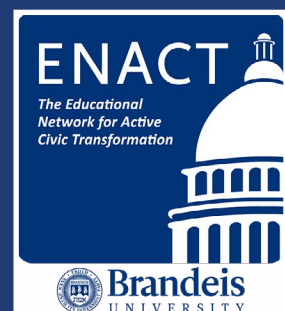


Advocacy for Policy Change



**Brandeis Students Work to Reform
Massachusetts Law**

Spring 2024



Advocacy for Policy Change is a part of a national program, ENACT: The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation. ENACT was made possible by a generous gift from ENACT Advisory Council Member and former Ethics Center International Advisory Board Member Norbert Weissberg and his wife, former Ethics Center Board Member Judith Schneider. In spring of 2019 ENACT was awarded a multi-year grant from the Teagle Foundation's "Education for American Civic Life" 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.enactnetwork.org

To learn about ENACT: The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation, and to sign up for updates, visit www.enactnetwork.org

Senior Editor: Melissa Stimell

Managing Editor: David J. Weinstein

Editorial Assistant: Clay Napurano '24

Photos:

Cover and page 1: istockphoto.com

Page 2: Mike Lovett

Page 6 (left): Michael Hauer

Page 6 (right): courtesy *Public Service Review*

Inside cover, page 4, and page 62: David J. Weinstein

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Introduction

Melissa Stimell

Director

ENACT: The Educational Network
for Active Civic Transformation
Professor of the Practice in Legal
Studies

Chair, Social Justice and Social
Policy Program

Brandeis University



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 and advocate for state legislative change.

“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 2024, Brandeis anointed 24 citizen advocates for such issues as food insecurity, climate change, gun violence prevention, healthcare access, 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 seven.) This anthology contains excerpts from these assignments, updates on the bills, and links to more information on the relevant issues or organizations.

Once again, I must thank several people whose support has been critical to the program’s success. This course would not exist without the support of Professor Emeritus Richard Gaskins, my mentor and the former director of the Legal Studies Program. He and Daniel Terris, former director of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life, took the kernel of a unique idea and made it a reality. Former Ethics Center Board member and former Massachusetts State Representative Jay Kaufman ’68, MA ’73 helped me to create a course worthy of Brandeis University. Massachusetts State Senator Becca Rausch ’01 and her staff have been invaluable: hosting us at the State House, speaking to the class, and making introductions to her fellow legislators. An exceptional list of teaching assistants ensures that the course runs smoothly each year. This year’s TAs, Emily Thoman and Casey Heely, were indispensable.

“Advocacy for Policy Change” is part of a national program based at Brandeis University called ENACT: The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation. 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 Assistant Director of ENACT, David Weinstein, we have developed a robust national network of faculty, students and alumni that includes an online platform for resource sharing and collaboration. Charlotte Powley, the Assistant Director of Research, continues to assess ENACT’s success. ENACT Faculty Fellows and students in public and private universities, four-year and two-year colleges, a military academy, HBCUs, HSIs and a TCU, are collaborating and supporting each other in the ENACT courses and in their careers.

ENACT’s development and growth was supported by a generous multi-year commitment from Norbert Weisberg and his wife Judith Schneider, former advisory board members to the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life. 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 expand across the country. 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 the continued growth of ENACT. For more about ENACT see brandeis.edu/enact.

Melissa Stimell
Director, ENACT: The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation
Professor of the Practice in Legal Studies
Chair, Social Justice and Social Policy Program
Brandeis University

On Advocacy and Democracy

Jay Kaufman, '68, MA '73
ENACT Distinguished
Legislative Mentor



Representative Kaufman leads Brandeis ENACT students on a tour of the Massachusetts State House in 2024.

Democracy demands engagement. Being informed and struggling with the issues of the day in the public square is every citizen's civil right and every citizen's civic responsibility. This is the secret sauce, the fundamental principle at the heart of democracy and democratic governance. We, the people, are the heartbeat of a vital and vibrant democracy. It works best when we engage as advocates for the causes that matter. We are the authors of democracy's successes as well as its failures.

So, what is effective advocacy? Here are a few thoughts based on my 24 years serving in the Massachusetts House of Representatives, hearing from advocates and lobbyists on issues large and small.

First: you matter.

I was struck – and disappointed – by how few people actually took the time to offer thoughts on the issues of the day. You get points for just showing up.

That said, having good data and making a compelling case are important, but these speak to the mind. If you want to have impact, you need to speak from and to the heart – from your heart and to the heart of the person in front of you.

Whether you're addressing a legislator, a governor, a president, or a staff member, let them know that you care and why you care. What about the issue you're addressing is personal? How does it affect you or a family member? What moves you?

Second: a moral compass is good, but don't forget to navigate.

If you are engaging with legislators and other government officials, know that their ethics requires them to make progress, not necessarily embrace your idea of the perfect. In public life, one of the cardinal sins is making the good the enemy of the perfect.

In Steven Spielberg's brilliant movie "Lincoln," we see President Lincoln in conversation in the White House cellar with Congressman Thaddeus Stevens. In Tony Kushner's script, Stevens attacks Lincoln for what he regards as Lincoln's equivocation on the issue of slavery, accusing him of lacking a moral compass.

I carry a copy of the words Kushner puts in Lincoln's voice in response:

A compass, I learned when I was surveying, it'll point you True North from where you're standing, but it's got no advice about the swamps and deserts and chasms that you'll encounter along the way. If in pursuit of your destination, you plunge ahead, heedless of obstacles, and achieve nothing more than to sink in a swamp, what's the use of knowing True North?

I learned pretty much the same lesson from a modern Congressional bright light, Barney Frank, who served as a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Massachusetts from 1981 to 2013. Congressman Frank offered that, if you're a preacher or an advocate, your job is to stand on the mountaintop, hold to your principles, and speak truth to power. If, on the other hand, you're in public office, your job is to advance the causes you care about as far as you can. Some progress is better than no progress. But, if all you're doing is speaking out on the mountaintop and not doing the hard work of making progress, you're acting unethically.

Unethically. This word struck me when I first heard him say it and strikes me still as both insightful and important. Smart and effective advocacy entails knowing and accepting that the ethics of advocacy and the ethics of governing are related, but not identical.

Third: never underestimate the power of inaction.

Given the deliberative nature of democratic governments, watching the legislature in action is often to see inaction. Sadly, in my 24 years in the legislature, I saw critical questions unaddressed and important actions left untaken. Fixing our schools? What's the rush? Addressing climate change? No hurry! Amending our tax laws to eliminate, or at least reduce, inequities? Maybe next year.

Advocates engage with issues of importance to them and are often forced to confront that their sense of the importance of an issue isn't shared in the halls of power. Or at least it isn't shared enough to overcome the instinct to take it slow, if at all.

Advocating for a bill is the work of many sessions and many years. It is rarely quick. It requires persistence and resilience.

This nation's founders were used to being confronted by new edicts from London, not knowing what might be coming next. To avoid this, they prayed at the altar of division and deliberation. There were to be debates and compromises, and then a repeat process of debates and compromises, and then yet more debate and compromise. While this layering was a good antidote to the rule of George III, it resulted in a system that lends itself best to inaction, caution, or incremental change. Our system of governance is not set up for quick turns, even when they are needed.

I know of only one instance in which I was party to a giant leap. Equal marriage was unimaginable three decades ago. Yet, starting with a decision of the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court and followed by legislative action (first in Massachusetts and then elsewhere), it has become the law of the land within one generation. Arguably the most basic unit of social organization, the family, has dramatic new meaning today, thousands of years of history and all of our cultural traditions notwithstanding.

This is stunning. And it stands alone. Would that climate change, our history of racial prejudice, or the large and threatening gap between the poor and the wealthy could be addressed so well and so rapidly.

Fourth: know the opposition.

While it is necessary, appropriate, and even a sacred calling to honor your ideas, ideals, and convictions, don't allow loyalty to leave you inattentive to those with very different ideas, values, or perspectives. Know the opposition and know it well.

Know how they feel, what they think, and appreciate that their convictions may be as deep as yours. It is easy to be devoted to your cause and see it as the true way, the only way. Failure to notice that others may not share your ideas or

enthusiasm may leave you vulnerable to counter arguments and attacks for which you are unprepared.

There's an old adage that applies here: keep your friends close and your enemies closer. The advocates and lobbyists I appreciated most during my time as a legislator were those who could – and did – make the case of their opponents, and then show me their weaknesses, or at least provide me with a way to understand that opposition.

Last, but not least: take care.

The work of advocacy and active citizenship is challenging. The forces of opposition, delay, and defeat are weighing on you all the time. Some of your allies will disappoint you. What some call victory you may see as surrender, an unacceptable compromise. It is easy to get disheartened.

You need to be prepared for a sustained effort, and there are two essential keys to your stamina and effectiveness: partners and sanctuary.

Advocacy and citizen engagement are team sports. You need allies to help you make the case and share your conviction. You also need confidantes who will speak to you frankly, offering encouragement and criticism as needed. Allies are with you for the cause. Confidantes are with you for you.

And you need a place to go to think, relax, renew and replenish yourself. This can be taking time to go to a concert, to read a book, to visit a museum, to pray, to play. It matters not what you do but it matters absolutely that you do. The fight can be draining, and you need to recoup and come back strong. You need that, and we all need you in full strength doing your share in this grand experiment we call democracy.

A final thought:

Just over a year from now, on July 4, 2026, we'll celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence and the formal launch of our grand experiment in democratic governance. We knew then – and know now – that eternal vigilance is the price we pay for liberty. We were – and still are – in search of a more perfect union. It falls to those of us who have studied and understand advocacy to lead us in these uncertain times. Let's get to it.

Jay Kaufman '68, MA '73 serves as ENACT's Distinguished Legislative Mentor. He is an essayist, writing about public life and leadership in these challenging times. He served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1995 through 2018, and founded Beacon Leadership Collaborative, a non-profit providing leadership education, mentoring, and professional development for those in and aspiring to public life. The full version of this essay can be found at brandeis.edu/enact/news-updates/jay-kaufman-on-advocacy-and-democracy-spring24.html.

ENACT's National Network

David Weinstein

Assistant Director

ENACT: The Educational Network
for Active Civic Transformation



“**A**dvocacy for Policy Change” students not only enroll in a course; they join a national network of students, alumni and faculty fellows from ENACT courses across the country.

I have the privilege to direct the ENACT Student Delegates program. ENACT Student Delegates foster civic engagement on their college campus and interact with ENACT Ambassadors (student representatives from ENACT courses), students and alumni around the country. In addition, Student Delegates mentor and collaborate with members of campus clubs to help them become more effective citizen advocates at the state legislative level.

In the 2023-24 academic year both ENACT Student Delegates, Lucca Raabe '23 and Vishni Samaraweera '23, joined by ENACT Student Delegate Mentor Elaina Pevide '20 visited ENACT courses across the United States via Zoom and “Advocacy for Policy Change” at their alma mater in person. They had lively conversations with students about networking opportunities, career paths in policy and government, and the resources accessible to ENACT students on enactnetwork.org.

In the 2024-25 academic year, Elaina and Vishni will continue to serve ENACT as ENACT Student Delegate Mentors, guiding the two newest Student Delegates, whose work you can find in this anthology: Clay Napurano '24 and Alaina Vermilya '24. Read more about the ENACT Student Delegates here: brandeis.edu/ethics/enact/people/studentdelegates. I am excited to work with them as they follow in the footsteps of the many other former ENACT Student Delegates!

This year ENACT's national impact was highlighted in the spring 2024 issue of the journal *Public Service Review* (Volume 5, Issue 1), which exclusively features ENACT.

Published by the Stennis Center for Public Service, a bipartisan legislative branch agency created by Congress in 1988 to promote and strengthen the highest ideals of public service in America, this journal is distributed to members of Congress, universities and colleges, and public servants in local, state, and federal government entities across the United States.

In the special issue of *Public Service Review*:

- I share an overview of the ENACT program.
- **Elaina, Vishni**, and fellow Brandeis alum **Ravi Simon '19** write about their experiences in “Advocacy for Policy Change” and the lessons they carry with them from ENACT.
- Randolph-Macon College student **Wesley Gerschick** writes about what he learned from advocating at the Virginia General Assembly as a student in Virginia Faculty Fellow **Richard Meagher's** ENACT class.
- ENACT Faculty Fellow **Lynne Chandler-Garcia** of the United States Air Force Academy shares her experience teaching an ENACT course, and the considerations involved in teaching about legislative advocacy at a military academy.



- **Massachusetts State Senator Becca Rausch (Brandeis '01)** is interviewed by Brandeis ENACT students **Dalia Moran '24** and **Arianna Jackson '25** about her commitment to ENACT.
- ENACT Faculty Fellow **Jennifer Seelig** is interviewed by University of Utah ENACT student **Tomas Cruz Villalvazo** about her experience teaching an ENACT course.
- **Maine State Representative Ambureen Rana** is interviewed by **Julian Ober**, an alum of Faculty Fellow **Rob Glover's** University of Maine ENACT course.

We deeply appreciate Brian Pugh, Executive Director of the Stennis Center and the ENACT Faculty Fellow for the state of Mississippi for this opportunity to share the power of the ENACT model with a wider audience of policymakers, scholars, public servants and students across the United States. Read the special issue of *Public Service Review* here: stennis.gov/public-service-review-spring-2024-2.

Thank you to everyone who supported our Brandeis ENACT students and the national ENACT network in the 2023-24 academic year. We invite you to reach out and explore more ENACT resources at enactnetwork.org!

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 2023. 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 analysis containing facts and figures of the bill 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 April 16, 2024, students gave brief oral presentations of their legislative advocacy projects and responded to questions from audience members.

Increasing Access to Menstrual Products in Prisons, Homeless Shelters, and Public Schools

Kristiana Lapierre '24
Alaina Vermilya '24



Kristiana Lapierre and Alaina Vermilya

S.2491/H.534, “An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products” aims to make menstrual products free and available in all Massachusetts public schools, prisons, and shelters. It defines disposable menstrual products as “products used by a menstruating individual including, but not limited to, sanitary napkins, tampons and underwear liners.” It defines a menstruating individual as “a person who menstruates.”

■ The Bill

S.2491/H.534: An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products (“The I AM Bill”)

■ Elevator Speech

K: My name is Kristianna Lapierre and my name is Alaina Vermilya, and we are both seniors at Brandeis University studying sociology and residents of Waltham, Massachusetts. As a result of our commitment to social justice, we believe that everyone has the right to be able to access basic necessities and cost should not keep us from doing so.

A: Massachusetts public schools, shelters, and prisons do not provide enough menstrual products to meet the needs of those requesting them. This disrupts crucial learning in school and one’s ability to maintain one’s health with dignity. In fact, according to MassNOW, 25% of responding shelters do not provide menstrual products and pads and tampons are some of the most expensive items sold in Massachusetts prisons commissaries. Additionally, 56% of school nurses observe students missing class to obtain menstrual products.

K: The I Am Bill, House Bill 534, would be the state’s first policy prioritizing menstruators and their needs. It would require all public schools, shelters, and prisons to provide menstrual products to all menstruators at no charge, ensuring everyone’s most basic needs are met as well as decreasing stigma and shame around menstruation in the commonwealth. When we go into public spaces and bathrooms, we aren’t expected to bring in our own toilet paper and soap, so why should we expect that from menstruators?

A: As a menstruator, my family and I spend over \$200 per year on menstrual products, and we are privileged to be in a position to be able to access products, but I know that this is not the case for all of my peers. Massachusetts prides itself on being a leader in healthcare and reproductive rights. To ensure that we truly are a leader, we need to pass this bill. Menstrual equity is essential. Will you vote the I AM Bill favorably out of the House Ways and Means Committee this session and garner support among your colleagues?

■ Excerpts from Storybook

The I AM Bill

An Act to Increase Access to Menstrual Products
S. 2491 / H. 534

What does the I AM Bill do?

The I AM Bill would require that free menstrual products be provided to all menstruators in public schools, shelters, and prisons throughout MA.

The Problem:

- MA schools do not provide enough menstrual products to meet the need of those requesting them, greatly impacting student attendance
- According to a Mass NOW survey, 25% of responding shelters do not provide menstrual products
- Pads and Tampons remain some of the most expensive items sold at MA prison commissaries

56%
of school nurses
reported observing
students missing
class to obtain
menstrual products
www.mmecoalition.com



When asked about what impact free products would have, Bindman says: "period products are deemed a necessity but they're also kind of considered a luxury because you have to pay for them."

—Rachel Bindman, Alum of Newton Public Schools

Help MA advance menstrual equity by passing the I AM Bill!



"I would do Go Fund Me campaigns just to get notebooks. It hit me that teachers and nurses were going into their own pockets to pay for period products. This is something that should just be offered for free."

—Dr. Charlotte Powley, PhD, MPH, M.Ed., a former teacher who often paid for menstrual products for her students out of pocket.

The I AM Bill is unique, Dr. Powley reported, because it includes schools, shelters, and prisons.

"It says, 'here is what we need collectively. We are not going to put the needs of one group over another.'"

BE A CHAMPION FOR MENSTRUAL EQUITY

- Scan the code/visit mmecoalition.com to learn more about S.2491/H.534
- Join the Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition



& help bring the I AM Bill to a vote in the House Ways and Means Committee!

■ Op-Ed

Kristiana Lapierre

Massachusetts Must Do Better: Menstrual Equity & the I AM Bill

Imagine you're sitting at a high school graduation ceremony awaiting your turn to cross the stage and receive your diploma when a familiar and unsettling feeling washes over you – your period starting.

You only have a few moments before you're expected to stand up in front of hundreds of people, risking leaving a bright red stain on your chair and gown. You panic as you scan the room for a solution. But alas, nobody around you has a spare tampon on them and no bathrooms nearby have products either. You know that the bathroom will definitely have toilet paper so you could wad up some 1-ply toilet paper to use during the ceremony until you can stop at a pharmacy on the drive home, but last time you did that, you still leaked all over your jeans. Today was supposed to be a celebration as you begin the next chapter of your life, not one stained by discomfort and worry.

The proposed [I AM Bill](#), "An Act to increase access to menstrual products," is crucial to prevent such distress across Massachusetts. This bill mandates that public schools, shelters, and prisons provide menstrual products to all menstruating individuals without stigma.

"Menstruating individual" is intentionally used, acknowledging the fact that not all who menstruate are women and not all women menstruate. It emphasizes the need for accessible products for all menstruators, regardless of gender identity and where they spend their time.

Massachusetts is a powerhouse for education, healthcare, and equity within a current nationwide surge of attacks on reproductive rights and sex education (which includes menstruation!).

Still, we need to do more. While Massachusetts serves as a beacon for reproductive rights, menstruation is often forgotten in these discussions. How can we claim to be advancing reproductive justice if we are not making menstrual management accessible to everyone? While [other states](#) are working to ban topics like menstruation in classrooms, shouldn't we be doing everything we can to destigmatize it in our schools? We have an example to set and an obligation to advance menstrual equity here.

Research has shown that menstruating individuals throughout the state struggle to afford and access period products, not only in schools. [A study conducted by the Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition](#) (MME) found that 25% of homeless shelters do not provide menstrual products, leaving many in need unsupported. Menstruators experiencing homelessness also cannot use SNAP benefits for menstrual products, making it extremely difficult to access or afford the products they need.

Access to menstrual products isn't guaranteed in incarceration facilities either; products are not provided alongside other necessities, are often restricted, and are used as a means of control and coercion. Most incarcerated menstruators frequently must purchase products at the commissary, which can cost upwards of \$10 for one box of super tampons, some of the most expensive items among nearly 400 items for sale. No person should have to work for several days just to be able to maintain their health with dignity.

H.534 would allow students to avoid the experience named above, and all menstruators would be able to receive their diploma without worry and with dignity. Nobody should have to stress about how they're going to manage their period without products when all other bathroom hygiene necessities are provided – toilet paper, soap, water.

Now is the time to pass the I AM Bill. This legislation has been proposed in the State Legislature for three consecutive legislative sessions and currently awaits a vote in the House Committee on Ways and Means despite overwhelming support. Critics point to its cost, yet where is this opposition when discussing the expenses of toilet paper? It's a distraction and an attempt to undermine the rights of menstruators.

Now is the time for us to act: call your [representatives](#), sign the [student petitions](#), join the [MME Coalition](#), and advocate for this bill to everyone you know to ensure it's finally implemented. Massachusetts policy currently falls short in addressing menstruators' needs. The I AM Bill presents an opportunity to change that. Will you help us?

Alaina Vermilya

Reducing Stigma and Elevating Dignity For All

Imagine you're in the eleventh grade and you're rushing to use the bathroom between classes. Once you're inside the stall, you reach into your backpack, pull out your roll of toilet paper, rip some off, and return the roll to your backpack. After you're done, you exit the stall and arrive at the sink. You reach into your backpack again, snag your bottle of soap, place some in your palms, and wash your hands. The bell

rings, so you hastily throw the bottle of soap back into your bag and sprint to your next class.

In this student's world, they are expected to carry toilet paper and soap everywhere they go. You may be asking yourself, why doesn't the bathroom supply this student with their most basic needs, like toilet paper and soap? What if they can't afford toilet paper or soap that month on top of their other expenses, like food and rent? What if they forgot toilet paper and soap at home that day?

This is a monthly reality for people who menstruate. Luckily, public spaces stock bathrooms with toilet paper and soap but rarely with free menstrual products. As a result, menstruators are forced to pay for their own products, making period poverty a critical issue in Massachusetts.

Right now, the Massachusetts House of Representatives is considering House Bill 534: An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products. This bill, otherwise known as the I AM Bill, would require all Massachusetts public schools, shelters, and incarceration facilities to supply free menstrual products to all people who menstruate.

The importance of the I AM Bill cannot be overstated. Despite Massachusetts boasting its leadership in healthcare and education, the needs of its menstruators, who make up about half of the state's population, are sorely under-prioritized. Menstrual products are one of the most expensive items sold in prison commissaries in Massachusetts, making them a luxury. One out of every seven children in Massachusetts lives in poverty and food stamps cannot be used to purchase menstrual products, even though they are just as necessary as food. Further, over half of Massachusetts school nurses observe students missing class to obtain products, which disrupts crucial time for learning.

Not only would the I AM Bill require schools, shelters, and incarceration facilities to make menstrual products accessible to all menstruators for free, but it would also significantly de-stigmatize menstruation. We are all well acquainted with this stigma; whether you're a menstruator or not, at one point or another, you have felt discomfort, shame, or embarrassment talking about periods, bleeding, or cramps. The passage of this bill would send the message that menstruation is normal and natural. It would make it clear that accessing products should neither be a burden nor a privilege, but a right, just as it is for toilet paper and soap.

We all know menstruators. Many of us live with them. This is an issue that impacts all of us. If you believe in gender, economic, or health equity, the I AM Bill needs your voice. Join the Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition to take action on this urgent issue. Visit the Coalition's website at <https://www.mmecoalition.com/> to sign petitions

advocating for the bill. Contact your state representatives and urge them to vote favorably for the bill this session. If you're a menstruator, share your worst period stories with your elected officials and explain how this bill would allow you to maintain your health with dignity. If you're not a menstruator, tell them why stigma around menstruation must end and how this bill would impact your family or someone you care about.

The commonwealth cannot achieve its mission of being a state of equal opportunity without addressing the needs of its menstruators. Period poverty is a collective issue that requires collective advocacy. It cannot wait any longer.

■ Video Project

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fAKQdWyQeT1Eg-CGh-p8XpF86X1kR7r79/view?usp=sharing>

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Stanley,

We are Kristianna Lapierre and Alaina Vermilya, residents of Waltham, Massachusetts, students at Brandeis University and advocates of H.534: An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products. Thank you again for discussing this bill with us in your office on February 8. We are writing to you now to reiterate the importance of menstrual equity and the need to pass H.534.

Approximately one out of seven children in Massachusetts live in poverty and more than 20,000 people were homeless in 2019. Strikingly, the state does not allow food stamps to be used to pay for menstrual products. A 2023 survey conducted by Mass NOW revealed that 25% of shelters do not provide products and these items are among the most expensive in prison commissaries. Fifty-six percent of school nurses observe students missing class to obtain products, further demonstrating the importance access to menstrual products has on education, health, and dignity.

The I Am Bill, H.534, would address these issues by requiring all public schools, shelters, and prisons to fund the provision of menstrual products to all menstruators. We understand there may be financial concerns, but just as toilet paper and soap are provided for free, menstrual products should be too. The state does not debate those costs; it cannot require necessary products to be provided to some individuals and not others. This is a matter of equity.

We urge you to discuss the I Am Bill with Chair Michlewitz at the House Committee on Ways and Means and bring this crucial legislation to a vote. This issue cannot wait any longer.

Thank you for your attention to our letter and to menstrual equity.

Sincerely,

Alaina Vermilya and Kristianna Lapierre

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Kristiana Lapierre

Period Packaging Event Hosted by ENACT

I attended Professor Powley and ENACT's Period Packaging Event on 4/2 in the SCC Atrium. This event was educational (with guests from Mass NOW and Free Period speaking about their organizations) and allowed people to package period products for local children, learn about the I AM Bill and other period legislation in Massachusetts, enter giveaways, and be in community with others who wish to advance menstrual equity.

Prior to this event, I drafted a template letter that students could use to write to their representative about the I AM Bill and made copies of my op-ed to share alongside other educational resources. During this event, I was able to talk with students about the I AM Bill (which many did not know about) while packaging products as well as share with Mass NOW and Free Period the legislative meetings that Alaina and I had earlier that morning.

It was great to chat with people who have done similar advocacy work and also feel the frustration we do for it not passing yet. We were able to talk about our strategies for scheduling meetings and what we collectively knew about the support for H.534 among the House Ways and Means members.

Additionally, myself and a few other volunteers stayed after the event to restock menstrual product dispensers in the first year dorm bathrooms. This was a new experience for me and allowed me to see firsthand the work that many students have had to do because of Brandeis' inability to make menstrual products accessible to everyone. It was also interesting to briefly chat with facilities staff during this and to learn that there is no pushback on their end for supplying period products. While this does not relate to the I AM Bill directly, it does directly relate to the same issue: period poverty.

I'm very glad to have attended this event and helped out in the ways that I could. Especially with PAD going through a leadership change and on pause for the semester, I realized with this event that there are so many Brandeis students passionate about menstrual equity who are looking for opportunities to get involved.

Alaina Vermilya

Meeting with Representative Stanley

Kristianna and I met with Representative Stanley on February 8th at the State House as part of the Mass NOW/IGNITE Advocacy Day. We also joined forces with two Brandeis students who also attended the Advocacy Day. Representative Stanley was present, along with three legislative aides. The purpose of the meeting was to inform him about the bill. We soon found out he was a co-sponsor. We then shifted gears to asking him more about if he will do more direct advocacy.

He asked us about the fiscal implications of the bill. This was early on in our advocacy, before we started advocating with the class, so we told him we did not know the specifics and the bill does not address cost explicitly. This was true, but it would have been better if we had told him that cost should not be a consideration because the cost of toilet paper and soap is not accounted for. This could have been a good point to advise him to tell his colleagues when they ask him about it.

■ Next Steps

The I AM Bill is currently in the House Committee on Ways and Means awaiting a vote. It has until the end of this legislative session, July 31st, to pass or else it would have to be reintroduced during the 194th legislative session in January. Before then, pressure needs to be put on representatives, especially those in positions of leadership, such as Chair Michlewitz and Speaker Ronald Mariano, to bring this crucial legislation to a vote. From our advocacy efforts and from conversations with other advocates and coalitions, we know that this bill is supported by many. The roadblock to getting H.534/S.2491 passed is the mere act of getting it on the House Committee on Ways and Means' agenda for a vote. We, alongside other menstrual equity advocates, would need to put pressure on legislators to bring it to the floor for a vote.

Because it requires funding, it is likely that some members of the House Committee on Ways and Means will be hesitant to support it due to fiscal concerns. Some legislators may argue that this bill would put constraints on schools, shelters, and incarceration facilities that already face budget shortages. More specifically, some may argue that prison commissaries depend on the profits they receive from the purchase of menstrual products.

While concerns about funding are understandable, they are a distraction from the fact that menstrual products are just as essential as toilet paper and soap, yet incarceration facilities, shelters, and public schools rarely provide menstrual products for free. The cost of toilet paper and soap is not tracked because they are seen as basic necessities. Menstrual products should be seen as basic necessities as

well. Our future advocacy efforts would continue to drive home this message to legislators and ensure they understand that cost should not be a barrier to passing this bill.

If we continued to work on this bill, we would also aim to have substantive meetings about the I AM Bill with all members of the House Committee on Ways and Means and particularly those in leadership positions. We are curious to see if we would be able to more effectively schedule meetings during a time when there is less focus on the state budget. Additionally, we would support or help host events such as Mass NOW's Advocacy day held back in February; these events are a great opportunity to mobilize new advocates, train individuals on how to engage with legislators in meetings, and bring together a community of menstrual equity advocates. We cannot do this work alone.

Once the I AM Bill passes the Massachusetts State Legislature, there is the potential for some implementation issues because there is no specific language in the bill for how this would work. From our meetings with Senator Jehlen, we know that implementation efforts will be checked by constituents who will hold the institutions accountable for providing the necessities to menstruators. Because there is no formal language in the bill for implementation, we worry this could cause issues once passed. While students have been especially vocal for this bill and for menstrual equity thus far, we hope that they are not subjected to additional labor to ensure that this legislation is implemented properly.

This is something that we would fight for if we continued to advocate for this bill: effective implementation and institutional-level policy evaluation once it passes. We would want to ensure that organizations like Mass NOW and the schools, shelters, and incarceration facilities themselves do research on menstrual product access to evaluate the effectiveness of the law and determine where the state needs to improve its support of its menstruators.

■ Update

As of August 30, 2024: The bill was referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means and passed the Senate.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

- S.2491: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S2491
- H.534: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H534

Organization or Coalition support:

- MASS NOW: massnow.org

Protecting Data Privacy

Quin Smith '25
Caroline Sturgeon '24



Caroline Sturgeon and Quin Smith

S.148/H.357, “An Act protecting reproductive health access, LGBTQ+ lives, religious liberty, and freedom of movement by banning the sale of cell phone location information” introduces comprehensive measures to safeguard the privacy of individuals in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The bill addresses concerns across the spectrum of data collection, spanning the collection, processing, and disclosure/sale of location data. Notably, the bill emphasizes the importance of transparent disclosure and informed consent, mandating that entities collecting location data must provide clear policies regarding their usage of location data, as well as obtain clear consent before collecting and handling said data. The bill would protect individuals seeking reproductive healthcare in Massachusetts, as the prohibition of the sale of their location data could help shield them from targeted harassment stemming from anti-abortion or religious extremist groups. Currently people are able to purchase the location data of any individual without restriction.

■ The Bill

S.148/H.357: An Act protecting reproductive health access, LGBTQ+ lives, religious liberty, and freedom of movement by banning the sale of cell phone location information. (“The Location Shield Act”)

■ Elevator Speech

We are Quin and Caroline, two Brandeis University students majoring in politics and legal studies. We are here to advocate for our constitutional rights to privacy, safety, and security. The non-consensual collection and sale of location data to third parties void these rights. Our cell phones go with us everywhere we go, tracking our every location. This information is analyzed and sold for profit – packaged by data brokers and purchased by anyone with a credit card. Introducing a blanket ban on the sale of location data to third parties through the Location Shield Act would safeguard these rights in one fell swoop.

Currently, there is no legislation at any level – local, state, or federal – that even considers this practice, let alone prohibits or regulates it. This directly endangers countless individuals as they go about their daily lives. Consider a police officer on their daily beat; if they use a cell phone at any point during the day, any individual with a grudge against that officer can potentially purchase and analyze their location data, jeopardizing their safety as they work to protect our communities. This example highlights vulnerable or targeted groups such as law enforcement, elected officials, immigrants, women seeking reproductive care, LGBTQIA+ community members, and so on. As it stands, those seeking to commit hate crimes or to expose the intimate details of someone’s life can and do purchase the location data of individuals that they suspect are prime targets for whatever nefarious deed they may have in mind.

Introducing a blanket ban on location data sales to third parties through The Location Shield Act, H.357/S.148, would directly address the unjust and nonconsensual collection and sale of location data, protecting Massachusetts citizens from public invasion of their private lives.

Therefore, we ask you to speak with the chair of the Joint Committee on

■ Excerpts from Storybook

THE PROBLEM

Non-consensual collection and sales of the location data of private citizens

- Our cell phones go with us everywhere we go, revealing the most intimate aspects of our lives
- Every day, the location information of countless individuals is unknowingly collected, analyzed, and sold for profit
- Your information is collected and packaged by data brokers, and then sent off to **anyone with a credit card.**

TALIA F. SAYS... ➔

A health technician for a non-profit, Brookline based abortion clinic that serves women from across the country, Talia highlights some of the health and safety risks associated with the collection and sale of location data.

- At the clinic, extensive privacy mechanisms protect both patients and providers. **The sale of location data essentially voids all of these protections, leaving healthcare professionals and innocent women at risk.**
- To receive safe reproductive care, patients must be seen in person. Without an in-person ultrasound to confirm that medication is a safe option, pregnancy termination pills can lead to incomplete abortions and/or serious health risks.
- Massachusetts is an healthcare haven for out of state patients. **When patients can be tracked within MA, we lose our power.**

"AFTER ROE, AT LEAST 100 WOMEN PER YEAR COME TO US FROM SOUTHERN STATES AND THE LOCATION SHIELD ACT WOULD PROTECT THIS (ONLY) OPTION."

CAROLINE H.

A Mass. resident speaks on her experience accessing reproductive healthcare in a world where location information lacks protection.

"I want to emphasize the deeply negative toll that stress and anxiety had on my mental health. Knowing that anyone was able to track these intimate moments brought up constant feelings of unsafety, and the fear [that] I was being watched"

When it comes to healthcare, location data tracking impacts:

- Mental health of patients
- Their family relationships

Safety of healthcare professionals, patients, and many others

THE SOLUTION - THE LOCATION SHIELD ACT (H.357 | S.148)

This bill:

- Would enact a universal ban on the sale of location data in Mass.
- Mandates that companies must obtain consent before collecting and processing data
- **Protects the safety of elected officials, law enforcement officers, government employees, and any citizen that might be at risk of targeted harassment**

"BECAUSE OF LOCATION [DATA] TRACKING, MY INTIMATE, PERSONAL [HEALTHCARE] DECISIONS COULD SUDDENLY IMPACT MY FATHER'S CAREER."

-Caroline H, MA. Resident/Recipient of Reproductive Healthcare

CONTACT US

THE LOCATION SHIELD ACT

AN ACT PROTECTING REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH ACCESS, LGBTQ LIVES, RELIGIOUS LIBERTY, AND FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT BY BANNING THE SALE OF CELL PHONE LOCATION INFORMATION

(H.357|S.148)

QUIN SMITH & CAROLINE STURGEON
BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure and their colleagues in the committee in support of H.357/S.148.

■ Op-Ed

Quin Smith

We Already Bring Our Cell Phones Everywhere – Let's Stop Letting the Creeps Tag Along

Anyone who has been to Massachusetts knows it's a state where people get things done. While Boston is fortunately a bit more grounded in the real world than our megalopolis neighbor to the south, the two flagship cities of the East share a common ground in their rapid pursuit of the cutting edge in their respective fields of specialization. Massachusetts has a long tradition of excellence in medicine, education, and technology, and – although I may be slightly biased – is frequently named the best state in the nation, exceeding and outpacing its contemporaries in a variety of metrics.

As many of us know, a necessary evil of life in a state that's constantly pushing the pace is the cell phone. Massachusetts residents use our phones to do business, communicate with our loved ones, watch the Sox, and complete countless other daily tasks. The technological advances we've seen since the turn of the millennium mean that our smartphones can use the data they collect to help us do all these things with greater ease and efficacy than ever before – but the collection of that data comes with a grim consequence.

Every minute of every day, the apps on your smartphone are tracking your precise movements and location. This deeply personal data that reveals where you live, work, pray, get medical care, and who you associate with is being silently bought and sold by unregulated data brokers. It's a massive privacy violation that puts us all at risk.

The details of your private life should not be a commodity to be peddled to the highest bidder without your consent. But that's exactly what's happening. Shady data brokers have already monetized location data to out Catholic priests for visiting gay bars, facilitate stalking and harassment by domestic abusers and bounty hunters, and reveal which women visited Planned Parenthood clinics after *Roe v. Wade* was overturned. Foreign governments and bad actors can easily purchase this location data to track public officials, intelligence personnel, and military members. Even your employer could buy information about where you spend your time to unfairly monitor and discriminate against you. With just a few clicks and a credit card number,

anyone can obtain intimate details about your private life and whereabouts.

This is an intolerable breach of our privacy, safety, and freedoms. That's why, according to the ACLU, 92% of Massachusetts voters support the bipartisan Location Shield Act – a bill that would prohibit the sale of our personal location data without consent. This common-sense legislation would still allow location tracking for legitimate operational purposes like app services, emergency response, and lawful orders, but it would finally put a stop to the insidious profiteering of the location surveillance of every Massachusetts resident.

For our democracy and basic liberties to survive in the digital age, we must draw a clear line: our personal data is not for sale without our explicit permission. The Massachusetts Legislature must urgently pass the Location Shield Act to safeguard our privacy rights and protect our most sensitive information from exploitation by corporate greed and unchecked surveillance capitalism. No one's movements should be an open book available to whoever can pay. It's time to take back control of our digital privacy.

If you'd like to play a part in this effort, stand up for yourself and your fellow Massachusetts residents, and remind corporate outsiders and bad actors that Massachusetts residents make a killing doing things the right way, contact your representatives in the Massachusetts Legislature and urge them to support H.357 & S.148, known as the Location Shield Act.

Caroline Sturgeon

Do you think the government is tracking you? Because it is, and that isn't even the biggest problem.

What does the voice in the back of your mind tell you when you swipe your debit card and enter your PIN? Or when you post a picture on social media, use your car's GPS, or call your wife? If you have ever worried that the government, your cell phone, or anyone else, is using your day-to-day actions to track your location, then this article is for you.

First off, you are right. The government can and will track you. They are using your mundane phone calls, social media posts, and other personal information to track your location, and it can be used against you. However, those of us who lose precious time worrying about the implications of government tracking could be investing our efforts in the wrong place.

Government tracking is already being regulated. Law enforcement is prohibited by law from accessing location

information from your cell phone without a warrant. Law enforcement or any government agency is prohibited from tracking real-time location data without probable cause, and these rules additionally apply to the requesting of historical data location. Location data also cannot be presented against you in a court of law without probable cause and legitimate warrant reasons.

These government restrictions are incredibly important for protecting our Fourth Amendment rights. In the age of ever-evolving technology, regulation of government-based location data tracking is one of the only policy areas attempting to adapt to modern times. However, these restrictions and regulations are not extended to non-government location data collection and sales. This means that instead of worrying about the government invading our personal space, we need to be worried about everyone else. Currently, anyone in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts with a credit card can purchase location data on anyone.

To put it in perspective, Massachusetts uses more GPS tracking devices than any state in America. Government-regulated GPS trackers are programmed with an exclusion zone, and officials are notified if the person on GPS enters that exclusion zone. The GPS trackers serve little other purpose than providing that alert. In contrast, cell phone apps ping your location up to 14,000 times per day. This data is then available to anyone and everyone. And, because most companies do not delete collected data, the most intimate details of your lives can be kept forever in the database of an app you didn't even know was tracking you. Essentially, because of the nonconsensual collection and sale of location data, we, as Massachusetts citizens, are more closely monitored by our cell phones than criminals are by law enforcement.

A common misconception is that this location data is being purchased for worthy reasons, such as when it's used to monitor the enforcement of state policies at the non-governmental level. However, it is important to remember that the benefits and drawbacks of location data impact all cell phone users regardless of beliefs, politics, etc. For example, on January 6th, 2021, the United States government used location data collected from third parties to find the protestors who had fled the Capitol, leading to the majority of the arrests made.

To reemphasize the point that location data is available to anyone with a credit card, location data can and has been purchased by people planning to commit violent crimes. The lack of regulation of location data sales puts police officers, elected officials, clergy, other religious people and so many more at risk of potential violence, while effectively voiding laws that exist to protect such community members.

We all deserve to live in a world that respects our privacy. As American citizens, our very dedication to this country is based on our right to freedom. This country allows us more freedom than any other would, and we must work hard to uphold these values. Currently, the rights that we so proudly bear, specifically our Fourth Amendment rights, are being essentially voided by the non-consensual collection and sale of location data.

If you want to protect your constitutional right to privacy, you must implore your legislators to vote YES on the Location Shield Act: an act that ensures the privacy of American individuals and helps to regulate the intrusive technology of the modern world.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

Our names are Caroline Sturgeon and Quin Smith. As students of law and policy, we feel that all Massachusetts residents deserve equal rights to safety and privacy and we know that you do too. Currently, the non-consensual collection and sale of location data jeopardizes the safety and intimate details of all Massachusetts citizens, disproportionately impacting elected officials, immigrants, women, LGBTQIA+ community members, police officers, and anyone else at risk of targeted hate.

A young woman who has to access abortion care in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts lacks protection around the collection and sale of personal location data, voiding the comfort and safety provided by incredible doctors and important Massachusetts laws that protect those accessing abortion care. Unfortunately, many of my peers have had an experience like this.

Your dedication to protecting access to healthcare in Massachusetts is inspiring.

However, the nonconsensual collection and sale of location data undermines the good that it does. Introducing a blanket ban on the sale of location data to third parties addresses these issues in one fell swoop. Critics of the act argue that this may cause economic disadvantage for Massachusetts businesses that use purchased location data. However, it has already been shown that this is not a significant barrier and may even give Massachusetts businesses a competitive edge when other states push for similar bans.

We are asking you to encourage your fellow senators to join you as a cosponsor and to vote to move the Location Shield Act forward to protect the right to safety and privacy that Massachusetts has worked hard to ensure for ALL

citizens.

Sincerely,

Caroline Sturgeon and Quin Smith

■ Video Project

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ihhEsP7xaD5exlRNgx_LJLL-6wedsf3ze/view?usp=drive_link

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Quin Smith

Reproductive Equity Now! Gala

This was a celebratory event looking back on the wins for the Reproductive Equity Now coalition over the past year while also looking ahead to protecting and expanding reproductive freedom across New England.

The atmosphere was energizing, with distinguished speakers like Lt. Governor Driscoll rallying the crowd with calls to ensure every person has access to comprehensive reproductive health care no matter their zip code or income level. As a relatively new organization to many parts of the region (recently expanding to Connecticut and New Hampshire), Reproductive Equity Now highlighted their growing momentum and valuable partnerships with legislators, community leaders, and healthcare providers who are committed to codifying and safeguarding abortion rights.

The speakers highlighted recent disappointing court rulings and regressive legislation in other states – but they rallied the crowd to view those as further motivation to keep pushing for progress here in New England. I was interested to note the rhetoric surrounding the election, as (unsurprisingly) a united front was presented against Donald Trump. I had wondered if, in a solidly blue state like Massachusetts, attention might be more closely focused on state level races, or policy that individuals might disagree with. I was also interested to see that no mention was made of the Democratic Party's failure to codify federal abortion rights during their control of both the executive and legislative branches of the federal government.

While not directly related to data privacy, this gala provided an inspiring reminder of the power of grassroots advocacy that persists even in the face of setbacks and opposition.

Caroline Sturgeon

Representative Tricia Farley-Bouvier Meeting

For this virtual meeting, I met with a researcher ... and a legal counsel ... for Representative Farley-Bouvier. I was very excited for this specific meeting because Marissa Dakin, the researcher Quin and I had previously met with, recommended that I set up this meeting to learn more about the bigger privacy bills coming out of Farley-Bouvier's office and how the Location Shield Act fit in. Because Representative Farley-Bouvier is already a cosponsor of the bill, and quite vocal in terms of data privacy legislation, I did not have to do any persuading or convincing in this meeting.

Farley-Bouvier's staff was able to speak to me about several privacy bills currently in the Joint Committee on Information Technology, the Internet and Cybersecurity including S.25, H.60, H.80, H.83 and S.227. They also emphasized the importance of H.532, a bill that empowers school boards to regulate third party data use related to their students. To be honest, the staffers did not explain the larger privacy bill to me in detail. I think they may have assumed I had already read the bill in depth, which in retrospect I should have done. Regardless, Claire and David were able to inform me that they have been working on a comprehensive privacy bill since November with the goal of forwarding progressive legislation that is able to pass through the State House.

A significant portion of our meeting was dedicated to discussing the progress of data privacy legislation in other states, as well as the overall opposition to data privacy policy.

■ Next Steps

Legislators voted to extend the Location Shield Act in the Joint Committee on Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure, with the new deadline to report out set for July 31st, 2024.

As we look ahead to the new July 31st deadline to report, we see several potential hurdles and areas of focus in the effort to get The Location Shield Act across the finish line:

• Implementation Challenges

While the core intent of restricting private companies' collection and monetization of geolocation data is straightforward, it is important to proactively address potential unintended consequences or loopholes. This concern/consideration was raised to us by several individuals who were not connected to the bill but would eventually be involved in its approval, including a staffer from the office of Senator Susan Moran. Drawing on the research of privacy experts, sponsors could draft airtight provisions with

clear definitions, strict compliance standards, and robust enforcement mechanisms. Then, once the bill (hopefully) proceeds to the reading process, amendments could potentially be introduced if deemed necessary.

• Further Steps for Advocacy

Many staffers confirmed that the vote to extend The Location Shield Act was a positive sign, and that the vote is likely to pass. That being said, there are still many important advocacy aspects needed to push the data privacy agenda forward. Currently, Reproductive Equity Now is extending their advocacy work to greater New England, including Rhode Island and New Hampshire along with Massachusetts in their push for data protection. Advocacy efforts in these areas are extremely important as New Hampshire and Rhode Island residents are less likely to support abortion rights, immigration rights and gender affirming care. It is extremely important to continue to submit testimony, write to and follow up with legislators and to get involved in any way possible. Advocating for The Location Shield Act additionally helps to further all data privacy legislation.

• The Future of Privacy Legislation

The Location Shield Act faces potential competition from other privacy bills currently in the Massachusetts State House. Right now there are several comprehensive privacy bills in the Joint Committee on Information Technology, the Internet and Cybersecurity including S.25, H.60, H.80, H.83 and S.227. Additionally, there is potential that H.357 will be merged into one of these larger privacy bills.

■ Update

As of August 21, 2024: The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure with the reporting date extended to Tuesday December 31st, 2024 for hearing.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

- S.148: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S148
- H.357: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H357

Organization or Coalition support:

- Reproductive Equity Now: reproequitynow.org

Lifting Children From Deep Poverty

Gene Kang '24

Grace Yang '26



Gene Kang and Grace Yang

“Deep poverty,” defined as half the federal poverty line, has a harmful impact on Massachusetts children, leading to worse health outcomes, stressful households, impaired school performance, and harmful environments for raising children. Massachusetts families in deep poverty receive cash grants from two major social welfare programs, the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) program and the Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children (EAEDC) program. These cash grants have been historically underfunded and have received few increases over the past two decades. In January 2024, Governor Healey cut the state budget amid a budget shortfall. Among the programs impacted were these two programs. Before the cuts, the cash assistance did not even meet the deep poverty levels, defined as half the federal poverty level at \$1076.910. S.75/H.144, “An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty” would implement increases to the cash grants annually by 25% until the maximum amount of assistance meets the deep poverty level.

■ The Bill

S.75/H.144: An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty

■ Elevator Speech

Speech is addressed to: Adelina Huo (Senator Friedman’s office – Healthcare Finance Policy Director)

Hello Adelina! How are you? How is Senator Friedman? It’s good to see you. If you remember us, our names are Grace and Gene. We are both public health students at Brandeis University as well as Waltham constituents and I am a voter in Lexington. Senator Friedman spoke at the Lexington Climate Strike I organized in 2019, and I have met with her before on climate issues. We know that Senator Friedman is especially passionate about healthcare and we know that you have a degree in public health as well, so we’re here as public health students to speak about an issue that is important to protecting the health of the most vulnerable children, elderly, and disabled people in Massachusetts.

We are here to ask Senator Friedman to use her position on the Senate Committee on Ways and Means to vote H.144/S.75, An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty, favorably out of committee. Currently, the maximum TAFDC cash assistance for a family of three is \$783 a month. This means that Massachusetts families in deep poverty can’t meet their basic needs.

Deep poverty has a heavy burden on children, leading to toxic living environments, lower educational attainment, and long term health concerns. This current maximum of \$783 does not even meet the deep poverty level (\$1076), which is half the federal poverty level.

In addition to being a public health student, I work as an EMT. I’ve seen firsthand how patients can be hesitant to treat health issues because of the cost, and how this can sometimes lead to health emergencies. As both a public health student and a healthcare worker, I understand how vital cash assistance

LIFT OUR KIDS

H.114/S.75

An Act to Lift Kids out of Deep Poverty



Image: Child wearing a Lift Our Kids Coalition hat.
Credit: Lift Our Kids Coalition

"Toward the end of the month, there will be days I don't eat to make sure (my son) eats, because that's my son. I have to make sure that he has."

— **Tanisha F. (Parent)**

JOIN THE LIFT OUR KIDS COALITION!

www.liftourkidsma.org



Image: The Lift Our Kids Coalition Advocacy Day at the MA Statehouse.
Credit: Lift Our Kids Coalition

CONTACT US

PERSONAL STORY

- CW is a first generation/low income college student who grew up with an easily-preventable vision issue because it was **expensive for her family to treat**.
- She is now at a point where it's too late to fix. When she graduates, **her career options will be limited** by inability to drive as well as trouble with any tasks involving looking at things.
- Saving that little bit of money when she was younger **will cost her much more money in the future**.
- Similarly, cash grants from Lift Our Kids, will help families treat medical problems when they're small, **preventing medical disasters down the line**.
- She also spoke about how federal grants like the TRIO program have helped her become the first in her family to go to college. "These programs help people focus on **more than just surviving**," she said.
- Her story shows that **money works**. When families can afford space for their children's hopes and dreams, many of them can go on to college to do great things.

LIFT OUR KIDS

H.114/S.75

An Act to Lift Kids out of Deep Poverty

THE PROBLEM

Cash assistance grants are only **\$783/month** for a family of three in 2023. For an elder or disabled individual, the maximum grant is a mere **\$401/month**.

This is still far below the Deep Poverty level (half the federal poverty level) of **\$1,036/month** for a family of three.

Projected 2023 Poverty Level: \$2,072/month for 3

Half of federal poverty level is known as Deep Poverty

Half of projected 2023 Poverty Level: \$1,036/month for 3


TAFDC with Oct. 2022 grant increase: \$783/month for 3

Source: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Bureau of Labor Statistics, MA Department of Transitional Assistance

EXPERT OPINION

“A recent report from a committee of experts convened by the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Management to explore the effects of child poverty in the United States found that expanding anti-poverty programs would **decrease deep child poverty** by **20% to 54%** depending on the generosity of the expansion.”

— **Dr. Pamela Joshi**



DR. PAMELA JOSHI

Dr. Joshi is a Senior research scientist and the associate director of the Institute for Child, Youth and Family Policy at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University.

H.114/S.75

The Act...

The bills would raise maximum grants by 25% a year until they reach the Deep Poverty line and then increase grants each year to keep pace with inflation.

Deep Poverty...

- produces health issues and emotional damage to children
- Creates toxic stress for households
- Impairs school performance
- Creates houselessness & housing instability

The Act...

- Solidifies cash benefit levels in a sustainable fashion by adjusting for rising cost of living and inflation
- Secures the health and safety of each family with enough money to at least be out of deep poverty.
- Allows parents to invest in further opportunities.

can be for families struggling to afford healthcare. The legislature did pass a 10% increase to grants in last year's budget for FY24 that was scheduled for April, but was cut by the Governor's 9C budget cuts in January. The House budget recommendations restore this increase, but still fall hundreds of dollars short of the deep poverty level.

In the wake of the rising cost of living and inflation, this bill will set a floor for aid at the deep poverty level and enable families to better meet their needs. TAFDC and EAEDC grants will increase by 25% every year until they reach half the poverty level, and will be adjusted every year as the poverty level increases. This way, these increases will be written into law so that there is no more back-and-forth battle with the budget every fiscal year. We are asking Senator Friedman to vote S.75, An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty, favorably out of the Committee on Ways and Means. Additionally, we are asking her to speak to her other colleagues on the Committee on Ways and Means about why this bill should be an urgent priority.

■ Op-Ed

Gene Kang

Governor Healey Is Failing Children's Health and Well-Being

Social safety nets are an important band-aid to support families beaten down by soaring inflation and the cost of living. That's why it is unthinkable, that in [one of the most expensive states](#) to live in, the government would cut significant funding to aid programs for Massachusetts' most vulnerable families. H.144/S.75, An [Act to lift kids out of deep poverty](#), can flip the tables by writing cash assistance for these families into law. Our representatives need to recognize the urgency of deep poverty and solidify our commitment to Massachusetts families and our children.

In the wake of lagging state revenue, Governor Healey made unilateral cuts to the state's budget, including slashing a shocking [\\$17 million](#) from the TAFDC and EAEDC transitional aid programs, which deliver cash directly to families in need of support. These cuts eliminated a 10% increase passed by the legislature that was supposed to go into effect later in the year. TAFDC, (Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children) and EAEDC (Emergency Aid to the Elderly Disabled and Children) aren't just programs to hand out money to those not doing so well, these programs offer crucial backing for families in "deep poverty." Deep poverty is defined as being at half the federal poverty level, meaning that while the monthly federal poverty level for a family of three sits at [\\$2152](#), deep poverty

in Massachusetts is [\\$1036 per month](#).

Governor Healey justified abandoning the state's commitment to the 10% increase by citing prior [incremental increases](#) secured in the last three budgets. While it is true that there were three increases since 2020, the Governor's office seems to ignore that the first historical 2021 increase was the [1st increase for TAFDC](#) since the year 2000 and the 1st increase for EAEDC since 1988 after decades of frozen benefit levels. Even with these prior increases, benefit levels have not been able to keep up with soaring inflation: the maximum TAFDC grant in 2024 for a family of 3 with no income is still only \$783 per month, almost \$200 per month below the deep poverty level of \$1076 per month for 3 people, while the maximum EAEDC grant for an individual is a mere \$401 per month, about \$600 below deep poverty.

[H.144/S.75](#), An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty, is currently making its way through the legislature to combat the cuts made by the governor. The act would allow TAFDC and EAEDC to keep pace with inflation and set the floor for grants at the deep poverty level. The already low benefit levels and the Governor's cuts disproportionately harm the children of the Commonwealth, making H.144/S.75 legislation that protects the children of Massachusetts. Deep poverty creates across the board [worse conditions](#) for child development.

Children in poverty face a higher risk of physical and psychological harm, live in toxic environments, and see lower educational attainment.

Deep poverty's ripple effects are multidimensional and can be felt by family, classmates, and teachers. In her testimony at the state house, Casey Colby, an elementary school teacher, [testified](#) that parents resorted to at-home remedies for their child's case of lice such as using mayonnaise in their child's hair. They eventually got lice shampoo from the Lynn Community Health Center, but the lice did not disappear. Colby stated, "After a while, we realized the family could not afford to wash the sheets, pillows, and clothes for the family."

The price of daily necessities can overwhelm and lead parents to make difficult decisions, impacting child health. Dr. Aura Obando testified that during a medical visit with a houseless family, the infant was brought in with a severe diaper rash. Dr. Obando stated: "I wish this occurrence was unusual for our clinic but we regularly see families who have to reuse or overuse wet diapers... This leads to unnecessary medical visits, missed days of daycare, and as a result, missed work for parents."

Income assistance is shown to have a direct positive impact on child well-being, and policies such as H.144 and

S.75 garner wide support in the legislature as well as from communities and organizations because it is essential and effective in protecting the commonwealth's children from the adverse health outcomes that occur as a result of poverty. The government must be the shield for the commonwealth's children.

Make your voice heard by simply emailing Aaron.M.Michlewitz@mahouse.gov and Ann-Margaret.Ferrante@mahouse.gov in the House Committee on Ways and Means to prioritize H.144 and contact Michael.Rodrigues@masenate.gov and Cindy.Friedman@masenate.gov in the Senate Committee on Ways and Means to pass S.75 in the FY25 budget to reaffirm our commitment to the health and well-being of children in deep poverty.

Grace Yang

Cash Assistance Doesn't Get our Families to Half the Poverty Level. Here's How We Can Change That.

You're an elementary school teacher working to prepare your students for a brighter future. One of your students shows up to school with lice, so you buy her lice treatment shampoo. But the lice come back. You realize the lice will not leave because her family cannot afford the 30 dollars it costs to wash all the sheets and clothes in the house. Thirty dollars.

This was the testimony of Casey Colby, a Massachusetts elementary school teacher. "Deep Poverty," defined as just half the federal poverty line, hurts Massachusetts children, leading to worse health outcomes, stressful households, impaired school performance, and harmful environments for raising children. If a family can't afford to keep their household free from lice, how can a child grow up healthy and supported?

I am a 19-year-old public health and biology student at Brandeis University on the premed track, working as an EMT. I support S.75/H.144, An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty, because of my public health background. One facet of public health is the importance of prevention – for example, if we spend a little money to vaccinate people now, we can prevent a disease outbreak down the line.

As an EMT, I've seen firsthand how patients might ignore a minor health issue because of the cost. It can worsen and culminate in a trip to the emergency room, costing more in the long run. As both a public health student and a healthcare worker, I understand how important cash assistance can be for struggling families to treat health issues before they become big.

If you're a family of three in Massachusetts making below \$783/month, you can apply to the Transitional Aid

to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) program. It'll give you monthly grants to get your income up to a maximum of \$783, a fixed number that does not adjust with the rising cost of inflation. A similar program, Emergency Aid to the Elderly Disabled and Children (EAEDC), gives a maximum of only \$401/month to our seniors and disabled people. For context, deep poverty (half the federal poverty level) is \$1076/month.

Not surprisingly, there are parents in our own state skipping meals to make sure their children eat. Compare our maximum grants with the estimated cost of living for US residents, which is between \$2500-\$3500 a month. It is unconscionable that 27,000 families in our own state live below the deep poverty line. Massachusetts can and needs to do better. At the bare minimum, our cash assistance grants need to reach the level of deep poverty.

A Brandeis class I'm taking connected me with the Lift Our Kids campaign, which fights to increase the maximum cash assistance levels. One of their most recent victories was a 10% increase to the TAFDC program starting this year. This January, Governor Healey slashed this planned increase, which would keep families hundreds of dollars below the deep poverty line. I got to see behind the scenes how they fought to restore the increase in the House Committee on Ways and Means budget and won. However, this would still be below the deep poverty level. This struggle happens every fiscal year and highlights how we have to struggle to fight for every increase possible since this program does not increase with inflation or the cost of living.

I serve as Community Chair for Brandeis Asian American Students Association (BAASA). We recently joined the Lift Our Kids coalition and created 38 handwritten letters to representatives in support of Massachusetts bill S.75/H.144, An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty, by Senator DiDomenico and Representative Decker. This would write cash assistance increases into law instead of fighting to fund the program every year. Grants would increase to meet half the federal poverty level, then adjust the grant amounts every year as the poverty level changes.

You can help. As a Massachusetts constituent:

- Write to members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means asking them to increase cash assistance by 20% in line items 4403-2000 (Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children) and 4408-1000 (Emergency Aid to the Elderly Disabled and Children) in the FY2025 Budget.
- Write to members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means asking them to vote favorably on S.75/H.144, An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty.

■ Video Project:

[Video Google Drive Link](#)

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Friedman,

My name is Grace Yang. I'm a voter in your district (Lexington) and a current student at Brandeis studying public health and biology on the premed track. I've met with you before when you spoke at the Lexington Climate Strike I organized in 2019, as well as during climate lobby meetings in 2020 and 2023. I'd like to thank you for your tireless work on healthcare and am writing to you today as a public health student, healthcare worker, and future doctor about an issue crucial to helping health outcomes for the most vulnerable children, elders, and disabled people in Massachusetts.

In particular, I am writing in support of the Lift Our Kids Act (H.144/S.75) to increase cash assistance levels in the TAFDC and EAEDC programs for families in deep poverty. Families in deep poverty fight to meet their basic needs and make sacrifices for their children in order to make sure that their kids have a roof over their heads and food on the table. Deep poverty has a heavy burden on children, leading to toxic living environments, lower educational attainment, and long-term health concerns. Every child in Massachusetts should be able to learn without the stress of being hungry and their parents, caretakers for people with disabilities, and those who can't work anymore must be able to live without the burden of being evicted or skipping meals for their loved ones.

Cash assistance grants remain far below half the federal poverty level, known as "Deep Poverty," which stands at \$1076/month for a family of three. The current maximum grant through TAFDC (for families with dependent children) is only \$783/month. The maximum grant through EAEDC (for the elderly and disabled) is a mere \$401/month. These numbers do not increase with inflation and can stay stagnant for up to 20 years without a strong push for incremental increases.

Governor Healey's 9C budget cuts eliminated the 10% cash assistance grant increases that you and the legislature passed for FY24. These were restored in the House budget recommendations, but at \$861 the maximum grant is still hundreds of dollars below half the federal poverty line. Additionally, this illustrates how precarious these grants are and how easily they can be cut. H.144/S.75, An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty, by Sen. DiDomenico and Rep. Decker, would increase the maximum grant levels by 25% every year until they reach half the federal poverty level, then adjust this number to stay at half as the federal poverty level

changes. In other words, it would write increases for these cash grants into law so that we don't have to fight for these increases every year.

A common counterargument for this cause is that government aid promotes laziness. TAFDC addresses this by requiring families supported by TAFDC to have a job, be searching for a job, or be training for a job unless something like a disability or illness prevents them from doing so. TAFDC's Pathways to Work program helps TAFDC recipients receive training and support for finding a job.

I understand that the cost of this program is a concern. However, it will cost us more in the long run to not support our families in deep poverty. If a child grows up unable to afford food, a decent education, or healthcare, we will have to pay more for hospital bills, homelessness programs, and even incarcerations in the future.

We have two asks for you:

- 1) Use your position as Vice Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means to increase TAFDC and EAEDC grants by 20% in the FY25 budget.
- 2) Vote H.144/S.75, An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty, favorably out of Ways and Means and speak to your colleagues about why this issue is a priority.

Sincerely,

Grace Danqing Yang

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Gene Kang

On Meeting with Senator Cindy Friedman

On Tuesday, April 2nd, We met with two members of Senator Friedman's staff at the Statehouse (Elizabeth Berman, the Senator's Chief of Staff, and Adelina Huo, the Senator's Health Care Finance Policy Director) at the same time as Rachel and Vickie who were lobbying for the Cover All Kids Bill.

Our visits on April 2nd were directed towards members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee because on the day we met with Senator Barrett's staffers, S.75 caught up to the House bill and was referred to Ways and Means. Senator Friedman holds a lot of influence as the Vice Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means and as the Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means. At the same time, she is also the Chairperson of the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing so she has responsibility in the areas we wished to address.

In our meeting, we thanked the Senator for all her

work on raising the minimum wage and implementing paid family medical leave as well as strengthening social safety nets during the pandemic. We also, like other meetings, stressed the burden of deep poverty on child health and well-being. This time I added an anecdote from a testimony from Dr. Aura Obando who works with unhoused families, one of whom brought an infant with a severe diaper rash as a result of reusing diapers because they could not afford new ones.

Overall I think this might have been our best meeting, as we effectively spoke on the public health concerns brought on by cuts to the budget. We were told the Senator strongly supports the bill and that it is actually uncommon for her to co-sponsor or file legislation, which I found interesting. We also talked with Elizabeth and Adelina about how the bill was going to pass. We were told that timing was very important and that sometimes bills just have a lot of momentum that particular year and sometimes bills that should pass do not even though they might have significant political will behind it.

This meeting was particularly useful in understanding the legislative process from the perspective of a staffer involved in Ways and Means, the position of the bill in the legislature, and its likelihood of passing. I feel like we spoke very well and made a strong connection with the staff who were very knowledgeable on the issue and its importance. This time around, we did have our fact sheet with us and were able to show the staff a visual. I think we did a great job of acknowledging the difficulty of a tight budget and asserting the material importance and moral obligation that TAFDC and EAEDC carry. I learned that despite the support a bill might have, internal politics might not let it pass that specific year in addition to the fiscal implications it might have.

In addition, we were given some career advice and both Elizabeth and Adelina gave us some background on their responsibilities as well as how they ended up working for the Senator and as a result, I learned I am interested in a position as a legislative aide in the future.

Grace Yang

Event 3: Brandeis Asian-American Students (BAASA) Association letter writing event

When and where: March 30th, 2024 at 2pm ET; Brandeis Intercultural Center (ICC) **People present:** Grace Yang, Gene Kang, members of BAASA (Brandeis Asian-American Students Association)

Reason for meeting: Gene and I organized this as the Community/Social Justice Chairs of BAASA and it served as BAASA's general event for the month of March. Our goal was to produce handwritten letters about the Lift Our Kids

bill and campaign that Gene and I would hand-deliver to the State House.

Substance of the meeting: The goal of this event was to utilize the unique voices and experiences of BAASA members to effectively communicate why Lift Our Kids should be a priority. Before the event, I made a spreadsheet of all BAASA members who were Massachusetts constituents and their representatives. I picked the legislators who had the most sway (Ways and Means members, House Speaker, Majority Leader) and ones I knew would be especially sympathetic to us (Brandeis alumni, especially BAASA alumni). Then, I made a separate spreadsheet where I assigned which BAASA member would write to whom.

Constituents wrote to their own legislators regardless of whether I thought those legislators were important, as constituent letters always hold more sway. Some were assigned based on their major or job. For example, I had the editor of our BIPOC literary magazine write to Sen. Gomez as he is big on racial justice. I had our EMTs, pharmacy techs, and disabled members write to Sen. Friedman as she is passionate about healthcare.

We prepared a slideshow explaining the situation with Lift Our Kids, our asks, and our role as constituents in the legislative process. I spent a couple hours creating a brief profile of every single legislator we would be writing to – what they've done we can thank them for; issues they care about / how we can connect our own major or job to those issues; aspects of their background we can use to connect to the legislator; and how to phrase our asks based on the exact position of the legislator. Participants used this along with a bullet pointed outline they could follow for their letters.

Connections made or lack thereof: At the event itself, we got to connect with BAASA members not on the executive board and educate them about the issue. At the State House, the handwritten letters impressed the Sen. Friedman and Sen. Keenan staff we met with, especially since we had a Sen. Keenan constituent. Running around the State House hand-delivering the letters gave us an opportunity to have a brief chat with legislators' receptionists on why Asian-American college students support Lift Our Kids.

What went well and what could have worked better: On the BAASA side we didn't plan the event well; we advertised that there would be snacks but didn't give the treasurers enough time to order them and they didn't arrive in time. I also hadn't realized that the 30th was during a long weekend; during a long weekend most Massachusetts residents would be at home and Massachusetts residents are so valuable. We fixed this by tabling at another BAASA event to get letters from more Massachusetts residents. But overall, the event was a huge success and we created a stack of 38 handwritten

letters. All our hands were cramped afterwards, but it was incredibly rewarding to see passionate handwritten letters on the Lift Our Kids campaign and participants told me afterwards that it was very well organized. Reading through their letters, I could see that they wrote persuasive letters that clearly explained the bill and put a personal flair on why the cause was important to them.

■ Next Steps

• Status of Bill April 21, 2024

Bills H.144 and S.75 are currently both in their respective Committees on Ways and Means. The House Committee on Ways and Means budget was released and would provide a 10% increase for TAFDC cash assistance grants. However, this increase is delayed until April 2025. In addition, there will be no increase for EAEDC grants at all in the budget. While we are happy at this partial victory (one of our larger requests was to reverse Gov. Healey's cuts to the scheduled 10% increase), at \$861 this is still far below the deep poverty level.

Representative Decker has filed budget amendment #788. This amendment would raise EAEDC grants by 10% and schedule both these increases to go into effect in October of 2024. The Lift Our Kids Coalition is currently making preparations to lobby in favor of this amendment.

While the maximum TAFDC benefit for a family of three would remain \$783/month for another year, EAEDC grant levels will remain at \$401/month with no increase on the horizon at all.

• Potential Implementation Issues

In our meeting with Elizabeth Berman, Senator Friedman's Chief of Staff, and Adelina Huo, the Senator's Health Care Finance Policy Director, we were told that for many bills, timing of a bill's momentum to pass is difficult to gauge and finicky to estimate. Sometimes bills just have a lot of momentum that particular year and cross the finish line, but in other instances, bills that should theoretically pass that session do not, even though they might have significant political will behind it.

As far as timing, the urgency of the bill's issue is at its peak. As such, the Coalition has had a two-pronged approach to implementing our goal of cash grants. The first was to push it through the legislature and persuade representatives and senators to prioritize TAFDC and EAEDC funding in their budget recommendations and passing H.144 and S.75. The second avenue is pressuring the governor either directly or indirectly through voicing support for the issue and

asking legislators to persuade the governor of transitional aid's urgency and importance.

However, one major issue that emerges in regards to timing, is the Governor's commitment to a "balanced budget." Healey and her proposed budget, released in late January, remain steadfast in limiting funding for certain programs, especially to EAEDC, since many bigger projects require immense amounts of funding, including housing, public transportation, education, climate, and labor. Implementing the bill when there are so many other priorities with limited funding is the greatest challenge.

• Future Advocacy Collaborations

In addition to working with the Lift Our Kids Coalition through this class, we have gotten our university club, the Brandeis Asian-American Students Association (BAASA) to sign on to the coalition as well. By joining the coalition, BAASA, as well as other clubs that are part of the Brandeis Intercultural Center, has the opportunity to engage with other organizations in the coalition to lobby legislators directly, attend hearings, and rally at the State House in favor of the bill. We plan to apply for an ENACT grant to possibly organize a lobby day with other collegiate Asian-American groups in the area, and we may choose Lift Our Kids as one of our priority bills.

Other future endeavors also involve emphasizing child health, which is one of the most critical aspects of funding transitional aid. Reaching out to certain organizations and offering further testimonies and creating social media awareness will strengthen the cause and mobilize the public; organizations such as those that work with children, medical professionals and groups that provide care for low-income or unhoused families, or teachers and school staff such as nurses.

• Potential Lobbying Problems

There have been some extenuating circumstances surrounding TAFDC and EAEDC and aid as a whole. Recently there has been a surge in illegal benefit skimming. This increased level of benefit fraud has hurt families who need this aid as well as the security of these programs. The Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) Commissioner Jeff McCue has stated that the DTA has spent several months attempting to limit the impacts of a "fairly sophisticated crime syndicate." In the last quarter of 2022, investigators found \$1.6 million in TAFDC fraud and \$7,300 in EAEDC fraud among additional skimming in SNAP benefits and Medicaid.

While we do not expect fraud to affect funding levels, it

might impact arguments from the other side. Opponents of aid might make the age-old claim that people take advantage of welfare benefits. However, we would respond that the vast majority of families who require this aid are not the perpetrators of this fraud, and those who take advantage of the system will be rooted out with investigations and the implementation of new policies and practices.

In addition, we think lobbying on the grounds that this aid is the bare minimum is effective rhetoric. The fact that this supplemental aid does not even reach the deep poverty level should still be the main messaging point along with the fact that inflation widens the gap between cost of living and benefit levels.

• Substantive Problems with the Bill Itself

Nothing about the bill itself is inherently flawed. It adequately asks for what in a normal budget year would be a reasonable ask. We say it is reasonable in reference to the decades of stagnant aid levels.

However, the urgency and need to reinstate the increase to cash grants has the same timing problem as mentioned before. It could be argued that the bill is too aggressive to pass this year based on what we see in the House Committee on Ways and Means budget that was recently released.

However we hesitate to label the urgent 10% increase for both programs as too high of a bar for the bill to pass, due to the broad support it has as well as the worsening conditions for families since the cut increase was first passed. We get the sense from our legislative meetings that key players have hope that the previously cut funding should still go into effect this year after some money gets moved around.

■ Update

As of August 30, 2024: The bill was referred to the Senate and House Committees on Ways and Means. The Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities reported the bill favorably and referred it to the Committee on Ways and Means.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.75: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S75

H.144: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H144

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute: mlri.org

Providing Access to Full Spectrum Pregnancy Care

Brenna Pearlstein '24
Sara Shapiro '24



Sara Shapiro and Brenna Pearlstein

S.646/H.1137: “An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care” has the primary objective of making healthcare more accessible and affordable by eliminating or significantly reducing cost-sharing requirements for pregnancy for specific health insurance plans. By addressing the financial barriers associated with deductibles, coinsurance, and copayments, the legislation aims to ensure that financial constraints do not prevent individuals from receiving necessary reproductive healthcare services such as lab work, ultrasound scans, and childbirth.

■ The Bill

S.646/H.1137: An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care

■ Elevator Speech

Hi ____,

Thank you so much for taking the time to meet with us. My name is Brenna, and I’m a senior at Brandeis University studying public health. And I’m Sara, I am also a senior at Brandeis, and I am studying sociology and legal studies.

We are here because we are committed to equity for all people. Our studies have taught us that everybody should have access to the type of healthcare they need, especially when it comes to their pregnancy. This freedom is the epitome of the values of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, but some people are not afforded the ability to make these decisions because of financial constraints.

In Massachusetts, it is estimated that with insurance, the cost of a vaginal birth averages \$7,700, and a C-section averages \$11,000. In 2022, the per capita income in Massachusetts was \$53,000. This means that deductibles, copayments, and coinsurance for childbirth alone may take up around 20% of a family’s yearly earnings. Under current state law, all insurance plans are required to cover pregnancy and miscarriage care. Still, the law does not prohibit cost-sharing, leaving new parents and birth-givers with high out-of-pocket costs.

The bill, An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care, will prohibit insurance plans from charging birth-givers any form of cost-sharing and offering full coverage for abortion, prenatal care, childbirth, and postpartum care.

This bill would provide equitable access to the full spectrum of pregnancy care and will ensure that all pregnant people will have access to the care they need, regardless of financial barriers. While this change would minimally increase insurance plans for everyone in Massachusetts, the benefits of this bill extend beyond individual health to societal well-being. Ensuring every pregnant person has access to comprehensive care regardless of their circumstances can significantly decrease mortality rates, reduce the frequency of preventable health conditions, and promote economic stability for families.

Full spectrum pregnancy care is not just a health issue; it is a matter of social justice and equality, and we hope that you join us in supporting this bill that aims to create a more equitable, safe, and healthy commonwealth.

■ Excerpts from Storybook



Real-life Stories: Emily V.

- Emily, a new mom, has employer-sponsored insurance from a university in Massachusetts.
- When she was pregnant this past year, she noticed a **severe lack of transparency** regarding the cost of her care. She was never told how much prenatal care or delivery would be until the bills arrived.
- Emily's family had to **cut down on other spending** during pregnancy as a precaution to make sure they had the funds for pregnancy care.

Cost sharing and high deductible plans, that have become increasingly common, are causing many individuals to apply for credit cards that they can't pay off, **forcing them into severe debt and bankruptcy.**

— Michael Doonan, PhD
Associate Professor of Health Policy at Brandeis University

Pregnancy care often requires inpatient services, and therefore issues such as the ones Professor Doonan mentions can be particularly problematic for birthing people and those who most may not assume can't afford it, like Emily.

"In the wealthiest country on the planet, you shouldn't go broke in the Commonwealth if you get sick, and **you certainly shouldn't have to be independently wealthy to grow your family.**"

— Senator Paul Feeney
Co-Chair of the Joint Committee on Financial Services, to The Boston Globe (2024).

■ Op-Ed

Sara Shapiro

The Price of Pregnancy in Massachusetts

Imagine you are a woman living in Massachusetts in your early 30s. You're recently married, just started a new job, and you're on Zillow almost every day looking at potential houses to buy with your partner. You're organized. Your friends often describe you as "Type A" because you have a plan in place for almost everything, from your monthly household budget to the girls trip you plan to take in the Summer of 2026.

Then, the day you've been dreaming about since you were a little girl is finally here...You're pregnant! Congratulations! Yes, this wasn't exactly planned or perfectly aligned with your "5-year-plan" because you wanted to be a homeowner before expanding your family, but you think to yourself, "I have plenty of money in savings, it'll be totally fine...right?"

As the weeks pass, you start to notice that almost all your questions about what to expect during this pregnancy

can be answered, except one...How much is this all going to cost?

This hypothetical situation isn't entirely made up. It's a reality that many pregnant people in Massachusetts face, and it can be incredibly daunting; even life-altering. Recently, I had a conversation with a new mother. She has employer-sponsored insurance from a university in Massachusetts.

During our conversation, she shared that when she was pregnant this past year, she noticed a severe lack of transparency regarding the cost of her care. She was never told how much prenatal care or delivery would be until the bills arrived. She asked everyone she could think of if they could at least give her a ballpark number of the total cost she could expect after giving birth, but even the HR department at her place of employment couldn't answer. She asked co-workers who had also recently been pregnant, and each one that she asked provided her with a different answer, which also did not help her get a better understanding of what to expect. After the delivery, she received three separate bills, with no indication that there would be more after the first and second.

She shared that throughout her pregnancy, her family had to cut down on spending – even for things such as medical visits for other members of the family – because they wanted to make sure that they were prepared for any additional pregnancy-related bills that might arrive. This shouldn't be the norm.

In Massachusetts, although some aspects of pregnancy care, such as prenatal scans and labor/delivery, are covered by private insurance, cost-sharing (co-pays) and deductibles are still permitted, and there is no telling how much money all these expenses will add up to, leaving pregnant people and their families constantly worrying about the next bill that will show up on their doorstep.

Rebecca Hart-Holder, President of Reproductive Equity Now, shares that it is estimated that a vaginal birth with private insurance averages \$7,741.64, and a C-section with private insurance averages \$11,012.54 (Hart-Holder, 2023). In 2022, it was reported that the per capita income in Massachusetts was approximately \$53,000 (United States Census Bureau, 2022), meaning that deductibles, co-pays, and coinsurance for childbirth alone for a family with private insurance may account for around 20% of their yearly earnings. In the same article, Hart-Holder writes that in 2023, 41% of Massachusetts residents (1.7 million people) were on high deductible (private) health plans, a sizable increase from the 19% recorded in 2014 (Hart-Holder, 2023).

These statistics show us that situations such as what was described by the new mother I spoke with are not uncommon. There are people across the commonwealth facing the same anxieties every day, being forced to choose between buying groceries and saving money just in case another unexpected medical bill related to their pregnancy arrives.

The solution? Full-spectrum pregnancy care. There is currently a bill in the Massachusetts State Legislature titled “An act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care” (H.1137/S.646) that is currently sitting in the Committee on Health Care Financing. The primary goal of this bill is to prohibit private insurance companies from charging policyholders any form of cost sharing or deductible for any pregnancy-related medical care, including prenatal, birthing, and postpartum care such as mental health counseling.

Pregnancy and childbirth already come with their fair share of struggles and fears, and the last thing that expectant birth-givers should be concerned with is being able to afford necessary, and sometimes even lifesaving, healthcare. The passage of this bill will ensure that cost will no longer be a barrier to care for pregnant people in the state of Massachusetts.

Join the thousands of people already in support of this bill. Write letters of support to your state representative, follow @reproequitynow on social media, and help us work towards making a tangible difference for the future generations of Massachusetts residents.

Brenna Pearlstein

Bay Staters Deserve Access to Full Spectrum Pregnancy Care

Picture this: you and your significant other are getting ready to welcome your new bundle of joy into the family. You're excited but a bit nervous – you don't do well on little sleep. When the baby arrives, you feel a love you never could have imagined possible. There's a new routine to get used to, and you'll probably never have a moment of quiet for a long time. But this moment is perfect. You are in absolute awe.

And then, you get a bill in the mail. \$1,400. You were expecting this – you have reasonable insurance from work, but it's not that great. You both planned for copayments like this, making different financial decisions over the last nine months so pregnancy bills wouldn't wreak havoc on your savings account. You look at your child, finally asleep in her crib, sigh, and tell her, “You were an expensive one. But so worth it.”

But then it happens again. Your baby is now three months old, and you've opened the mail to find another hospital bill, this time for \$842. Huh. You just paid the last one, right? While your child is learning to recognize faces, improving her eyesight, and following objects, you're rethinking this year's budget. For you, this means less money towards paying off your student loans, and you'll have to be stringent with your everyday expenses for a few months. How come they didn't warn you this second bill was coming? Quickly, your bundle of joy is becoming your bundle of debt.

The full spectrum of pregnancy care should be accessible to everyone, regardless of income and economic status. But in Massachusetts, new parents are forced to give up an average of 20% of their yearly income towards hospital bills, leaving families with little choice in where they get their care. While every Massachusetts resident is required to have health insurance, many have expensive copayments and high deductibles. According to a 2021 Center for Health Information Analysis report, “birth of a child” was one of the top reported reasons for families facing problems paying medical bills.

When pregnant people can't afford their care, they are less likely to receive prenatal care. According to a report from NPR, women without pregnancy care are seven times

more likely to give birth prematurely, and their babies are five times more likely to die. That statistic is startling and downright horrifying. But there's a viable solution: free pregnancy care for all. When cost-sharing is not a burden for pregnant people, they can more easily receive adequate care for their pregnancy without concerns about cost.

An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care (S.646/H.1137), currently in the Massachusetts legislature, requires all Massachusetts private or employer-sponsored insurance plans to cover pregnancy care without deductibles, copayments, or coinsurance.

I urge you to reach out to your Massachusetts congresspeople and push them to vote yes on S.646/H.1137. You can determine your elected officials by visiting www.wheredoivotema.com. Call your legislator, write them an email, or send them a letter.

Full spectrum pregnancy care ensures that all birth-givers have access to the best care for their pregnancy and infant. It means that no family will have to choose between putting food on the table or receiving regular pregnancy scans. It means that no Massachusetts residents will regret their pregnancy because of unexpected costs. Most importantly, it means birth-givers will deliver happy, healthy babies.

■ Video Project:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DVzJJpVGq6FBirGc6PJio8LkRSoUuWNM/view>

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

We hope this letter finds you well. Our names are Sara Shapiro and Brenna Pearlstein, and we are constituents of Waltham. We are writing to you today because we believe in equity for all people. Everyone has the right to receive the care they want, when they want it. As a father, I'm sure you can agree that new parents and infants deserve the best prenatal, childbirth, and postpartum care.

However, in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, not every pregnancy is treated equally. In Massachusetts, it is estimated that, with insurance, the cost of a vaginal birth averages \$7,700, and a C-section averages \$11,000. In 2022, the per capita income in Massachusetts was \$53,000. This means that deductibles, copayments, and coinsurance for childbirth alone may take up around 20 percent of a family's yearly earnings. Under current state law, insurance plans are required to offer some coverage for pregnancy

and miscarriage care, but this still leaves new parents and birth-givers with high out-of-pocket costs. Massachusetts law does not prohibit cost-sharing for this kind of care, forcing pregnant people to cut spending for other important expenses. This gap in healthcare access not only jeopardizes the health of pregnant individuals but also has long-term effects on the well-being of children and families.

An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care, S.646/H.1137, will prohibit insurance plans from charging birth-givers any form of cost-sharing and offering full coverage for abortion, prenatal care, childbirth, and postpartum care. It will ensure that pregnant people have access to the care they need, regardless of financial barriers. Ensuring every pregnant person has access to comprehensive care regardless of their circumstances can significantly decrease mortality rates, reduce the frequency of preventable health conditions, and promote economic stability for families. Full-spectrum pregnancy care is not just a health issue; it is a matter of social justice and equality. We noticed that you have co-sponsored several bills that aim to provide monetary support to Massachusetts residents, many of which are in regard to the Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities. We were inspired by your commitment to better the lives of so many Massachusetts residents, and we hope that you will join us in understanding that this bill will do the same.

We urge you, Senator Barrett, to support An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care. This bill is more than just a piece of legislation; it's a commitment to our community's health and future. By backing this bill, you affirm that our state values every individual's right to comprehensive healthcare.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Brenna Pearlstein and Sara Shapiro

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Sara Shapiro

"Emma" Zoom Meeting

The most impactful meeting that I had by far was when Brenna and I spoke to Emily, who shared her experience as someone who had recently given birth. ... This meeting occurred over Zoom, and Emily, Brenna, and I were the only people present. The reason for the meeting was that neither Brenna or I had a close connection with someone who has recently been pregnant, nor knew about the private insurance costs generally associated with pregnancy care at that time.

We were able to make a good connection with Emily, and I am very grateful that she was willing to be very open and honest about her personal experience and that we had the opportunity to hear her story. Luckily, for her own records, Emily kept track of all the co-pays and all medical bills she paid throughout her pregnancy and postpartum care, so we were able to see real data from an individual that had experienced the issues that our bill aims to address. When we told her about our bill, she was very passionate about supporting it and making sure that a change is made for future pregnant Massachusetts residents.

...Overall, hearing Emily's story in her own words was incredibly impactful, and the statistics and personal details she shared will stick with me long after the conclusion of this course. Meeting with Emily is what made me realize and understand how large of a problem insurance costs for pregnancy care really is, and what inspired me to give my advocacy for this bill my all.

Brenna Pearlstein

Meeting with Kerry Shea, Legislative Aide, to Rep. Hannah Kane

Our first advocacy meeting was on March 12th with Kerry Shea, a legislative aide for Representative Hannah Kane of the 11th Worcester District. Since this was our first State House meeting, Sara and I didn't know what to expect. We were surprised when the meeting only lasted a few minutes. Despite the brevity of the interaction, it felt like Kerry got a sense of our bill and understood its importance to us. Handing over our storybook at the beginning of the meeting allowed Kerry to take in the facts and figures we were sharing with her. She then asked us some questions, most of which we had the answers for. This dialogue prepared Sara and me for the upcoming meetings we would continue to have. Kerry asked questions about the bill's effect on healthcare spending and who it would affect.

■ Next Steps:

Our work with this bill over the course of the semester has taught us a lot about advocacy, insurance, and what equitable healthcare for all should look like. Although our time formally advocating for this bill has come to an end, there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure that this bill is passed and that cost is no longer a barrier to pregnancy care for Massachusetts residents.

The first suggestion that we have to offer regarding possible next steps that will hopefully garner more support for the bill and aid in getting it passed is fostering stronger relationships with other coalitions. In tandem with this

ENACT class, Sara took "Gender, Justice, and Legislation" this semester with Professor Charlotte Powley, which used the I AM bill as a case study. MassNOW, the Massachusetts chapter of the National Organization for Women, brought forth this bill. MassNOW supports hundreds of bills each legislative session, many of which are also priority bills for ReproEquityNow, which is the organization that we have worked closely with this semester and that put bill H.1137/S.646 on the map.

After learning more about MassNOW's advocacy efforts and researching the types of bills they support, we noticed that currently, the full spectrum pregnancy care bill is not on their list of supported bills. In Prof. Powley's class, after hearing from a guest speaker who works at MassNOW, Sara approached that individual and asked if it would be possible to get MassNOW behind this bill. She said that there is a way to do this on their website, and if it gets approved (which it likely will), their team would be happy to provide support for the bill. From this, we learned that often all it takes is speaking up and asking questions. We hope to finalize this process and connect these two amazing organizations in hopes that, together, we can enlist enough supporters to get this bill passed.

We also think there are questions regarding this bill that have yet to be answered. By doing so, more legislators may be willing to show full support for this bill. Professor Zinner raised one of those questions at our Present and Defend. He asked what our bill would mean for people who are on low-cost, high-deductible plans. Wouldn't this make it too expensive for them? We have not seen an answer to this question in any of the literature we've studied about the bill. Another question raised at the Present and Defend that must be answered is how midwives play into the bill. The text of the bill and any accompanying work has yet to mention this.

Regarding opposition to this bill, we identified a few key opponents. First is fiscal conservatives, who are fearful of higher costs for insurers and employers. These costs could get passed onto taxpayers or premium payers. This bill may also be viewed as government overreach in mandating what insurance plans must cover.

Surprisingly, we have noticed mixed social opposition to this bill. While conservatives do not approve of full coverage abortion care (which this bill wishes to expand), some agree with full spectrum pregnancy care because it may persuade pregnant people to keep their pregnancies instead of choosing an abortion because the cost of care is no longer a barrier for them.

Insurance companies may argue against the bill because it would increase their claims payouts, driving up premiums for everyone and turning away customers. Insurance

companies rely on cost-sharing mechanisms to help control utilization and keep total costs down. Removing these would remove an important lever they use to prevent overutilization of services. In addition, mandating full spectrum pregnancy coverage undermines the ability of insurers to design and price their plans as they see fit based on actuarial data. It impinges on their ability to decide what benefits to include or exclude in their tiered plans. The core arguments against full spectrum pregnancy care would likely center around the potential for significant cost increases, loss of cost control levers, reduced plan design flexibility, and the social impacts of increased coverage.

Currently, the bill remains in the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing. In early April, the reporting deadline was extended to June 1st, 2024. This is a good thing, and the goal of extending this deadline is in hopes that it will allow more time for the House and Senate versions of the bill to end up in the same place at the same time. Our hopes are high that this bill will be passed before the end of the current legislative session. After meeting with and/or emailing the majority of members of the committee, we have seen nothing but the utmost support, and we believe that the representatives will vote in favor of the bill when the time comes.

Our journey of advocacy throughout this semester has taught us a lot. We have had so many different experiences ranging from meeting with state legislators to people who have been directly affected by the issue that the bill aims to solve, and even attending a gala where we got to speak with so many like-minded individuals who are all so passionate about issues such as full spectrum pregnancy care.

We've learned how to be effective advocates and use our voices in productive ways, and we've gotten to witness first-hand what it looks like when an idea has the potential to become a real law.

■ Update

As of August 30, 2024: Both the Committees on Financial Services and Health Care Financing reported the bill favorably and referred it to Ways and Means.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.646: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S646

H.1137: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/HD1582

Organization or Coalition support:

Repro Equity Now: reproequitynow.org

Promoting Mental Health Education in Public Schools

Tasha Epstein '25

Elana Regan '25



Elana Regan and Tasha Epstein

Bill H. 497/S. 240, “An Act relative to the promotion of mental health education” seeks to address the lack of mental health education in K-12 schools. Young students may undergo a variety of stressors in their everyday life, from a difficult or abusive home environment to schoolyard bullying. According to the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health, “36% of Massachusetts youth ages 0 to 17 experienced at least one form of trauma, abuse, or significant stress in the prior year, with almost 14% experiencing multiple traumas,” and yet within the same age group (K-12), less than 50% of students could recognize depression as a problem (less than 30% of students recognized anxiety as a problem). K-12 students are unaware of their peers’ struggles, and likely unaware of their own as well; they don’t know what’s wrong with them, or where to look for help and guidance. After receiving mental health education, one eighth grader was quoted as stating, “I knew something wasn’t right, but I didn’t have the words for it;” mental health education gave them those words.

■ The Bill

H.497 /S.240 An Act relative to the promotion of mental health education

■ Elevator Speech

E: I am Elana Regan, a voter from Hopkinton Massachusetts,

T: and I’m Tasha Epstein, a constituent from Waltham, Massachusetts. We’re both students at Brandeis University, studying sociology and political science. We have a responsibility to safeguard the health and safety of our future generations. Mental health is a serious issue in our local schools. There are systemic barriers for students who are currently uninformed about mental health and lack access to diagnostic resources because of insufficient education and information. Currently, there is no requirement for schools to educate students about mental health.

E: And I was one of those students. I know how it feels to have a lot going on; a new disability diagnosis, challenges at school, and mental health struggles, and I had no clue where to turn. I was grappling with adapting to a new reality all while feeling adrift, alone, and unaware of how to get help for feelings and thoughts that were hard to describe or categorize. If our K-12 schools teach mental health education this would empower youth to protect themselves and their peers through improved knowledge and decreased stigma. H. 497/S.240 would require a mental health education curriculum in K-12 schools in Massachusetts, and would still leave flexibility for schools to choose how to implement these curriculum changes to best fit their communities.

T: When asked about the potential of teaching mental health in schools, former Massachusetts public school students affirmed any mental health curriculum would’ve made a “dramatic” difference in their experiences. Abbie Rosenberg, who teaches mental health literacy to educators, students, and parents, confirmed mandatory mental health education would “100%” save children’s lives.

E: By passing this bill, we can help future generations – and ensure they’ll be there in the first place. Will you, Sen. Spilka [May be replaced with any name], talk to the chairs of the Education Committee and encourage them to report favorably on H. 497/ S. 240?

■ Op-Ed

Tasha Epstein

We Need To Act For Mental Health

I first encountered my peers self-harming in middle school, and I had a go-to funeral outfit by high school. The schools in my local area averaged one suicide a year. That’s one successful suicide, amongst who-knows-how-many attempts. That sounds dark, I know, but it should. Nobody told us what to do if we felt so worried we couldn’t speak, or so sad we could barely get out of bed.

Mental health is an increasingly pressing issue; CDC data found over 40% of US high school students experienced depressive symptoms, a rise of nearly 15% since 2011. Many young students suffer from mental illness but don’t know what it is, or where to turn. We have a responsibility to help the next generation; mental health education needs to be added to public school curriculums. Without this addition, we’ll keep leaving students in the dark with their bleak feelings of darkness.

For reference, this wasn’t just my area: the year I graduated high school, suicide was one of the top three causes of death across the 10-14, 15-24, and 25-34 age groups. Students were and are taking their own lives at record rates. Something needs to change. Suicide is an act of desperation, when people don’t know how to help their mental state, when they’re suffering and can’t see any other way out.

Implementing mental health education in school curriculums could be the key to saving lives. Mental health education can help students overcome systemic barriers to diagnosis and treatment, through knowledge. It can decrease stigma, introduce students to healthier coping mechanisms, and show students they’re not alone. One in seven 10-19 year olds experiences a mental illness, anything from anxiety to eating disorders. One in six people are between the ages of 10-19 years old. That’s an incredible portion of our population undergoing mental illnesses, potentially without any help or guidance.

I was one of the lucky ones; my school had a brief module on mental health and mental illness, which briefed us on some common disorders and told us what to do if we suspected a peer was in trouble. These alone were helpful, but it also taught us compassion for our peers’ struggles.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

**MASSACHUSETTS
H. 497 / S. 240**

**AN ACT FOR
MENTAL HEALTH**

WHAT'S THE PROBLEM?

- Currently, there is **no requirement for public K-12 schools to teach students mental health education** within the Commonwealth.
- Students are **suffering** and are **uninformed** and **unaware** of how and when to get help because of a lack in information.
- Mental Health education would **empower** and **inform students about their mental health** and **would save lives**.

Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death for those ages 10-34 (CDC 2019).

WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

- By **passing H. 497/S. 240**, the state would ensure that all students in Massachusetts public schools would gain an understanding about their mental health, and it would:
 - Decrease stigma**
 - Help students to **recognize stress** and other mental health concerns
 - Teach them how to **effectively seek help**
 - Get children diagnosed, treated and supported at a younger age
- Additionally, the **law leaves flexibility for the school districts** to decide what programs to use, how it is implemented, and when the education should occur.

LEARN MORE: <https://www.mentalhealthcollaborative.org>

H.497/S.240 SPONSORS

Senator Nick Collins
nick.collins@masenate.gov

Representative Natalie Higgins
natalie.higgins@mahouse.gov

Representative Meghan Kilcoyne
meghan.kilcoyne@mahouse.gov

MAKE YOUR VOICE HEARD AND YOUR VOTE COUNT!

ABBIE
FOUNDER OF MENTAL HEALTH COLLABORATIVE, ADVOCATING FOR MENTAL HEALTH LITERACY IN SCHOOLS

Mental health education and literacy would have a significant impact as "it would **decrease stigma** surrounding mental health, **combat myths**, and **get students treated earlier**. Other peers [...] recognize mental health concerns within their friends, and without mental health literacy **they might not know when, if, or how to get help**".

Abbie agrees that if mental health education were mandated, this could "100%" **save lives**.

MADISON
ATTENDED PUBLIC SCHOOLS K-12 IN SEEKONK

"Having knowledge about mental health and healthy coping mechanisms (in high school) could have helped to **improve my wellbeing** and **all-around functioning** dramatically."

Being aware of healthy coping mechanisms and mental health resources could **help teens to feel less alone**, **better regulate their emotions**, (and) **prepare them to enter college** and the workforce, where the stresses of balancing responsibility are multiplied."

BEN
ATTENDED PUBLIC SCHOOLS 9-12 IN NORTHAMPTON

"It's so **important that teens have awareness of mental health** issues and to **destigmatize** them, many teens struggle with their mental health and **are suicidal** and it's really important that **they feel they're not alone** and have places to go to, I know it would have helped me. I wish I had **learned more** strategies for dealing with it."

LEARN MORE: <https://www.mentalhealthcollaborative.org>

The teaching took only a few hours of class time over a couple of weeks, but it saved lives. I can say that confidently, because I helped do so. A peer had confided in me that she was harming herself, and I could see her situation escalating. At the same time, I was a middle schooler who didn't know what to do. I could've told my parents, but at age 12 when you're asked to keep a secret you don't think to question it. After a school program encouraged us to tell a trusted adult if someone we knew was experiencing a mental health crisis, I was able to start the ball rolling to connect my friend with the help she needed. The intervention worked – she later graduated high school early and enrolled in college. Only when reconnecting later did she reveal that without help, she likely wouldn't have lived to graduate middle school.

Massachusetts currently has a bill titled “An Act relative to the promotion of mental health education” (H.497/S.240) that would mandate public schools cover mental health education in K-12 learning, while leaving flexibility for districts to tailor it to fit their curriculum needs.

People imagine saving a life as administering CPR, or carrying someone out of a burning building. Legislators now have the opportunity to save lives without even leaving their desks. I call on legislators to pass this bill by voting on it favorably in the Joint Committee on Education. I encourage others to call or email their representatives, asking them to vote YES on “An Act for mental health.”

We have a duty to protect the children and adolescents in our community; if you saw a child drowning, you'd rush to rescue. Including mental health education in our schools doesn't seem as dire, but there's no time to waste. I helped save my classmate – your child could be the next person to save a peer...or the next victim. The decision lies with you and your legislator.

Elana Regan

Don't Sit and Wait, Educate!

In 2015 we flocked to the theaters to watch the movie “Inside Out” and immerse ourselves in the world of Riley and her complex and ever-changing emotions. This film allowed adults and children alike to better understand the importance of maintaining good mental health, and how mental health can impact people of all ages. Fortunately, Disney-Pixar has decided to release a sequel this summer with added emotions to fit Riley's more mature, teenage mental state featuring characters like anxiety and embarrassment, but this begs the question: why is Disney teaching kids more about mental health than the Massachusetts public schools?

Currently, Massachusetts does not have a requirement

for K-12 public schools to teach students about mental health, leaving many kids uninformed about their own mental health and confused about where to find help. This was the case for me. During my time in Hopkinton Public Schools, I had a lot going on. At age 10, I was diagnosed with an eye condition that would eventually lead to blindness, and I had no idea how to cope with that. This diagnosis increased my anxiety and stress and I was completely unequipped to handle it. I did not know where to turn for help. I felt alone, overwhelmed, and uninformed about what was happening in my head, and if my feelings were normal. I would be so anxious I could hardly breathe or so stressed it was easier to just miss school than have to deal with academics, bullying, and my dwindling vision. I know I'm not the only one! Struggles with mental health are in no way unique to me, my town, or even Massachusetts; this country is in the middle of a youth mental health crisis and we must be proactive to protect our students.

This is why we need S.240/H.497, An Act relative to the promotion of mental health education. This bill would mandate that every K-12 public school in Massachusetts provide students with mental health education. In data from the [Department of Public Health](#), 17.5% of Massachusetts high school students report having seriously considered committing suicide, and 7.5% of high school students report having attempted suicide in 2019. This equates to thousands of students seriously considering ending their lives, which should not and does not have to be our reality. [A pilot study performed at Hopkinton Middle School](#) showed that after receiving mental health education, 89% of students had a better understanding of “when to seek professional help for their mental health and increased knowledge about how to access that help.”

Mandating mental health education would decrease stigma, increase avenues for students to access help, and empower students to understand their own thoughts and feelings. According to the [Mental Health Foundation](#), 75% of mental health conditions are established before age 24, so instructing children about coping mechanisms and when to get support would help many people manage their conditions at a young age and prepare them for the stresses of adulthood. We cannot sit back while our youth – the future of our nation – suffer silently with no support.

With a simple alteration to the current laws, mental health education would be mandated, just like physical education. Schools teach students about exercise and nutrition to keep their bodies healthy, so it's not a huge step to instruct them about how to keep their minds healthy. Schools are supposed to support and develop our further generations and it is irresponsible for our state government

to sit and watch as these futures are lost to suicide. Especially when a measure as simple and effective as requiring mental health education in schools could save lives.

You have a chance to make a difference in this fight! Take action: call or email your state senator and representative asking them to sponsor S. 240/ H. 497.

After all, the children are our future; why not do our best to protect them?

■ Video Project:

<https://youtu.be/cwKyzghgQkE?si=lpFjnaw85Hs9DnhS>

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Spilka,

We are concerned constituents. We're both students at Brandeis University, studying sociology and political science, and we have a passion for mental health support and education.

While attending Hopkinton High School, Elana noticed the dire lack of mental health education, as she and her peers were often struggling. She would often feel alone and have no information on where to go for help, or if her experiences were actually cause for concern. She was dealing with a newly diagnosed disability, trying to maintain her friendships, and keeping up with school all while adjusting to a new reality. She would be in class and be so anxious it was hard to breathe.

Our reality does not have to be like that! Suicide is the second leading cause of death for individuals ages 10-34, and 75% of all mental health conditions present before the age of 25. Because of this, there are countless conditions that should be addressed; they could be managed if students and educators could identify when something is wrong.

We have a responsibility to safeguard our future generations and insufficient mental health education presents a systemic barrier for students. Mental health is a serious issue in our local schools. There are students who are currently uninformed about mental health and lack access to diagnostic resources because of insufficient education and information. Currently, there is no requirement for mental health education in public K-12 schools within the state, which has allowed the stigma around mental health to fester in our communities. The implementation of mental health education programs would empower and inform students, thus saving people's lives.

H.497/S.240 would ensure that all students in Massachusetts public schools would gain an understanding about their mental health, ways to manage and recognize

stress, and how to effectively seek help for mental health concerns.

Some argue that overarching educational mandates impair the ability of school districts to tailor education to their students, but this bill leaves vast flexibility for them. The language of the bill does not mandate how or when mental health education must occur, so this allows school districts to customize the education to their needs and communities.

There are financial concerns that these programs would cost the school districts extra money, but Delaware implemented a similar program and found the fiscal impact to be negligible.

You have the opportunity to save these young lives by voicing your support for H.497/S.240 in a letter or meeting to the Joint Committee on Education before the bill's reporting deadline on April 21st.

Sincerely,

Elana Regan and Tasha Epstein

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Tasha Epstein

Meeting with Brandeis Active Minds Student Group

...Elana and I were able to visit a meeting of Brandeis's Active Minds group, a community run club meant to help reduce stigma and serve as a safe space to share experiences with mental health. We'd contacted the group's leader...who very graciously allowed us to come talk to the group at the end of one of their sessions.

We began by sharing a bit about ourselves and the bill and then got to lead a discussion about the importance of mental health in schools. Group members shared stories ... from their K-12 years, and eagerly gave suggestions for how mental health education could help better students' lives. Elana and I then shared our previous advocacy efforts on the bill (meeting with staffers) and shared an example letter to a legislator we'd written. [The group's leader] then kindly shared our example letter and the emails of the Waltham legislators with the group, who we encouraged to email their senators.

Elana and I learned to be super-prepared, as we came in without having the information already neatly arranged, but found the club wanted to help right then and there rather than receiving a follow up email. Their enthusiasm was invigorating!

Overall, it felt like a productive and meaningful

conversation. While the group members were shy at first, we were able to connect with them by talking about our own experiences. They grew excited to share what they'd gone through, and what resources they wished they'd had. We asked discussion questions like, "How do you think mental health education would've impacted you?" and "What do you think should be covered in mental health education?" They also asked us questions about the bill, and what it included, which we were able to provide.

It was much less stressful than meeting with legislators or their staffers, and it felt good to really connect with some students who would've benefitted from what the bill aims to implement. The fact that it was on our campus made it especially close to home – these were my peers! This was my favorite meeting. I felt like an expert on the bill, and the audience seemed passionate about the topic.

Elana Regan

Meeting with Momina Haidri, staffer for Senate President Karen Spilka

[M]y partner Tasha and I met with one of Senate President Karen Spilka's staffers, Momina Haidri, for a scheduled meeting. We met in a meeting room within the Senator's office in the State House, and we chose to meet with a member of Spilka's staff because I am a voter in her district and we thought she might be a good voice for the bill.

When we talked, Ms. Haidri did not have any knowledge of the bill, so this was more of an educational meeting. Tasha and I gave our elevator speech and indicated that we would appreciate it if the Senator would voice her support for the bill to the Education Committee. She was vague on what the Senator would likely do with the bill, but did say she would pass her notes along to the policy team. Ms. Haidri actually was from my town, and we were able to chat about how her mental health education was very similar to mine, because we went to the same schools.

I think the meeting was productive, but I would have liked it if the Senator was actually in the office and available to talk. We can only take what we can get, so overall I am happy with how this meeting went. During this meeting I learned that most people are unfamiliar with this bill, but are generally supportive of what it aims to do. This makes me question that if this bill is so common sense and helpful why is it not moving forward? Every person we meet claims to be supportive of the bill, so either they are lying, or the bill is facing other challenges we are unaware of – it is certainly interesting! I also learned that my town can be used as a good connection point as many of the staffers and aides are from Massachusetts as well.

■ Next Steps

H.497/S.240 is currently stalled in the Joint Committee on Education, with a reporting deadline of 4/21. It's unclear what will happen, though we hope matters will be reported out favorably. Representative Sena's staffer, Ian, mentioned that the bill might end up being consolidated into an omnibus budget line item, but expressed hope and confidence that the bill's general purpose would still be fulfilled. Every legislator (and/or staffer) we talked to expressed support for the bill, and mental health care in general.

The only concerns we occasionally encountered were about implementation or funding, but we were able to address these by pointing out existing budget line items and the new Massachusetts health frameworks (both of which districts could use to implement the bill). The implementation of the bill would be primarily up to the individual school districts, so that flexibility comes with both advantages and disadvantages. There could be some concerns around enforcement and tracking compliance within each district just because the bill is so vague. It could be difficult to know what each school is doing and how well.

In a move that adds pressure to lawmakers and would ideally assist in implementation, the CDC recently released an "action guide for school and district leaders" aimed at "promoting mental health and well-being in schools." This shows that federal officials are paying attention to the youth mental health crisis, and are attempting to improve matters by promoting mental health in schools. Mental health literacy and classroom-based mental health education were both specifically mentioned, which clearly demonstrates this bill would be supported on a national level – why shouldn't state lawmakers support it?

The April 21st deadline will be very enlightening to tell the prognosis of this bill. We are getting to the end of the second year of the legislative session, so advocates and legislators alike are running out of time to pass a mental health bill. The last day of the session is July 31st, so if the bill needs to be sent to another committee there will likely not be enough time to fully pass the bill through both chambers. I have a sneaking suspicion that the extension of the deadlines has just been a way to delay the inevitable death of the bill, but there is still hope for further movement on H.497/S.240.

Future advocacy collaborations could include the Mental Health Collaborative (MHC), a Massachusetts-focused and founded nonprofit that aims to increase mental health literacy in K-12 schools. During our coursework, we talked with founder, Abbie, on multiple occasions and found both she and her nonprofit team were aligned with the bill and

interested in supporting its passage and implementation. If schools didn't want to follow the CDC or Massachusetts Health frameworks themselves, they could outsource mental health education to nonprofits such as the MHC. Doing so would also mean supporting a local grassroots nonprofit organization. Abbie and her colleagues are definitely dedicated, engaged advocates in this legislative area, and they will continue fighting for bills like H.497/S.240. We have passed along all of our materials to Abbie so that she can use our storybook and video project to include any future advocacy. The coalitions we have interfaced with will continue to advocate for this topic even if the bill fails to pass this session.

We're not aware of any substantial problems with the bill itself; it's quite simple and broad in nature, and nobody we talked to seemed apprehensive about it. If anything, legislators might be overlooking it in order to focus on more controversial, pressing issues. However, Ian's assurance that the bill would make it through in some form (perhaps bundled with other similar bills) seemed logical. We recommend continuing to advocate for the bill, ensuring that lawmakers can't forget about or overlook it in their busy days. They mentioned being in support of it – now they just need to act on that.

■ Update

As of August 30, 2024: The Committee on Education reported the bill favorably and referred it to the House and Senate Ways and Means Committees, and school based mental health supports were allocated \$7.5 million in the proposed FY '25 budget.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S. 240: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S240

H. 497: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H497

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Association for Mental Health: mamh.org

Promoting Effective Drought Management

Clay Napurano '24

Miranda Sheinbaum '24



Clay Napurano and Miranda Sheinbaum

H.861/S.475, “An Act relative to maintaining adequate water supplies through effective drought management” which was recently voted favorably by the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources, was sponsored and presented by Representative Joan Meschino from the 3rd Plymouth District (located in Hull). The House bill would amend Chapter 21A of the Massachusetts General Laws, specifically the section concerning the executive office of energy and environmental affairs, which was last updated in 2020. H.861/S.475 would be made law in the following section, 2B, which concerns legal proceedings surrounding settlement claims for damages or description of natural resources.

SUGGESTED INTRO: H.861/S.475, “An Act relative to maintaining adequate water supplies through effective drought management” instructs the governor to appoint a task force of experts to manage drought appropriately, and ensures that drought protections are equitable across the commonwealth, rather than determined independently by each municipality.

■ The Bill

H.861/S.475: An Act relative to maintaining adequate water supplies through effective drought management

■ Elevator Speech

We are Andie Sheinbaum, a Massachusetts constituent, and Clay Napurano, a Massachusetts voter. We are both involved in the Environmental Studies Program at Brandeis University. We believe that it is our duty as citizens to do all that we can in order to continue making Massachusetts the best commonwealth it can be. This includes ensuring that the next generations have enough resources to flourish. One resource that is in danger is water.

Massachusetts has faced serious issues with drought in the past and currently. The commonwealth has been in drought conditions in all five of the past five years. In 2022, for example, the entire state was in a severe drought that affected citizen recreation, wildlife, and the livelihood of farmers.

Massachusetts’ current drought policy is piecemeal. Individual municipalities decide on the best ways to handle periods of drought. This often leads to inequitable distribution of water resources.

The drought bill will solve these issues. The bill has two provisions. Firstly, it requires the governor to appoint a task force to study and manage drought. Second, it requires that drought response be equal across the state. These elements will help resolve drought by making the commonwealth’s response standardized and well-managed. The bill has provisions to allow water for farmers and recreational opportunities, but limits non-essential uses. Thus, more water remains for essential uses like agriculture and drinking for the next generation of Massachusetts residents.

Can we count on your support in pushing S.475 through the Senate Committee on Ways and Means by voicing your support for the drought bill with the chair, Senator Michael J. Rodrigues?

HEAR THEIR STORIES

COLLEEN HITCHCOCK
ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF
BIOLOGY AND
ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES
PROGRAM CHAIR,
BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY



Professor Colleen Hitchcock argues that if we reduce our watering of lawns, in addition to other measures, we can vastly increase the Commonwealth's climate resilience.

"ANYBODY WHO IS WATERING THEIR LAWN IS OVERUSING WATER."

ZEUS SMITH
POLICY ADVOCATE,
CHARLES RIVER WATERSHED
ASSOCIATION



Zeus Smith describes this bill as one of plain common sense. He explains that the measures proposed in the bill can improve inequality in the Commonwealth. He adds that this bill will prevent the Commonwealth from running out of water in both the long- and short-term.

"THERE IS A PROFOUND SENSE AMONG CITIZENS . . . OF A LACK OF EQUITY WHEN YOU GO INTO A TOWN THAT HAS SPRINKLERS RUNNING BECAUSE THEY'RE ON A PRIVATE WELL, AND YOU'RE ON A PRETTY STRICT DROUGHT CONSERVATION MEASURE."

HOW DOES THE BILL ADDRESS DROUGHT?

SUMMARY OF BILL

- Gives power to the Governor to appoint a drought management task force
- Applies drought provisions equally across the Commonwealth, ensuring equity across municipalities

WHY SHOULD I VOTE FOR IT?

- Protect our most precious resource, water
- Resolve inequality across municipalities
- Ensure future generations have an adequate water supply



THE PROBLEM

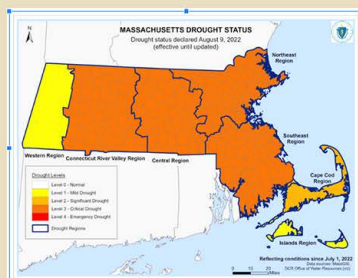
BACKGROUND

Drought in Massachusetts is an ongoing problem. In 2022, the entire Commonwealth was in a severe drought. This will get worse with climate change, as periods of drought extend. All municipalities draw water from the same aquifer. If this is depleted, the Commonwealth will run out of water.

SIGNIFICANCE

- We all need to water to live; drought keeps us from having enough.
- Drought response has not been equal. Some municipalities are forced to conserve while others are not.
- Our progeny deserve adequate access to water.

MA DROUGHT IN 2022



SPONSORS

Representative Joan Meschino
3rd Plymouth District
Joan.Meschino@mahouse.gov

Senator James B. Eldridge
Middlesex and Worcester
Jamie@Jamielldridge.com

H. 861/S. 475

AN ACT RELATIVE TO MAINTAINING ADEQUATE WATER SUPPLIES THROUGH EFFECTIVE DROUGHT MANAGEMENT



Hoppin Hill Reservoir in North Attleboro during a period of drought. The reservoir extends to the edges of the photo in wetter periods. Photo Credit: David L. Ryan, Boston Globe Staff

■ Op-Ed

Clay Napurano

Drought Reform or Demise: Saving Our Planet One Sip at a Time

There are a lot of uncertainties in today's world. Was "Dune 2" any good? Is Timothée Chalamet a generational talent? Would you want to live in a desert world covered in sand? Drought is bad. It's bad for farmers, it's bad for homeowners, and it's even bad for aquaphobics. I think that we can all agree on that. This claim is particularly easy to assert because every living being needs water to survive. Even the folks that claim to only drink Diet Coke. Water, albeit carbonated, is the beverage's first ingredient. Checkmate.

Currently, Massachusetts, like the rest of the world, is grappling with a changing climate due to increased amounts of human-emitted greenhouse gasses in the atmosphere. Increasing atmospheric temperatures have caused an exponential acceleration of emergency drought declarations in the commonwealth, most recently in 2000, 2016, 2020, and 2022. This is frightening for future generations that will most definitely be in need of water, or Diet Coke.

For the past three legislative sessions, representatives in the Massachusetts state legislature have been working to pass legislation that would help adapt to this changing climate. H.861/S.475 is the current iteration of a bill that would, if enacted, lead to stronger regulations on local watering bans. The bill would codify the current Drought Management Task Force and empower them to centralize drought responses that are currently inequitable. The bill would protect essential uses of water and ensure that all municipalities's drought restrictions during emergency drought conditions are equal.

Current drought regulation in emergency situations depends on the town that one lives in. Although I was born and raised in Natick, Massachusetts, my childhood home was right on the border of Dover, the next town over. Drought restrictions were slightly looser in Dover. So, while our lawn was composed mostly of crabgrass, dandelions, and dead brown patches, my neighbor's front yard looked more akin to the fictional Emerald City than the black-and-white Kansas reality.



My barren and brown lawn. (Photo by Clay Napurano, 2022)

The fate of our future is in the hands of the present. If you are a resident of Massachusetts, calling and writing to your representative is vital to moving this common sense bill forward. Not only would civic action in support of the passage of H.861/S.475 promote more sustainable and equitable drought regulation, but it would also get the ball rolling on green Massachusetts lawmaking.

In my meetings with legislators in an effort to support this bill, few had even heard of this bill at all, despite it being a proposal that has been floating around their committee for years. Their lack of knowledge on this, I believe, reflects the environment's secondary or tertiary importance to these public officials. While Massachusetts lawmakers and elected officials of both parties tout strong support of environmental legislation, there is much more that needs to be done.

Climate change is bad too. Although Massachusetts representatives make it clear that this simple statement is the truth, they don't seem to put too much effort into actually solving this concern. It becomes especially troubling, especially for a young person, when after countless climate strikes, endless data, and a smattering of goals touting "2050" this and "2100" nothing tangible gets passed to address these issues.

Our environment, our future, and ready access to water are not things that can be conveniently forgotten about by elected officials. We need to push harder to get our representatives to save the planet and protect us from effects of climate change that are already harming people in Massachusetts and around the world. So I ask, is sacrificing a neon green lawn, a few minutes on the phone, or writing a letter to a representative worth it? Would it help push Massachusetts in the right direction?

Who's to say, but it might be the best we can do.

Andie Sheinbaum

Defeating Desiccation Depends on Drought Defense

You get a new bonus at work. You immediately spend it on a new car without saving anything, right? You go grocery shopping for the week and, of course, eat as much as you can in one sitting and throw the rest out. You receive a liver transplant and start drinking as much as possible. None of these choices make sense, yet this is how the commonwealth is choosing to manage its water. It is up to us as concerned citizens to take steps to prevent these kinds of decisions, and to protect water use for the next generation.

As spring arrives in force, we naturally begin to use more water on our lawns and at our neighborhood pools. Massachusetts law has no restrictions on this use. Right now that feels reasonable, seeing as we are in a glut of rainy days; of course there should be no restrictions. However, drought has come for the commonwealth before, and certainly will again. By taking advantage of the current rain – the bonus at work – and using this time of surplus to pass legislation creating drought restrictions – putting money in our kid’s college fund, for example – we can better manage our commonwealth’s resources.

Right now, drought restrictions in Massachusetts are unsystematic and partial. Some towns implement protections, while others do not, even though most communities in the commonwealth draw from the same water aquifer. The results are unfair and unequal. Someone living on the border of two towns can watch their lawn die while their neighbor’s thrives. Not only is this frustrating, but it defeats the purpose of drought restrictions. If your town is conserving water, and another isn’t, not enough water is going to be saved overall. If you keep your bonus in your child’s college fund, but your kid immediately withdraws the money and spends it, your family won’t have enough to send your kid to school.

Luckily, Representative Joan Meschino (D, 3rd Plymouth) and Senator Jamie Eldridge (D, Middlesex and Worcester) introduced a bill into the Massachusetts legislature to end this inequality. The Drought Bill (H.861/S.475) has only two provisions: it instructs the governor to appoint a task force of experts to manage drought appropriately, and it ensures that drought protections are even across the state. Think of this like hiring an account manager for your bonus: they take care of the college fund for you, and make sure no one is spending it unnecessarily.

Even better than hiring an account manager, though, is that the Drought Management Task Force won’t cost you or the commonwealth a single penny. The task force will

be composed of existing government employees who will serve within their current roles. That means that our water is going to be kept safe and plentiful for generations to come without making anyone bear the brunt of the cost. Your kid’s college fund is safe, secure, and managed, all for free.

Of course, just like when you’re managing a college fund, you shouldn’t only rely on one person’s testimonial. You can also look to everyone from the [EPA](#) to the [Sierra Club](#) and even to [Fox News](#), all of whom agree that saving water saves everyone money. The Drought Bill itself is supported across the aisle, just like smart college investments are valued by people all over.

We also must consider what our future will look like. In a world rapidly changing due to global warming, droughts are going to become more frequent and more disruptive. Massachusetts has already endured drought conditions in each of the past five years. A study by Wei Zhang at Utah State University and colleagues, just published in the journal “Science Advances”, shows that heat waves, which exacerbate droughts, have been getting longer over the last 40 years with no end in sight. Droughts not only will last longer, but will be more intense. By protecting against drought today, we can conserve our commonwealth not just for our kids, but for our grandchildren and their children, too.

We cannot sit idly by and hope someone else puts money in our kids’ college funds. We cannot lay back and hope that our legislators will take action and pass the Drought Bill without pressure from their constituents. It is up to us to call or write our legislators and express support for this much needed bill. It’s common sense to invest in our future. It’s common sense for all of us to advocate for the Drought Bill.

■ Video Project

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nOSfveKE7BTq7oRy8Dr12xFdWYWVCiOF/view?usp=sharing>

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Honorable Representative Linsky,

We are Andie Sheinbaum, a Massachusetts constituent, and Clay Napurano, a Massachusetts voter and resident of Natick, both involved in the Environmental Studies Program at Brandeis University. We are writing to express our support for H.861/S.475, “An Act relative to maintaining adequate water supplies through effective drought management.”

Both you and Clay, as fellow lifelong residents of Natick, have seen the way the community has changed through the years, all while remaining home. We know how important

it is to keep our community prosperous for the future. One of the most important duties that we can take together to preserve our home for the next generation is to protect one of our most important resources: water.

Drought is a serious threat to both Massachusetts and the world. Emergency drought conditions swept our commonwealth in 2022, and, with the threat of global warming, these instances of drought are likely to get more frequent. Unfortunately, drought protections in the commonwealth are unequal. For Clay, living on the border of Natick, his neighbor across the street in Dover is able to water his lawn, while he is unable to. This is unfair to both him and the environment.

We believe that future generations of Massachusetts residents deserve the same adequate access to water that we enjoy today. The Drought Bill will empower the preexisting Drought Management Task Force, appointed by the governor, to apply drought response equally throughout Massachusetts to best preserve our water. Without any additional cost to the commonwealth, it will regulate municipal drought response to ensure equitable limits to nonessential watering (primarily excessive lawn watering). This means Clay will no longer have to see his neighbor's lawn flourish while his dies, and our grandchildren will have water to drink and recreate in for years to come.

Some may claim that this regulation may lead to a prohibition of essential uses of water or an encroachment on personal rights. However, the bill specifically protects all essential watering, even during emergencies, such as for drinking, agriculture, or private businesses like golf courses. Although this bill may limit excessive lawn watering, it helps ensure that essential water resources are available in the future so that lawns can exist at all.

Since the Drought Management Task Force already exists, this bill would cost nothing to pass and implement. It would, however, preserve our natural resources and adapt our Commonwealth, already a trailblazer in the fight against climate change, to meet changing needs in a warming world.

We ask for your support in passing this bill by encouraging your fellow representatives in the House Ways and Means Committee, where the bill currently resides, to pass H.861 by a vote of favorable action. Once the bill goes back to the House floor, we hope that you will vote in favor of it.

Sincerely,

Andie Sheinbaum and Clay Napurano

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Clay Napurano

Meeting with Representative Kilcoyne Legislative Director Madelyn Bedard

Andie and I were ... able to personally meet three representatives/senators themselves: Senator Keenan, Representative Higgins, and Representative Kilcoyne briefly.

Senator Kilcoyne, and ... her Legislative Director, Madelyn Bedard, were incredibly kind and helpful. Their meeting took place at 10:00 am on April 2nd. After speaking with the secretary at the front, we were ushered into the narrow hallway between offices cramped in a tiny corner of the State House where all the members of the Joint Judicial Committee were crammed. It was not glamorous, but the people were incredibly kind and insightful.

We delivered our elevator pitch to Madelyn Bedard, met the Representative herself, and answered a few questions Ms. Bedard had about opposition and cost with ease. Then, Andie asked about how Ms. Bedard got into her line of work and we found out that she had just graduated from undergraduate school the year prior. She spoke about her experience getting a job with Representative Kilcoyne from working with her previously and even gave us her personal phone number if we need any help with finding a career in Massachusetts state politics. She then said that she will brief the Drought Bill to Representative Kilcoyne and will get back to us.

Andie and I both agreed that it was a very successful meeting both in terms of spreading awareness about the Drought Bill and for our own personal networking. It was really intriguing to meet someone so young already working in such a high-up position in the State House. I think it shows the value of opportunity and networking in politics. While Ms. Bedard got her role directly out of college, most other representatives' legislative aides had a masters degree.

Andie Sheinbaum

Letter-Writing Campaign at Inundation District Event at Brandeis's Mandel Center for the Humanities

At this event, Clay and I set up a table with the assistance of the ENVIS [Environmental Studies Program] staff, and handed out candy, letter-writing materials, and a draft of a letter for people to copy. We set up right outside the auditorium, so as people walked in we encouraged them to write letters to their representatives. We found the correct representatives for everyone, helped facilitate the letter-writing process, and then addressed and mailed around a dozen letters. For an event attended by around 20 people, we felt very accomplished!

We also got to have a brief conversation with a “Boston Globe” reporter who was at the event, helping to establish positive relationships with the media. This was very important because legislators do different things when constituents are watching, and these letters show that constituents are watching.

A lesson we learned from this event is that people like as many things to be low-effort as possible. Even though we already drafted the letter for them, and they just had to copy it, people were highly resistant to taking the time to do so. For future events, we will shorten the copy of the letter and remind people how powerful a handwritten letter can be.

■ Next Steps

The Drought Bill is still currently in the Senate and House Ways and Means Committees and has yet to be voted on in either committee. We foresee some potential lobbying obstacles to getting this bill passed, particularly on the House side. The Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA) opposes this bill, and we were told by a staffer on conditions of anonymity that the current Speaker of the House is seeking to court the MWRA to expand water supply into his district. As such, he might be loath to support the bill because he is worried about angering the MWRA and the organization installing water supply elsewhere. A potential remedy to this would be to meet with/lobby the MWRA for the bill, because they are partially public, and thus must represent their constituents’ needs.

There would be some potential implementation issues, especially if municipalities or individual people decide not to follow emergency drought regulations. However, these potential regulations included in the Drought Bill from the Drought Management Task Force should be enough to encourage a critical mass of people to conserve more water for the future. This is the case because it relies on the same system of trusting individuals to follow drought regulations as individual municipal regulations. These state resources should also help provide another guardrail in order to softly enforce drought regulations in times of emergency drought conditions through their guidance of municipalities.

There are opportunities for future collaborations with many environmental organizations. The Charles River Watershed Association (CRWA) already supports the bill, so it may be worth trying to partner with peer organizations, such as the Mystic River Watershed Association (MyRWA). There is also the potential for larger groups to participate. The Earth Law Center, for example, has partnered with the CRWA on a “Rights of the Charles” campaign, and thus might have vested interest in protecting other Massachusetts waters from drought.

There may also be opportunities to partner with the

numerous institutions of higher education in Massachusetts, as younger generations will be more in need of water, and thus perhaps more likely to support the bill. This could be done by reaching out to organizations at those colleges or universities, or even by sending our op-eds to student newspapers there.

In regard to legislators, most supporters of the bill come from the eastern half of the commonwealth, but residents in western Massachusetts face similar issues with drought. By trying to involve them more with the bill, a cross-commonwealth coalition could be formed in support of the bill.

Some potential substantive problems with this current iteration of the bill as it is presented in the House and the Senate are that the bill is too simple, common sense, and thus limited in scope. The creation of a Drought Management Task Force to regulate municipalities may not be enough to properly encourage the requisite conservation of water resources to provide for future generations. There is also a striking and potentially concerning limited scope of the definition of “essential,” in the bill. For example, golf courses are considered an essential use of water under the definitions of this bill. This is a striking instance of this bill being potentially too limited in scope to allow for any sincere change in the preservation of water.

However, although this iteration of the bill would only regulate and preserve water from excessive lawn watering, it would set the groundwork both socially and legislatively for any potential future additions to drought restrictions in emergency conditions, if at all necessary.

Overall, there is much more work to be done in regard to passing the Drought Bill in Massachusetts. First, we must get the current iteration of the bill onto the governor’s desk and into law. Then, work will still remain to ensure that people follow the Drought Bill’s restrictions, contribute to saving water in any way they can, and maintain water for generations to come. We look forward to getting to participate in these efforts.

■ Update

As of August 30, 2024: The Committee on Environment and Natural Resources reported the bill favorably and referred it to Ways and Means.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

[S. 475: \[malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S475\]\(https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S475\)](https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S475)

[H. 861: \[malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H861\]\(https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H861\)](https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H861)

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Rivers Alliance: massriversalliance.org

Raising the Age for Juvenile Detention

Adah Anderson '24
Jessica Freedberg '24



Adah Anderson and Jessica Freedberg

S942/H.1710: “An Act to promote public safety and better outcomes for young adults” would raise the automatic age of prosecution within the juvenile criminal justice system from 18 to 20 years old by raising the age of “criminal majority.”

■ The Bill

S942/H.1710: An Act to promote public safety and better outcomes for young adults

■ Elevator Speech

Adah: I am Adah.

Jessica: And I am Jessica, we are two constituents and politics and legal studies students at Brandeis. Maintaining a fair judicial system is necessary to ensure a just commonwealth for everyone. Thus, it is critical we guarantee young people have the opportunity to receive necessary resources and ultimately, have a chance at redemption.

Adah: “I was incarcerated since the age of 17” is a phrase I no longer find surprising. Throughout my work with the Brandeis Educational Justice Initiative and my own research on reentry within the commonwealth, I have spoken to countless currently and formerly incarcerated people with this same story. I cannot recall meeting a singular person who was first incarcerated after the age of 25.

- Some of these people are now over fifty years of age and have spent much of their lives recidivating in and out of prison.
- I often wonder what their lives would look like now if they had been given a second chance by having the resources of a juvenile facility.

Jessica: Currently, there are numerous problems facing young people who are held in adult correctional facilities.

- The recidivism rate for juveniles in the adult system is 55% versus 26% for juvenile facilities.
- Science clearly shows that human brains are not fully developed until age 25.

Adah: Passing this bill would allow many Massachusetts youth an honest chance at success by providing them with rehabilitative resources during their sentence, rather than placing them with older prisoners, where they will likely be fearful for their safety.

Jessica: As adolescents are rehabilitated in juvenile facilities, they will be less likely to commit additional crimes following their release, ultimately increasing public safety. Individuals in juvenile facilities also get better access to education, mentors, and families that support their rehabilitation efforts.

Adah: Therefore, we ask that you ask other judiciary committee members to vote the Raise the Age Bill out favorably.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

THE PROBLEM

- Confining **18 to 20-year-olds** in **adult prisons** hinders their rehabilitation and causes immense harm.
- This age group maintains the **highest recidivism rate out of any age group** in the adult system.
- Science shows that human brains are not developed until age 25.

An Act to promote public safety and better outcomes for young adults


H.1710 / S.942

"Research supports that **brains don't stop developing until around age 25**... If we want this "emerging adult" age group to have the best chance of not reoffending, **we should be providing them with the services available at the juvenile facilities.**"


-Professor Rosalind E. W. Kabrhel
Chair of the Department and Associate Professor of the Practice in Legal Studies, Brandeis University

THE BILL...

- Incrementally raises the age of automatic juvenile prosecution from 18 to 20 years old.
- This would be gradually implemented over 4 years.



Jason Tatum wearing a **Raise the Age** shirt. The Boston Celtics have initiated a campaign in support of the bill.



Raise the Age MA website.

■ Op-Ed

Jessica Freedberg

The Madness of Juvenile Justice: The Impact of Juvenile Incarceration of Massachusetts Young Adults

We all know that March in the United States is synonymous with college basketball. March Madness, the biggest collegiate athletic event of the year, puts a spotlight on young adults for an entire month. 18.7 million people this year tuned into the Women's March Madness final game just to support the Iowa Hawkeyes former star player Caitlin Clark. Yet, there are individuals in this exact age group that deserve just as much support as we give to college basketball stars.

Current law in Massachusetts incarcerates young adults, ages 18-to-20-years-old, in adult prisons with minimal rehabilitation support from the state. [Young adults are 55% more likely to recommit crimes](#) after being incarcerated in adult facilities. Youth ages 18-to-20-years-old are extremely influenced by their environment and adult jails only increase criminal behavior. Thus, it is time for Massachusetts to change its current laws and house 18-to-20-year-olds under the juvenile criminal system.

We, as Massachusetts residents, need to support initiatives that provide more resources to system-impacted youth. [The Emerging Adult Justice Project at Columbia University](#) found that juvenile

"None of us should be held to the decisions we made as teenagers..." Massachusetts has the resources, history, and track record of working with youth until age 21. **To raise the age, all you're doing is giving them a second chance."**

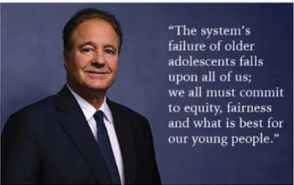
-Superintendent Lynne Allen
Long Creek Youth Development Center, Maine Department of Corrections

CALL AND WRITE YOUR LEGISLATOR AND ASK THEM TO SUPPORT THE RAISE THE AGE BILL TODAY!


CONTACT US WITH ANY QUESTIONS

THE SOLUTION

- **Protect youth** from the harmful consequences of adult system incarceration (e.g. solitary confinement and lack of programming).
- **Rehabilitate adolescents** through juvenile facility programming fostering positive skills (e.g. decision-making and maintaining family ties).



Stephen Pagliuca, co-owner of the Boston Celtics.
NBA/Boston Celtics, "Raise the Age" home page.



The Boston Celtics and other Raise the Age advocates at the statehouse.
Representative Dan Sena, Facebook. 01/31/2024.

facilities in Massachusetts have focused, individualized treatment and assessment plans. This means juvenile detention facilities provide developmentally tailored mental and behavioral health services and classroom instruction (or vocational training) during confinement along with special education teachers that are available and utilized in the correctional setting. Inmates are also encouraged to maintain contact and good relationships with family members during their incarceration.

While both the adult and juvenile criminal systems seek to hold individuals accountable for their actions, the juvenile system does more to rehabilitate detainees. [Similar adolescents experience a 26% recidivism rate](#) when in the juvenile system, which is 34% lower than the rate young offenders in the adult system experience.

As much as people like to say that turning 18 makes you an adult, science tells a different story. Scientists have found that our brains don't [finish developing until our mid-to-late twenties](#). The area of our brains that makes good decisions is not fully developed until way after we turn 18. Thus, there is no way any young person can truly understand the consequences of their actions like someone who is 30 can. So, putting 18-to-20-year-olds in adult prisons, which lack the main thing detention should provide – rehabilitation – leaves them worse off than when they committed the crime in the first place.

Massachusetts prides itself as being one of the most progressive states in the country. However, with the criminal justice system we currently have, we've been falling short of that reputation.

Luckily, there is a piece of legislation proposed in the Massachusetts State Legislature, called the Raise the Age Bill, that shows just how progressive this state is. Supporting this bill demonstrates to young adults that they have a community they can rely on inside and outside of prison. In adult systems 18-to-20-year-olds are detained with individuals up to four times their age and constantly thrown in solitary confinement. They are stripped of their support system and are often alone and scared; not getting the true help they need. The future of young adults in Massachusetts is reliant on our efforts as a community to find solutions that give them a shot at redemption and do not reduce them to things that are beyond help.

Join me and various other supporters, including the Celtics basketball organization, in the fanbase for juvenile justice reform, just like you join the supporters of college basketball stars every March. I encourage you to call, write, or tell your elected Massachusetts state representative to pass the Raise the Age Bill this year and help system-impacted youth around the commonwealth.

■ Video Project:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1EU3VYJ2xEgNCSedoRV5172AlCk-cghPW/view>

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Stanley,

Our names are Adah Anderson and Jessica Freedberg, and we are writing to you as concerned Waltham constituents and legal studies and politics students at Brandeis University. Maintaining a fair judicial system is necessary to ensure a just commonwealth for everyone. It is critical we guarantee young people can receive the necessary resources and, ultimately, have a chance at redemption. Thus, we ask that you support the Raise the Age Bill (H.1710).

As a father, we are sure that you work tirelessly to protect your children and ensure they have the best possible chance at future success. Moreover, we have seen your repeated commitment to children throughout your involvement with the Warrendale Little League Board of Directors, the Waltham Partnership for Youth Board of Directors, and the Waltham Family School Advisory Board. Your involvement with the Waltham Community Day Center also indicates that you are aware of the struggles of houseless people in our community. As I am sure you are aware, those who struggle with financial instability are far more likely to become involved with the carceral system. For these reasons, we hope that you will support this bill and see how greatly it can help Massachusetts youth.

Currently, all Massachusetts youth aged between 18 to 20 are prosecuted within the adult criminal system. Adolescents incarcerated in adult prisons have a 55% recidivism rate versus 26% for teenagers held in juvenile facilities. In adult correctional institutions, youth are deprived of the more extensive rehabilitation resources offered at juvenile facilities such as educational requirements, teaching of positive decision-making skills, and programs helping them maintain positive relationships with family members and adult role models. Within adult prisons, youth also face further problems such as an increased susceptibility to being targets of violence and being placed in solitary confinement.

By allowing these teenagers to be held in juvenile facilities instead, you are not only giving them a second chance at success, but also making communities safer. As youth are rehabilitated better in juvenile facilities, they are less likely to recommit crimes and thus end up in prison again. In turn, Massachusetts will be safer and adolescents will be allowed to work to achieve success and redemption.

Law enforcement that opposes this bill argues that it would create inconsistencies in the law since 18-year-olds have the right to get married, vote, and sign contracts. Opponents also argue that adolescents should understand the consequences of their actions. However, what they fail to recognize is that young brains are not developed until age 25, so while youth should understand the severity of their actions, their unfinished growth limits their full comprehension. Resources in juvenile facilities will help young people avoid making poor choices again, whereas adult facilities don't support them in this way.

Therefore, we ask that you vote this bill into law when it reaches the House floor. Thank you very much for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Adah Anderson and Jessica Freedberg

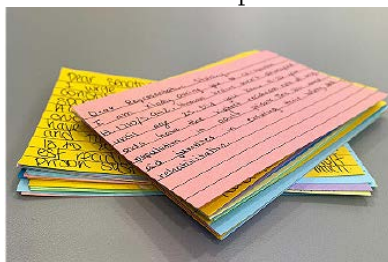
■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Adah Anderson

Letter Writing with the Brandeis Democrats Club

We organized a letter-writing event in collaboration with the Brandeis Democrats club for the Raise the Age bill. We had the members write to the state elected officials for the Brandeis area, meaning Representative Thomas Stanley and Senator Michael J. Barrett. At the beginning of the meeting, I gave a brief overview of the bill and our reasons for supporting it. From there, we had the members (about 15 people) write one letter to each of the elected officials including the reasons they felt the bill should be passed.

Overall, this event went well! We had a good turnout considering the usual attendance for Brandeis Dems meetings and people seemed very committed to the issue. Sending both of our elected representatives so many letters will hopefully make an impact on their viewpoint of the bill. One thing that could have been improved is having people write to other representatives who may be on important committees to the bill, such as the Judiciary Committee (where the bill was at the time). This could have given us more of an opportunity to reach out to other representatives and senators. Moving to the next event, we kept this in mind and offered alternatives to just Waltham's state officials.

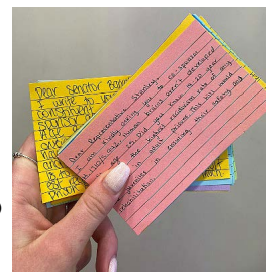


Jessica Freedberg

Letters Written by Club Members

Neuroscience Event with Dr. Kinscherff

The second event I attended had a lot more reach to individuals on Brandeis Campus outside of those who are already politically active. For this event I went to a Neuroscience and Juvenile Crime lecture with Robert Kinscherff, PHD JD, that was being held for a law and psychology lecture happening this semester.



Dr. Kinscherff is the Executive Director of the Center for Law Brain & Behavior at Massachusetts General Hospital. His talk was focused on his involvement in the court case Commonwealth v. Mattis [which] held that a sentence of life without the possibility of parole for 18- to 20-year-olds was a violation of the 8th Amendment.

Throughout his discussion Dr. Kinscherff went through the history of the Supreme Court and the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court cases that address the legality of punishment for juveniles. This conversation was very eye opening because he talked about a lot of information I was not aware of in regard to the death penalty and life sentences for juveniles. He also talked about it from a psychological lens which was very interesting because I don't tend to think about issues that way, as someone who has not taken a psychology course.

Dr. Kinscherff's lecture transitioned very nicely into the advocacy work that Adah and I had prepared for the end of the event. We gave an edited version of our elevator speech to make it more amenable to the audience of about 40 students. At the end, our call to action was asking them to sign a pre-written letter to the chair of the House Judiciary Committee, Representative Michael Day [and] Adah and I could mail them to him.

Dr. Kinscherff supported our efforts and told the class that the "Raise the Age" bill was very important to his work with juveniles and their safety in general. The support given to us by the speaker led about 25 students to take a letter and sign it. Making this a makeshift letter writing campaign was successful because we had access to a different group of students who cared about the subject matter but understood it from a different point of view. We were a little rushed at the end of class as students wanted to leave so I think in the future it would be good to remind the professor and lecturer about our plan to factor in more time for the advocacy work planned to make it even more effective....

■ Next Steps

Moving forward with the Raise the Age bill, much depends on the Judiciary Committee's decision on April 30th, regarding how to proceed with the bill. What is clear is that there is significant support within the committee, especially amongst those with more experience and knowledge of the justice system. Therefore, it is critical that legislators are made aware of the realities of the carceral system and the significance of the harm it creates for youth. Given that the prison system is largely hidden from the public, and arguably designed to be this way, this is not an easy next step to take.

However, given that the Department of Corrections is funded by the legislature directly, it is critical that they are more knowledgeable about the realities of this system. Perhaps one way of approaching this would be to require all legislators to tour at least one adult and one juvenile correctional facility while being encouraged to speak to incarcerated people. If legislators were more aware of what prison does to people, they would hopefully be more compelled to support this bill. Overall, it is simply necessary to remove the leeway currently afforded to the Department of Corrections in terms of transparency and truly hold officials accountable for the trauma they induce for system-impacted people and youth.

It is further critical that deterrence is practiced more widely within Massachusetts communities, as with less crime fewer incarcerations are experienced. Moreover, resources within both the Department of Youth Services and adult facilities could be made much better to accommodate the needs of incarcerated populations. While the rehabilitative resources within the juvenile justice system are far better than within the adult system, they can certainly be further improved.

At the same time, juvenile facilities could be made with a far less punitive structure, as their current state still closely resembles adult correctional institutions. If youth facilities were purposefully designed to be less traumatic, and perhaps more like schools, those confined within the system would benefit from these reforms.

Additionally, given that this bill would only raise the age to 20, many youths will still enter the adult prison system once they age out. Thus, it is imperative that access to rehabilitative resources is made more accessible to adults in the system as well, for the benefit of not only younger incarcerated people but also their older counterparts.

Overall, the passage of this bill would represent one step toward achieving criminal justice reform. If passed, Massachusetts would have the opportunity to be a trailblazer state in this area. Therefore, it is critical to continue advocating for its passage, but also to work to get other reforms passed.

The justice system is far from being truly just and significant work must be done to ensure that it is equitable for all. Continuing with the currently unfair prison system will continue to stall work to ensure the commonwealth is the best it can be for everyone.

■ Update

As of August 30, 2024: As part of a larger economic development bill, the Senate voted on July 11, 2024 to raise the age of juvenile detention to include 18-year-olds. On July 18, 2024, the bill was sent to a conference committee. The committee failed to reach consensus.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.942: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S942

H.1710: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H1710

Organization or Coalition support:

Citizens for Juvenile Justice: cfjj.org

Increasing Access to Midwifery Care

Arianna Jackson '25

Dalia Moran '24



Dalia Moran and Arianna Jackson

S.1457/H.2209: “An Act promoting access to midwifery care and out-of-hospital birth options” would create a licensure for certified professional midwives and create a standard of care and responsibilities. Licensing certified professional midwives would recognize their professional duties and qualifications and make their care reimbursable by Medicaid/MassHealth. This is part of a broader effort to expand access to midwives, home birth, and birth centers in Massachusetts, as the state currently lags behind the nation in these areas.

■ The Bill

S.1457/H.2209: An Act promoting access to midwifery care and out-of-hospital birth options

■ Elevator Speech

Good afternoon, thank you for taking the time to meet with us.

We are Arianna Jackson and Dalia Moran, two constituents of Massachusetts attending Brandeis University, where we focus on environmental science and health: science, society, and policy. Our studies have informed us of the inequities in our society, and that is why we champion equal opportunity and autonomy for all.

Today, we speak on behalf of bill S.1457, “An Act promoting access to midwifery care and out-of-hospital birth options.”

We were all brought into this world by a birth-giver, and it is our duty, along with the health care system’s, to protect the lives of birth-givers and infants, future members of society, throughout the pregnancy process.

The problem we face in Massachusetts is a lack of equitable access to maternity care, particularly for people of color.

The state, renowned for its medical industry, falls behind in maternal mortality rates and initiatives that could combat this issue.


Arianna: As a Black woman who would like to give birth one day, this information is extremely alarming to me. I am almost three times more likely than my white counterparts to die when giving birth due to a lack of acknowledgement and resources during the pregnancy process. This disparity highlights a clear lack of equal opportunities for all birth-givers.

The enactment of bill S.1457 aims to create licensure for certified professional midwives and make their care reimbursable by Medicaid/MassHealth. This legislation is part of a broader effort to expand access to midwives, home birth, and birth centers in Massachusetts. By integrating certified professional midwives into our healthcare system, we can provide more personalized and culturally sensitive care, reducing maternal mortality rates and improving outcomes for birth-givers and infants.


We urge you to act in support of this bill. By advocating for its passage, you can help ensure that all birth-givers in Massachusetts have access to safe and equitable maternity care options. Please speak to your colleagues about the impact this bill will have on our communities and healthcare system. Together, we can make a significant difference in the lives of future generations.

■ Excerpts from Storybook


Areas of Impact

AVAILABILITY 


Educate and increase
amount of Certified
Professional Midwives

ACCESSIBILITY 

Secure healthcare
access through
financial coverage

ACCEPTABILITY 

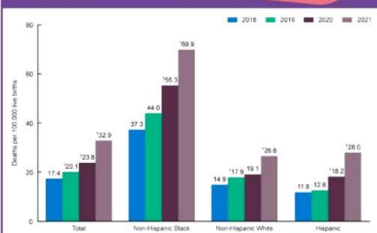
Dignify Care

QUALITY 

Regulate, register
and license midwives

Bridge infrastructure
and resources for
maternal and newborn
health

CURRENT STATISTICS



Deaths per 100,000 live births

Category	2018	2019	2020	2021
Total	13.4	20.1	23.8	28.9
Non-Hispanic Black	37.3	44.0	55.5	58.9
Non-Hispanic White	14.0	17.0	19.3	26.6
Hispanic	11.8	12.8	14.8	28.0

Maternal mortality rates increased from previous years (p < 0.001). Rates were highest among Black women (p < 0.001). Rates were lowest among Hispanic women (p < 0.001). Source: CDC, National Vital Statistics System, Maternal Mortality Review System, 2021. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023, March 16). Maternal mortality rates in the United States, 2021. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention p. 4

- Maternal mortality rates in U.S (2021)
- Increase in mortality when looking at the statistics of women of color

Midwives can lower...

- overall maternal mortality rates
- unnecessary C-sections
- postpartum complication
- infant deaths


Nové, Andrea et al. "Potential impact of midwives in preventing and reducing maternal and neonatal mortality and stillbirths: a Lives Saved Tool modelling study." The Lancet. Global health vol. 9, 1 (2021): e24-e32. doi:10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30397-1

CONTACT US

Arianna Jackson
Email: arijackson@brandeis.edu
Dalia Moran
Email: dallamoran@brandeis.edu


AN ACT PROMOTING ACCESS TO MIDWIFERY CARE AND OUT-OF-HOSPITAL BIRTH OPTIONS

BILL H.2209/S.1457



What is a Midwife?

skilled, knowledgeable and compassionate care for childbearing persons, newborn infants and families across the continuum from pre-pregnancy, pregnancy, birth, postpartum and the early weeks of life



PROBLEM


- MA is behind in having more adequate maternal care options for pregnant people
- There is an increasing demand for maternity care but MA lacks safe, accessible, and affordable options and has limited out-of-hospital birth options
- Restrictive regulations on midwifery care hinder maternal care growth

SOLUTION


Bill S.1457 will create licensure for certified professional midwives and make their care reimbursable by Medicaid/MassHealth. This will expand access to midwives, home birth, and birth centers in Massachusetts. The bill will bridge the gap between healthcare professionals (or hospitals) and midwifery care. It will offer more options for all pregnancies, especially reaching the demographic of birth givers of color.

MIDWIVES SAVE LIVES

- Certified Professional Midwives have the knowledge and capacity to provide up to **87%** of maternal and newborn care provided by physicians
- Black and Indigenous birth givers in the U.S. are **3X** more likely to die from a pregnancy-related cause than white birth givers
 - Midwives provide culturally competent care that can avert 41% of maternal deaths, 39% of neonatal deaths, and 26% of stillbirths
 - Averting 2-2 million deaths per year by 2035



Nové, Andrea et al. "Potential impact of midwives in preventing and reducing maternal and neonatal mortality and stillbirths: a Lives Saved Tool modelling study." The Lancet. Global health vol. 9, 1 (2021): e24-e32. doi:10.1016/S2214-109X(20)30397-1




Emily Anesta
Engineer,
co-founder of the Bay
State Birth Coalition

"It is a human right to respect bodily autonomy and health, to thrive, and reclaim experiences that are free from oppression"

Midwives in community settings are **5X** more likely to provide higher autonomy and respect to their patients compared to physicians in hospitals

Nové, P. Mimi et al. "Examining respect, autonomy, and mistreatment in childbirth in the US: do provider type and place of birth matter?" Reproductive medicine 2012; 67: 14 May 2023. doi:10.1093/rm/054-1



Rebecca Rausch
Massachusetts State
Senator

"In my first term in the Senate, we passed this bill on midwifery licensure on the Senate floor, unanimously. And there is no reason for us to not do that again right now in a moment where the health statistics on maternity care, and birth care, and outcomes are scary at best."

■ Op-Ed

Dalia Moran

Unveiling Birth-Giving Realities

Having a baby is supposed to be one of the happiest moments of a person's life. However, behind the veil of societal expectations and glossy magazine covers lies a reality that many birth-givers know all too well – one fraught with challenges, uncertainties, and, at times, harrowing ordeals. Just ask Kate Middleton or Serena Williams or the millions of other mothers who suffered as a result of their pregnancy.

In 2017, the Duchess of Cambridge confessed to [Vogue](#), “For many mothers, myself included, this can at times lead to a lack of confidence and feelings of ignorance.” Even Serena Williams, a champion of the tennis world, was dismissed by healthcare professionals who overlooked her concerns, her medical history with blood clots, and her attempts to advocate for herself. Middleton's candid admission of postpartum depression and Williams' unnecessarily dangerous childbirth experience underscore the urgent need for comprehensive support and compassionate care for all birthing individuals, regardless of their socioeconomic status or fame. These individuals have experienced pregnancy issues and have resources – imagine those with fewer choices and less financial liberty.

Williams' [unacceptable ordeal](#) highlights the stark reality that even the most recognized and accomplished birth-givers are not immune to systemic issues within maternal care, where individual experiences and needs are often sidelined. [Massachusetts bill H.2209/S.1457](#). An Act promoting access to midwifery care and out-of-hospital birth options, aims to license professional midwives and create a standard of care and responsibilities. It also allows certified professional midwives to be compensated for their services through MassHealth (Medicaid) and recognizes their professional impact addressing maternal health disparities.

This bill recognizes that the solution to the maternal mortality crisis extends beyond access to care and insurance and is a systemic issue that must be addressed carefully and comprehensively.

Postpartum depression is not merely a fleeting mood disorder; it is a debilitating condition that can shatter the very essence of maternal well-being. By endorsing midwifery care and supporting this bill, personalized support can be offered along with continuity of care throughout the perinatal period, reducing the risk of postpartum depression and improving maternal mental health outcomes.

Furthermore, licensing certified midwives ensures that birth-givers receive care from qualified professionals who

adhere to rigorous standards of practice. It offers a level of accountability and transparency crucial to safeguarding the well-being of both birth-givers and infants. Certified midwives play a pivotal role in ensuring safe and respectful maternity care.

Promoting out-of-hospital birth options is another essential aspect of this legislation. While hospitals play a vital role in high-risk pregnancies and emergencies, many low-risk birth-givers may prefer the comfort of giving birth in familiar surroundings, attended by a trusted midwife. By supporting out-of-hospital birth options, birth-givers are empowered to make informed decisions about their birthing experiences, fostering autonomy and choice in a system too often characterized by medical paternalism. This can also alleviate stress and case overload in hospitals, allowing low-risk patients to receive individualized personal care and increasing medical staff's capacity to attend to cases of higher risk.

Consider the staggering disparity in cesarean section rates between different healthcare models. While most people believe a reasonable cesarean rate should hover around 20%, the state of Massachusetts [reports](#) an alarming rate of 31.8%. In stark contrast, the [Midwives of New Jersey](#) proudly boast a total cesarean rate of just 10.7% for the year 2017. These statistics underscore the profound impact that midwifery-led care can have on promoting vaginal births and reducing unnecessary surgical interventions.

In light of the undeniable evidence supporting the efficacy of midwifery care, it is incumbent upon policymakers to enact legislation that promotes its widespread availability and accessibility. This includes licensing certified midwives, expanding insurance coverage for midwifery services, and incentivizing the establishment of out-of-hospital birth options found in Bill S. 1457.

The benefits of midwifery care extend beyond statistics – they embody a holistic approach to childbirth, grounded in empowerment and compassion. By nurturing a trusting relationship between midwives and their clients, this model of care fosters continuity, empathy, and individualized attention – a stark departure from the impersonal model prevalent in many hospital settings.

It is time for action. Massachusetts constituents, your voices matter. Reach out to your representatives and urge them to support Bill S.1457 – an act that promises to revolutionize maternity care and prioritize the well-being of birthing individuals and their families. Attend hearings, write letters, and amplify your voices on social media. Together, we can ensure that every birth-giver receives the compassionate care and support they deserve during one of life's most sacred journeys. The time for change is now.

■ Video Project

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Ybi_vcGjTZvMfw-MgGNgYClnjyBkH7Bi/view

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

We are writing to you as concerned constituents and students at Brandeis University.

We are reaching out to seek your support for bill S.1457, “An Act promoting access to midwifery care and out-of-hospital birth options,” which is currently under consideration in the Massachusetts legislature.

The solution we support is the enactment of bill S.1457. This bill seeks to license and integrate certified professional midwives into our healthcare system, thereby expanding the maternity care workforce.

Throughout the state of Massachusetts, there is a pressing issue of inadequate resources for maternity care, particularly for birth-givers in marginalized communities. This lack of access to necessary resources results in significant health disparities, with people of color being 2.6 times more likely to die due to birth-related reasons. The current system fails to provide equitable opportunities for all birth-givers, putting their lives and the lives of their infants at risk.

Part of the solution to this problem lies in the enactment of bill S.1457. This legislation seeks to license and integrate certified professional midwives into our healthcare system, allowing them to provide care in various settings, including at-home births, hospitals, and birth centers. By expanding insurance coverage for out-of-hospital services and lifting barriers to midwifery licensure, we can expand midwifery care to 100% of low-risk births across the U.S. and save as much as \$340 million per year, as the National Institutes of Health has estimated. By doing so, we can promote maternal and infant health and address the disparities reported by the 2013 Period Linked Birth/Infant Death Data, which found that the preterm-related infant mortality ratio for infants born to African American mothers (491 deaths per 100,000 live births) is more than three times as high as the infant mortality ratio for infants born to white mothers (159 deaths per 100,000 live births).

One of the main goals of this bill is to make maternal care options more affordable and accessible to a broader range of people. While there may be concerns about a potential increase in insurance premiums, it is important to note that any such increase would be minimal. The

long-term benefits of improved maternal and infant health outcomes far outweigh the short-term financial costs.

We urge you to support the licensure of midwives and the coverage of their services through MassHealth. Every birth-giver deserves the opportunity to receive quality care, regardless of their background or financial status. Your support for this bill can help make that a reality.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward to your response and hope for your support in this important matter.

Sincerely,

Dalia Moran and Arianna Jackson

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Arianna Jackson

State House Visit to the Office of the Joint Committee on Public Health

This meeting took place in the office of the Joint Committee on Public Health. These offices seemed to be where aides and interns worked. We sat at the connecting cubicles and started the meeting. In this meeting were Daniella Montero, Dalia, and me. Montero is a research analyst for the committee. With this information we were hoping to hear more about the analytics on the progress of our bill.

After introducing ourselves, we started an elevator pitch advocating for the bill, expressing our passion for and knowledge about it. However, by this point, we were a more well-oiled machine allowing us to shift gears in order to keep her interested. To do so we added a personal anecdote [about someone].

...We didn't discuss this beforehand but I believe that we had this pivot because Montero was most likely used to hearing numbers and statistics. We read the room and tried to adjust accordingly. This meeting didn't go as intended, especially in the aspect of creating a connection. Although we did change our initial approach it felt like the conversation was falling flat.

The takeaway we gained from this is figuring out how to ask the right question. There's a possibility that she was hoping to gain information from us the same way we were hoping to gain information from her.

Dalia Moran

State House Visit to Senator Rausch's office

This meeting took place in the office of Senator Rausch, in a small room where Erica Woloszynski, David Weinstein, Arianna, and I sat around a table. Our purpose was to gain insights into the current status of Bill S.1457 within the State House, understand the opposition's stance, identify legislators potentially on the fence, and gather information on individuals who might benefit from further education about the bill's content.

Erica Woloszynski, representing the office, greeted us warmly, expressing eagerness to engage. She informed us that while there wasn't significant opposition to our bill, certain physician organizations had reservations in supporting Bill S.1457. She encouraged us to articulate why institutionalized hospital care isn't the sole solution, suggesting it could sway physicians who are hesitant about licensing midwives and extending their coverage under Medicaid/MassHealth.

During the discussion, Erica asked about our academic background regarding midwifery, prompting us to discuss more about its history and the over-medicalization of childbirth in the U.S. We emphasized the necessity of licensing to validate midwifery's long-standing safety and efficacy. Erica also advised reconsidering the term 'midwifery' and its perception, particularly given its roots in communities of color, which often face marginalization. This was helpful as it was not a question Arianna and I had previously discussed being important in our advocacy efforts.

Our engagement displayed our commitment to advocating for the bill's significance. We navigated unexpected questions about midwifery's history adeptly, reinforcing our argument for licensing. However, I acknowledge the need for more concise responses to maximize our limited time and missed an opportunity to inquire about common misconceptions regarding support for the bill.

Despite these areas for improvement, we successfully established a connection with the office, facilitating the scheduling of an interview with Senator Rausch. This connection proved pivotal in advancing our advocacy efforts.

In reflection, the meeting underscored the relevance of our advocacy for Bill S.1457, highlighted by our proactive engagement and adaptability to unforeseen questions. The encounter also emphasized the importance of concise communication and the importance of establishing connections to further our cause.

"Navigating Intersectional Identity and Expectations as Femme of Color"

Today's meeting took place in the cozy setting of Swig Lounge within the Intercultural Center at Brandeis University. The setup was intimate, with two chairs positioned at the room's center for two panelists, surrounded by inviting couches. The gathering was hosted by the Femme of Color Alliance (FOCA) under the title, "Navigating Intersectional Identity and Expectations as Femme of Color." Its purpose was to foster dialogue on the diverse experiences and challenges encountered by femmes of color on campus....

As part of FOCA's Women's History Month events, the aim was to amplify the voices of femme-identifying people of color and their contributions to our communities. My presence was motivated by advocacy efforts for Bill S.1457, recognizing the importance of acknowledging all birthing people and addressing the disproportionate impact of maternal mortality rates on people of color.

I saw this event as a welcoming space to share insights on increasing midwifery licensure and out-of-hospital birth options. I initiated the conversation with an elevator pitch for Bill S.1457, I also provided an email template projected on screen, facilitating engagement with representatives, and I also provided a link for attendees to find. The ensuing dialogue delved into the expectations imposed on femmes of color, particularly the pressure to embody strength and prioritize motherhood at the expense of their own needs. Exploring the historical role of Black midwives further unearthed sentiments and perspectives on expectations and the devaluation of professions led by femmes of color.

While the event wasn't solely focused on my advocacy efforts, I appreciated FOCA's platform to share insights on Bill S.1457. The presence of passionate undergraduate femmes of color, particularly their interest in systemic change within the healthcare system and tackling Black maternal mortality, resonated deeply with FOCA's objectives.

Reflecting on what went well, I found personalizing the elevator pitch, a lesson learned from my first State House visit, to be effective in engaging attendees. However, in hindsight, incorporating a brief Q&A session for clarification could have enhanced communication. Nevertheless, I believe my contributions left a lasting impact, aligning with the overarching goal of advocating for Bill S.1457.

■ Next Steps

As of April 18th, 2024, the House and Senate have concurred on extending the reporting date to Tuesday, December 31, 2024. After speaking with an analyst of the Public Health Committee, to our knowledge the bill is in good standing, it just needs to be critiqued. This means that the bill is receiving positive feedback and support from the committee members and now they are focusing on the details. This bill covers many issues and for it to be sustained for a substantial amount of time, they must make sure all parts of the bill are clear and concise.

Additionally, considering the conversation we had with Senator Rausch's staff member, she indicated that there's a possibility that part of the bill may be examined and moved on but not the bill as a whole. With that being said it is not certain that the bill will be dismantled, but it is an option for it to be broken down and placed alongside other bills to adequately provide long-term change. In either scenario, the bill technically has positive standing, and the idea will move forward with either pathway.

As advocates of the bill while it is moving through the legislative process, we want to continue to bring awareness to the significance of the bill. A major part of this bill is breaking down what a midwife is and the services they can provide. Our next steps would be to continue to educate others about the influence and importance midwives and midwifery have on maternal care.

One of our ideas to continue advocating and being engaged with the bill is working with groups on campus such as Femme of Color Alliance (FOCA) or the Brandeis

Student Sexuality Information Service (SSIS). With either or both of these groups, we would look to have a screening for a film called "At Your Cervix." This would allow students from campus to become knowledgeable about the realities, scares, and possibilities of healthcare institutions.

Additionally, this would allow us to interact with our peers to gain insight into their perspectives. It is important as we continue to advocate and educate others about our bill, that we ourselves continue to adapt and listen to our colleagues and peers. This can act as valuable information when figuring out how to best advocate for our bill.

■ Update

On August 15, 2024, the Massachusetts Legislature passed the landmark midwifery and maternal health bill "An Act promoting access to midwifery care and out-of-hospital birth options" as part of a package of legislation that expands access to midwifery care, birth centers and much more. On August 23, Governor Maura Healey signed the bill into law.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.1457: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S1457

H.2209: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/HD3100

Organization or Coalition support:

Bay State Birth Coalition: baystatebirth.org

Provide Healthcare to Children Regardless of Immigration Status

Rachel Gao '25

Vickie Hsieh '25



Rachel Gao and Vickie Hsieh

H.1237/S.740 “An act to ensure equitable health coverage for children” will help to grant children health benefits regardless of immigration status. Currently, comprehensive MassHealth coverage is unavailable for undocumented children, a population that includes between 30,000 to 50,000 individuals. This is because although there is no law about this specifically, when applying for health insurance, individuals are asked to fill out a form that requires a social security number. However, undocumented immigrants do not have a social security number, meaning that they would only be able to receive MassHealth Limited, which only covers emergency services, rather than receive a MassHealth plan that will cover all of their medical needs. In order to resolve this problem, the “Cover All Kids” bill seeks to expand full MassHealth coverage to all.

■ The Bill

H.1237/S.740: An act to ensure equitable health coverage for children

■ Elevator Speech

Nice to meet you! Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today! We are Rachel and Vickie. We are juniors at Brandeis University studying political science and public health.

Our academic and personal interests allow us to recognize the incredible power the government has in improving health outcomes. So that is why we are here today to talk to you about the Cover All Kids bill. As residents of Massachusetts, we believe that every child in the state should have an opportunity and chance to stay healthy and succeed as our future leaders, regardless of circumstances. However, more than 40,000 children in our state are denied health insurance coverage due to their immigration status, which leaves them vulnerable to preventable diseases like the seasonal flu and COVID.

These are the issues that the Cover All Kids bill will address. 12 other states already implemented similar bills, so Massachusetts should follow their example and take charge in protecting our citizens' health. By making prevention a priority, when we cover all kids, we protect the health of the entire community.

We urge you to advocate for this bill by speaking to your colleagues in the Senate Committee on Ways and Means, which can help advance bill S.740 to the senate chamber floor for a vote. Thank you for your time and consideration!

■ Op-Ed

Rachel Gao

Left out in the Cold: The Hidden Healthcare Crisis Undocumented Children Face

Knock, knock.

“Emma, wake up!” When you open the door to your middle schooler’s bedroom, your daughter says,

“I can’t go to school today. I’m sick.” Cough, cough. “Olivia was sick

■ Excerpts from Storybook



Q&A

Why should we expand MassHealth for immigrants?

- Immigrants, including refugees and asylees, **contributed** a remarkable \$123.8 billion* more than they have cost in governmental expenditures between 2005 and 2019.
- Despite paying taxes, undocumented immigrants may not receive comprehensive public benefits, including access to certain healthcare coverage.

Have other states passed similar bills like H1237/S740?

- **12 other states****, including California and New York, have already passed similar bills.
- **Massachusetts** (and NH) are the **only states left** in the New England area that currently does not provide Medicaid benefits for their undocumented immigrant population.

*Source: "Children of Immigrants: Health, Adjustment, and Public Assistance" 1999.
**Lanahan: "Bill would make kids without legal immigration status eligible for MassHealth." July 25, 2023.

"Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."
-- Frederick Douglass

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Spread awareness about the bill & encourage others to learn about the importance and potential impact of the bill
- Attend public hearings or rallies about the bill
- Volunteer with advocacy groups, such as **Health Care for All (HCFA)**
- Read and learn about immigrant stories
- Stay informed and engaged!

Cover All Kids

H.1237/S.740

An act to ensure equitable health coverage for children

What is the Problem?

40,000+ children & young adults in Massachusetts are denied healthcare resources* such as:

- Dental and Vision care
- Medication
- Mental health visits

This leads to:

- Higher mortality rate
- Elevated risk of preventable diseases
- Higher demands for government-funded emergency care

*Note that these children **meets** all other eligibility requirements **except** immigration status

"It is really hard for undocumented people to trust people[...] there has been many instances of neighbors, landlords, and bosses calling ICE[...] Throughout the history of the United States, immigrants have not been seen as worthy, deserving of policies to protect them."

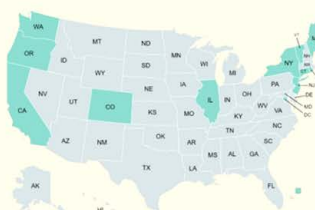
-- Alexandra Piñeros-Shields, Consultant and former Executive Director at Essex County Community Organization (ECCO), who worked on driver's license for undocumented immigrants in MA for 22 years

*Kauritz, "Care Coverage Push Continues for Undocumented Kids," January 18, 2024.

THE SOLUTION...

H1237/S740

The Cover All Kids bill (H1237/S740) seeks to expand full MassHealth coverage to all income-eligible children and young adults under the age of 21 regardless of immigration status.



12 states across the United States have already passed similar bills

Addressing Cost Concerns



Evidence shows that we save money on the long run as Emergency Room costs are more expensive than prevention care.

"The only kids that are not covered in Massachusetts is undocumented kids... The least we can do is to do it for the children."

--Michael Doonan, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Health Policy Forum and Director of the Council for Health Care Economics and Policy.

"[Immigrants] want to be self-sufficient but they are not able to."

--Lauren Davis, The Right to Immigration Institute (TRII) staff member



yesterday. I think I got it from her.” Checking her temperature, you realize it’s 100.1°F.

“You have a fever, I’ll pick up some medicine from the pharmacy.”

In Massachusetts, we all have access to healthcare through MassHealth – all except undocumented immigrants. Instead, undocumented immigrants are left out in the cold, literally. They have a harder time getting the medical help they need and on time. This means they don’t receive proper care and put other children and families at risk, like in the case of Emma and Olivia. So imagine, perhaps Olivia is undocumented, and she’s feeling unwell, there’s no doctor visit or quick medication runs for her. She then goes to school, coughing, hangs out with her friends, coughing, and eats with them, still coughing. Emma and her friends then all end up bedridden for days. Unfortunately, this is a common occurrence – can you guess why?

MassHealth, the state-funded health insurance in Massachusetts, currently serves approximately two million residents. Of the six coverage types, MassHealth Limited is the only health insurance that undocumented immigrants are eligible for, but it only covers emergency services. Therefore, undocumented children cannot get the preventive care they need, including non-emergency hospital services, dental and vision care, and medication. In other words, despite meeting all of MassHealth’s eligibility criteria – except for immigration status – these children cannot access basic healthcare check-ups and services essential to their well-being.

When people don’t have insurance or enough coverage, they are more vulnerable to illnesses and mental health conditions, leading to depression and worsening health conditions including heart disease, cancer, and stroke. It also contributes to health disparities, disproportionately impacting communities of color. Consequently, uninsured individuals end up in expensive emergency rooms. With ninety percent of America’s annual \$4.1 trillion healthcare costs being spent on chronic and mental health conditions, early detection saves money and lives.

There are currently approximately 40,000 children in our state who don’t have full healthcare coverage due to their immigration status, leaving them at risk of preventable illnesses. When an undocumented child gets sick, they delay seeking treatment until their conditions worsen because they can’t easily see a doctor or get medicine. This leads to more severe illnesses that would require emergency room visits. This is even more concerning because emergency rooms are swamped in Massachusetts, with patients waiting over ten hours just to get a room.

Therefore, the Cover All Kids bill is the solution. This

bill will extend comprehensive health coverage to all children under the age of 21 by removing the immigration status requirement, resulting in less pressure on ERs and ensuring everyone gets the care they need and on time.

This has never been an issue of “them” or “us” because children, regardless of status, are part of our community. When children are the most vulnerable to illnesses, we must protect them. As we saw during the pandemic, schools were one of the first places to shut down. Children not only transmit illnesses faster than adults, but it is also harder for them to recover. During the pandemic, children suffered significantly, representing approximately 18% of all COVID-19 cases. Simply put, not having full healthcare coverage doesn’t just put undocumented children at risk – it poses public health risks for all children and our entire community.

Twelve other states around the country already passed policies that offer full healthcare coverage to everyone – adults and children – regardless of immigration status. Other than New Hampshire, Massachusetts is the only New England state left that still does not offer comprehensive health insurance for its immigrants. It is crucial that policymakers address these health disparities and ensure that all children have access to healthcare services to promote the health and well-being of you, your child, and everyone else in Massachusetts.

So...what can you do to help? I urge you to call your legislators and ask them to support and co-sponsor the Cover All Kids bill (H.1237/S.740). If you’re unsure who your representatives are, search here: <https://malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator>.

Vickie Hsieh

Give Children a Chance, a Bill to Cover All Kids

Beep. Beep. Beep. Alarm blares at 9:00 am. The past week’s been rough with constant coughing, fever, COVID tests, and heaps of homework – a reality nobody wants. But the new oral antiviral pill from your doctor surprisingly subdued most COVID symptoms. The extra tests handed to you also provided some comfort; knowing is better than not.

Tossing aside yet another useless COVID test, you freshen up for a long-awaited meal with your friend. “Hey,” you say into your phone. “Are you on your way?” “Sorry, I think I’ll have to cancel. Not sure what I caught, but it’s nasty.” Your friend croaked.

“Oh no! Hope it’s not COVID... Take a COVID test, then see your doctor. Their prescriptions worked surprisingly

well for me.”

“I would if I could...” they reply hesitantly. “You know what? It’s alright. I’ll see you in class sometime soon, hopefully.”

“Wait, what do you mean?” you tried asking before they hung up.

The answer is that your friend is undocumented.

Currently, there are over 40,000 children and young adults in the state of Massachusetts who are in a similar situation to the friend in the story. Despite fulfilling all eligibility criteria for MassHealth, undocumented individuals are denied access to visit the doctor, obtain essential prescriptions, or even receive affordable COVID testing and treatment by the Massachusetts government. From children to young adults in college, these individuals are not given equal opportunities because their health needs are constantly dismissed. A simple infection can cost hundreds of dollars, which many cannot afford, leaving them to suffer alone without treatment.

In a state that proclaims itself as a leader in healthcare, MassHealth Limited, or emergency Medicaid, is the only government-issued healthcare service that non-citizens could receive. They receive no care other than that for emergencies, making preventive care non-negotiable. Even then, the requirement to disclose immigration status is a common obstacle that prevents immigrants from getting the care they need due to the fear of deportation. In the matter of life and death, what is more important: health or citizenship?

Access to affordable healthcare is crucial, particularly for children, who are highly susceptible to illnesses and can quickly spread them. That’s why schools were among the first to enforce lockdown protocols. Children make up approximately 18% of COVID cases, and around 70% of COVID transmission within US households originated from a child. When one child is sick, everyone is at risk. COVID has mercilessly infected nearly 77.5% of the population, and it doesn’t discriminate based on citizenship. We all need care to survive, yet not everyone has the opportunity to stay healthy. By making healthcare inaccessible to undocumented children, the legislature is actively hindering the educational development of our future leaders and endangering the entire community. Children cannot learn when they are sick, and sick children will not have an equal chance to grow up as the leaders of tomorrow.

The bill “Cover All Kids,” H.1237/S.740, addresses these issues by providing access to preventative care to stop illnesses before they progress. If passed, it would remove the immigration status requirement for all income-eligible children and young adults. This change is not only feasible

but also moral. Twelve other states have already taken the lead and passed similar bills to Cover All Kids, all thriving without any consequences. This is not an issue of “them” or “us” but rather about creating a safe environment for all people in this community. It’s time for Massachusetts to prioritize the health and growth of all its children.

With the bill now awaiting passage in the Senate, we have no time to lose. When we cover all kids, we make our community a better and safer place to live. As a resident of this state, please reach out to your representatives to urge them to move the Cover All Kids bill forward. Write to them, send an email, call – make yourself known. We, as residents of Massachusetts, have a voice, and now is the time to use it.

■ Video Project

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aIYvf2AhwXoAir_rBF11xF3Q2Zmpk6sh/view?usp=sharing

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Mike Barrett,

We hope you and your family are well! We are Rachel and Vickie, juniors at Brandeis University studying political science and public health. We are writing to you to express our passion for enhancing the development and health of children, specifically through the Cover All Kids bill. As Waltham residents, we believe that every child in Massachusetts should be given a chance to stay healthy and succeed as our future leaders, regardless of their circumstances. We know that you are deeply passionate about and committed to safeguarding the well-being of children, including those with disabilities: their growth, education, and healthcare.

Healthcare is essential to the well-being of all individuals, particularly children, who rely on access to quality healthcare services to thrive and reach their full potential. Therefore, prioritizing comprehensive healthcare initiatives is not only a moral imperative but also provides a foundation of health and safety to protect our children and all who live within our community.

However, currently, more than 40,000 children in our state are denied health insurance coverage due to their immigration status, leaving them vulnerable to preventable diseases like the seasonal flu and COVID-19. For example, according to the joint report from the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Children’s Hospital Association, children are one of the vulnerable populations that suffered the most, representing approximately 18% of all COVID-19 cases. This is incredibly concerning as children are most prone

to transmitting illnesses, preventing them from getting adequate education, especially without the quality healthcare they need.

That's why we are passionate about the Cover All Kids (H1237/S740) bill. By making prevention a priority, this bill ensures all children have access to basic healthcare services, regardless of circumstances, while investing in a brighter and more equitable future for all. By removing the immigration status requirement, we not only protect children's health but also safeguard the well-being of our entire community. Although there are financial concerns in enacting this bill, 12 other states have already implemented similar bills, so Massachusetts, as a leader in healthcare, can and should follow their example and take charge in protecting our citizens' health. Moreover, by providing preventive care through this bill, we avoid high emergency room costs that are paid by taxpayers, saving money long-term. This bill will alleviate both the financial and health burdens of the state. When we cover all kids, we protect the health of the entire community.

Therefore, we urge you to continue your advocacy for healthcare policies that prioritize the needs of children and promote equitable access to healthcare services for all by helping us advocate for this bill and speaking to your colleagues in the Senate Committee on Ways and Means which can help advance bill S.740 to the senate chamber floor for a vote. Thank you for your time and consideration!

Sincerely,

Rachel Gao & Vickie Hsieh

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Rachel Gao

Meeting with Representative Sabadosa's staff

...Vickie and I met Chris, a staff member in Representative Sabadosa's office in Room 160. We had previously tried to set up a Zoom meeting with Representative Sabadosa twice before this meeting, but she was unsurprisingly busy during both times, so we decided to postpone and ultimately met Chris in the office instead.

We wanted to meet with Representative Sabadosa because we noticed that her policy history and priorities seemed to match what Cover All Kids was about in terms of her commitment to social justice and public health and safety, specifically equitable access to quality, affordable healthcare services. We originally did not see her name as a cosponsor on the bill, but we later saw it. Nevertheless, since the bill was still stuck in the Senate Ways and Means

Committee, I wanted to meet with at least one person from the House for when the bill moves to the House. We wanted to make sure we had at least some strong supporters in the House other than Representative Rogers, who introduced the bill.

Therefore, we met with Chris to introduce him to the bill since he was not familiar with it. We asked Chris to pass along our bill brochure/storybook as well as our message to ask Representative Sabadosa to prioritize the bill once it reaches the House, which he promised he would do. We were also able to learn a little about Chris about his journey before he came to the State House.

Ultimately, I think the meeting went well. The one thing that might have made the meeting better is if we had prepared more questions that Chris could answer. Because we were originally supposed to meet Representative Sabadosa and had to postpone a couple times, we had prepared questions to ask Representative Sabadosa that Chris did not know the answers to since he was not aware of the bill beforehand.

Vickie Hsieh

On an Immigration Day Event Hosted by the MIRA (Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy) Coalition at the State House:

Despite the rainy atmosphere and early morning, the State House was packed with people of all origins. It was my first time attending an immigration-based event, and I essentially went in blind. Sharing no American-immigrant experience, it was hard for me to predict what would come next. We were situated in the Hall of Flags, and a sense of familiarity arose when I saw a pin that said "I speak Mandarin," which I had no hesitation to pin on my coat.

There were many performances and speeches by people of all origins, and to my surprise, this event hosted by the MIRA Coalition had changed my perspective entirely. The stories, the songs, and the speakers all emphasized one thing: we are people of the same earth, and we should all celebrate our individuality without it becoming an obstacle to unity.

Prior to the event, I felt disconnected from "immigrants" because I shared no experience or mindset with people with an immigrant background, yet at this moment, it felt as if we had never been separated by our differences. With this, I came to the realization that the essence of the bill is to provide for and better the lives of people regardless of their background. This new understanding of mine made it easier for me to approach the bill's advocacy because now I am not required to have that "immigration experience" but to simply be a person who

cares for the lives of others.

After the event had ended, the volunteers of MIRA gave a few folders to anyone who wished to advocate for immigrant rights. I was surprised to see the fact sheets for Cover All Kids within the folders, and Rachel and I gladly took some. The volunteers had us head to various offices to drop off the folders to their respective recipients, and we also placed our own pamphlets into the mailboxes of legislators. The offices that were assigned to the folders were mostly legislative offices that focused on family and children's rights, budgeting, and racial equality. Although we were unable to speak directly to any of the legislators, we were able to talk to a few staffers in the office and promote our bill, along with passing over the folders.

I've learned that having a conversation with legislators is definitely effective in advocacy, but having a large-scale supporting system is also an effective way to spread awareness. The utilization of the occasion to promote our bill even further was unquestionably a productive act on our end, and I was glad to have been present at the event.

However, one major thing I would say that I regret is not taking the initiative to talk to the attendees of the event. We had plenty of time prior to the start of the event to talk to the general public about our bill, but we felt uneasy because we are inexperienced. This is definitely something that could be worked on, and being inexperienced does not have to be a barrier to advocacy since we all have to start somewhere.

■ Next Steps

H.1237/S.740, also known as the Cover All Kids bill, is currently in the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. Despite being introduced as a bill three times in the legislature, the main obstacle that prevents the bill from moving forward to a vote on the senate floor is its fiscal implications, as well as its lack of priority. The bill is well supported by legislators (who know about the bill) and advocates, but issues involving the well-being of immigrants are not presently a primary consideration for the state.

Moving forward, the bill should be amended to clarify the source of the bill's funding, as well as to include specific details on the bill's implementation once passed, such as educational campaigns and interpreters for undocumented immigrant patients. Due to the lack of specifics on the implementation of the bill once it is enacted, a potential implementation issue that we can foresee is the difficulty in explaining and anticipating logistical challenges that may arise. This includes ensuring access to healthcare facilities, accommodating cultural differences, as well as limited resources in the healthcare system.

It is vital to ensure the passage of Cover All Kids as the influx of immigrants in Massachusetts continues to increase. The budget needed to accommodate potential emergency health care for immigrants far exceeds the current proposed funding for the bill. Therefore, extending the eligibility for health insurance will not only provide preventative coverage for children but also be a long term investment for state revenue. This also ensures the well-being of the entire state of Massachusetts since preventative care for children prevents a rapid distribution of infectious illness, including COVID-19, that is transmissible to all individuals.

In order to move the bill forward in the legislative process, the next step needs to be bringing more awareness to the issue and this bill. This is because although some legislators know this bill – and support it, there are also legislators who do not know of this bill, contributing to the lack of priority of the bill. Therefore, in addition to educating legislators about this bill, the residents of Massachusetts should also be more aware of this bill.

Although there is definitely opposition to the bill due to ideological differences, there are many people in the state who will support this bill and can contact their legislators to support the bill. Therefore, advocacy efforts should include educational campaigns to spread the bill and what it hopes to accomplish for the general public, which can be used to push legislators to support the legislation as well.

Advocacy groups and organizations such as the MIRA Coalition are already supporting this bill. However, it is crucial to collaborate with other groups and individuals in the state to push this bill further. For example, partnering with churches who support newly arrived immigrants, as well as getting more firsthand experience and anecdotes of nurses and doctors who work in Emergency Rooms, who can express the urgency of the health situation, pushing legislators to prioritize this bill for the health and safety of everyone in the community.

■ Update

As of August 30, 2024: The Committee on Health Care Financing reported the bill favorably and referred it to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.740: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S740

H.1237: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H1237

Organization or Coalition support:

Health Care for All MA: hcfama.org

Providing Comprehensive Sexual Health Education in Schools

Lilu McNiff '24

Ayden Novick '24



Lilu McNiff and Ayden Novick

S.268/H.544, “An Act relative to healthy youth” aims to provide students with comprehensive sex education in order to give students accurate information when it comes to their body, sexuality, gender, consent and relationships. This proposed bill is a vital contribution to education, health, safety, and inclusivity especially considering the lack of a strong health curriculum for public schools.

■ The Bill

S.268/H.544: An Act relative to healthy youth

■ Elevator Speech

We are Ayden and Lilu, undergraduates at Brandeis University studying public health and policy. As a result of our studies, we believe people deserve to have the knowledge to make informed decisions about their sexual health and safety. Knowledge is the cornerstone of a healthy society and having empowerment and autonomy is a fundamental right. In order to achieve this, well rounded, evidence based, standardized sexual health education in the state of Massachusetts is imperative.

Despite the overwhelming support of 91% of voters for comprehensive sexual health education in schools, this bill has endured four sessions without being passed. A social change won't occur without necessary action from the policymakers that reflect the positions and desires of a majority of voters.

The Healthy Youth Act addresses these issues with a simple solution, with an updated framework that requires schools in Massachusetts offering sex education to incorporate consent-based relationships and teach medically accurate, inclusive, and age appropriate information.

This is a critical change that needs to happen as there has been no change to the curriculum since 1999. Going 25 years without any changes has seen drastic impacts as adults are not properly equipped with the knowledge they need to lead future generations. Due to this there have been increased sexually transmitted infection rates which have skyrocketed as well as the risks of teen pregnancies highlighting the urgent need for updated education to empower individuals and promote healthier outcomes.

The proposed bill respects parental choice to opt their child out of the curriculum and review the content of what is taught in schools. It is imperative that today's youth have the necessary skills and knowledge of how healthy relationships should function in order to be better prepared as the future leaders of America.

We urge you to use your position to ensure that these youth are empowered to make informed decisions regarding their own sexual identities and gain a better outlook as they face the world's interpersonal relationships by pledging your support for The Healthy Youth Act.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

HEALTHY YOUTH ACT

H.544/S.268

The Problem:

Massachusetts has not updated their sex education curriculum since 1999. Students are receiving out-of-date and even medically inaccurate information with a old framework that prioritizes abstinence above all.

91% of registered Massachusetts voters stated they believe students should receive sex education in high school

93% said that sex education should include a comprehensive range of topics

So why hasn't this changed?



more than 60% of high schoolers will graduate high school having sex

"When I (she/they) was in 8th grade I received a rudimentary sex ed course. The girls were taught by our school nurse the boys were taught by the gym teacher. There was no attempt to incorporate gender inclusivity or a non-binary state of gender. No physical demonstration of how to put a condom on. They never discussed anything regarding consent or resources outside of the classroom"

-Former MA public school student



<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/S263>
<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/193/HD3874>

"we cannot trust individual parents to educate their children about sex because of cultural taboos that exist around sex and children"

-Keridwen Luis

Senior Lecturer at Brandeis University in Anthropology and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies



"Sex ed tries to often to put people in one box and that sex is only for reproduction and this isn't something many young people want"

-Alaina Vermilya

Senior at Brandeis University
Conducting thesis analyzing young adults perspectives of their sex education



"Many of today's youth go to the internet for questions surrounding sex ed and most of the stuff on the internet that they access is not accurate or not fact based; leading to further misinformation"

-Vanna Howard

Co-sponsor of the Healthy Youth Act

The Solution:

- Provide comprehensive and inclusive sex education that is scientifically accurate, culturally relevant, and age-appropriate for students.
- This education will empower young people with the knowledge and skills they need to make informed decisions about their health and relationships.

■ Op-Ed

Lilu McNiff

It is Time for Change: Why the Healthy Youth Act Needs to Pass

As we reflect on changes that have shaped our world over the past 25 years, from the advent of smartphones to the rise of social media, one critical aspect remains stuck in the past: our approach to sex education. In a time where communication is instantaneous and information is at our fingertips, it is shocking that our curriculum for sex education has not changed since 1999.

More recent years have brought to light a concerning trend in how social media platforms are becoming a hotbed for misinformation regarding sexual health. From myths about contraceptive methods to misconceptions about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and consent, inaccurate information is being disseminated widely, especially among young people, and it is time to change.

Today's youth navigate a digital landscape where they are bombarded with information about relationships, sex, and consent from various sources. Despite this, our education system continues to offer a stagnant framework that fails to address the complexities of modern relationships and sexual health. In a digital age where information is readily accessible at the tap of a screen, the outdated framework prioritizes abstinence-based education and lacks essential discussions on consent, leaving young individuals vulnerable to misinformation and toxic relationship patterns.

Consent, a fundamental aspect of healthy relationships, is often reduced to a simplistic "yes" or "no" in outdated curricula. This oversimplification ignores the nuances of consent and fails to address the systemic issues that can lead to coercion and discomfort, especially for people who are socialized to prioritize others' feelings over their own.

The reluctance to update sex education reflects a larger societal trend where instant gratification and technological advancements are prioritized over essential rights and education. We invest in the latest gadgets and technologies without hesitation, yet when it comes to comprehensive sex education, there is a systemic lag.

We cannot continue to treat consent education as a checkbox in a curriculum; it is an essential aspect of young adult development. By neglecting to provide holistic sexual education that includes discussions on consent, we perpetuate systems of violence and neglect the well-being of our youth.

The Healthy Youth Act (H.544/S.268) offers a clear solution by pursuing a comprehensive approach to sex

education that covers a wide range of crucial topics, including consent, healthy relationships, gender and sexual identity, online safety, reproductive health, contraception methods, STI prevention, recognizing signs of abuse, and accessing support services. It advocates for teaching not just “yes” and “no,” but also respect, communication, and understanding in relationships. This act recognizes that consent is not just a formality but a human right that is ingrained in every aspect of our lives.

In spite of this, there is much opposition that these types of topics are inappropriate and do not belong within a school setting. The reality, as uncomfortable as it may seem, is that young people are already exposed to sexual content from a variety of channels such as media, peers, and the internet. As we witness the impact of movements like #MeToo in shaping societal conversations, it’s clear that our curriculum must evolve to reflect current events. Therefore it is imperative that we make the information that students receive be not only comprehensive but accurate, age appropriate, and reliable for them. These types of conversations and education can start early, addressing important personal boundaries in elementary school and progressing to discussions about harassment as children grow older.

We need to move beyond outdated frameworks and embrace a curriculum that equips young people with the essential knowledge and skills they require to lead healthy and fulfilling lives. We must invest long term in comprehensive sex education as this not only benefits individuals’ well-being but also leads to societal savings in terms of healthcare costs and social services. When there’s a financial interest at stake, there is often a societal push to advocate for change. However, when it comes to advocating for the rights of individuals without immediate financial gains, the system tends to resist change. Nevertheless, investing in comprehensive sex education has long-term benefits that will be financially profitable.

It is time to bring our sexual education into the present day. It makes no sense that this bill has gone five sessions without being passed. We must break the cycle of delaying the passage of The Healthy Youth Act as it directly impacts the well-being and empowerment of our youth. Living in the present means taking decisive action now to ensure a brighter future for generations to come.

I encourage everyone to reach out to legislators on the Joint Committee of Education and urge them to vote in favor of the The Healthy Youth Act. The passage of this bill is essential to ensure comprehensive education on consent and equip our youth with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate healthy relationships and make informed choices.

Ayden Novick

They Can't Learn If You Can't Teach

Worldwide, sexually transmitted diseases are now more common than malaria. As a public health and policy student at Brandeis University, I have studied a plethora of different aspects surrounding health education within the United States and Massachusetts specifically.

Throughout my studies, no aspect of public health and policy has been as critical or contested as the need for comprehensive sexual health education in the state of Massachusetts. An Act relative to healthy youth, or “The Healthy Youth Act,” prominently stands at the head of this debate. This act aims to propose medically accurate, standardized, and inclusive sexual health education for all students. Yet, despite overwhelming public support, the bill has yet to pass. Although it has been passed several times in the Senate, it continues to remain in legislative limbo due to the Massachusetts House of Representatives not passing it.

The fact of the matter remains that this act offers a previously lost beacon of hope. In today’s world, there is a rampant spread of misinformation which has contributed greatly to a societal divide. This bill transcends the pigeonholing of legislation and acts as a commitment to the education and empowerment of our youth.

By ensuring that all students have access to education grounded in scientific accuracy, this bill aims to shrink the divide between students who have had access to accurate sexual health education and those who have not. This bill also strives to respect the diverse tapestry of the Massachusetts student population and include LGBTQ+ students as well as those who are not native English speakers. This bill won’t simply educate; it will equip future generations with the tools to make informed decisions and successfully navigate their interpersonal relationships.

Through all the political jargon, one ideal remains clear: knowledge is power. The power to understand one’s body, respect the boundaries of others, and advocate for oneself in relationships are all necessary aspects of sexual health education. This bill is about paving the path for healthier and more respectful interactions and celebrating the diversity of our student body.

The Healthy Youth Act isn’t just a standardization of existing education; it’s a moral imperative for our society to value and protect all its members.

Some, especially the Massachusetts Family Institute, question the costs and challenges associated with implementing such a comprehensive sex education. Yet, what is the cost of such ignorance? The investment in a comprehensive sexual health education curriculum reflects

the realities of youth in today's society. Youth are exposed to more and more due to early access to the internet and it is imperative that they understand how to build healthy relationships; if we don't teach them, they may be lost trying to navigate the complex world of online relationships on their own.

This is where my personal conviction lies. As someone who believes wholeheartedly in the role of education in transforming lives and preparing youth, I see the Healthy Youth Act as a promise – a promise to future generations and students that they matter, and that their health and well-being are worth the investment. This bill acts as a statement that Massachusetts values the rights of all its youth to make choices to protect themselves and their relationships with others.

While critics such as the Massachusetts Family Institute may continue to push back against the bill, the fact remains that the lack of inclusive and comprehensive sexual health education fails our students. It leaves them vulnerable and unprepared for the operations of the real world. This bill isn't simply about teaching the mechanics of sex and sexual health but is also about fostering a culture of consent and mutual, respectful understanding. It acts to dismantle societal taboos and builds a foundation of knowledge that can educate and change the culture surrounding sexual health for the better.

As we remain at the crossroads, the choice is clear. We must choose to empower our students to live healthier and more responsible lives. Instead of letting the fear of the unknown and misinformation guide our policies, we must let education triumph and change the status quo. I urge lawmakers, educators, and all Massachusetts residents to support the Healthy Youth Act. We must make a collective commitment to the future and well-being of our youth. With your support, I see a future where every student is empowered, educated, and confident in their ability to navigate future relationships. This isn't just an investment in education, it's an investment in a healthier society for all.

For our students, for our state, and for our future the time to act is now.

■ Video Project

https://drive.google.com/file/d/14XHYaeMYQHPx3pmFbwRZhNcENXGVlCbJ/view?usp=drive_link

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Stanley,

We hope this letter finds you well. Our names are Ayden Novick and Lilu McNiff and we are reaching out to you as Brandeis University students with concerns about the current status of sex education in Massachusetts' public schools. All youth deserve a well-rounded and comprehensive education when it comes to making informed choices regarding their sexual health and well-being. Knowledge is the cornerstone of a healthy society and having empowerment and autonomy is a fundamental right. It is our responsibility as mentors for the future generations to help guide and prepare them to the best of our ability. We recognize and deeply appreciate your commitment to the health and safety of Massachusetts from your previous sponsorship and cosponsor of bills aimed at protecting and defending reproductive health.

We believe your support and advocacy for the health of public school students is vital for ensuring the well-being of our state's youth. Currently many Massachusetts public schools are failing to provide students with the necessary information to make informed and safe decisions regarding their sexual health and safety. With the outdated Massachusetts Comprehensive Health Curriculum Framework last updated in 1999, it does not adequately address crucial topics of contraception methods, LGBTQ+ inclusion, sexually transmitted infections, or consent. Although we know the framework was finally updated in September, this is not enough to keep students afloat in this system that does not have their best interests at heart with how it is currently structured. Massachusetts students are left with a curriculum that does not prioritize medically accurate information and focuses on abstinence-based education, despite residing in a state known for its reproductive equity.

Furthermore, LGBTQ+ students are affected by the cracks in education, as the framework does not provide accurate and inclusive information. According to Planned Parenthood, the lack of representation and education also contributes to higher rates of STIs and sexual violence among the LGBTQ+ community.

We know that a potential concern with modernizing education is that it will promote earlier sexual activity and disregard personal or religious beliefs. The Healthy Youth Act (H.544/S.268) provides a simple solution to these concerns, requiring that schools that do offer a sexual education program are age appropriate, medically accurate, and LGBTQ+ inclusive. This bill importantly preserves the

rights of and respects a parent or guardian's right to review the curriculum and opt their child out should they choose to.

Comprehensive sex education is essential for the health and well-being of Massachusetts students and is a matter of public health. By providing accurate information, we empower young people to make safe and informed decisions about their sexual activity and relationships, ultimately leading to healthier outcomes for our communities.

We urge you to speak to your colleagues on the Joint Committee on Education and advocate for the passage of the Healthy Youth Act (H.544/S.268). Your support on this critical issue will have a profound impact on the lives of Massachusetts youth and contribute to a healthier, safer future for all.

Best,

Ayden Novick and Lilo McNiff

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Lilo McNiff

Sexual Health Awareness and Health Youth Act Advocacy Event at Brandeis University

For this event we were able to have a substantial meeting and attend an advocacy event, all in one. At the table, Ayden and I were able to write messages to public schools and talk to Olivia Toscano, who we had previously met with when she and Sasha Goodfriend came to Brandeis in the beginning stages of us working with the bill. She asked how our bill was going and we had a good conversation at the table. We were able to also talk about the Healthy Youth Act to some people who passed by the table and discussed ways of messaging with people managing the table as well as just our roles as students working with ENACT to [passersby]. I think this experience was definitely less formal and different than talking with other advocates and people interested in the bill's work.

During a moment when there were [fewer] people at the table, Charlotte Powley, Assistant Director of Research for ENACT, shared with us some of her work and let us look through her Condom Accessibility Training slides.

I feel like this was good to be able to ask her more about her work and advice with next steps of where we were at with the bill. I think she contextualized well that as much as we are researching about this bill, the importance of condensing the bill to be digestible and people can understand the main parts of the bill in everyday language. She was extremely helpful in terms of adding to our perspective the types of differing opinions we might encounter and that there is

much work to do in terms of shifting larger organizations' minds about the bill.

The key about age appropriateness was something we added more heavily to our elevator speech to account for opposition and in other meetings as we can make tangible examples that this bill does not teach 3rd graders how to put a condom on but rather begins important discussions about consent. I think also recognizing that people can be onboard with the bill but just not really care enough to find incentive to vote for it was something I really began to think about after this meeting.

Ayden Novick

Legislative Meetings: Staff for Representative Smitty Pignatelli and Representative Danillo A Sena

Today, Lilo and I traveled to the State House and had the opportunity to speak with multiple staff members. We met with a staff member of Representative Smitty Pignatelli as well as a staff member of Representative Danillo A. Sena. This was our first experience meeting with any legislator or staff member outside of the people who came to our class to speak with us.

The purpose of these meetings was to talk to the staff members and inform them about the bill in the hopes that they would inform the legislators members about our goal. ... For both meetings, Lilo and I gave our elevator speeches.

Following the delivery of the elevator speech, Representative Pignatelli's staff member questioned us about the financials surrounding this bill. This question caught us a bit off guard. We were able to explain that in the long run, this bill will essentially pay for itself because of the introduction of better, more comprehensive education. We explained that over time, there will be lower rates of medical issues and unwanted pregnancies which will save the state money. After this they asked us more in depth about how the state will pay for it now which we explained will be allocated by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. They seemed satisfied with this answer and assured us that they would pass along our reading materials to the representative.

Our meeting with the staff member of Representative Sena went fairly similarly. We presented our elevator speech and were able to change it slightly to relate to Representative Sena's work with the Department of Public Health and that the Healthy Youth Act is a concern of all public health in Massachusetts. This staff member felt much more excited about the prospects of our bill and promised that they would speak to the representative about what we talked about. We made sure to send follow up emails to both staff members

and the representatives.

As a whole, this experience with the first two staff members helped me learn more about what these State House interactions would actually look like and the importance of the elevator speech. This experience was also very nerve wracking because I had never spoken to official people about an issue like this before. The elevator speech ended up being really important because neither of the staff members had much spare time to give; so it was imperative that we presented our argument as quickly as possible while still leaving time for discussion and questions.

■ Next Steps

Now that the Healthy Youth Act has passed once again in the Senate and has been referred to the Joint Committee on Education, there are multiple next steps involved with our bill.

The first steps involve remaining in correspondence with the sponsors of our bill as well as any members of the House of Representatives who may still oppose it. We can continue to act as a resource and middleman between members of the Healthy Youth Act Coalition and legislators who we have worked with. We will also reach out to legislators who we didn't have the opportunity to meet with and schedule meetings with them in order to further advocate for our cause.

While we are still in Massachusetts before graduating, we hope to also attend different town halls in neighboring towns and cities to answer questions that citizens might have about this education.

Along with attending and organizing these meetings, we plan to form strong alliances with different educational advocacy groups such as the Massachusetts Teachers Association. Having supporters like these will allow us to obtain further testimonies from those involved with the educational system to advocate for our bill. Some of these testimonies can come from current and past teachers, administrators and students of the Massachusetts public schools system. These testimonies will allow us to further understand how students and staff feel about sexual health education and change our advocacy efforts to meet the needs and beliefs of those involved with the system. Having these better arguments and testimonies will allow us to interact better with the opposition and provide them with better information about the bill's implementation than they were previously receiving.

We are hoping to concurrently meet with more healthcare professionals involved within the Massachusetts hospital system to build up further medical coalitions.

Once the bill moves past the Joint Committee on Education, we plan to continue to advocate for it and meet with representatives of the next committee that the bill travels into. Although this involves much more time and continued out-of-class efforts, Lilo and I are up to the task to make sure we do everything in our power to make sure that the bill finally passes and the efforts of those involved with the bill are not in vain.

We expect that the next committee for the bill to travel into is the House Committee on Ways and Means. With this in mind, we will research members of the house we are most concerned about being influenced by the opposition and meet with them to address any of their negative thoughts regarding the bill and anything that the opposition has said to them.

Of course there are implementation issues involved with this bill that are addressed within these next steps. The Healthy Youth Act's implementation yields a few issues – for starters, having to actually prepare and teach educators how to approach the topic and ensure that they educate in a way that matches up with the new standards set by the bill. To address this challenge, we plan to assist in the forming of partnerships between educational institutions and non profits for training and resource development. These non profits and outside organizations can include Planned Parenthood, which already has a large focus on sexual health education.

A second issue with the implementation of this bill is making sure that there are individuals correctly tasked with the monitoring and evaluation of these classes once they are implemented in the school system. To address this issue, we plan to help propose a framework that will assign and allocate the funds to pay for trained individuals to monitor the implementation at different schools and track the impact that the bill has had on student knowledge and behavior.

Lastly, we want to make sure that the work we have done this semester for the Healthy Youth Act was not done for nothing. We want the bill to pass with as much bipartisan support as possible.

To be certain that our bill passes in the House of Representatives this session, we plan to continue to advocate and mobilize supporters for our bill. We plan to work more with the Healthy Youth Act Coalition and actually work with different youth in Massachusetts to make sure that they understand what the bill is and the importance that it has within their own educational system.

Already the support for The Healthy Youth Act has gained much momentum since the last session. We will encourage supporters to advocate at their respective schools

and write to their local representatives detailing that The Healthy Youth Act's implementation is something that they want for their own education. We will invigorate these supporters to watch the legislative process and participate in any advocacy efforts or further town halls that might be occurring.

We know that this bill is ready to pass and Massachusetts needs its implementation. We are confident that with our past and future efforts along with the efforts of organizations such as the Healthy Youth Act Coalition the bill will pass this session and be made into law.

■ Update

As of August 30, 2024: the bill passed the Senate, and the House referred it to the Committee on Ways and Means.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.268: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S268

H.544: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H544

Organization or Coalition support:

MASS NOW: massnow.org

Modernizing Firearm Laws and Gun Regulation

Yoni Kahn '24
Jackson Wu '24



Yoni Kahn and Jackson Wu

S.2572/H.4135 “An Act modernizing firearm laws” was first proposed in October 2023 to crack down on unregistered ghost guns, to expand provisions against public carry of weapons, and to extend the authority petitioning for a red flag against troubled individuals from a family or household member and local police departments to include health care providers, school administrators, and employers, with the goal to combat and prevent modern gun violence in Massachusetts. As the House bill faces fierce opposition from gun rights groups and draws concerns from local police departments, Senate amendment S.2572, also known as the SAFER Act, was introduced in January 2024. S.2572 reduces the extensive House bill to its essential parts by restricting the expansion of eligibility to file red-flag petitions to only healthcare providers and by allowing local police departments to conduct and report gun dealer inspections before intervention from state police. Both bills include key measures, including the introduction of a broader definition of “firearm” in Massachusetts and banning firearm carry in Massachusetts government buildings, with some areas left for further debate in an upcoming conference committee before being submitted to Governor Maura Healey.

■ The Bill

S.2572/H.4135: An Act modernizing firearm laws

■ Elevator Speech

Hello [Legislator], how are you? [pause/respond to legislator] I am Yoni Kahn, and I am Jackson Wu, and we are undergraduates at Brandeis University and constituents of the commonwealth.

Our youth and communities in Massachusetts have the right to feel safe in all settings, whether at school, Market Basket, places of worship, or music festivals.

[Legislator], do you remember going through school shooting exercises as a kid? [pause] Growing up in Portland, Maine, my childhood was marked by school shooter drills, constantly wondering when these rehearsals would become a reality. These drills felt necessary because of our country’s exponential increase in gun violence.

In 2023 alone, there were more shootings than days in the year, and we are on track to repeat this tragic record in 2024. This growing pandemic of gun violence is a result of the loose regulations and enforcement of current gun laws, which allow unfit individuals to easily access unregistered firearms. These “ghost guns,” whether manufactured by under-inspected gun dealers or unlicensed individuals, pose great threats to our safety in the commonwealth.

Increased inspection of gun dealers and increased data to track these illegal firearms in Massachusetts will help prevent this. Additional legal tools such as an expansive eligibility to file Extreme Risks Protection Orders will also help ensure that those who are unfit cannot obtain these deadly weapons by banning them from obtaining a license in the first place, or removing their

■ Excerpts from Storybook

Allison Weiner - Former President of Students Demand Action at Brandeis University

In 2023, in between classes, Allison learned of the Michigan State shooting where her childhood friends attend school...



"My story [...] is not unique - millions of people share my story."



Rajesh Sampath, Professor of the Philosophy of Justice, Rights, and Social Change at Heller School of Social Policy & Management

"We are normalizing the rapidity and the depth [of gun violence] But geographically, it's unpredictable - it could pop anywhere, which is extremely frightening. Our nanny takes [our daughter] out to play...who knows [what could happen]?"

What Next?

Make YOUR Voice Heard!

A closed-door committee conference is now negotiating the differences between the Senate and House Bills. We encourage you to **call and share your stories and concerns** with the senators and representatives participating in the conference.

The roster of the committee conference:

Sen. Cynthia S. Creem [D] (617) 722-1639
Sen. Joan B. Lovely [D] (617) 722-1410
Sen. Bruce E. Tarr [R] (617) 722-1600



Rep. Michael S. Day [D] (617) 722-2396
Rep. Carlos González [D] (617) 722-2230
Rep. Joseph D. McKenna [R] (617) 722-2810



Photo Credit: [adibalea](#) from [pixabay](#)

A Safer Commonwealth For All



Modernizing Gun Reform in Massachusetts

Bill S.2572
Bill H.4139

The SAFER Act: Bill S.2572

- Amends the state's definition of a firearm to include **ghost guns** - unserialized, unregistered, and often self-assembled firearms
- Authorizes MA state police to help conduct **gun dealer inspections**



An Act Modernizing Firearm Laws: Bill H.4135

- Expands **Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPO)** to include school administrators and healthcare providers in the Red Flag Law
- Bans **public carry** of firearms in educational institutions, polling places, and government buildings

Feasible measures to protect communities from ghost guns have earned the support of Massachusetts law enforcement.

"The Senate Bill makes sense. Whatever [the legislature] does has to be carried out by people in our sphere, and when it's distilled down and simple and makes sense, it's going to work. So that's what works for us."

— Chief Eric Gillis, Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association President, in an interview with Chris Lisinski



Photo Courtesy of the MCOPA

The Problem

2,000%

Increase in the # of ghost guns, which are unserialized firearms untraceable to law enforcement. This increase from 6 to 318 unserialized weapons retrieved between 2019 and 2023 shows that ghost guns cause crimes and danger in Massachusetts. Making the matter worse,

62%

of MA Police Departments that have not inspected a single gun dealer since 2017, which had allowed these dealers to sell unserialized weapons in illegal channels. Such loopholes incur a

\$3.5 Billion

Annual cost of gun violence in the commonwealth of Massachusetts in forms such as medical bills and public safety expenditures. This is also a racialized threat, as

18X

marks the rate at which Black people are homicide victims of gun violence compared to their White counterparts in Massachusetts.

firearms and suspending their license if they are a current gun owner.

We urge you to reach out to the conference committee to support authorizing state police to inspect gun dealers and to expand the red flag law petition eligibility to school administrators and healthcare providers in the omnibus gun reform bill.

■ Op-Ed

Yoni Kahn

Keeping our Commonwealth Safe: Gun Violence Prevention in Massachusetts

Gun violence is not just a problem; it's an epidemic threatening the very fabric of our communities in Massachusetts. From the tragic loss of lives to the haunting specter of "ghost guns" – unregistered and untraceable firearms – our great Bay State is facing a crisis that demands urgent action. Although we are renowned for being a national leader in low gun crime incidents, our legislation is falling behind as other states enact policies addressing contemporary firearm threats such as 3D-printed guns and rises in mass shootings throughout the country. As we stand at this critical juncture, it's imperative that we rally behind modernized gun reform legislation to protect our citizens and ensure a safer future for generations to come.

The statistics paint a grim picture: our commonwealth suffers an average of nearly 1,000 gun violence victims annually, a quarter of whom end up losing their lives. Communities of color bear the brunt of this violence, with Black Bay Staters being killed at a rate 18 times higher than their white counterparts. "It's not fair, it's not fair..." Selena Santana, a mourning mother, shared in an interview after the infant in her womb was killed in a shooting in Holyoke, Massachusetts. The heartbreaking story of Mrs. Santana underscores the devastating toll gun violence has on families across our state.

But it's not just lives lost – gun violence threatens the very foundation of our democracy. The potential presence of armed persons entering our schools, targeting our polling places or threatening our political representatives casts a shadow of fear and intimidation over our academic institutions and electoral process. We cannot allow such threats to undermine the fundamental principles of our nation.

Moreover, the emergence of "ghost guns" presents a new and alarming challenge. Massachusetts law enforcement recovered 316 such firearms in 2022, an increase of over 2,000% since the start of their official tracking in 2019,

when 15 guns were recovered by local police departments. Ghost guns are unregistered and untraceable firearms that can be easily assembled using readily available kits or 3D printing technology, circumventing existing regulations. Cases like that of Charles Santos in Kingston, a felon who was able to 3D print and buy parts to assemble an AK47, highlight the urgent need for legislative action to address this loophole in our laws.

An additional issue is the lack of enforcement of current state gun laws by the authorities. As of two years ago, Littleton had one of the highest concentrations of gun distributors in the nation. With over 60% of our police departments having not conducted a single gun dealer inspection since 2017, it is a matter of when – not if – our commonwealth will experience its next mass shooting. The responsibility of holding such distributors accountable must be taken seriously, and it is clear that local law enforcement either does not have the willingness or the capability to abide by state law and regulate our state's firearm manufacturers.

Thankfully, there is hope on the horizon. Two bills – House bill H.4135 and Senate amendment S.2572, also known as the SAFER Act – offer promising solutions to tackle the scourge of gun violence in Massachusetts. Both bills aim to crack down on ghost guns, strengthen provisions against public carrying of weapons, and authorize state police to inspect gun distributors. They also seek to expand the authority to petition for extreme risk protection orders (ERPOs) which restrict gun licenses and access to firearms from individuals the courts deem a risk to themselves or others. While there are differences between the two bills, particularly regarding red-flag provisions, regulations on public carrying, and how they tackle the issue of 3D-printed guns, they share a common goal: to enhance public safety and prevent future tragedies. The support of the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association for the SAFER Act underscores the importance of these reforms to keeping our communities safe.

There are also legal implications to consider. The proposed legislation would require individuals purchasing firearm components and kits to undergo background checks and obtain appropriate licenses, closing loopholes that currently allow for the unchecked proliferation of ghost guns. Additionally, increased enforcement measures on gun dealers and manufacturers would help stem the flow of illegal firearms into our communities.

Of course, there will always be opposition to gun reform efforts. Gun rights groups like the Gun Owners Action League actively decry these measures as infringements on civil liberties. However, the right to live free from the fear of gun violence is a fundamental liberty that must be upheld

over any citizen's right to bear arms. By prioritizing public safety and the well-being of our communities, we can strike a balance between individual rights and collective security.

The time for action is now. We cannot afford to wait for another tragedy to strike before taking meaningful steps to address gun violence in Massachusetts. The passage of comprehensive gun reform legislation is not just a moral imperative – it's a necessity for the future of our state. Let us come together, across party lines and ideological divides, to ensure Massachusetts remains a safe home for all its residents. Therefore, please call your legislators and tell them to vote yes on H.4135/S.2572 when it comes out of the Conference Committee!

Jackson Wu

Expand ERPO – We Do Not Need More Guns to Prevent Mass Shootings

Most tragedies can be prevented. We slam our brakes when we realize we are driving too fast. We turn the stove off when our pots are boiling over. We apply pressure on our wounds when we are bleeding out. We take immediate action when we know something could go wrong, in the hope that it is not yet too late.

In the face of the growing threat of gun violence, there should be a way to prevent mass shootings from happening without harming anyone. This is why red flags laws are in place for firearm carry and possession – to allow judges to prevent tragedies from happening to a person carrying firearms and the people around them.

These red flag laws are called Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs). In Massachusetts, if someone demonstrates signs of hurting themselves or others with a firearm, only their family and household members, as well as the police, can petition for an ERPO to remove their weapons and temporarily ban them from firearm purchases.

Lucky you! This is a perfect way for you to stop someone with a firearm as long as you are a member of their family or household, have learned about their harmful intentions, are not under their manipulation, are not complicit in their action, are aware of and familiar with the ERPO processes, and feel comfortable interacting with law enforcement and legal systems.

As you can imagine at this point, very few individuals in Massachusetts have ever actually filed an ERPO petition since its introduction. If a brake only worked 12 times in one year, a sensible driver would probably get it tuned up as soon as possible. But while only 12 ERPO petitions were filed in the entire Commonwealth of Massachusetts in 2022, state lawmakers now are still hesitant to expand the eligibility to

petition to school administrators after witnessing record-breaking 302 school shootings in the United States.

Despite all the bright minds from Harvard, MIT, and other top-ranking universities in Massachusetts, other states seem to know better when it comes to protecting their communities from gun violence. In 2019, [following the 2018 Parkland high school shooting](#), New York incorporated school administrators into the list of individuals eligible to file an ERPO request. The state legislature then added medical professionals and social workers to that list in 2022 [after the Buffalo shooting in May](#).

Our neighbor, Connecticut, signed their ERPO regulations into law in 2021, [already including medical professionals as eligible for petition](#). Colorado and Michigan, [in response to the 2022 Oxford High School Shooting](#), now allow medical professionals to file ERPO requests as well.

Unfortunately, many of these states only updated their laws after deadly mass shootings. Our representatives and senators on Beacon Hill have a rare chance now to protect us, the constituents of Massachusetts, from heart-shattering tragedies, before it becomes too late.

Talks around a new Massachusetts firearm law have entered a conference committee, where three House and Senate representatives are negotiating differences between the House and Senate bills on gun control reform. The House version (H.4135) seeks to expand the eligibility to

file an ERPO petition to health providers, social workers, school administrators, and employers. The Senate bill (S.2572), on the other hand, does not sense the urgency to include the latter two categories into the list, claiming that other laws are already in place to prevent underage children from carrying a weapon. Such a relaxed attitude from the Senate side is terribly ironic to Massachusetts youth when at least [three local high schools](#) received [shooting threats from their students](#) in the past six months, including [a 12-year-old child](#) who filmed a video of himself holding a gun.

Take a proactive approach in protecting our youth! Immediately reach out to your representative and voice your support for extensive regulations around ERPO measures. Additionally, urge them to vote in favor of the concluding report out of the ongoing conference committee for a modernized firearm law in Massachusetts.

More than half of all perpetrators displayed a warning sign before committing a mass-shooting. The current firearm bill presents a great opportunity for us to save young, vulnerable lives in Massachusetts from the growing threat of gun violence across the country.

Act now, before regret hits us later.

■ Video Project

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Hl1CiKmUT2XwUGhU2nOr-Y3GEbW-w4Kj/view?usp=sharing>

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Assistant Majority Leader Lovely,

We are Yoni Kahn and Jackson Wu, undergraduate students at Brandeis University and your constituents from Waltham. We firmly believe that our youth and all members of our communities in Massachusetts have the right to feel safe in public settings, whether at school, Market Basket, places of worship, or a music festival. We support the firearm bills H.4135 and S.2572 and advocate for comprehensive measures in red flag laws and gun dealer inspections to ensure our safety.

[Legislator], do you remember going through school shooting exercises as a kid? Or do you have any school-age children yourself? For us, our classmates, and really for all current students in the United States, our school years are marked by school shooter drills, constantly wondering when these rehearsals would become a reality. These exercises feel necessary for us because of the increasingly prevalent gun violence throughout our nation, such as the Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde, Texas. In 2023, there were more shootings than days in the year, and we are on track to repeat this tragic record in 2024.

This growing pandemic of gun violence is a result of the loose regulations and enforcement of current gun laws, which allow unfit individuals to easily access unregistered firearms. These so-called “ghost guns” are manufactured and distributed by under-inspected gun dealers and unlicensed individuals and pose great threats to the safety of our commonwealth.

The current proposed legislation in the State House and Senate is faced with opposition from the Gun Owners Action League (GOAL), which believes their Second Amendment rights shall not be restricted by any means possible. We and many other constituents disagree with their hardline stance of prioritizing the right for anyone to own a gun over all constituents’ rights to

attend school, work, and public spaces without fearing death or injury from firearms. Others raise concerns about whether these bills are “over-legislating,” to which we respond that there is no such thing when it comes to protecting the youth and communities in our commonwealth.

We, along with many of our peers, share the House bill’s

belief that increased inspections of gun dealers through the help of state police and increased data tracking of illegal firearms in Massachusetts will help contain this pandemic. Additionally, expanding eligibility to file Extreme Risk Protection Orders (ERPOs) to include school administrators, who unfortunately are on the front lines of this public health crisis, can help ensure that those who are unfit cannot obtain these deadly weapons.

We urge you to reach out to the conference committee and voice your support of these measures in the omnibus gun bill. When the conference committee concludes and publishes their report to the Senate, we hope you vote in favor of the report and help us pass a modernized firearm law that protects the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from the epidemic of gun violence.

Sincerely,

Yoni Kahn and Jackson Wu

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Yoni Kahn

Meeting with the Counsel to Representative Carlos Gonzalez

Jackson Wu and I met with W. Kevin Fitzgerald, the Counsel to Representative Carlos Gonzalez who serves as Chairman of the House Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security. The meeting occurred in Rep. Gonzalez’s office and its purpose was to further understand the two chambers’ reasoning behind the different approaches between H.4135 and S.2572; to advocate for important measures in the bill such as increased inspections of gun distributors and expanding ERPO to include school administrators; and to form a relationship with the Chairman’s office. Rep. Gonzalez was the chief architect of H.4135, which is a more comprehensive bill than S.2572, so we deemed it vital to meet with his office.

This was a fruitful discussion, such as when I pressed Mr. Fitzgerald on the difference in approaches between the two chambers despite democrats having a trifecta in Massachusetts government. He explained that regarding policy in Massachusetts there is more of a House/Senate divide than a Democrat/Republican one.

...This meeting displayed the intense work that Rep. Gonzalez put into creating sweeping and implementable firearm legislation.

This connection with Mr. Fitzgerald was essential to understanding the House perspective on modernizing gun

reform. We researched and understood the bills enough to ask illuminating questions, but one thing we could have done better was read the bills verbatim to understand the nuances better.

Jackson Wu

Meeting with Jamie Nathan, Legislative Director for Senator Joan Lovely

During our second State House visit, the conference committee working on the firearm bill had already moved into closed-door sessions due to safety concerns. Sen. James B. Eldridge recommended us via email to simply knock on the policymakers' doors and see if there are any people we can talk to.

We eventually met with Mr. Nathan from Sen. Lovely's office, and it was a very successful meeting. From what has been reported in the media, I believe Sen. Lovely plays a facilitator-like role in the conference committee and may have a strong influence on Sen. Creem's decisions as the Assistant Majority Leader. I really wanted to persuade Sen. Lovely to look at measures we support and encourage Sen. Creem to agree with the House members on them.

Luckily for us, Mr. Nathan is very young and shares our experience and anger in the lack of action preventing gun violence – particularly in schools. Mr. Nathan told us that Sen. Lovely is completely open to negotiation and also personally threatened by gun violence for being a member of the conference committee. Yoni and I then homed in on how dangerous these gun rights groups can be, which is why there need to be preventative measures in place rather than reactive law-making after tragedies happen. We told Mr. Nathan why these measures are necessary and how they will not violate any Second Amendment rights, which he completely agrees with and believes that action needs to be taken.

Eventually, we restated the measures in the House bill that both we and many Brandeis students had signed onto, and Mr. Nathan affirmed that he would inform Sen. Lovely of our recommendations. This meeting proves how younger staff members connect with us more while still having an influence on policymakers' decisions.

■ Next Steps

• Pass the Conference Report

We urge all Massachusetts legislators to vote in favor of the Conference Report. When the conference committee finishes negotiating the two firearm bills, H.4135 and S.2572, it will generate a conference report and send it back to the

two legislative branches – the House of Representatives and the Senate – for their review. The two branches, at this stage, are not allowed to make any amendments to the report but can only either accept or reject it. If the report is accepted by both branches in the Massachusetts State House, it will be delivered to Governor Maura Healey for her signature or veto. If the report ends up rejected by either branch, it will be returned to the conference committee for further negotiations and better compromises.

Although we want to see a comprehensive bill, which incorporates the specific measures we advocate for, passed, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts urgently needs modernized firearm laws to help crack down on the prevalence of ghost guns, ensure gun distributors are regularly inspected, prevent those at risk from obtaining a gun license in the first place, and much more.

Since the House and the Senate agree with each other on these key propositions, the conference report will likely be substantive enough to help guarantee the safety of every Massachusetts constituent.

We hope all legislators, regardless of what the conference report encompasses, vote in favor of the report, so we can forward the bill to Governor Healey for her signature and guarantee communities across the commonwealth better health and safety.

• Continue to Advocate for Certain Measures or Monitor Their Implementation

We advocate for three certain measures: (1) expansion of the eligibility to petition for Extreme Risks Protection Orders (ERPOs) to school administrators and health providers, (2) authorization of the state police to assist local police departments with gun dealer inspections, and (3) banning all hardware equipment and software that can be used to manufacture firearms without a license. If any of these measures are not included in the new firearm law, we will continue to advocate for them until they are all legislated in the Massachusetts General Laws.

If any of these measures are included in the conference report and passed as a part of the new firearm law, it would be our duty as advocates to monitor the implementation of them. We need to supervise if local police are conducting regular inspections on local gun dealers and, when they request assistance from the state government, if the state police can effectively intervene. We need to observe the trend of ERPO petitions after the legislation and see if the expanded eligibility actually encourages more people to file ERPOs when necessary. We must also look at crime statistics to examine whether a ban on the unlicensed

self-manufacture of firearms prevents the use of ghost guns in criminal cases. It is our responsibility as advocates and Massachusetts constituents to supervise our local and state governments to implement the new law and look for room for improvement.

• Raise Awareness of the New Measures

In carrying out the new legislation, it is important to raise awareness of the new measures established by the new firearm law. Part of the reason for the underuse of ERPO and the rare inspections of local gun dealers lies in the lack of public awareness of these measures in the current firearm law. Thus, after the new firearm law is passed this summer, it is crucial to be in touch with communities in Massachusetts and inform them of the new measures in place. It is only when people know about these measures that they can utilize the new legal tools in place (such as ERPO and authority to ban public carry in government buildings) and make adjustments accordingly (such as stopping use of unlicensed equipment to make firearms and stopping the purchasing of unserialized weapons).

Being in close communication with the communities will also help us collect feedback for future reference. There is always room for improvement in government policies, especially when it comes to addressing the gun violence

pandemic. We can better understand why certain measures are loosely implemented or underutilized by members of local communities, including local residents, school administrators, health providers, police departments, and even gun dealers through interacting with them more frequently. Their feedback can then help guide further improvements in future Massachusetts firearm laws.

■ Update

On July 25, 2024, the bill was signed into law by the Governor Maura Healey as part of Chapter 135 of the Acts of 2024.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.2572: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S2572

H.4135: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H4135

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence:
mapreventgunviolence.org

Providing Food Subsidies for Immigrants

Splendid Hall '24
Bernyss Kekeh '24



Splendid Hall and Bernyss Kekeh

S.76/H.135, “An Act establishing basic needs assistance for Massachusetts immigrant residents” proposes a specific state-funded expansion of food assistance programs to legal immigrants in the state of Massachusetts. First proposed and approved in 1997, the benefits program was reduced to exclude immigrant, non-citizen, populations from qualifying for essential government food assistance programs in 2002 as a result of a series of laws passed affecting the requirements of qualifications for applications for government funded food assistance program benefits. Massachusetts assistance programs currently do not include legal immigrants residing in the state to qualify for government assistance food programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP). As a result, many of these individuals are left to face food insecurity due to lower income rates within immigrant populations. In consideration of the factors faced by legal immigrants residing in the state of Massachusetts, this bill seeks to reinstate a permanent expansion of the state funded assistance program that will include populations of legal immigrants. Bill H.135, “An Act establishing basic needs assistance for Massachusetts immigrant residents” was presented by Representatives Cabral of New Bedford and Garcia of Chelsea. This bill was allotted \$6 million in the FY24 budget and is ending in April of 2024. The Feeding Our Neighbors Coalition aims to get funding once again in the FY25 period beginning July 2024.

■ The Bill

S.76/H.135 An Act establishing basic needs assistance for Massachusetts immigrant residents

■ Elevator Speech

I am Splendid Hall and I am Bernyss Kekeh. We are both public health and policy majors from Brandeis University seeking to promote more positive health outcomes in communities. This often starts with ensuring the body is receiving proper and constant nutrition. What are you having for dinner today? That is something that most people think about before they get home from work or school. But what if you did not know what you were having for dinner tonight or even tomorrow night? There are kids who don't know if they are going to have dinner after school. Some nights they might eat cereal when they don't have enough, and other nights they might have sleep for dinner.

As a community, we hold a shared responsibility to ensure all members have equal opportunity to access nutritious foods. This will ensure more positive health outcomes for current and future populations. No child should be having sleep for dinner. No parent should have to worry about their child's next meal.

Many legal immigrants in the state of Massachusetts do not qualify to apply for or receive SNAP benefits. Many of these families experience food insecurity and do not know what they are having for dinner tonight and,

in most cases, do not have the means to simply go and purchase meals or ingredients to prepare meals.

Currently, 1 in 6 Massachusetts residents are immigrants and the immigrant population is constantly growing. Massachusetts ended state-funded food benefits specifically for legal immigrant populations back in 2002, stripping some of the commonwealth's most vulnerable residents of the ability to feed their families.

Restoring these benefits and expanding the supplementary budget is vital as we move closer to guaranteeing that no one in Massachusetts goes hungry. Your support for Bill S.76/H.135: An Act establishing basic needs assistance for Massachusetts immigrant residents, will allow many legal immigrant families the opportunity to qualify for and receive SNAP benefits.

We ask that you place a favorable vote in support of the passage of Bill S.76/H.135.

■ Op-Ed

Bernyss Kekeh

The Road to a More Equitable Society: Expanding Nutritional Assistance to the Legal Immigrant Population of Massachusetts

Massachusetts is no stranger to welcoming immigrants from all around the world into the state. As a multicultural hub, Massachusetts has thrived on the contributions of diverse communities who call this state their home. However, despite having a reputation for inclusivity, the legal immigrant population continues to face barriers to accessing essential public benefits, undermining their ability to thrive and contribute fully to our society.

One in six residents in Massachusetts is foreign-born. This 17% of the population of Massachusetts makes up 20% of the labor force, contributing heavily to the thriving economy of the state. Legal immigrants, or legally present immigrants who have followed proper immigration protocol,

■ Excerpts from Storybook

FEEDING OUR NEIGHBORS

The 5 W's For Bill H135/S76

Where Do The Experts Stand ?

"It's much harder to get food through the emergency food system... than to purchase them from the store"

-Professor Sara Shostak

Patricia Baker
SENIOR POLICY ADVOCATE AT MASSACHUSETTS LAW REFORM INSTITUTE

La Colaborativa
A COMMUNITY PILLAR AND NON-PROFIT FOOD SERVICE ORGANIZATION SUPPORTING A LARGE NUMBER OF THE IMMIGRANT POPULATION IN MASSACHUSETTS

Massachusetts was the first state to establish this bill in 1997, but the perfect storm came and eliminated it and we need to bring it back"

- Pat Baker

Professor Sara Shostak
PUBLIC HEALTH POLICY AND SOCIOLOGY PROFESSOR AT BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY

Food insecurity is particularly detrimental to women"

-Professor Sara Shostak

ONLINE MISSION STATEMENT
"La Colaborativa empowers Latino immigrants to enhance the social and economic health of the community and its people; and to hold institutional decision-makers accountable to the community."

Other Community Partners

No one should go hungry because they cannot afford fresh and healthy foods... take action and support bill H135/S76!

For more information visit: feedingourneighborsma.org

FEEDING OUR NEIGHBORS:

An Act establishing basic needs assistance for Massachusetts immigrant residents

The 5 W's For Bill H135/S76

What Is the Problem ?

- 1 in 6 Massachusetts residents are foreign born, but still legal immigrant residents do not qualify for federally funded benefits such as SNAP
- Within the immigrant population, access to affordable healthy and fresh foods can be limited and at times completely inaccessible.
- The state lacks lasting support to ensure legal immigrants gain access to nutritious and healthy food items and meals outside of emergency food service centers
- The number of residents who are food insecure has doubled in the last 15 years to 11.9 percent of Massachusetts population

Why Is It Important ?

- This budget would permit legal immigrant families to receive SNAP and/or TAFDC every month, ensuring low income families have equal access to fresh and healthy foods
- Increasing access to fresh and healthy foods will produce more positive health outcomes

How Do We Fix It ?

- The proposed budget will cost \$12-\$18 million dollars for 2024. This bill proposes to use state funding to compensate for the additional cost necessary to provide food assistance to low income immigrants in Massachusetts.
- Bill H135/S76 seeks to reestablish the former state funded food assistance program of 1997 to 2002.

Who Are the Supporters ?

This bill was introduced by Representative Antonio F. D Cabral and Representative Judith A. Garcia and is supported by 53 additional legislators

The bill also has at least 84 supporting member organizations, with over 40 under the Feeding Our Neighbors Coalition

For questions, comments, and concerns please email.

residing in Massachusetts have played an important role in the maintenance of the state's economy and the vibrancy of the multiple cultures that thrive in the state, yet still find themselves excluded from crucial programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) due to federal regulations.

In recognition of the importance of expanding access to needs assistance to all members of the population, Senator Sal DiDomenico, Representative Anthony Cabral, and Representative Judith Garcia have championed a bill titled An Act establishing basic needs assistance for Massachusetts immigrant residents (H.135/S.76). This vital bill seeks to reinstate access to state-funded benefits for legal immigrants, including cash assistance for vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant women, and caretaker adults, as well as nutritional assistance through SNAP.

Massachusetts already has a history of providing such support to its immigrant population. From 1997 to 2002, the commonwealth ensured access to SNAP and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) through state funding. This effort demonstrated our commitment as a state to inclusivity and social justice, but this commitment ended in 2002 and has yet to be reinstated.

Nutritional assistance is not a luxury – it's a basic human right. Access to sufficient food is fundamental to the health and well-being of individuals and families, and denying this support to vulnerable immigrant populations only prolongs cycles of poverty and inequality. What's more, investing in the nutritional needs of our immigrant communities benefits society as a whole, fostering a healthier, more prosperous Commonwealth for everyone.

As the debate continues and policymakers deliberate on the future of Bill H.135/S.76, it's imperative that we, as residents of Massachusetts, advocate for the restoration of vital benefits for immigrant residents.

Our state's strength lies in its diversity, and by ensuring that all members of our community have the support they need to thrive, we uphold the values of equality, compassion, and justice upon which Massachusetts was founded. It's time to reaffirm our commitment to our immigrant neighbors.

Contact your state legislators today and urge them to support Bill H.135/S.76 by placing a favorable vote in support of this bill as it passes through the State House.

Splendid Hall

Our Stomachs Are Rumbling: Providing SNAP Benefits to Legal Immigrants in Massachusetts

Do you hear that rumble? Well, it isn't New England's

unpredictable rain showers, it's the stomachs of legal immigrants who are hungry all over Massachusetts. Currently, the state of Massachusetts does not provide legal immigrants government assistance food programs such as the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). As a result, many of these legal immigrants are left to battle food insecurity alone.

The permanent expansion of state-funded food assistance programs to include legal immigrant populations is necessary to ensure that no one in our commonwealth will have a rumbling or growling stomach.

In recent years, Massachusetts has experienced an influx of immigrants which has exacerbated the existing issues in immigrant populations. In fact, 1 in 6 Massachusetts residents are immigrants and the immigrant population is constantly growing. How would you feel 1 out of every 6 people you knew went to bed hungry every night? I'm sure a lot of us would lose sleep over that thought. A pressing issue amongst this immigrant population is accessing affordable fresh and healthy foods. Should anyone be allowed to go hungry due to their status or is accessing food a privilege to some? Ensuring that every person has a meal shouldn't be a debate; since when is providing basic resources to live optional?

The Feeding Our Neighbors Coalition advocates for the passing of the bill H.135/S.76 "An Act establishing basic needs assistance for Massachusetts immigrant residents." This bill calls for the state of Massachusetts to support a newly-growing legal immigrant population that has demonstrated a high need for government-led food assistance programs. This would be a huge step for Massachusetts as it would reinstate aid to legal immigrants, like the Commonwealth once did before it ended in 2002.

Apparently, the Commonwealth believed that legal immigrants wouldn't require food assistance after 2002, but 22 years later we are still fighting to put food on their tables. We can only wonder how many legal immigrants went to sleep hungry and couldn't perform at their best over the past 22 years. Let's not make it a 23rd year with legal immigrants not knowing where their next meal will come from.

Currently, Massachusetts does not offer SNAP benefits regardless of socioeconomic status of legal immigrants. This bill will extend benefits to legal immigrants that are eligible based on existing SNAP criteria. This means that low income legal immigrants will finally be able to have dietary resources comparable to other Massachusetts residents.

The Feeding Our Neighbors Coalition projects that the proposed budget will cost between \$12 million and \$18 million dollars for 2024. This is more than double than

the previously approved \$6 million dollar budget that was allocated for providing resources to these legal immigrants. The coalition also projected that the funding allocated will likely rise annually in order to maintain adequate state funding for SNAP for the 2025 fiscal year; this will cost approximately \$20M to \$25M in state dollars.

Although these figures may seem large, this increase is necessary when we look at the inflating prices all over the United States. If corporations get to raise their prices and we still have to pay sales tax then the resources provided to consumers should rise as well. If the cost of living goes up, it only makes sense to increase the amount of aid allocated.

The current proposed bill plans to have a budget that would permit between 8,000 to 12,000 legal immigrant families to receive at least \$180 in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits per month. \$180 a month is roughly \$6 a day per household. How many people can feed themselves with just \$6 a day for three meals: breakfast, lunch, and dinner? Let's not even try to conceptualize how we are going to feed a family on \$6 a day. Nonetheless, that's an extra \$6 a day that these families will have. Is \$6 a day a lot to ask for?

Providing households with this supplement is a good place to start in combating food insecurity amongst these families. This bill would also provide up to 1,500 immigrant families with an average of \$300 per month through the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children. This is roughly \$10 per day per family which is a reasonable request in the grand scheme of grocery budgets.

It is important that we all advocate to feed our neighbors, to ensure that no one in our commonwealth experiences food insecurity and to support the passage of Bill H.135/S.76.

■ Video Project

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1qij1D-vmZTsVvnpnQKx6n-ZoVX6U5M7Ebr/view>

■ Letter to the Legislator

Good Morning Senator Barrett,

My name is Bernyss Kekeh and I am a student at Brandeis University studying public health policy. My project partner, Splendid Hall, and I are constituents of the commonwealth living in your district, Waltham. We are working with the Feeding Our Neighbors Coalition to petition for passing Bill H.135/S.76 to establish SNAP benefits for legal Massachusetts immigrant residents.

As a representative of the state, you must understand

the importance of ensuring all members of the supported population have the means to support a healthy lifestyle, especially the growing youth. We are passionate about promoting positive health outcomes in neighborhoods, with a specific focus on families of color, who are often systematically disadvantaged. Children in low-income households are more likely to face food insecurity and these risk factors increase when applied to immigrant households. As a representative of the state you must understand our need to fight for equitable access to food for all residents.

Food insecurity in the state of Massachusetts is greatly affecting the current growing immigrant population, with the most impacted groups being women and children. The state of Massachusetts is faced with providing emergency shelters and feeding centers to cater to the needs of the incoming immigrant population, but these are only temporary solutions that will not allow for these families to move out of food insecurity.

From your support of previous bills focused on public health and safety, you must also understand the importance of ensuring communities cultivate growth and seek means to promote successful futures for youth. Promoting more positive health outcomes relies heavily upon proper nutrition, but these efforts may be in vain if the most vulnerable populations do not have access to funded resources.

We ask that you consider the growing immigrant population within the state of Massachusetts and join in supporting the passing of Bill H.135/H.76: An Act establishing basic needs assistance for Massachusetts immigrant residents. Your support of the passage of this bill will aid in the expansion of the state budget to provide necessary aid to populations in need while reducing the ongoing dependence upon emergency food centers. Bill H.135/S.76 will allow eligible legal immigrants residing in the state of Massachusetts to qualify for and receive necessary SNAP benefits that will aid in increasing equitable access to food items.

Bill H.135/S.76 is currently in the House Committee on Ways and Means and we urge you to contact any and all committee members stating your support of this bill and asking for a favorable vote from them.

We urge you to support this very important and impactful bill that will grant many immigrant families residing in the state opportunities to move out of food insecurity and maintain positive health outcomes.

Have a blessed day.

Sincerely,

Bernyss Kekeh and Splendid Hall

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Bernyss Kekeh

Meeting with State Representative Natalie Higgins

This was our very first in person State House visit. Though I did not know what to expect of these meetings, I was hopeful [about] the impact we can make through our efforts. Rep. Higgins was very informed on the bill and so we did not have to answer many questions. She also revealed that she is in support of the bill and our efforts do not go unnoticed.

I appreciated her taking the time to listen intently and also pose questions to understand our efforts and I felt overall the meeting was impactful in its own way. Though Rep. Higgins was well educated on the bill, she was still interested in hearing our elevator pitch and taking a look at our storybook. She also suggested a few other offices to visit, but we could not as the House Committee on Ways and Means was out for the day.

Though we did not need to convince a representative who has never heard of this bill to support it, I believe our meeting with Rep. Higgins still proved to be helpful and allowed us to bring this bill back to the attention of a House Ways and Means member.

Splendid Hall

Presentation at the Brandeis Black Student Organization

Another advocacy meeting I had for our bill was done through the Brandeis Black Student Organization. I am the president of the Black Student Organization on campus and I included the storybook in our weekly newsletter with 209 current members. The newsletter recipients include students, faculty, and alumni who are now informed about the bill and its goals.

After sending the newsletter I was approached by several students at the end of our next general meeting expressing their gratitude for sharing the information. As a result, I did a quick info session where I shared our elevator pitch as well as information about the course and all the action we have taken thus far.

Many of the students in my organization expressed care about this bill, as many of our members are children of immigrants and can relate. Many students visited the Feeding Our Neighbors website during and after to learn about what they can do and I also informed them about contacting the House Committee on Ways and Means to encourage representatives to advocate for the passage of this bill. They were excited to learn that we visited the State House and spoke with representatives; many were happy to learn about how to access and contact representatives as well as how to figure out who to contact.

Many students were also interested in taking this course next year as they saw Bernyss and I have taken strides to make a difference. In the future, I hope to probably organize a larger seminar with more bills being presented so we can also engage the Black community in this advocacy.

■ Update

As of August 30, 2024: The Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities reported the bill favorably and referred it to the House Committee on Ways and Means.

For more information

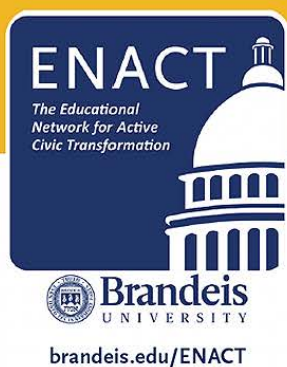
View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.76: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S76

H.135: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H135

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute: mlri.org



ENACT: The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation *Teaching Democracy Through the State Legislative Process*

ENACT's Impact by the Numbers

- 3,000+ alumni of ENACT courses
- 1,300+ student and faculty-produced resources on the ENACT digital platform
- 95% of surveyed ENACT alumni who were eligible voted in their most recent state election
- 74% of surveyed ENACT alumni consider themselves well qualified to participate in politics
- 52 Professors at 50 schools in a range of disciplines have taught ENACT courses
- 3 ENACT institutes at Brandeis University inducting new Faculty Fellows
- 50 states with ENACT courses since 2016

Where is ENACT?

ENACT is based at Brandeis University in Massachusetts, and since 2016 has expanded to all 50 states. Participating schools include public and private institutions, four-year and two-year colleges, large research universities and small liberal arts colleges, HBCUs, Hispanic-Serving Institutions, a United States military service academy and a tribal college.

The mission of ENACT: The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation is to teach college students about democracy through engagement with the state legislative process. ENACT brings the commitment to citizen participation embodied by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Louis D. Brandeis to students and organizations engaged in state-level legislation across the United States.

An Experiential Model

Built on knowledge, cooperation, justice and integrity, ENACT is a national, inter-collegiate non-partisan program. ENACT empowers students to be active participants in democratic processes through connecting with policymakers and community organizations; conducting research and analysis; and informing public policy with evidence and expertise.

In ENACT courses, student teams learn through direct engagement in this work: traveling to their state capital; meeting with and lobbying legislators; strategizing with advocacy organizations; and creating outreach materials to advance their chosen issues.



A National Network

ENACT has built a national network of students, faculty, activists and legislators – a strategic and information hub. This resource enables participants to connect in person and online with counterparts throughout the country, with guidance from the team at Brandeis University.

ENACT's network:

- features curricular resources that enhance student learning and support faculty teaching.
- connects faculty, students and alumni with practitioners in the field.
- provides opportunities for students to share their work and interact with peers across the United States.



My ENACT students learn one big lesson that everyone should learn: the barriers to civic participation are not always as high as we think. With some elbow grease – and maybe a little bravery – you can become an effective advocate and help influence the important



decisions being made in our state government.

– Prof. Richard Meagher, ENACT Faculty Fellow, Randolph-Macon College, Virginia

We've always had an assignment where [the Cadets] analyzed a policy with respect to Constitutional principles. This is extremely important because as military members sworn to defend the Constitution with their lives, they must understand it. ...I modified it with the help of ENACT. Students traced the path of a bill, analyzed supporters and detractors, in some cases contacted the legislators sponsoring the bill.... The assignment came alive. **Students understood the policymaking process in a new light, and some commented that this was their favorite assignment in the course.**



– Prof. Lynne Chandler-García, ENACT Faculty Fellow, United States Air Force Academy, Colorado

This course taught me that I have power and it enabled me to grasp the difference any single person can make through involvement in local politics, either by running for office or being a citizen advocate. Although at times the legislative process is slow and discouraging, and immediate results are hard to come by, it is important to be



patient and maintain the passion and persistence necessary to effect change.

– Marian Gardner, Brandeis University class of 2018, former ENACT Student Delegate

I plan to teach this course every other year FOREVER. Or, at least till I don't teach political science anymore. **This class is changing my students' view of government and giving them a sense of empowerment they would not have otherwise gotten.** They are passionate and full of excitement about the possibility for democratic control for our communities. I cannot think of a bigger gift that they could get from an experience. I could



not be more grateful to be a part of the ENACT community.

– Prof. Kathleen Cole, ENACT Faculty Fellow, Metropolitan State University, Minnesota

Focusing on the policy process at the state level made a big difference. I had never done that before. It was a very big plus for my students. They learned a lot about hot-button issues that they cared about. **They had an opportunity to learn at close range, they were asked to be engaged, they talked about how things work, and about the power of the legislature.** They said they learned about things that they used to take for granted.



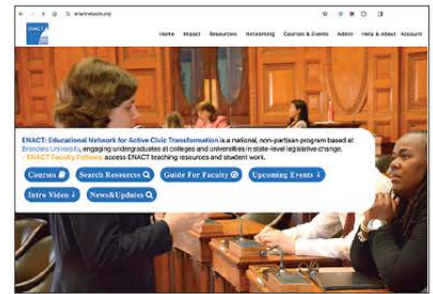
– Prof. Victor Eno, ENACT Faculty Fellow, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Florida

When I started college at Brandeis University, I had sweeping ideas of government and how it functioned. ... ENACT helped lead me back to why I was interested in public policy: the goal of addressing problems I saw in my own community growing up. ... **Suddenly, the ideas of lobbying and legislating felt tangible and accessible to me. Advocacy wasn't just men in suits speed walking through the halls of Congress.** It was also the experience of sitting down with a local official and sharing stories from my community. –from "All Politics is



Local: Changemaking Happens Closer to Home Than You Realize," (Ms. Magazine, 2/15/21), by Elaina Pevide, Brandeis University class of 2020, ENACT Student Delegate Mentor

Connect with ENACT



- Visit brandeis.edu/ENACT
- Explore enactnetwork.org
- Join our mailing list: email ENACT@brandeis.edu



Melissa Stimell
Director
enact@brandeis.edu
781-736-8577



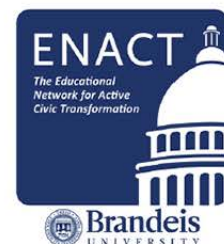
David J. Weinstein
Assistant Director
djw@brandeis.edu
781-736-2115

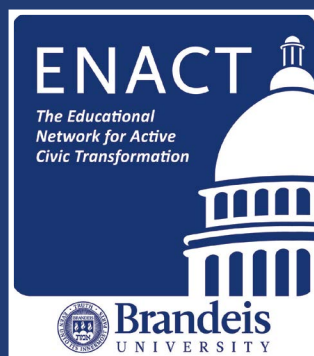


Charlotte Powley
Assistant Director of Research
cpowley@brandeis.edu
781-736-8577

ENACT was made possible by a generous gift from Norbert Weissberg and Judith Schneider. This built upon a gift from Abraham Feinberg that originally established and endowed the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life at Brandeis University in 1998. The program is also supported by the Teagle Foundation and by the Rice Family Foundation.

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