scary, for me at least. I was expecting him to be withdrawn, and almost frustrated with having to meet with two undergraduate students that would likely provide no value to him. However, in the first couple minutes of the meeting, Rep. O'Day quickly dispelled my concerns. He was lighthearted, funny, and extremely interactive with us. I found this really helpful in both relieving my nerves and helping us stimulate a thoughtful, productive discussion.

The meeting began with a little bit of a background discussion. He was curious about why we were so interested in the bill, so we gave him some background about ourselves and our history with the bill, which also made the flow of

conversation much more casual. We were not only able to learn about the bill specifically, but also about the experiences of somebody who has been the main sponsor of the bill. I found this really interesting.

We quickly moved onto discussing the bill and its strengths, weaknesses, and how we could mitigate these weaknesses. He also chatted with us briefly about how we, as students and advocates, could get more involved with the bill and better persuade others to support it. He even referred us to some external resources for more information. His mindset towards the bill seemed to be focused on putting yourself in the shoes of someone really experiencing being processed by the adult justice system, and how that could leave you scarred at such a young age. Being so freshly out of that age range, I found it really easy to relate to what he was saying. Sometimes, a fresh perspective can really change the way you view a problem or idea. Representative O'Day provided this for us.

Personally, this was my favorite meeting. Representative O'Day provided everything we asked for and more. Talking to him was informative, eye opening, and also entertaining; the meeting was mostly informational, though. He is a really cool guy, and I wish we had the opportunity to speak to him more.

On meeting with Mark Phillips and James Zanghi, Legislative Aides to Representative Thomas Stanley

This was the first time we had been given the opportunity to speak with aides, so we had some different questions for them. What we discussed first was how they got involved with the representative, and [what it was like] working for a representative – their input was extremely interesting. We then moved on to their perspectives about the bill, and we spent some time discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the bill, why we think it is important, and specifically what about it we think is most important.

I felt that meeting with people closer to our age range really lowered the tension and made it easier for us to enter a casual, productive, and informative discussion. ...I wasn't expecting [legislative aides] to be so knowledgeable about the bill....

Kevin Truong

On meeting with Representative James O'Day and Legislative Aide Alexis Vaillancourt

Representative O'Day and Alexis were extremely personable towards us, as we began the Zoom call from our homes by thanking both for agreeing to schedule a meeting. The Representative was then asked about his involvement in the bill, and he responded with a quick background of his life and how he ended up where he is now within the

Massachusetts Legislature. He threw in a few jokes here and there throughout this portion of the conversation, which really lightened up the interaction a bit. This quick conversation about his background gave me a sense of comfort because I was able to realize that he was a human being who can have a casual conversation. This made it easier for me to chime in when I wanted to contribute to the conversation.

The conversation then shifted to more specific questions that we had about the bill, such as the financial projections and weaknesses of the bill. We were even able to show him a quote from a first-hand interview related to these questions that we included in our storybook, which left an eye-opening impression on the Representative. The atmosphere of this call was really centered around the idea of “putting yourself in their shoes.” Representative O’Day would consistently ask Jared and me, “what would you guys do in that situation?” throughout our call, which was parallel to my attitude towards this bill from the beginning. One of the things that’s special about this bill is that the age range could have applied to me a couple years ago, so there was this instant connection where I resonated with what he was saying.

■ Next Steps

Bill H.1826/S.920 has been referred to the Judiciary Committee to wait for future public hearings. The next steps would be to hold these public hearings on its subject matter and to eventually advance to an Executive Joint Committee Session, where members of the Judiciary Committee would collaborate to discuss the findings of the public hearings, offer some recommendations for the bill, or even completely redraft the original bill that will eventually be assigned a new bill number.

If the bill receives a favorable recommendation, it will then proceed through the legislation process, which would entail three mandatory bill readings in each of the branches in the General Court. Within these meetings, the newly revised bill will be presented before the State House and Senate, Committee on Steering and Policy, Orders of the Day/Ways and Means Committee, and the Committee on Bills in Third Reading where the bill is consistently debated and analyzed in order to gather enough information on its subject matter to possibly be amended in the future.

If the bill successfully passes these early steps of the legislative process, the bill could then possibly be considered for engrossment and enactment, where it will proceed through the three mandatory readings again before potentially allowing the governor to view it. The governor can act on the bill in several ways: pass it, veto it, or return it to the General Court for recommendation revisions.

■ Potential Lobbying Problems

This bill, because of its complexity, might prove difficult to lobby for. The main strengths of the bill are quite simple and easy to highlight: it will reduce recidivism and overall juvenile crime rates, both of which have their own web of secondary effects. However, the data and time required to dispel the opposition’s arguments might be a barrier to lobbying. For example, explaining to an opponent that each juvenile we send to the juvenile justice system versus jail does not actually cost \$100,000 per year per person would be time consuming: the proponent would have to delve into recidivism, past data on recidivism reduction, past data on juvenile crime rates, and maybe even incorporate some math. Requirements like these might make having many short, concise, and ultimately persuasive conversations difficult because of the time required to explain all the relevant details.

■ Potential Implementation Problems

One potential implementation problem was discussed earlier in regard to the retroactivity debate of this bill. As mentioned before, there was a lot of debate about whether bill H.1432, the bill that raised the age to include 17 in 2013, should operate retroactively or not. Although there was a major push for the bill to operate retroactively, it was eventually deemed impractical and would only apply to cases that occurred after the bill was enforced. Because of this history, it is safe to believe that bill H.1826 will have the same controversy over whether operating retroactively is feasible or not. It is also important to note, however, that a general rule of thumb for newly passed bills is that they will operate prospectively. With this being said, bill H.1826 can definitely anticipate a push to operate retroactively, similarly to bill H.1432, but will most likely result in operating prospectively.

■ Update

On March 9th, 2021, the bill was referred to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary. As of October 6, 2021 a hearing was scheduled and no further action has been taken.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.920: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S920

H.1826: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H1826

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Coalition for Juvenile Justice Reform:
cfjj.org/juvenile-justice-reform-coalition

Authorizing Driver's Licenses for Undocumented Immigrants

Allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain a driver's license in order to decrease the spread of COVID-19 and improve public safety

Members of the Project:

Jennifer Manzano '21

Grace Teng '21

More than 185,000 undocumented immigrants reside in Massachusetts without being able to acquire a driver's license. This issue has resulted in 20,000 court cases, making driving without a license the second most common criminal offense in the state. Additionally, thousands of undocumented immigrants are forced to share rides with coworkers or face crowded public transport to get to work, exacerbating the spread of COVID-19. By allowing undocumented immigrants living in Massachusetts to have a driver's license, bill S.2289/H.3456 would address public health concerns related to COVID-19 and seek to increase public safety measures in the state. This bill would increase road safety in Massachusetts, decrease the spread of COVID-19, and address the disproportionate economic impact faced by undocumented people.

■ The Bill

S.2289/H.3456: An Act relative to work and family mobility during and subsequent to the COVID-19 emergency

■ Elevator Speech

Hi, my name is Jennifer. My colleague Grace and I are two Massachusetts constituents with a concern about the current state of public health and public safety. Like you, we want to keep the roads safe and essential workers protected.

Currently, there are an estimated 185,000 people without documentation in Massachusetts, many of whom are essential workers driving every day without a license so they can get to their jobs. Giving these immigrants licenses would ensure that the driver next to you knows how to drive and that carpooling in a pandemic isn't a necessity. Hit-and-run accidents would also decrease, and auto insurance premiums would lower as much as \$20 per person per year according to the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center. Passing "An Act relative to work and family mobility during and subsequent to the COVID-19 emergency" would do all of that.

Please ensure that it gets out of the Transportation Committee this year, and talk to your colleagues about making it law!

■ Excerpts from Storybook

"We are the people who drive in fear and risk our health in this pandemic to provide you all food while you rest or work from home."

– a *Movimiento Cosecha* advocate

"They were picking up coworkers and were spreading COVID between the four of them in a single vehicle. Then those four would take it home to their spouses and family."

– health director for a Massachusetts community

■ Op-Eds

Jennifer Manzano

More Than a License

There are an estimated 235,000 undocumented people living in Massachusetts, who produce more than \$184.6 million in state and local taxes. In the midst of a global pandemic, many of these people are also essential workers risking their lives every day to provide for this country.

Yet despite undeniably being huge assets to the country, they do not have the basic right to drive. People who are undocumented are not able to get behind the wheel of a vehicle and go to the grocery store, doctor appointments, or even their jobs without the fear of being deported. Bill S.2289/H.3456, “An Act relative to work and family mobility during and subsequent to the COVID-19 emergency,” would enable undocumented immigrants living in Massachusetts to obtain a driver’s licenses.

As someone who grew up in a community with many undocumented people and has lived in an area for the past four years where the majority does not know these struggles, I have grown to understand the disconnect of simply not knowing the difficulties undocumented people face every day. This bill specifically looks at the use of a license, a piece of plastic that could relieve 235,000 people, plus their families, from fear that their whole world could be destroyed by the deportation of their mom, dad, son, or daughter.

When being undocumented and not being able to drive, you do not have freedom – freedom to go out on the roads and feel safe, freedom for your mental health. Let me walk you through a simple grocery errand for someone who, while not undocumented, has a parent who is undocumented.

You are awakened on a Sunday morning by the sound of your parents discussing whether today’s grocery haul will be big enough to be worth taking the car. Your dad is insisting on taking the car because a taxi would cost over \$30 for a round trip. Money has been tight, so that amount would be better going towards food. Your mom tries to explain to him that the police have been more active these days. Due to the recent election of a new deputy, they have been giving people more tickets and stopping folks for no reason. She also reemphasizes that there are new laws being put into effect that allow for an officer to question the legal status of everyone in a vehicle if the driver is found to be without a license and undocumented.

Fear takes over your body and you are no longer sleepy. Instead, you’re hoping your mom wins this battle. If you had \$30 dollars, you would pay for the taxi yourself. Somehow, your father successfully convinces your mom that everything will be okay. They come to your room to say bye and you give them the blessing. Your body is heavy and you try not to cry. You fear that this could be the last time you see them. As

soon as they leave, you start praying and making all types of promises to the Virgin Mary and God. Telling them that if they bring your parents home safely, you’ll get straight A’s this year or will go two months without watching WWE. For over two hours, you’re there praying and waiting for updates from your mom. Every text you hear, you brace yourself.

It is not only these 235,000 people who are affected by this bill, but their families and entire communities. Ensuring these people are able to drive also brings assurance to all of us that the person next to us has the proper testing to be on the roads. Sixteen states plus the District of Columbia have passed and successfully executed this bill. In Connecticut, the number of hit and runs decreased by 10%. A former representative of State Farm who has experience working with undocumented people mentioned that having a license brings a sense of security to these people. It makes them feel safe and more inclined to stay after an accident because it won’t mean deportation.

For over 15 years, people have been fighting to pass this bill. Over the last three years, the bill has gained a lot of momentum and support from other organizations. Let us make this the year we pass it.

Jennifer Manzano is a former research assistant for Massachusetts General Hospital and the Lurie Institute for Disability Policy at Brandeis University. She currently serves as the Special Projects Coordinator for the Georgia Association for Latino Elected Officials and is a student at Brandeis University.

Grace Teng

The COVID Commute: Essential Workers Need Licenses

I think every Bay Stater can attest to the importance of having a car and the ability to drive. We all need some form of transport to get to work, get our groceries, or take our kids to school. Although many of us, fortunately, can work from home and do not need to commute during the COVID-19 pandemic, many people without documentation are essential workers and don’t have that option. Immigrants are continually putting themselves on the frontlines and have shown their courage and dedication to keeping our country running; the least we could do is legalize their commute.

Currently, many people without documentation are forced into carpooling or roughing it on public transport to get to their workplaces. Consequently, COVID-19 spikes have been linked to these conditions. A driver may pick up their coworkers and if even one person in the car has caught the virus, everyone else will likely get it and then go home and spread it to their families. Every day, essential workers are driving in fear and putting themselves at risk while providing us necessities.

Now let us do a thought exercise. Imagine what might

happen if you got pulled over while driving without a license. You might think you would get off with a warning, maybe a slap on the wrist, and go home with a funny little story about what happened that one day you forgot your license at home. Now, imagine you are an undocumented person. Think of the anxiety you would feel every time you go out on the road. If you are a person without documentation and you get pulled over, you might be thinking not only of being arrested, but of the likelihood of deportation. This means the forced removal from your life here, your family, and often the return to a country of oppression or war.

To clarify, a license would only provide a form of identity and ensure that the driver next to us knows how to drive. The license would NOT grant any ability to vote, or serve as a means to a fraudulent identity.

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, 16 states plus the District of Columbia already offer licenses to undocumented immigrants. These states have seen a decrease in the number of hit-and-run accidents and a reduction in their insurance premiums. Massachusetts would likely see the same; in fact, a report from the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center (MBPC) also mentioned how licenses would increase immigrant earning potential and tax contributions.

Allowing undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses is not a novel idea. In fact, Massachusetts residents have been arguing for the need for such an allowance for 15 years! Many proposed bills have crossed the paths of our legislators and only last year did one make it to committee. It is time that a bill finally be passed, specifically bill S.2289/H.3456, "An Act relative to work and family mobility during and subsequent to the COVID-19 emergency". This bill would grant the undocumented community access to licenses. Supporters estimate a range of 40,000 to 78,000 out of the 185,000 undocumented immigrants in Massachusetts would obtain a license in the first three years of the bill's enactment.

A license would not only protect our roads and stimulate our economy, but more urgently, it would also give people without documentation a means of identification to be tested for COVID-19 and receive the vaccine. I urge readers who care about essential workers and who want to see an end to this pandemic to call or email their state representatives to tell them you support bill S.2289/H.3456.

Grace Teng is a senior at Brandeis University where she studies international relations and politics with minors in legal studies and East Asian studies. She has done volunteer internship work with the Alzheimer's Association's Waltham Chapter and the Lowell Court Service Center.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Jamie Eldridge,

My name is Grace Teng. My colleague Jennifer Manzano and I are writing to you because like you, we care about the public health and safety of our community. As students in the state of Massachusetts and, in my case, a resident of Littleton, we have witnessed the significant barriers and consequences people without documentation face without driver's licenses. With over 185,000 of these individuals residing in the state, we are putting our community at greater risk by creating unsafe road and health conditions. As a senator who consistently supports bills in favor of our valued essential workers, and as a cosponsor of bill S.2289, "An Act relative to work and family mobility during and subsequent to the COVID-19 emergency," we urge you to continue to fight for this bill.

Like all of us, undocumented immigrants need to drive to complete the most basic of tasks for survival, including getting to and from work, buying food and home necessities, taking their children to school, etc. However, because their immigration status does not allow them a driver's license, these immigrants are driving without one, and therefore without insurance and without the standard testing that confirms all drivers have the essential road knowledge to keep everyone safe. Furthermore, as many are essential workers, they often must rely on public transportation and carpooling during a pandemic, which disproportionately puts them at higher risk of being exposed to and spreading the COVID-19 virus.

Providing this identification would decrease the number of hit-and-run accidents. Undocumented immigrants would be properly insured and feel safer to stay at the scene of an accident. With a projected 75,000 people who would register for this license within three months of the bill passing, the state would also financially benefit from the registration and application fees. According to the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center, the increased number of people in the insurance pool would lower insurance premiums as much as \$20 per person annually.

Massachusetts is no stranger to bills requesting that those without documentation have access to driver's licenses. In fact, this bill has been proposed every year for the last 15 years and only just made it out of committee last year. Our community has been patient and working diligently. We appreciate your co-sponsorship and urge you to vote in favor of S.2289 and continue to discuss this bill with your fellow representatives.

Thank you,

Grace Teng & Jennifer Manzano

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals:

Jennifer Manzano

On meeting with Scott Campanella, Legislative Aide for Representative Jack Patrick Lewis

Throughout our entire Zoom call, I couldn't help but be grateful to speak to Mr. Campanella, who was like a breath of fresh air. ... His views, no matter how different [from mine], were genuine and filled with no filters while still remaining professional without giving us the same repetitive answers we had been receiving. He isn't a representative, but I definitely wish he was.

He provided us with a lot of information about the House, including, what representatives' positions are and what they are looking for... [He] commended these activist groups and looked for common ground instead of disregarding and criticizing them. There were a lot of moments when I questioned my future in politics, but Mr. Campanella showed me that with good intentions, anyone can find their place. Towards the end of our meeting, he encouraged us to keep in touch and connected us to a colleague of his to continue advocating for our bill.

On all meetings

As I am reflecting, each and every meeting we held this period for bill S.2289/H.3456 was very different and informative in unique ways. There was a lot of research and preparation that went into these meetings, but in the end, I learned that what matters most in these settings is the personal aspect and genuineness one brings. I learned a lot in terms of public speaking, writing, and presenting compact information, but a skill I take with me in my everyday life is how to create an atmosphere where every individual knows I speak from a place of wanting to create change. Setting this up really gave me an opening to be daring and real during my meetings. I learned not only to speak for myself but a whole community of individuals.

Grace Teng

On meeting with Representative Tricia Farley-Bouvier

We wanted to meet with Rep. Farley-Bouvier because she is one of the cosponsors on our bill and we wanted her insight on how best to advocate for it. When we entered the meeting, she got right down to business. She asked us how much we knew about the bill and how she could best be of service to us. We asked how we could best support the bill moving forward...She told us that the best way to advocate for the bill would be to reach out to our fellow students who are Massachusetts residents and tell them to contact their representatives. Quincy's representatives are currently not supporting this bill, and so she emphasized

that we should find other students from Quincy to contact their representatives specifically. In her eyes, having a constituent from your own district is what really convinces a representative.

Even though we were strangers, she was incredibly open and honest. Her sincerity made this one of the best meetings so far. One aspect of advocating that has been relatively unclear to Jennifer and me, is the difference in attitudes between the legislators and grassroots organizations. Representative Farley-Bouvier cleared this up for us by highlighting the many different methods and routes to advocating, and how these divides can sometimes make it difficult to keep people together, even if they are fighting for the same cause. ... [O]ur conversation illuminated the effectiveness of organizations, like Movimiento Cosecha, to put pressure on our legislators and how these legislators may view such organizations.

Next Steps

This bill is currently on referral to the House Transportation Committee. This is where the bill died last year, so we are hoping for a different outcome this time around. There is currently a lot of momentum behind our bill and we hope to keep it going, and secure enough House votes to override a veto by Governor Baker.

We definitely hope that in the future we can collaborate with groups on campus to help lobby for the bill. We would also love to put them in touch with Movimiento Cosecha in order to bolster their outreach efforts. After talking with Scot Sternberg from Cosecha, he brought up the idea that we may be able to work with them to create a lobbying workshop with interested groups. As stated in our campaign journals, Rep. Jack Patrick Lewis's legislative aide, Scott Campanella, put us in touch with The Right to Immigration Institute's (TRII) cofounder Jonathan Goldman. Jonathan contacted us and expressed his support, so we hope that we will be able to ask him if collaborating with TRII in the future might be a possibility.

Right now we do face some potential lobbying problems concerning the ability to meet with senators and representatives who are not for our bill. We hope we can take Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier's advice and find constituents from these legislators' specific districts to help advocate for the bill. Quincy's legislators especially do not favor the bill, so we hope that maybe we can conduct some social media outreach to find Quincy residents to contact these legislators and express their support.

Update

As of October 2021: The bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Transportation, where it has been since March 29, 2021.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.2289: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S2289

H.3456: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H3456

Organization or Coalition support:

Movimiento Cosecha: lahuelga.com

The Right to Immigration Institute (TRII):
therighttoimmigration.org

Mandating Accuracy, Inclusivity, and Comprehensiveness in Sex Education

Requiring that Massachusetts schools offering sex education provide information that is age-appropriate, medically accurate, and LGBTQ+ inclusive.

Members of the Project:

Jesse Qu '21

Aidan Vogelsson '22



Jesse Qu



Aidan Vogelsson

The Healthy Youth Act, or bill S.318/H.673, mandates that Massachusetts schools and districts teaching sex education adopt a comprehensive, medically accurate, age-appropriate, and LGBTQ+ inclusive sex education curriculum. It also ensures that students are learning the most accurate information by updating the Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework (MCHCF). The Healthy Youth Act promotes sex education that teaches students of all gender identities and sexual orientations consent and the tools for building healthy and respectful relationships. Additionally, it allows parents/legal guardians to withdraw student(s) from sex education. The bill also seeks to prevent sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancies, and sexual violence among youths. This will empower students, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, to make healthy decisions about their sexual activity and gain the tools for building respectful relationships.

■ The Bill

S.318/H.673: An Act relative to healthy youth

■ Elevator Speech

Our names are Aidan Vogelsson and Jesse Qu. Every Massachusetts youth deserves the education they need to make informed decisions about their sexual health and safety. Massachusetts schools are teaching sex education according to a 1999 framework that does not require schools to cover sexually transmitted infections, contraceptives, or consent. Consequently, young people ages 15 to 24 accounted for roughly two thirds of chlamydia cases in 2015, according to the Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts.

The Healthy Youth Act addresses these issues by updating the framework and requiring that Massachusetts schools offering sex education not only cover these topics, but also provide resources for LGBTQ+ students. This will empower students, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation, to make healthy decisions about their sexual activity and gain the tools for building respectful relationships.

Will you vote in favor of the Healthy Youth Act (S.318/H.673) in the Joint Committee on Education?

■ Excerpts from Storybook

“That line from the movie *Mean Girls* was all we knew: ‘don’t have sex because you will get pregnant and die.’”

– a graduate of a Massachusetts public school

“Young people ages 15 to 24 reported roughly two thirds of chlamydia cases and almost ½ of gonorrhea cases in MA in 2015.”

– Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of MA

“There are a lot of people who cause harm not intending to...but they don’t know. They are ingrained in this rape culture and raised in a society that gives them power. By teaching consent...we are creating a society that is more likely to use it.”

– Katia Santiago-Taylor, Policy Director, Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)

■ Op-Ed

Jesse Qu

Comprehensive Sex Education is Long Overdue in Massachusetts

We often hear that youths are our future. True to that statement, Massachusetts youths are at the forefront of change at [protests against police violence](#). As 21-year old Amel Viaud put it, [“young people are the carriers for the messages that \[their\] ancestors and \[their\] mentors are giving \[them\].”](#) If the past generation shapes the next generation of leaders, then how can we turn a blind eye while youths suffer rising rates of sexually transmitted infections (STIs), unintended pregnancies, and sexual violence because Massachusetts public schools are not teaching comprehensive sex education? We have had a solution for 11 years. Yes, you read that right: 11 years. That solution is the Healthy Youth Act.

Did you know that Massachusetts public schools are teaching sex education according to a 1999 framework? That is the year I was born! This means that students are learning information that is *not* comprehensive, medically accurate, age-appropriate, or LGBTQ+ inclusive. If schools do not offer reliable information about consent, maintaining sexual health, and building respectful relationships, youths will turn to sources like the internet for guidance, where there is a *lot* of misinformation. It is naïve for us to think that youths will not be curious about sex or be sexually active, especially considering that more than 60% of Massachusetts high school students will have sex by the time they graduate, according to the Healthy Youth Act Coalition. Furthermore, deterrent strategies like teaching abstinence-only *do not work* and do more harm than good.

Every day that public schools do not teach consent-based, comprehensive, and medically accurate sex education is another day that youths disproportionately bear the consequences of inadequate sex education. The statistics are staggering. Youths account for [more than two-thirds of chlamydia cases in 2015](#). [Over 10% of teens reported that they experienced sexual dating violence in 2017](#). [In the past year, 17.7% of gay, lesbian, and bisexual high school students reported that they experienced physical dating violence](#). Without a policy solution, these numbers will continue to rise. But we can *prevent* STIs and sexual violence among youths. How, you ask? With the Healthy Youth Act.

The Healthy Youth Act will address the outdated framework by mandating that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) update the framework. The bill will also require that public schools teaching sex education adopt a curriculum that is comprehensive, medically accurate, age-appropriate, and LGBTQ+ inclusive. This ensures that the schools teach students of *all* gender identities and sexual orientations about consent, STI prevention, contraceptive use, and the skills for developing healthy relationships.

Last year, the Massachusetts Legislature passed a bill to address sexual violence on higher education campuses. The Healthy Youth Act shares the same goal of sexual violence prevention but intervenes earlier in students' education. Massachusetts is *long overdue* in passing a comprehensive sex education bill. Legislators have had time to adapt to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Senate passed the Healthy Youth Act with little opposition last session and many representatives in the House support it. There is no excuse for either both chambers to not pass the bill this session. Call or email legislators on the Joint Committee on Education and urge them to vote in favor of the Healthy Youth Act (S.318/H.673) today. We cannot afford to delay passing this bill any longer.

Jesse Qu is a Brandeis student studying sociology, African and African American studies, legal studies, and history.

Aidan Vogelsson

Massachusetts Must Begin Teaching Consent

After the #MeToo movement took off in 2017, many pundits lauded the start of a new era of politics. We were told that newfound accountability would intimidate rapists and predators, keeping them from public office, while allowing the public to have much needed conversations about toxic masculinity, privilege, and consent. These conversations would facilitate social change and bring about a new era of respect and awareness.

And yet, despite years of new MeToo allegations and discussions about consent and proper workplace behavior, we are still surrounded by public figures who abuse their power and behave as predators. Over the past couple of months, we've learned that Governor Andrew Cuomo abused his power to harass multiple staff members. Congressman Matt Gaetz violated laws against sex trafficking and showed nude photos of women he slept with to his fellow lawmakers on the floor of the House of Representatives. In Hollywood, prominent actor Armie Hammer made multiple women feel unsafe through his violent behavior. Why is it that we have made so little progress? The answer is that while there has been ample discussion about consent, there has not been enough done to create change.

If we want to change rape culture, the societal impulse to ignore and excuse the violent behavior of powerful men and glorify that violence in media, we need to address a key issue that leads to society's acceptance of this flawed system: we need to teach consent. Consent can be taught from an early age and includes more than consent regarding sex. Elementary school teachers can begin by teaching the importance of asking permission before sharing a hug or a high-five. In middle school, teachers can discuss harassment and explain the importance of creating mutual boundaries between friends or dates. By high school, teachers can focus

on discussing consent in a sexual capacity, discuss how alcohol and other substances that impede judgement affect consent, and help students become comfortable discussing consent.

While nearly everyone knows that sexually violent behavior such as rape is inherently wrong, some people engage in societally normalized behavior that does not respect others' boundaries without realizing that they are causing harm. Katia Santiago-Taylor, the policy director for the Boston Area Rape Crisis Center, explains this situation, stating, "There are a lot of people who cause harm not intending to cause harm, but they don't know. They are ingrained in this rape culture and were raised in a society that gives them that power. By teaching consent and healthy relationships and teaching people about boundaries, we are creating a society that is more likely to use it." Arming students with this information will help increase their safety and reduce the chances that they unwittingly cause others harm.

[The Healthy Youth Act \(S.318/H.673\)](#), a bill currently on the docket in both chambers of the state legislature, would do just that. The bill mandates that schools addressing sex education include information on developing "relationship and communication skills to form healthy, respectful relationships free of violence, coercion, and intimidation and to make healthy decisions about relationships and sexuality, including, but not limited to, affirmative, conscious and voluntary consent to engage in physical or sexual activity." Teaching these skills would allow change to start from the bottom up. As students learn new and valuable tools to recognize and avoid unhealthy and unsafe relationships and build healthy relationships, we can begin to change the culture. It is vital that Massachusetts teach these skills to reduce the chances that students experience coercive relationships and dating or sexual violence.

While the Healthy Youth Act will help to prevent dating violence and abusive partnerships, passing the legislation will not be easy. This is the 11th year the bill has circulated through the legislature. It has been passed by the Senate on multiple occasions and appears primed to do so again, but has repeatedly met resistance in the House. Despite its struggles in the past, this can be the session that the Healthy Youth Act finally becomes law. With new leadership in the House and a renewed spotlight on education due to the governor's proposed budget, this can be the year. We must contact our legislators and encourage them to bring the Healthy Youth Act up for a vote so that we can take a vital step towards eliminating rape culture and protecting students.

Aidan Vogelson is a third year student at Brandeis University studying politics, legal studies, English, and classics.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Stanley,

Our names are Aidan Vogelson and Jesse Qu, and we are Brandeis students deeply concerned about the state of sex education in Massachusetts public schools. Every Massachusetts youth deserves the education they need to make informed decisions about their sexual health and safety. Based on your track record of bills you sponsored and cosponsored, it is clear that the health and safety of Massachusetts youths are a top priority for you. From reading Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of MA's endorsement of you, we also know that you are committed to defending reproductive rights and championing reproductive health. We thank you for all the work you've done for the wellbeing of women and public school students. We recognize that you are very busy, but we ask that you devote a bit of your time to advocating for the health of public school students who are bearing the consequences of inadequate sex education.

"That line from the movie Mean Girls, 'don't have sex because you will get pregnant and die,' is all we knew." These are the words of a former Massachusetts public school student speaking about the poor quality of sex education at her school. Unfortunately, her words are representative of the experiences of many public school students. Most schools that choose to teach sex education base their curriculum on the Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework (MCHCF), which has not been updated since 1999. This framework does not mandate that schools teach students how to avoid sexually transmitted infections (STIs) or unintended pregnancies, how to use contraceptives and condoms, or how to discuss consent. Students have suffered from this, as Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of MA found that young people between the ages of 15 and 24 accounted for roughly 2/3 of all chlamydia cases in 2015. In addition to these deficiencies, the MCHCF does not require schools to provide accurate sex education information for LGBTQ+ youths. Consequently, Massachusetts youths – especially LGBTQ+ youths, who are disproportionately impacted by STIs and sexual violence – lack the information they need to make safe and informed decisions about their sexual activity and relationships.

Fortunately, the Healthy Youth Act (S.318/H.673) provides a solution to these issues. The act requires the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to update the MCHCF and continue to update it at least every ten years. Furthermore, it mandates that schools teaching sex education cover the benefits of abstinence, but also provide information that is age-appropriate, medically accurate, and LGBTQ+ inclusive.

Opponents are concerned that this bill intrudes upon parental control over what their children learn in public

schools regarding sex education. However, the Healthy Youth Act empowers parents and legal guardians by allowing them to withdraw their children from any or all parts of the sex education program and to review program materials beforehand.

Providing Massachusetts students with comprehensive sex education is a matter of public health and safety. It is naïve to think that students will not engage in sexual activity. If students are not given accurate information, they will seek it from misleading or dangerous sources like the internet. The Healthy Youth Act ensures that Massachusetts students have the tools to preserve their well-being. Will you speak to your colleagues on the Joint Committee on Education to vote in favor of the Healthy Youth Act (S.318/H.673)?

Thank you,

Jesse Qu and Aidan Vogelson

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Jesse Qu

On meeting with Emrah Fejzic, Legislative Aide for Representative Andy Vargas

The purpose of this meeting was to learn more about any obstacles or opposition that the Healthy Youth Act may encounter during this legislative session. To start, Aidan briefly discussed the bill facts, including the problem of the outdated MCHCF and how the bill addresses this problem. Aidan then asked for Emrah's thoughts on whether the bill will pass this legislative session, to which Emrah responded that he and Representative Vargas were hopeful but noted that there is much work that still needs to be done regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and the budget. This was helpful for us to know in terms of what legislators' priorities are this session and how that will impact the Healthy Youth Act's legislative path.

I asked whether there was any opposition to the bill that we should be aware of, to which Emrah said that there is nothing really holding this bill back and that constituents in Representative Vargas' district have not opposed the bill. This indicated that outside opposition was not a major obstacle. I followed up with a question about whether there was a conflict between DESE's decision to update the framework and the Healthy Youth Act, something Representative Diggs and his staffer Tom had suggested. In response, Emrah emphasized that the Healthy Youth Act supersedes DESE's framework update.

Additionally, he mentioned that the ROE Act faced a lot of opposition and still passed during the last legislative session. The only difference is that the Healthy Youth Act requires more implementation efforts. This further reinforced how we should not be too concerned with opposition and hinted at potential obstacles the bill may encounter after its passage.

Overall, this meeting was successful. Aidan and I gained a clearer sense of the kinds of obstacles to expect this session as well as a renewed sense of optimism about the Healthy Youth Act passing this legislative session. However, I would have liked to learn more about Representative Vargas' views on the bill even [as] a cosponsor.

Aidan Vogelson

On meeting with Representative Kelly Pease

We went into this meeting with some trepidation because Representative Pease is a Republican, but we were overjoyed to find that he was very receptive to us. We gave our advocacy speech and then provided a detailed account of the bill itself. While Representative Pease had never heard of the bill, he agreed that this was important and said that he saw no reason he would oppose the bill, but was concerned about opposition he might face from conservative voters.

We were able to explain parents' ability to preview the material and remove their children from the program. We also cited a parental advisory board that every district has which would be able to preview and comment upon potential curriculum decisions as well.

This meeting was very fulfilling because I truly felt like an expert. Representative Pease listened intently, took notes, and asked questions throughout. We spoke for about 20 minutes and at the end he said that while he probably would not advocate for the bill, he would almost certainly vote for it. He promised to reach out if he had questions and to update us if he changed his mind, but reiterated that he thought it was a good bill.

While it would have been exciting to get definite and enthusiastic support from him, this meeting made me feel like I was making a difference and it was really satisfying.

■ Next Steps

Now that the Healthy Youth Act has been assigned to the Joint Committee on Education, our next steps will be to 1) maintain correspondence with legislators we have met with and 2) connect with legislators on the committee whom we have yet to speak with and address any questions or concerns they have by making ourselves available as resources. For legislators we have not been able to reach via email, we will contact them via phone call instead to see if that increases our chances of meeting with them.

We will also collect testimonies from former or current Massachusetts public school students who have particularly positive or negative sex education experiences at their schools. The positive experiences can reinforce the importance of high-quality and comprehensive sex education while the negative experiences are a reminder of the many impacts of the outdated framework.

When the bill is voted favorably out of the Joint Committee on Education (and based on our meetings with legislators as well as the bill's legislative history, we have no doubt this will occur), we will advocate for it in the next committee that it arrives in. This will likely be the Joint Committee on Healthcare Financing. Our plan is to speak with the members of that committee and if possible, try to meet with the Speaker of the House, Representative Ronald Mariano, or persuade legislators on the committees to speak with him to 1) underscore the importance of this bill and 2) convince him to bring the bill to the floor for a vote.

Outside of the legislature, we will strengthen our ties with the Healthy Youth Act Coalition and see what we can do to help further their efforts, whether that is by advocating on social media, mobilizing support from Brandeis students, or speaking with concerned constituents. Another one of our goals is to connect with teachers and educators to find out their stances on the bill and assess how the content and implementation of the Healthy Youth Act may impact them. In line with that, we would like to reach out to someone from DESE and learn more about what DESE's updates are and how closely aligned those updates are with the Healthy Youth Act's guidelines.

We also want to ensure that the bill does not lose momentum this legislative session. According to the legislators we have spoken to, there is a high chance that this bill will pass this session. We know that the Senate will pass it again, so we will remain focused on representatives in the House, especially on the Joint Committee on Education, the Joint Committee on Healthcare Financing, and the House Ways and Means Committee, and continue to do everything we can to keep pressure on the committees to vote out the bill favorably. We are confident that both chambers will pass this bill this session.

■ Update

As of October 2021: The Committee on Education reported favorably a new draft of the Healthy Youth Act to the Committee on Senate Ways and Means on July 19, 2021. The new draft is bill S.2495.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.318: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S318

H.673: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H673

Organization or Coalition support:

Planned Parenthood Massachusetts:

plannedparenthood.org/planned-parenthood-massachusetts

NARAL Pro-Choice Massachusetts: prochoicemass.org

Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC): barcc.org

Providing Free Meals in Massachusetts Schools

Providing free breakfast and lunch to all children in Massachusetts public schools, regardless of their family's income

Members of the Project:

Ruby Bevan '22

Abby Turner '21

Sophie Brill Weitz '21



Ruby Bevan



Abby Turner



Sophie Brill Weitz

COVID-19 has revealed and exacerbated the struggle families face accessing basic resources, including food. Right now in Massachusetts, hunger affects more than 1 in 5 households with children in them. But food insecurity has been negatively affecting children long before the pandemic, and unless we act, it will continue long after. Current programs that provide need-based free and reduced-price school meals neglect the 27% of students statewide who are experiencing food insecurity but don't meet the eligibility criteria. By enacting a statewide mandate requiring breakfast and lunch for all students in school, regardless of income or background, bill S.314/H.714 would greatly improve the widespread problem of food insecurity in Massachusetts.

■ The Bill

S.314/H.714: An Act relative to universal school meals

■ Elevator Speech

Hi, thank you so much for taking the time to talk with us about the Universal School Meals bill. My name is Ruby and I'm studying health policy. Hi, I'm Abby and I'm studying legal studies. Hi, my name is Sophie. I'm from Bedford, Mass. and I'm studying education. We are students at Brandeis University and, like you, we want to ensure that children are treated fairly. Imagine the last time you tried to do work on an empty stomach. Could you focus? Were you productive with your stomach growling? Now imagine you're a child trying to learn at school without proper food or nutrition.

COVID-19 has revealed and exacerbated the struggle families face accessing basic resources, including food. Right now in Massachusetts, hunger affects more than one in five households with children. But food insecurity has been negatively affecting children long before the pandemic, and unless we act, it will continue long after. Current programs that provide need-based free and reduced-price school meals neglect the 27% of students statewide who are experiencing food insecurity but don't meet the eligibility criteria.

Fortunately, now is the perfect time to take action and address this pressing issue. There is currently a bill in both the State Senate and House that would provide free breakfast and lunch to *all* students in public schools in Massachusetts, regardless of their family's income. Families would not need to prove eligibility. Nutritious meals for school-aged children should not be a privilege, but a right. Providing free school meals for all would reduce stigma associated with eating school meals and would ensure students are no longer hungry in the classroom.

This legislation maximizes federal funding by increasing participation in existing programs, such as the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP). Any remaining costs would be covered by the state of Massachusetts through the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Therefore, this bill should not and will not be an additional financial burden on individual schools.

The Universal School Meals bill will help ensure that all children can thrive and succeed in the classroom and beyond. We anticipate that this bill will first go to the Committee on Education. We ask that you support H.714/S.314 by speaking to the chairs of the Committee on Education, Senator Lewis and Representative Alice Hanlon Peisch, to request a speedy hearing and favorable report.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

“I remember as a kid having one of those little blue cards. I had to go up and get it punched...every kid in the school knew I was a free and reduced lunch kid! There’s a huge stigma that comes with that, and that can often cause bullying and other issues for that child, so having an equalizer where everyone gets free lunch, that can take away some of that stigma.”

– Darcy Fernandes, Superintendent, Athol-Royalston

“Our school was providing [free] breakfast to students... which then allowed them to focus for the rest of the day... That physical need, when it wasn’t met, would affect students’ attention and their ability to participate positively in our class.... It affected students’ ability to learn and ability to join in the class without this other thing taking the forefront of their minds.”

– a former student teacher in a Boston public school in Allston

“Having taught Brandeis students about food insecurity and solutions to food insecurity, [I know that] school lunch is one of the most powerful ways to access basically all children who face food insecurity. Having universal school meal programs is a huge way to address the issues of stigma that arise when you have to have students sign up specifically and do income-based testing.”

– Dr. Deborah Garnick, Heller School for Social Policy Professor, Brandeis University

■ Op-Ed

Ruby Bevan

Child Hunger: The Hidden Pandemic

Growing up Jewish, I know many members of my family fasted on Yom Kippur. I cannot imagine having to attend school, pay attention, take tests, and do homework during a fast. This is the reality on a regular basis for children who are facing food insecurity. Food insecurity also involves the emotional trauma of not knowing when your next meal will be or where it will come from. A free breakfast and lunch every weekday would have a profoundly positive effect on these food insecure students.

The COVID-19 pandemic has devastated families around the world. For families struggling to make ends meet even before the onset of a global crisis, the effects of this pandemic have been immeasurable. We know that now, more than ever, families in Massachusetts are struggling to provide for their children. Between 2018 and 2020, Massachusetts saw a [102% increase](#) in children living in food insecure households.

The federal government recognizes that the rate of food insecurity is rising in our country, and with the help of our state governments, it has implemented the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA). This act temporarily

allows for free meals for all students (from kindergarten to 12th grade) until [June 30th, 2022](#).

However, this solution is akin to putting a band-aid on a bullet hole because [27%](#) of food insecure Massachusetts students are still ineligible for free or reduced-price school meals. This means that these children face food insecurity every day, but do not meet the income eligibility requirements for a lower-priced school meal.

When the pandemic eventually ends and the free meals students have been receiving end with it, almost one-third of our food insecure students will slip through the cracks. These children struggling with food insecurity who do not qualify for free or reduced-price lunch will be forced to skip meals or go into [debt](#) in order to eat. The hidden pandemic of food insecurity sweeping our country will not end when the COVID-19 pandemic ends. In order to save our kids, we need a better solution.

Permanent implementation of universal school meals is that solution. Providing all children in the state of Massachusetts with a free breakfast and lunch regardless of their family’s income is imperative. According to the CDC, eating school meals improves students’ [health and wellness](#). Research also shows that students’ [development and performance in school](#) is negatively affected by food insecurity. A former public school student teacher in Allston, Mass., describes the children she worked with who came to school hungry: “That physical need, when it wasn’t met, would affect students’ attention and their ability to participate positively in our class.... It affected students’ ability to learn and ability to join in the class.”

Currently, there is a bill circulating in the Massachusetts House and Senate that would provide students with universal school meals. With implementation in the summer of 2022 (right after FFCRA school meal coverage ends), this bill would provide free meals by requiring schools to participate in existing federal programs such as the [Community Eligibility Provision \(CEP\)](#) and [Provision II](#).

If you want to provide all students with an equal opportunity to thrive, call your legislator and tell them to co-sponsor the Universal School Meals bill and to vote it out favorably. You can also visit [feedkidsma.org](#) for more information about the bill and how to support it.

Ruby Bevan is a student at Brandeis University double-majoring in psychology and health: science, society, and policy. She is interested in a career in health policy and was recently accepted into the Heller School’s Master of Public Policy (MPP) program.

Abby Turner

Knowledge Universal School Meals is Power

If a child falls off the monkey bars at recess, nobody asks them if they can afford a band-aid or gauze. If a child falls ill with fever, nobody asks them if they can afford a visit to the school nurse. On the first day of school, do teachers ask children if they can afford desks, pencils, art supplies, or books? Of course not, because the right for children to succeed in this world starts with education. As long as the gift of education becomes conditional, our children cannot be guaranteed a promising future. Knowledge is power, but the power of knowledge cannot sustain itself without proper nourishment and fuel for these young minds. Without proper nutrition, an education is meaningless.

During the battle with COVID-19, we have also suffered an economic downturn. Coupled with students no longer learning in the classroom environment during the pandemic, access to food has significantly decreased because students across the U.S. are unable to rely upon school meals to fulfill their nutritional needs. We want to ensure that once students are back in school, they are getting exactly what they need. These students may be coming from even higher stress and lower resourced environments in the aftermath of this disastrous pandemic.

Twenty percent of kids throughout Massachusetts cannot afford school meals, through no fault of their own. Yet, they inevitably suffer the dire consequences. Food insecurity leads to both educational and emotional insecurity. We can nip the vicious cycle caused by hunger in the bud, right here in Massachusetts.

Universal School Meals is the one-way ticket away from school hunger and towards a better, brighter future. Bills H.714 and S.314 benefit all children from all walks of life.

Too often, financial factors can divide children. By providing two hot meals per day, school breakfast and lunch can finally be the uniter: the equalizer we have been yearning to find. No matter what a child's family income is, they will be eligible. The benefits of this bill are distributed equally along socioeconomic lines. Every child wins, whether wealthy, poor, or anywhere in between.

Much of our well-being depends exclusively on one factor: what we put into our bodies. If our diet is too high or too low in calories, or not properly balanced, our body will respond negatively. A weakened body results in a weakened mind. Nutrition is an art and a science that many adults have not fully mastered. These meals will provide children with the best nutrients possible to remain focused, alert, and sharp throughout their educational journeys. I call on you not only to support passing this bill, but also to promote the access of healthy food to children in schools, food that they may otherwise not be able to afford.

Imagine a world when kids no longer detest school meals! Just kidding. There will probably never be a magical bill that will suddenly cause kids to fully appreciate their school lunches. But maybe Universal School Meals will be the first step in the right direction. Kids, we cannot promise you a delicious, five-course meal in your cafeterias, but we promise your lifestyles will be forever changed.

Abby Turner is a native South Carolinian, and a soon-to-be legislative intern for her U.S. representative in the local congressional office, following her graduation from Brandeis University in May.

Sophie Brill Weitz

No Child Should Go to Class Hungry

You've probably heard the phrase "the pandemic revealed and exacerbated" more times than you care to count. But the truth is that it did bring into sharp focus the struggles of many Massachusetts families to meet the most basic of needs. The pandemic also temporarily led to free school meals for all students. But that federal program, funded through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, [is set to end in June 2022](#). As we look towards a time when the pandemic no longer affects our daily lives, let's ensure that we don't let students return to classrooms hungry. All public school students should permanently receive free breakfast and lunch in school.

The issues our students and schools face are complex. Universal School Meals, a current bill in the Massachusetts State House, would be a simple, impactful step towards fulfilling our responsibility to provide a quality education for every child.

For many K-12 students, the possibility of returning to "normal" feels like it may be just around the corner. But "normal" for many in Massachusetts means going to class hungry. One in five households with children in Massachusetts experience food insecurity; even before the pandemic it was one in 10. Project Bread estimates that [27% of children who experience food insecurity do not qualify for free or reduced-price school meals](#). Now is the time to say enough with "normal." All students deserve access to free meals at school.

We claim to support every student in reaching their full potential. Massachusetts now has the chance to enact legislation that would do just that.

Universal School Meals, also known as bills S.314 and H.714 in the State Senate and House respectively, would provide free breakfast and lunch to all K-12 students in public schools in Massachusetts. As adults we know it's difficult to do our best when we are hungry: we can't focus; we get "hangry." It's even worse for children. I don't need to convince you that children need nutritious food to do their best in the classroom. We should not ask any child to learn on an empty

stomach. Not only do current school meal programs leave out some students who need free meals, they also create stigma for students who do get free meals. No child wants to be separated or labeled based on their family's income.

Who could disagree with feeding children? Opposition to this bill mainly comes down to money. Some funding would come from the federal government by maximizing participation in existing programs. For example, the Community Eligibility Provision (CEP) offers schools with high levels of low-income students additional funding to implement free meals for all at the school level. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education would provide the additional funding needed to reach all students. Yes, there is an initial cost for the state, but we have to ask ourselves if we can afford *not* to make that investment in our children. Public schools don't ask students to pay for books, or desks, or visits to the school nurse. Why should they ask for money when it's time to eat?

Universal School Meals is an investment in the children, and therefore the future, of our state. According to the Food Research and Action Center, food insecurity is linked to costly health problems, which can directly or indirectly cost an estimated \$160 billion in the United States. Access to school meals can [increase academic performance](#) and [lead to lifelong healthy eating habits](#). These effects would positively impact the future economy.

I'm not a nutritionist, a teacher, a policymaker, or an expert on school meals. But you don't need to be to join this fight. [Email your legislators](#). Text your friends and family and let them know about this bill and how they can make their voices heard too. This issue affects us all. I'm a student – an education major – and I'm passionate about education equity. We all have a duty to every student in our state and we recognize that public education is a public good. Whatever your reason for supporting this bill, reach out to your state representative and senator now to make sure they know you care about this issue and that they need to as well.

Sophie Brill Weitz is a senior at Brandeis University, majoring in education studies and triple minoring in social justice & social policy, journalism, and creativity, the arts, & social transformation. Within her education coursework, she has a concentration in equity and social change. She is currently a Teaching Fellow for Breakthrough Greater Boston's after-school program. She's from Bedford, Mass.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett:

My name is Abby Turner and I am writing to you along with my two colleagues, Sophie Brill Weitz and Ruby Bevan. We are currently students at Brandeis University in Waltham, and Sophie is a Massachusetts voter from Bedford. Collectively, our fields of study include: legal studies, health policy, and education. Like you, we want to support the health and wellbeing of all students in our schools and make sure that everyone has equal access to a quality education.

This correspondence seeks to underscore the importance of the Universal School Meals bill and to urge you to sign onto its list of cosponsors. Given your record as a former commissioner on the National Education Commission on Time and Learning and your demonstrated dedication to children and their education, we know we can count on you to support this bill. S.314: "An Act relative to universal school meals," as proposed by Senator DiDomenico, is crucial to the wellbeing of students across the state. Its success in the legislative process is promising, but not guaranteed without supporters like yourself.

The rate of hunger among households with children in Massachusetts increased by 102% between 2018 and 2020. As a result, children in schools are deprived of basic nutritional needs that are essential for their academic success and access to equal opportunity. For those who may argue that this bill is unnecessary because of existing need-based free and reduced-price school meal programs, and suggest it would just provide free meals to students who can afford to pay full price, it is important to remember that 27% of students statewide who are food insecure are currently ineligible for free or reduced-price school meals. Under the current system, children who need help paying for meals are treated differently, and this difference causes stigma that can have a profound effect on a child's experience at school.

The statistics are alarming. The solution is universal school meals. Enacting a statewide mandate requiring free breakfast and lunch for all students in school, regardless of income or background, would improve the widespread problem of food insecurity. The stigma children face would also be eliminated.

The Joint Committee on Education is currently considering this bill and we expect it to go to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means next. As you sit on the latter, and your colleagues are on both committees, we ask you to write a favorable letter to Chairman Rodrigues and Chairman Lewis in support of S.314.

Sincerely,

Abby Turner, Ruby Bevan, and Sophie Brill Weitz

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Ruby Bevan

On meeting with Elizabeth Leiwant, Research Analyst for the Joint Committee on Education

We met with Elizabeth Leiwant, a research analyst with the Joint Committee on Education and a member of the Committee's staff who oversees issues related to school nutrition. We met via Zoom. During the meeting, she emphasized her past experiences as a schoolteacher and a school administrator. This meeting was brief, but she seemed very supportive of the bill, although a little concerned about the cost. She asked if we knew how many of the 27% of food-insecure children who do not qualify for free or reduced-price lunch do not qualify for CEP. We got this 27% number from the Feed Kids Coalition. We did not have data available on what she was asking about, but said we would try and find out if that research existed. We sent a thank you email after our meeting with the promise to follow up on that question.

Abby Turner

On meeting with Dana Mascari, Legislative Aide to Senator John Cronin

While we presented our bill to [Dana Mascari] listened closely. At the end, she asked a few questions regarding the request for more resources, particularly covering the cost analysis so that she could report to the Senator. We cited Project Bread as the coalition we were working with closely as well as some data provided on their website. Dropping the link in the chat, we also promised to follow up and pass along any further information that could be helpful to Senator Cronin's office. [Dana Mascari] informed us that she will be briefing the Senator on the bill in the next few days, and will utilize all of the information that we provided.

As Dana thanked us, she told us that the part I mentioned in regard to the stigma truly resonated with her [as a former public school student]... and that she believes the Senator will be incredibly understanding of this need. She also told us that he has previously been supportive of similar measures, such as universal pre-kindergarten education. Finally, we attached our storybook via email, encouraging her to share it with both Senator Cronin and other relevant contacts.

I thought the meeting couldn't have possibly gone better. We connected with Dana on both a personal and professional basis, and our message seemed to definitely get through to her. Though it may have been more helpful if we had more resources on cost analyses to provide in the moment, she appeared to remain on board with the bill regardless. We knew to come prepared in the future with every resource, to cover all bases.

Sophie Brill Weitz

On meeting with Dennis Burke, Legislative Director for Senator Jason Lewis

It was great to connect with [Dennis Burke]. He was very friendly so that made it more comfortable. Although we were not really able to lobby him because he and the Senator were already strong supporters, I still think it was a worthwhile meeting. I was reassured to know that the Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Education was such a strong supporter. In my research on Senator Lewis before the meeting, I learned that he went to public schools, has a focus within education policy on financing, equity, and increasing economic opportunity, believes healthcare is a human right, and his wife is a middle school science teacher. Therefore, I was prepared to show how this bill aligned with his values but I also wasn't surprised to learn of his strong support.

On meeting with Legislative Director Lauren Matteodo and District Aide Ali Reza-Reyes, office of Senator Adam Gomez

On April 15th, we met on Microsoft Teams with Senator Adam Gomez's Legislative Director Lauren Matteodo and District Aide Ali Reza-Reyes. Senator Gomez is already a cosponsor and we wanted to meet with him because he is on the Joint Committee on Education. Both of the staffers we met with were very friendly and I feel like we were able to make a connection with them. We started with our elevator speech, as always, and then were also able to answer some questions for them. They knew about the bill and that Senator Gomez supported it, but did not seem to know a great deal about the details. They said they would tell Senator Gomez about our meeting, so I hope that prompts him to become an even stronger supporter of the bill, and hopefully he will talk to the other members of his committee about it as well.

■ Next Steps

If we were to continue working on this bill, we would want to continue to meet with legislators, specifically those on the Ways and Means Committee. That committee is likely where this bill will go next. There is already extensive support in the Joint Committee on Education, but we know that support in the Ways and Means Committee will be particularly important because the major concerns for this bill are usually cost-related. We would continue explaining to legislators why that investment is worthwhile and necessary. In order to best lobby in the Ways and Means Committee, we would like to know more about where the money for this bill could come from and how much legislators predict it would ultimately cost. We would continue to educate ourselves on the budget and funding specifics for this bill as they become available.

As we said in our "Present and Defend" presentation,

Victoria Martins of Project Bread informed us that we are at 99 co-sponsors, one away from the coalition’s goal of 100. We would keep in touch with the legislators and staffers who we’ve met with who haven’t yet cosponsored this bill and urge them to do so. Sharing our storybook, videos, and op-eds with legislators as well as continuing Zoom meetings with them would be our goal. Staying connected with the Feed Kids MA Coalition, as we have for this entire semester, and following their lead would be another goal.

Two implementation issues we have discussed is that even if the bill is passed and we successfully provide school meals to all public school students in the state, the quality and cultural responsiveness of school meals could still be improved to truly ensure that every child is getting the food that they need. Even if food is available to kids, if it isn’t food they like, if it doesn’t taste good, or if it doesn’t fit into the cultural norms and expectations of the community in which it is being served, then we are not serving our kids to the best of our ability. The former Boston public schools student teacher we interviewed for our storybook, first brought these issues to our attention, and we think that these are two of the most salient implementation issues currently facing the bill. This issue could also be considered a problem with the bill itself, although we think that these changes can be made later, after the most important part of providing the meals to all students is accomplished.

In terms of future advocacy collaborations, we would love to talk to more students, parents, and families directly affected by this bill. At the first Feed Kids Coalition meeting we attended, we heard testimony from a single mother facing food insecurity and it was extremely powerful. This type of testimony would be very valuable when talking to legislators. Hearing from the people whom this bill impacts the most would be one of the most effective ways to communicate our message and the necessity of school meals for all.

■ Update

As of October 2021: The bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Education, where it has been since March 29, 2021.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website)

S.314: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S314

H.714: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H714

Organization or Coalition support

Project Bread: projectbread.org

Promoting Safer and More Hygienic Conditions for Drug Use

Establishing supervised consumption sites to promote the health and safety of drug users

Members of the Project:

[Jason Lin '21](#)

[Valérie Pierre-Louis '21](#)

Bill S.1272/H.2088 will establish at least two supervised consumption sites under a 10-year pilot program overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health. In these facilities, individuals can bring in their controlled substances and use them under the supervision of medical professionals. Supervised consumption sites in other countries have shown promising and consistent results, including reducing overdose deaths, public drug use, and crime rates while increasing the number of individuals initiating treatment for substance use disorders.

■ The Bill

S.1272/H.2088: An Act relative to preventing overdose deaths and increasing access to treatment

■ Elevator Speech

Jason: My name is Jason Lin (and my name is Valérie Pierre-Louis). We are public policy students with a passion for social and health policy. It would mean a lot to us if you could give us one minute to introduce you to this bill that could help change and save lives in Massachusetts.

Valérie: There are people who struggle every day from opioid addiction; in 2019, there were 1,967 confirmed opioid-related overdose deaths, and the problem has only worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic as quarantines have led to a higher rate of unsupervised injections. Massachusetts is one of the top five states with the most opioid overdose deaths in the country. We have been putting so much effort into ending the pandemic, that sometimes we forget there are multiple epidemics still happening.

Jason: Bill S.1272/H.2088 will permit a 10-year pilot program for supervised consumption sites, where individuals can bring in their controlled substances and use them under medical supervision. Supervised consumption sites in other countries have shown promising and consistent results, including reducing overdose deaths, public drug use, and crime rates, while increasing the number of individuals initiating treatment for substance use disorders.

Valérie: We need this bill to pass now so we can start saving lives. We really hope to have you on board with us. You can help by testifying when the bill has a hearing, or by rallying for support among your colleagues. Your support and actions are essential for us to improve our health environment successfully. Thank you for your valuable time and consideration.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

“I would feel better if the people that I know and love, as well as the people that I’ve met in my profession, had a place to go that could be a resource for them to get better, as well as keep them alive if they are in this physical state of needing a drug.”

– Cassandra Campbell, Massachusetts Voter, Clinical Stabilization Services (CSS)

“The longer we wait, the more people will die!”

– Somerville Mayor Joseph Curtatone

■ Op-Ed

Jason Lin

OP-ED: Illegality vs. Saving Lives: Is it Really That Hard to Choose?

The fact is: The longer we take to decide, the more people will die.

The opioid epidemic in the United States started in the 1990s, when we had limited knowledge about how addicting opioid pain relievers can be. Three decades later, the combination of overprescribed opioids and illegal synthetic opioids unmonitored in our community is still threatening our health environment. The opioid epidemic has escalated in Massachusetts, killing 2,000 people per year, or 5.5 people every day.

So, who do we blame for all these deaths?

The majority of opioid-related overdose deaths are caused by illicitly manufactured fentanyl that is made in a lab and sold on illegal drug markets. It is often mixed with heroin and/or other drugs to enhance their effects. So we can put the blame on criminals who manufacture these drugs and sell them for profit, but does blaming bad people ever bring us anywhere in this world?

Truthfully, it is policymakers and legislators who are at fault. Those individuals with the power to cause changes within the community refuse to act on the epidemic. Most of them respond with excuses like “the opioid epidemic is a controversial societal problem that does not have simple solutions.” They treat all opioid users like criminals, so instead of providing healthcare and sources of rehabilitation, law enforcement arrests these individuals who are suffering from substance use disorder.

There is a solution to the opioid epidemic: supervised consumption sites. Supervised consumption sites are locations where individuals can bring in their opioids and administer them in a sanitized and safer environment. At the same time, health professionals monitor them to make sure they do not overdose. Narcan would be immediately available for the health professionals to administer if an overdose does happen. Clean needles are also provided at supervised

consumption sites to reduce the spreading of bloodborne infectious diseases like HIV and hepatitis C.

If we start looking at the facts and data from other countries that have implemented supervised consumption sites into their communities, we see many improvements in their health environment. For example, a study found the implementation of supervised consumption sites in Vancouver, Canada has shown great improvement in the community health environment by reducing the opioid-related overdose death rate, public drug use, the HIV/hepatitis C infection rate, and the crime rate. Furthermore, supervised consumption improves the community environment as well as increases the number of patients that initiate the rehabilitation process.

People passionate about improving their community environment must keep on fighting to legalize supervised consumption sites in Massachusetts. I am eager for Massachusetts legislators to open their eyes and see how many people are dying from opioid overdoses. The sooner they stop stigmatizing individuals with illegal drugs and start accepting them as patients, the sooner we can start saving lives. If you want to take action and start saving lives, contact your local legislators to encourage them to cosponsor bill S.1272/H.2088.

Valérie Pierre-Louis

Substance users deserve quality of life and protection.

We are part of their safety and recovery. Normalize protecting their lives.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have begun to understand our collective duty to preserve and save lives. Even our smallest interactions have proven to be helpful – from wearing masks to maintaining a six-foot distance from each other, small gestures help to keep each other safe. Yet as this pandemic takes its course, other issues that have long needed our intervention have been highlighted. Among these is substance use in Massachusetts. The increased isolation caused by COVID-19 has caused an aggravated mental health situation in Massachusetts. In turn, this has exacerbated the rates of substance use in the state. Furthermore, drug abuse can put users at higher risk for contracting COVID-19.

Many of us are lucky to be free of the burdens of substance use disorders. While substance abuse is a destructive and difficult experience, substance abuse impacts the lives of those who are linked to substance users, too. Families are deeply affected by substance users who struggle with addiction. This can even affect the professional lives of next of kin as well as that of friends close to an individual with a substance use disorder. Substance use disorders are witnessed in secrecy by family members who might attempt to shelter and supervise substance users for their safety. Any

user can be one injection away from death. Overdose death is not the only risk for substance users: they are at a high risk of contracting intravenously transmitted diseases such as Hepatitis C and HIV due to the multiple uses of needles and needle sharing.

These are many reasons we must work on opening supervised consumption sites (SCS) in Massachusetts. These sites are medically supervised facilities where substance users can more safely consume substances, dispose of used needles and get sterile needles, and get guidance and support about recovery from substance use disorders. Needle exchange programs at SCS decrease the risk of contracting diseases from used needles. Supervised consumption sites are not new and already exist in a few other countries such as in Canada. In Vancouver, for example, SCS have statistically been proven to reduce overdose death rates and to encourage substance users to seek professional help for recovery.

The narrative for substance use has long been vilified and has allowed many to dehumanize those under the grip of substance use disorders. This has been amplified by the “not in my backyard” rhetoric, demonizing substance use rather than understanding its impact. We must learn that addiction is not a choice, but rather a consequence of multiple factors including chronic poverty, mental illness, and systemic homelessness. These are not the only factors that lead to substance abuse, and forgetting this can be detrimental to saving lives. Substance use disorders are often disregarded in the context of health and mental health as an individual affliction, which only serves to aggravate the ongoing epidemic in Massachusetts. We must question ourselves as to why we have allowed people suffering from substance use disorder to be overlooked.

We must value preserving their lives. Enough is enough. As we continue managing in this pandemic, growing awareness of our collective responsibility towards substance users is important. Support the Massachusetts Senate Bill S.1272 to establish a 10-year pilot program for supervised consumption sites. Protect Massachusetts and protect all people, not just the few we choose to care for.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

My name is Jason Lin, and I am writing to you along with Valérie Pierre-Louis. We are public health students at Brandeis University. We would like to start by thanking you for your service for our community, especially during such an unprecedented time.

Valérie and I are both passionate about public health and would like to assist you in keeping our community safe. Ever since opioid prescriptions became available in the early 1990s, the number of opioid-related overdose deaths has increased

exponentially. Massachusetts went from 379 overdose deaths in 2000 to 1,974 in 2018, making it the state with the fifth highest rate of opioid-related overdoses.

Bills S.1272/H.2088, “An Act relative to preventing overdose deaths and increasing access to treatment,” is a promising solution to the opioid epidemic. The bill will permit supervised consumption sites (SCS) to operate in the state of Massachusetts under a 10-year pilot program which will be overseen by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health.

Supervised consumption sites are clinics where individuals can bring in substances and use them under medical supervision in a safer, sanitized environment. SCS have proven to improve public health in other countries by reducing overdose rates and providing clean needles to prevent the spread of bloodborne diseases such as HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B and C.

Opponents of this bill would argue that these facilities would increase crime rates, public drug use, and drug trafficking. However, there are multiple studies with data that have already proven supervised consumption sites decrease crime rate, public drug use, and drug trafficking. Not only do SCS improve public health, but another study finds that \$2.33 is generated in savings when a dollar is spent on a supervised consumption site.

If you could show support for this bill, in addition to improving public health and saving money, you will gain trust and support from families affected by the opioid epidemic.

Our ask is simple. Multiple senators have already shown their support of the bill by cosponsoring it. We ask you to consider becoming a cosponsor for this bill as well. We truly believe this bill will greatly benefit the community. Additionally, we hope you can provide us with any resources or contacts of individuals that could help us with supporting the bill. As graduating seniors and current Waltham residents, we would like to help you improve our community environment and leave it better than we found it.

Sincerely,

Jason Lin and Valérie Pierre-Louis

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Jason Lin

On meeting with Cassandra Campbell

The first meeting we had was with Cassandra Campbell, a Massachusetts voter who has work experience in a methadone clinic. It was a wonderful learning experience to hear stories from an individual who has helped many patients dealing with opioid addiction. We were able to understand further how a supervised consumption site would operate. The biggest lesson I learned from Cassandra was that individuals

with opioid addiction would obtain (legally or illegally) and consume opioids no matter what. Addiction is a severe mental disorder; if these patients cannot help themselves, we must lend our helping hands before it is too late.

Cassandra also mentioned that supervised consumption sites are much more than just clinics that save lives; they are also great savings investments. It was her comment about saving money that inspired me to research about financial benefits that supervised consumption sites can bring. The result of my findings made a significant contribution to our list of arguments.

Valérie Pierre-Louis

On meeting with Cassandra Campbell

Our first meeting was [on Zoom] with Cassandra Campbell. She has worked closely with people suffering from substance use disorders, in particular in methadone clinics in Massachusetts. In fact, most of her work has allowed her to encounter many people who also work in this field and are versed in substance use discourse. ... We first asked her about her educational and professional background for context. This meeting was very insightful because it showed us that many people are willing to protect those suffering from substance use disorders. ... She leaned in favor of SCS establishment in Massachusetts, especially considering that people are even more alone and isolated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, she shared with us her opinion on the lack of advocacy for substance use safety in Massachusetts. She stressed the importance of collective responsibility to protect substance users.

By emphasizing the amount of people and institutions that are currently needed by substance users, she enlightened us about how supervised consumption sites are an essential part of this crisis management. Cassandra was more than willing to share with us some other contacts who would know more about the fiscal and political implications of SCS....

■ Update

As of October 2021: The bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery, where it has been since March 29, 2021.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website)

S.1272: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/SD1358

H.2088: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/HD3167

Organization or Coalition support

SIFMA Now!: sifmanow.org



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