

Advocacy for Policy Change



Brandeis Students Work to Reform Massachusetts Law

Spring 2025

Brandeis

ENACT: THE ABRAHAM FEINBERG
EDUCATIONAL NETWORK FOR
ACTIVE CIVIC TRANSFORMATION

Advocacy for Policy Change is a part of a national program, ENACT: The Abraham Feinberg Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation. 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 Teagle Foundation's Education for American Civic Life initiative enabled ENACT's national expansion.



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 Abraham Feinberg Educational
Network for Active Civic Transformation, and to sign up for
updates,
visit www.enactnetwork.org

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Introduction

Melissa Stimell

Director

ENACT: The Abraham Feinberg

Educational Network

for Active Civic Transformation

Professor of the Practice

in Legal Studies

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 2025, Brandeis anointed 22 citizen advocates for such issues as housing insecurity, reproductive justice, healthcare equity, juvenile justice, and immigrant rights.

Working in teams, the students research their chosen issues and design and implement models of legislative advocacy. State legislators and community 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 7.) 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, and continues to serve as ENACT’s Distinguished Legislative Mentor. Massachusetts State Senator Becca Rausch ’01 and her staff have been invaluable: hosting the students 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, Casey Heely and Anika Kumar, were indispensable.

“Advocacy for Policy Change” is part of a national program based at Brandeis University called ENACT: The Abraham Feinberg 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 was made possible by a generous gift from Norbert Weisberg 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 Teagle Foundation’s Education for American Civic Life initiative enabled ENACT’s national expansion. The students, staff, Faculty Fellows and I are very grateful for the 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 Abraham Feinberg Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation

Professor of the Practice in Legal Studies

Brandeis University

On Advocacy for Policy Change

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

As the United States continues to face challenges that are vast in scale and deep in impact – wealth, income, and opportunity inequality, racial injustice, climate change, and political polarization, to name a few – some question our democracy’s capacity to meet the moment. Can we even begin to address today’s pressing issues? What is the role of policy-makers? What is the role of advocates and citizens? What roles do states play in these uncertain times?

What a demanding and exciting time for the wonderfully engaged, bright, and energetic students in Professor Stimell’s “Advocacy for Policy Change” course. They get to engage directly in the state legislative process, learning how to be effective, ethical, active participants in the democratic process.

Grounded in a realistic look at what it takes to advocate for and make significant change in the public square, they dig into difficult “real world” problems and interact with the state’s change agents and would-be (or should-be) change agents. They grapple with competing policy ideas, different and often opposing in interests, and engage with lawmakers and advocates alike.

“Advocacy for Policy Change” continues the Brandeis University tradition of active engagement with the pressing issues of the time. As a Brandeis alum, I am particularly gratified to have had the opportunity to help establish and nurture this valuable course and, for many years, to work with the students. Their probing questions, insights and ideas gave me hope for better policy in Massachusetts and beyond.



Jay Kaufman, with Senator Becca Rausch and ENACT Director Melissa Stimell, speaks with Brandeis ENACT students in the House Chamber of the Massachusetts State House.

Building on the course's success on campus and in the halls of the Massachusetts State House, we have taken this model to scale, creating ENACT: The Abraham Feinberg Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation, which brings to all 50 states the university/state capitol intersection we've known for more than a decade at Brandeis. There are now students, faculty, citizens and legislators in every state engaging in critical thinking about policy and policy-making, and collaborating with one another online and in person.

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

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. His 2024 essay "On Advocacy and Democracy" can be found at brandeis.edu/enact/news-updates/jay-kaufman-on-advocacy-anddemocracy-spring24.html.



Brandeis ENACT students, faculty and staff at the Massachusetts State House in February 2025, with Representative James J. O'Day (front row, left), Senator Becca Rausch '01 and former Representative Jay Kaufman '68, MA '73 (front row, right), and Representative Jay Livingstone (second row, right).

ENACT's National Network

David J. Weinstein

Assistant Director

ENACT: The Abraham Feinberg
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.

Some highlights from our national network:

Student Delegates

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 students, alumni and Faculty Fellows around the country.

In the 2024-25 academic year Clay Napurano '24 and Alaina Vermilya '24, joined by ENACT Student Delegate Mentors Elaina Pevide '20 and Vishni Samaraweera '23, visited ENACT courses across the United States via Zoom and “Advocacy for Policy Change” at Brandeis in person. They had lively conversations with students about networking opportunities, career paths in policy and government, and the resources accessible to ENACT students at enactnetwork.org.

In the 2025-26 academic year, four ENACT alumni will serve as Student Delegates: Isabel Hon-Anderson '25 and Niyati Patel '26, whose work you can find in this anthology; Faculty Fellow Jennifer Seelig's student Tomas Cruz-Villalvazo, Utah State University class of '25; and Faculty Fellow Victor Eno's student Kera Sayles, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University class of '26. Read more about the ENACT Student Delegates here: brandeis.edu/ethics/enact/people/studentdelegates.

Alumni Networking Night

In the spring, Student Delegate Alaina Vermilya moderated the annual ENACT Networking Night, which featured college, graduate school and career advice from accomplished ENACT alumni in a range of fields including advocacy, finance, government, and immigration law. Many thanks to this year's panelists: Myeisha Boyd, University of Hartford '17; Jonathan Goldman, Brandeis '19; Brenna Pearlstein, Brandeis '24; and Ravi Simon, Brandeis '19.

Inaugural ENACT Student Summit

This year ENACT hosted the first-ever ENACT Student Summit. Students from ENACT courses across the country came together for a virtual gathering to share insights and experiences from their civic engagement journeys, and submitted videos about their experiences in ENACT courses. Read more and see videos here: brandeis.edu/enact/2025-student-summit.

Resource Sharing Platform

Talented Brandeis computer science students continually improve our online resource-sharing platform. This year, ENACT Student Software Developers Aby Iberkleid MS '25 and Madina Nasriddinova '25 took on this challenge, with support from Brandeis computer science professor Tim Hickey. Thanks to them, enactnetwork.org is more user-friendly and useful than ever before.

Thank you to everyone who supported our Brandeis ENACT students and the national ENACT network in the 2024-25 academic year. I invite you to reach out to us and connect with our network in the coming year!

David J. Weinstein

Assistant Director, ENACT: The Abraham Feinberg Educational Network
for Active Civic Transformation

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 2025. 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 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 five 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 29, 2025, students gave brief oral presentations of their legislative advocacy projects and responded to questions from audience members.

Providing Access to Full Spectrum Pregnancy Care

Hana Miller '25
Eva Zacharakis '25



Eva Zacharakis and Hana Miller

Pregnancy and childbirth in the United States impose substantial financial burdens on individuals, with costs varying significantly by insurance status and geographic location. Bill H.1311/S.761, *An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care*, would decrease cost as a barrier to pregnancy care, creating a more equitable healthcare system. This bill would require all Massachusetts-regulated private health insurance plans to cover the full spectrum of pregnancy care – including prenatal, delivery, postpartum, miscarriage management, and abortion and related care – without cost-sharing and without subjugation to unreasonable delays in coverage.

The Bill

S.761/H.1311: *An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care*

Elevator Speech

Hi, our names are Eva and Hana, and we are students from Brandeis University advocating for H.1311/S.761. We believe that cost should never prevent people from accessing care, especially in a state which prides itself on having some of the best healthcare in the country. Due to soaring healthcare costs, Massachusetts families are being forced to choose between necessary medical care and basic necessities, such as groceries and gas – a choice that often places people in insurmountable debt and forces people to delay necessary healthcare. More and more, young people are being forced to move out of Massachusetts to afford to raise a family, which takes opportunity away from Massachusetts, and the families who call it home.

An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care would require all private insurers in Massachusetts to cover the full spectrum of pregnancy care without deductibles, copays or other cost sharing practices, allowing families and women more agency over their lives and ensuring that people aren't punished financially for becoming pregnant, losing a pregnancy, or making the decision to raise a family.

Running the numbers show how the benefits of this bill outweigh the costs. For just \$1.51 extra on our average monthly premiums, less than a pack of gum, we can provide Massachusetts residents the chance to choose their path in life instead of having insurance deductibles make that choice for them.

Can we count on you for a speedy hearing and favorable vote?

Excerpts from the Storybook

Access to Full-Spectrum Pregnancy Care (H.1311/S. 761)

H. 1311/S. 761 would require Massachusetts private health insurers to cover the full spectrum of pregnancy care—including fertility care, prenatal care, delivery, miscarriage management, abortion, and abortion-related care—without deductibles, co-pays, and other cost-sharing practices.

The Problem

The high costs of pregnancy care in Massachusetts force many people to ration care while pregnant, delay abortion care, take on medical debt, forgo pre-/post-natal support, or avoid becoming pregnant altogether. Every Bay Stater should be granted the same opportunity to decide if, when, and how they choose to grown their family. **Pregnancy impacts all of us and we cannot allow cost to push essential health care out of reach.**

Fast Facts

- The cost of pregnancy care in MA is growing faster than wages, and residents pay the highest premiums and out-of-pocket fees in the nation (CHIA, 2021)
- In 2021, **41% Massachusetts residents** reported experiencing health care affordability issues in the past 12 months, including **54.9% of Hispanic residents** and **50.8% of Black residents** (CHIA Annual Report, 2024)
- While Massachusetts is historically known for quality health care, the state ranked **45th for rates of severe maternal morbidity** in 2023. Any complications can significantly increase the cost of care, compounding the burden on families (HPC, 2023; Commonwealth Fund, 2023)

H.1311/S. 761 Provides a Solution

- Eliminating cost-sharing from maternity and abortion-related care would **save consumers at least \$28,000,000** a year (CHIA, 2021)
- Removing all cost sharing from full-spectrum maternity care, will incur an **increase to monthly premiums of as little as \$1.51 per member** (CHIA, 2021)
- A similar bill in NY eliminating cost-sharing from postpartum mental care helped **reduce rates of suicide in new parents**

Join The Fight!

Lead Sponsors:
House—Rep. Lindsay N. Sabadosa
Senate—Cindy F. Friedman



Access to Full-Spectrum Pregnancy Care (H.1311/S. 761)

41%

of MA residents struggled with the cost of healthcare in the past year, including **54% of women**. (CHIA, 2024)

Ndidiamaka Amutah-Onukagha, PhD, MPH, CHES

Founder/Director, Tufts Center for Black Maternal Health and Reproductive Justice

"When forced to choose between co-pays and basic necessities like groceries or gas, the consequences can be devastating."

"For women of color, who are disproportionately impacted by economic and healthcare inequities, **this bill represents an essential piece of the solution to decreasing Black maternal mortality and severe morbidity rates while advancing better maternal and infant health outcomes.**"

Dr. Rebekah Rollston, MD, MPH

Family Medicine Physician at Cambridge Health Alliance and New Mom

"Every time my patients come in for a prenatal visit or care associated with miscarriage or abortion or postnatal care, **they're missing work for almost all of those appointments. So that's missed pay** [on top of the cost of transportation...] **Those costs add up quickly, which is just really tough when you're already struggling to get by.**"

"It's hard to tell my patients we're supporting them to have children, when that's not actually the case."

The cost of pregnancy care in MA is **growing faster than wages**. (CHIA, 2021)

COALITION PARTNERS



Op-Ed

Hana Miller

What You Don't Expect When You're Expecting

We need to reckon with the fact that, due to rising costs, the most lasting damage of an ER visit in Massachusetts isn't always medical in nature. I was recently unlucky enough to be hit with a particularly nasty case of food poisoning, which required my boyfriend and me to take an admittedly ungraceful trip to the hospital for some IV fluids and anti-nausea medication. When all was said and done, we had been there 5 hours and walked out with a bill of \$700 in out-of-pocket costs. As we made our way to the exit, we crossed paths with a heavily pregnant woman in labor, being swiftly wheeled to a private room.

Most assume that when you're having a baby, you check in to a maternity ward, deliver with the help of skilled professionals, and leave with your newborn, but in reality, the path to the delivery room often begins with a visit to the ER. Labor doesn't wait for a scheduled appointment, and for

many pregnant people experiencing complications, pain, or uncertainty, the ER is their only option. The disproportionate costs of an emergency visit most significantly impact low-income women and women of color, who are even more likely to rely on emergency care due to systemic barriers in access to primary and prenatal healthcare services.

In Massachusetts, the average vaginal delivery costs \$26,154 before insurance, and the average c-section costs \$35,430. These costs can soar even higher when, like the woman I saw, patients come in through the ED or experience a complication. Even with insurance, out-of-pocket costs are growing faster than wages in the state. By the third trimester, pregnant patients are expected to attend weekly check-ups, which also means paying co-pays weekly. For low-income families, those expenses can add up to hundreds or even thousands that they cannot afford to spare.

Massachusetts is home to some of the best hospitals in the country, but what good is high-quality care if people can't afford it? And what does that mean for me – or anyone else – who hopes to grow their family here?

We're beginning to see the consequences of these costs play out in real-time. Young people, especially those planning to grow their families, are leaving the state in droves because they simply can't afford to stay. Massachusetts has one of the highest costs of living in the country, and that includes the cost of healthcare. When starting a family often comes with a five-figure hospital bill, it's no wonder so many people are choosing to move elsewhere.

The loss of young families also has serious long-term consequences for the state. A shrinking workforce, declining school enrollment, and reduced economic mobility are just some of the ripple effects. And when people leave, they take their talent, innovation, and economic contributions with them. Massachusetts prides itself on being a hub of progress, but how can we call ourselves forward-thinking when we make it financially impossible for people to have children here?

The state ranked 45th in the country for rates of severe maternal morbidity in 2023, meaning pregnant patients here experience life-threatening complications at alarmingly high rates. This crisis is especially dire for women of color, who are far more likely to suffer from poor maternal health outcomes due to systemic racism and disparities in care.

There is, however, a solution: a bill currently in the Massachusetts legislature (H.1311/S.761) entitled "An Act to ensure access to full-spectrum pregnancy care." This bill would eliminate cost-sharing for full-spectrum pregnancy care, including labor and delivery. This means that no family would have to shoulder thousands of dollars in medical bills just to give birth.

The bill has bipartisan support, reflecting a growing recognition that the cost of childbirth is not just a healthcare issue, but an economic and social one. Expert analysis found that eliminating pregnancy-related co-pays would only cost an additional \$1.51 on their monthly premium. This legislation would also set a precedent for other states to follow, reaffirming Massachusetts' status as a leader in healthcare innovation.

If Massachusetts truly wants to be a place where families can thrive, it needs to ensure that no one is priced out of parenthood. I implore all readers to contact their local representative and ask for their support in solving this hidden crisis burdening families. Because in the end, a system that forces people to choose between financial security and their health is a system that has already failed. It's time to fix it by passing H.1311 and S.761, an Act to ensure access to full-spectrum pregnancy care.

Eva Zacharakis

A Path Towards Reproductive Equity in Massachusetts

The cries of a newborn baby echo around the hospital room. It is one of, if not *the* happiest moment in a person's life: the day a family begins or grows, the day a new life enters the world with the promise of endless possibilities. That day, it seems like nothing could possibly dampen your happiness... until you receive a bill that looks like a phone number. A day that was supposed to be so joyful suddenly becomes marred by anxiety. You think, "I don't have that kind of money. How can I afford this?"

Pregnancy and birth are the most fundamental aspects of life, and yet, the desire for profits has rendered safe and healthy pregnancies and births severely inaccessible to many, even in Massachusetts – a state that purports to prioritize reproductive equity.

Premiums and cost-sharing are rising more quickly than wages and salaries, according to the Massachusetts Health Policy Commission (MHPC). The MHPC also concluded in their 2022 report that out-of-pocket spending for labor and delivery is growing faster than the total cost of care. Approximately 40% of mothers reported delaying necessary prenatal care due to the excessive cost – a decision which is detrimental, as newborns of mothers who have not received prenatal care are five times more likely to die than those born to mothers who have, according to a 2021 Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA) report.

Due to exorbitant healthcare costs, people are being forced to delay or forgo necessary reproductive and maternity care – worsening conditions, causing complications, and resulting in increased spending that is shouldered by everyone. The MHPC found that from 2019 to 2022, private insurers spent, on average, just over \$22,000 for a maternity episode without severe complications and over \$43,000 for a maternity episode with severe complications – almost double! These additional costs are then pushed down to the average policyholder in the form of increased monthly premiums. Compounded by the fact that Massachusetts has one of the highest costs of living in the nation and that high deductible health plans are the fastest growing insurance plan in the state, it is no wonder why more and more young people are being forced to leave Massachusetts to be able to start a family.

It does not need to be like this.

A proposed bill (H.1311/S.761) in the Massachusetts legislature, entitled "An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care," would create a more equitable healthcare system by helping to remove cost as a barrier to starting or growing a family. This bill would require all Massachusetts

private insurers to cover the full spectrum of pregnancy care – which includes prenatal, delivery, postpartum, and miscarriage management – without deductibles, co-pays, or other cost-sharing requirements. This is vital to ensure that no woman has to forgo necessary healthcare and that no one has to deal with, and shoulder the cost of, preventable complications. Bill H.1311/S.761 supports and encourages people to start and grow families in Massachusetts and ensures that we do not punish them for doing so.

This bill has bipartisan sponsorship and has received support from both Planned Parenthood and Massachusetts Citizens for Life. That shows how much of a problem inaccessible pregnancy care is in Massachusetts and how good of a solution this bill provides. In a time as politically divided as this one, two polar opposite organizations have come together, looking past politics, to champion pregnancy care as a human right.

CHIA has run the numbers, and it is apparent that the benefits of this bill greatly outweigh the costs. Eliminating cost-sharing would increase premiums by just \$1.51 to \$2.09 per member per month – that is like a pack of gum!

Pregnancy care is a fundamental aspect of life and should not be limited or prevented by a for-profit insurance system. For the cost of a pack of gum a month, we can ensure that it is women and families making their healthcare decisions, not their deductibles and copays.

Contact your legislators and urge them to support this bill.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Hana Miller

Meeting with Representative John Gaskey

Our meeting with Rep. John Gaskey was entirely spontaneous and somewhat serendipitous. We had finished our meetings on the first state house visit and were running low on time before we needed to get back on the bus due to confusion about office locations (which moved in the new session for a number of members), so I began to just start offering extra one-pagers to members that we saw in the elevator and give them our pitch.

Rep. Gaskey happened to be one of those lucky lawmakers who I cornered, and he was immediately interested. We initially planned to just leave him with the one-pager and head to the bus, but when we got off he made eye contact and asked if we could tell him a little bit more about the bill. He introduced himself as a Republican representative who was “super anti-abortion” and “really concerned about the population decline in this country.”

continued on the next page

Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Stanley,

In hearing your family's story – the community engagement and work ethic that your parents instilled in you and your siblings and the way you hope to carry these values to your kids – it is apparent that family is very important to you and has shaped the person you are today. An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care is a bill that can allow you to support residents of Massachusetts looking to start or grow a family.

Massachusetts prides itself on having some of the best healthcare in the country and, yet, rising costs leave necessary healthcare out of reach for many. Massachusetts families are being forced to choose between necessary medical care and basic necessities, such as groceries and gas – a choice which often places people in insurmountable debt and forces people to delay necessary healthcare. More and more, young people are being forced to move out of Massachusetts in order to afford to raise a family, which takes opportunity away from Massachusetts, and the families who call it home.

An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care would reform our state law to ensure that women and families aren't saddled with insurmountable debt, enabling them to have greater control over their lives and financial futures, and ensuring that we don't punish people for becoming pregnant, losing a pregnancy, or making the decision to raise a family.

Requiring all Massachusetts-regulated plans to cover pregnancy-related care – including abortion care, prenatal care, childbirth, and postpartum care – without deductibles, co-pays, and other cost-sharing, will help put Massachusetts on a path to ensuring equitable and accessible healthcare for all.

This bill was proposed in 2021 and received little opposition.

In fact, in a highly divided time, An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care has received support from both pro-choice and pro-life groups who have come together to champion the fact that equitable maternal health care goes deeper than politics: it is a fundamental human right. Women and families should not be placed into debilitating, trying, impossible situations for simply trying to bring new life into the world.

Can we count on your support for this bill?

Sincerely,

Eva and Hana

Brandeis University students
and Massachusetts constituents

Thankfully, Eva and I had prepped our framing and pitch in the event that we encountered a conservative or anti-choice member.

We discussed how healthcare in Mass. is too expensive and how cost is becoming an increasing barrier for people to start families, which he responded well to. We explained how this bill would make it easier to support the decision to have children, and make it easier for families to do so. We ... [noted] it's endorsed by both Planned Parenthood and the Massachusetts Coalition for Life. He was particularly interested to hear that bit, and expressed agreement that if those two organizations could get on board for this bill together, it must be something good for everyone.

...[H]e told us that he loved everything that he heard and he was going to head in there right then and there to add his name as a co-sponsor. We actually had no idea who we had spoken with until we checked his name later, but I think it really taught us the value of speaking to everyone and taking every opportunity to lobby for our bill because you never know who's going to respond the best.

Eva Zacharakis

Tabling at Menstrual Equity Event

This event was part of a legal studies course studying menstrual equity. There was an hour-long panel consisting of three business owners, one researcher, and one state representative, all of whom were advocating for accessible, well-made and safe period products for women.

Following the panel, I then began tabling for the bill. I only ended up receiving one signature as everyone left following the panel. It is difficult to convince college students to stay past the hour as they are busy, so tabling independently would be more useful. I shared a table with Mass NOW, who came with flyers and branded stickers and pens for students to collect, which is a great idea – having something that people can take home with them ensures that they will remember the organization and the bill, which I think would make it more likely that their support and advocacy will continue. In addition, these flyers and stickers were very colorful and eye-catching, which [made] people want to come over and check out the table.

I believe the letter to the legislator was a good idea, as the letter was written out already, so all people had to do was write their name, address, and signature. Having this easy task (as opposed to telling people to write the letter themselves) makes it more likely that people, especially busy college students, will engage with the organization and the bill. One downside of this letter is that people cannot take it home with them, which is not conducive to continued advocacy.

Next Steps

Hana Miller

H.1311/S.761 was most recently considered in the Joint Committee on Financial Services. At present, the most important next steps are making sure that the bill passes in that committee and/or is favorably referred to another.

In my opinion, the most effective next steps would be raising the profile of the bill, particularly to constituents in the committee members' districts, to inspire greater popular participation in the bill's passage.

I think that some of the most potent potential collaborations would come in the form of the bipartisan support that the bill has, both from the liberal/Republican camps as well as the pro/anti-choice spectrum. Having that established power behind the bill really emphasizes its importance across our highly divided society. Moreover, it has the potential to activate more political networks.

Additionally, because of the supermajority in the state legislature, the legislature is particularly fond of opportunities for bipartisan lawmaking, and this bill provides a relatively non-partisan way of advancing this kind of legislation, particularly when we find ourselves at a time when the need to promote trust in government is at an all-time high.

Additionally, I think that we need to further consider some of the implementation impacts and challenges that this bill may face if our lobbying is successful. Currently, we believe that insurance companies haven't voiced significant opposition because they do not see the bill as likely to pass, which means that we have not yet been forced to respond to the counterarguments that they are sure to promote on this issue. Namely, the increase to their own bottom line, which they are – in my own opinion – likely to throw back on the individual consumer with threats to raise prices at a level inconsistent with the analysis CHIA performed in 2021.

I also think that one of the next steps we should think about is resolving some of the questions we identified with regard to the language of the bill, itself. As it is currently written, there is some ambiguity about who would qualify because the bill only requires that someone has been an employee in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for the conditions to apply, which could affect people coming to the state to seek care and create confusion about what rules apply. This is mainly applicable, I think, in the context of reproductive care like abortion, where Massachusetts has become somewhat of a care refuge for those in ... [other] states.

That being said, this is a bill meant to benefit everyone, and I think that our advocacy will be most effective now and, in the future, if we target all arms of power. Because of the aforementioned value seen by the legislature in passing bipartisan bills, I think it would be valuable to pursue more Republican sign-ons and see if we can get the co-sponsors to issue a joint statement explaining the importance of this bill to them from both sides of the political spectrum.

Eva Zacharakis

Bill H.1311/S.761 has gone through its first hearing and is currently being considered by the Joint Committee on Financial Services. Future advocacy efforts should, therefore, focus on contacting legislators from this committee, including the House Chair (Representative Murphy) and the Senate Chair (Senator Feeney), to ensure the bill receives a favorable vote. Should the bill receive a favorable vote in this committee, the bill will then be assigned to a second committee for a second reading and then, with a favorable vote, a third committee for a third reading.

Past iterations of Bill H.1311/S.761 have received favorable votes from the Joint Committee on Financial Services and have been assigned to the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing and the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, so beginning advocacy efforts with legislators in these committees early is very helpful as it is likely that the bill will pass its first reading.

Through our meetings with legislators at the State House, Hana and I were able to get the first Republican co-sponsor on board in the bill's history. This is monumental as bipartisan support makes the bill that much stronger and makes passage that much more likely. This is a great springboard for reaching out to more Republicans and targeting advocacy efforts to gaining more Republican support.

Potential advocacy collaborations with Planned Parenthood and the pro-life organization Massachusetts Citizens for Life would be very beneficial, as well, to really bolster the messaging of this bill having bipartisan support and crossing political boundaries. While Massachusetts Citizens for Life expressed support for the bill in the 2023-2024 legislative session, they have not spoken about the bill in the current session, so gaining their support for this current session could be a potential next step.

The bill has received support from the Massachusetts Section of the American College of Obstetrics and Gynecologists. Future advocacy collaborations with this group and with additional medical professionals could be a potential next step. While it is useful to have many OBGYNs supporting this bill, it is also important to obtain support from medical professionals in a variety of fields who can attest to the financial burdens of healthcare and the wide scope and severity of complications associated with delaying and/or forgoing necessary healthcare. Additionally, ensuring that support is not solely from OBGYNs allows for framing the problem as not just a women's issue.

Update

As of July 9, 2025, the bill has been scheduled for a hearing by the Joint Committee on Financial Services on April 29, 2025.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

- S.761: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S761
- H.1311: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H1311

Organization or Coalition support:

- Repro Equity Now: reproequitynow.org

Ensuring Affordable Access to Prescription Drugs

Daniel Hahn '25
Charles Nabbout '25
Shaiilo Zhou '25



Daniel Hahn, Charles Nabbout,
Shaiilo Zhou

The rising cost of prescription medications in Massachusetts has created substantial financial strain for patients, insurance providers, and healthcare professionals alike. Many individuals struggle to afford basic medications due to price increases that often have no clear justification. *An Act to ensure affordable prescription medications through accountability standards* promotes tighter supervision of pricing, enhanced transparency, and stronger accountability for manufacturers.

Legislative solutions include three main strategies. The first is greater oversight of pharmaceutical pricing through price reporting, cost evaluations, and the disclosure of pricing components. The second is accountability for price hikes through the use of manufacturer fines, recommendations for price reductions, and mechanisms for future enforcement. The third is enhanced regulation of pharmacy benefit managers through mandatory licensing, annual audits, and financial transparency.

The Bill

S.868: An Act enhancing health care market oversight and pharmaceutical access

H.1092: An Act to ensure affordable prescription medications through accountability standards

Elevator Speech

Hi, we're Daniel Hahn, Charles Nabbout, and Shaiilo Zhou from Brandeis University, and we're advocating on behalf of improving healthcare affordability in Massachusetts. Thank you for taking the time to meet with us.

Imagine needing a life-saving medication, only to find it costs more than your rent – even with insurance. That's the reality facing too many Massachusetts residents today, particularly those living with chronic conditions like diabetes, asthma, or heart disease. For communities of color, the burden is even worse, with higher rates of disease and lower access to affordable treatment.

We're supporting *An Act enhancing health care market oversight and pharmaceutical access*, which tackles this head-on. It caps co-pays at \$25 for essential medications, requires transparency from drug manufacturers and pharmacy benefit managers, and gives the Health Policy Commission the power to review and flag excessive price hikes. This isn't just policy – it's a lifeline. Families are skipping doses and rationing insulin; we've heard these stories firsthand.

We respectfully ask for your support in moving this bill forward in committee. Can we count on your office to help champion this legislation?

Prescription Drug Pricing Reform

HD.3583

An Act to Ensure Prescription Drug Cost Transparency and Affordability

Darren Zinner

1

Associate Professor of Health: Science, Society and Policy Program at Brandeis University: “Even with insurance, when drugs cost hundreds or even thousands of dollars a month, a 20% or 30% co-pay is still too much for many patients to afford the medications they need to survive.”

2

Sabah Hanna

Elderly woman with diabetes living in the Greater Boston Area: “Although I live in Massachusetts and am provided with good health insurance, I still have to choose between paying for my insulin or using that money for other necessities. A few years ago, it was affordable, but now the price keeps going up, and my social security check stays the same. How am I supposed to stay healthy if I can’t even afford the medicine that keeps me alive?”

3

Devin Burnside

Medical Doctor previously employed in Boston: “The key to successful drug policy administration is balancing regulation with compassion.”

Pharmaceutical companies must be able to maintain their financial integrity while also considering the patients ability to afford such medications.



Problem

Prescription drug prices in the U.S. have risen exponentially, outpacing inflation and making essential medications inaccessible to many individuals.

Solution

This bill seeks to introduce greater transparency in drug pricing and ensure affordability by regulating pharmacy benefit managers (PBMs) and implementing price review mechanisms.

Evaluation

By increasing transparency in drug pricing and regulating PBMs, this bill aims to reduce excessive price spikes and make essential medications more accessible.

Implementation

If successfully implemented, this legislation could alleviate the financial burden on patients, particularly those in marginalized communities, and improve overall public health outcomes.

Op-Ed

Daniel Hahn

No One Should Have to Choose Between Medicine and Rent: Pass the Prescription Drug Pricing Bill Now

Imagine walking into a pharmacy to pick up your medication – lifesaving medication – only to leave empty-handed because the price exceeds your weekly paycheck.

For too many Massachusetts residents, this isn't a hypothetical. It's a monthly reality. Despite being home to world-class hospitals and a booming biotech sector, our state

is facing a prescription drug cost crisis that prioritizes profit over public health. As prices climb unchecked, working families, seniors, and even insured individuals are being pushed to the edge.

Prescription drugs are not a luxury. They are essential tools for managing chronic illnesses and preventing costly hospital visits. Yet the prices of basic medications like insulin and asthma inhalers have doubled or even tripled in recent years. Pharmaceutical companies continue to report record profits while raising prices without explanation.

This is not just unjust – it is dangerous.

That's why the Massachusetts Legislature must pass S.868: An Act enhancing health care market oversight and pharmaceutical access. This bill would give the state's Health Policy Commission (HPC) the authority and funding it needs to investigate rising drug prices, demand accountability from manufacturers, and issue public reports to increase transparency.

This isn't about red tape – it's about real change. By requiring drug companies and pharmacy benefit managers to justify their prices, we shine a light on an industry that's been operating in the shadows for far too long. This information will empower policymakers to consider caps on out-of-control prices, promote generic alternatives, and negotiate better deals for patients.

Opponents often claim that any oversight will stifle innovation. But that's a false narrative. We can support breakthrough research and protect the public from exploitation. Massachusetts, as a healthcare leader, should be setting the standard for balancing innovation with affordability.

This isn't just policy. It's personal.

It's the grandmother in Worcester who rations her blood pressure medication. It's the single father in Waltham who must choose between his child's antibiotics and the electric bill. It's every person who has ever walked away from a pharmacy counter unsure of what to do next.

Massachusetts cannot claim to lead in healthcare while ignoring this crisis. We need to act now.

I call on Governor Healey and state lawmakers to pass S.868 and fully fund the HPC's efforts to investigate and regulate unjustified price increases.

This bill is a critical step toward protecting Massachusetts families from medical debt, unnecessary suffering, and financial ruin. Let's live up to our state's healthcare legacy. No one in Massachusetts should ever have to choose between paying rent and staying alive.

Charles Nabbout

Healthcare for the People, Not Above but Equal

In *The Republic*, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato raises a timeless question: who is truly fit to rule over others? In constructing the foundation of a just society, Plato concludes that the ruler must be someone who possesses knowledge, acts with reason, avoids personal gain, and seeks justice. Though the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has long prided itself on being a protector of liberty and fairness, recent developments within the healthcare system suggest we may be drifting toward the very dangers Plato warned against. At the heart of this issue lies a growing tension

between the interests of patients and those of shareholders. Massachusetts has historically led the nation in healthcare reform, championing accessible coverage for individuals and families facing financial hardship. This commitment to fairness and safety in healthcare is a point of pride for many residents. However, pride alone cannot resolve the deepening crisis in prescription drug affordability.

This is why S.868: *An Act enhancing health care market oversight and pharmaceutical access* deserves both attention and support. This legislation seeks to restore balance to a system increasingly shaped by the influence of large corporations. As hospital consolidations and pharmaceutical price hikes continue to outpace wage growth and strain family budgets, immediate reform is necessary.

The bill targets two pressing issues: the rapid consolidation of healthcare organizations and the dramatic rise in prescription drug prices. These forces lie at the core of our affordability crisis.

The first problem concerns market oversight. Major healthcare systems are steadily acquiring smaller institutions, often under the guise of improving access and care. But behind these promises are troubling outcomes namely, increased costs and diminished attention to local needs. This bill strengthens the authority of the Health Policy Commission, requiring greater scrutiny and transparency regarding both cost and quality before such mergers are allowed to proceed.

The second key concern is pharmaceutical access. This legislation gives the state the tools to hold drug manufacturers accountable when they set prices unreasonably high. The Health Policy Commission will be empowered to conduct investigations and recommend action in cases where price increases are unjustified. Just as importantly, the bill demands transparency: pharmaceutical companies must explain their pricing decisions.

While innovation in medicine is essential, life-saving drugs should never be priced out of reach. It is unacceptable for human suffering to be a byproduct of unchecked market competition. The safety of Massachusetts residents must always come before corporate profit, especially when pharmaceutical companies are making billions each year.

Some defenders of the free market may argue that this bill goes too far. But we are fortunate to live in a country where capitalism and public health do not have to be at odds. We must recognize that the well-being of the people must always take precedence over the pursuit of profit. This bill marks a critical step toward a healthcare system that centers patients, not corporations. That's how it should be.

Massachusetts has the history, the resources, and the moral compass to lead a new movement for liberty, one that

puts people before profit. With *An Act enhancing health care market oversight and pharmaceutical access*, communities across the Commonwealth can begin to ensure that healthcare is not a business but a lifeline. A system rooted in equity, transparency, and compassion is not only possible, it is what's necessary.

Shailo Zhou

Want to Stay Alive? That'll Be \$300, Please.

Fill a prescription. Go to a check-up. Manage a chronic illness. In Massachusetts, these things might sound routine – unless you can't afford them.

Because for too many people, especially those with asthma, diabetes, or heart disease, filling a prescription is not about convenience. It's a calculation: pay rent or pick up insulin. Keep the lights on, or refill that inhaler. This isn't just a personal dilemma; it's a systemic failure. In a state celebrated for world-class hospitals and biotech innovation, it's outrageous that people are skipping doses and cutting pills in half because the cost of medication is so high.

It's not just hurting wallets. It's hurting health. According to the Massachusetts Health Equity Data, 1 in 4 residents have reported skipping or altering prescriptions due to cost. The numbers are even more staggering for Black and Hispanic residents, making this a full-blown health equity crisis.

And while patients, providers, and insurers have worked to rein in costs, the pharmaceutical industry? They've been sitting comfortably on the sidelines, protected by layers of middlemen, and a lack of transparency.

But that's where *An Act enhancing health care market oversight and pharmaceutical access* comes in.

This bill does what common sense says we should've done years ago. It caps co-pays for essential medications. It ensures that at least one generic drug in key categories – like insulin for diabetes – costs patients nothing. And it gives the state power to demand transparency from drug companies and PBMs, so we can finally see what's driving up prices.

Critics will say this is government overreach. That regulating PBMs or drug pricing data will stifle innovation. Let me ask: what's more harmful to innovation: being asked to explain your pricing, or letting millions go without the medication they need to survive? Massachusetts shouldn't accept a tradeoff between life-saving medicine and fair pricing.

This isn't about politics. It's about fairness. It's about opportunity. And it's about making sure that access to health care doesn't come with a price tag that only some can afford.

So to our legislators, I say: this bill isn't radical, it's rational. Let's lead the nation once again – not just in discovering the next blockbuster drug, but in making sure that the people who need it can actually afford it.

Pass the bill. Cap the co-pays. Shine a light on the system. Massachusetts patients deserve nothing less.

Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Kilcoyne,

We are students at Brandeis University advocating for more affordable healthcare in Massachusetts, and we are writing to urge your support for *An Act enhancing health care market oversight and pharmaceutical access* (S.868/H.1092).

Prescription drug costs in Massachusetts rose by \$1 billion in 2023 alone, contributing to an 8.6% spike in total healthcare costs – more than double the state's benchmark. These increases hit families and patients hardest, especially those managing chronic conditions like diabetes, asthma, and heart disease. Nearly one in four Massachusetts residents have skipped or rationed medications due to cost.

This bill is a meaningful step toward a fairer system. It would:

- Cap co-pays at \$25 for at least one brand-name medication per condition
- Eliminate co-pays for certain generic drugs for chronic illnesses
- Increase oversight of pharmacy benefit managers
- Require data transparency from pharmaceutical companies to help rein in excessive pricing

We recognize that some fear this may impact pharmaceutical innovation. However, similar policies in other countries have led to better health outcomes without sacrificing R&D. As healthcare costs soar past wage growth, bold and balanced reform is not only possible – it's necessary.

We respectfully ask that you co-sponsor and champion this bill to help reduce the burden on Massachusetts families and improve health equity. We would also welcome the opportunity to meet with your office to discuss this legislation in more detail.

Thank you for your time and commitment to health access in our state.

Sincerely,
Daniel Hahn
Charles Nabbout
Shailo Zhou

Excerpts from Campaign Journal

Charles Nabbout

Meeting with Madelyn Bedard, Legislative Aide to Representative Meghan Kilcoyne

Madelyn and her office were not familiar with the bill or with related issues concerning prescription drug cost transparency and affordability. Representative Kilcoyne is more widely known for her work in areas like education, public health, environmental protection, and labor. Even though Madelyn said they had no prior involvement with this specific bill, she expressed interest given the overlapping themes with their current policy priorities.

We spent most of the meeting explaining the bill, emphasizing how it aligned with the interests of Kilcoyne's constituents and broader goals. Madelyn asked insightful questions about pharmacy benefit managers and the role of pharmaceutical companies. She concluded by stating that she would pass our message along to Representative Kilcoyne and that there was potential for support from their office.

Daniel Hahn

Brandeis Campus Petitioning

While less formal, this outreach was vital in building grassroots support and raising awareness among peers.... We set up a table near the C-store on campus and initiated conversations about the financial trade-offs students face. Framing the issue around choosing between rent and medication resonated with many students, and we collected several petition signatures.

Lessons Learned: We succeeded in translating an abstract policy issue into something personal and tangible. However, I believe the effort could have been stronger with printed flyers or QR codes linking to more information. In the future, such materials could help demonstrate the depth of student engagement.

Shailo Zhou

Meeting with Kate Costello, Health Care Financing Department

During this meeting, we presented the same pitch, but shifted our emphasis slightly to highlight the financial implications – knowing that healthcare financing staff focus heavily on cost containment and system-wide sustainability. Kate responded positively to the goals of the bill but raised questions about its implementation, especially how the oversight mechanisms would be staffed and funded.

She also brought up concerns about whether increased oversight might drive away pharmaceutical investments in Massachusetts. While we didn't have all the answers, we acknowledged the concerns and emphasized that the bill focuses on transparency, not price-setting. Kate appreciated the thoughtful approach but made it clear these issues would need further discussion.

Lesson Learned: Tailor your message. Knowing your audience's concerns helps frame your advocacy in a way that resonates.

Next Steps

The advocacy process was a way of learning about a new topic that we as a group had never encountered before. It required more than just research and studying, rather a proactive participation was necessary in order to reach the desired outcome of external support. With that being said, the next steps moving forward following the established foundation we have set will be an expansion of the network that has been built.

What this means is that beyond the recognized officials that we have spoken to, the focus must be on the hearts and minds of not only those who will be affected by our bill but also those who can help us in championing it.

An avenue we see a great future in is visiting other universities, raising awareness among students and professors alike. Appealing to this specific group who in today's society are seemingly more active in terms of politics and overall change will most likely be effective in attracting concrete awareness behind the legislation of healthcare throughout the state of Massachusetts. Utilizing tools such as petitions and rallies are a good first step in the right direction in putting pressure on representatives and senators in joining the side against the fight with big pharma.

...A collective effort from driven students and professors will allow for meaningful change and impact towards a brighter future.

While the advocacy process has provided us with a critical introduction to the complexity and nuance of healthcare reform, particularly in Massachusetts, it has also taught us that awareness and action must be ongoing and multifaceted. Our initial efforts, grounded in research and public officials, have created a springboard from which real, impactful change can begin to emerge. However, the path forward demands that we shift from foundational work to strategic mobilization.

The next phase of our advocacy campaign will involve a deliberate and targeted expansion of our coalition. Beyond elected officials, we recognize that long-term success

will be rooted in engaging diverse stakeholders across multiple sectors. This success will be rooted in engaging diverse stakeholders across multiple sectors. This includes healthcare professionals, community organizers, and non profit organizations. We will prioritize outreach to other universities throughout Massachusetts and on-campus platforms that can amplify our message.

The university setting offers a uniquely fertile ground for political mobilization. College students and professors are often at the forefront of progressive change, unafraid to question the status quo and eager to participate in shaping the policies that will govern their futures. Hosting information sessions will provide opportunities not only to educate but also to recruit passionate advocates to our cause.

The next steps will be more ambitious, more visible, and more inclusive. This will ensure that our advocacy evolves into a movement with the power to influence not just legislation, but culture and consciousness. By harnessing the energy of our peers and the expertise of our mentors, we can begin to transform the healthcare narrative in Massachusetts and beyond.

Update

- As of July 9, 2025, the Senate bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. The House bill had a hearing by the Committee on Financial Services on June 10, 2025.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

- S.868: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S868
- H.1092: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H1092

Organization or Coalition support:

- Health Care For All: hcfama.org

Protecting Location Data Privacy

Tanvi Raju '27
David Tuan '25



Tanvi Raju and David Tuan

The primary objective of H.86: *An Act to protect location privacy* / S.197: *An Act to protect safety and privacy by stopping the sale of location data*, otherwise known as the Location Shield Act, is to regulate the collection and distribution of location-based data, such as that collected via cell phones, by third party service providers. This data is used to provide useful services but can be exploited for profit and other purposes.

The lack of restrictions surrounding the sale and distribution of this location data to third parties puts the privacy of consumers, and particularly members of vulnerable groups, at risk. The commercial availability of this data via location data brokers facilitates the tracking and potential harassment of members of the LGBTQ+ community, individuals seeking or providing healthcare services such as abortions, as well as migrants and refugees.

These bills aim to prevent malicious parties from obtaining location information by prohibiting the collection of this data outside of permissible purposes. They also prohibit all sales or distribution of which to third parties, strengthen already in place opt out regulation, and shift regulation regarding location privacy policies. The shifts in disclosure policy assist users in making informed decisions on the use of a product.

The Bill

S.197: *An Act to protect safety and privacy by stopping the sale of location data*
H.86: *An Act to protect location privacy*

Elevator Speech

Hi, I am Tanvi/David from Brandeis University, and I would love to take a minute of your time to discuss an urgent piece of legislation – the Location Shield Act.

Can you please take out your phone? When was the last time you went anywhere, or did anything important without this device on your person? And do you have apps like Uber, Lyft, or the Weather App on your phone?

If this is the case, your location is accessible to anybody anywhere. Companies can sell your location data to anyone with a credit card, and the scary part is you wouldn't even know. In the modern day, given the vast strides in technology our society has witnessed, our digital privacy is now directly linked to our safety. Because our devices are an extension of ourselves, every time you open an app on your phone, your location information is collected and can be bought by anybody.

On the ground, this data can and has been weaponized against residents of this state. According to a poll conducted by the ACLU, 93% of Massachusetts voters find this sale and collection of personal information deeply concerning.

This support is bipartisan. Of those concerned by the sale of their information, more than ¾ of these respondents were concerned about domestic abuse victims, more than ⅔ concerned about foreign governments,

those seeking abortion, and violent extremists, and more than 1/2, concerned about their employers. On the ground, this data has led to the outing of members of the LGBTQ+ community, the enabling of anti-abortion extremists, and the tracking of undocumented immigrants.

The Location Shield Act is a necessary step in protecting the dignity and livelihood of all residents of Massachusetts. By banning the sale of location data to third parties, you shine the spotlight on Massachusetts once more as an advocate for the common good. We urge you to demonstrate your support for the Location Shield Act by ensuring a speedy hearing, and a favorable outcome. Can we count on your support?

Op-Ed

Tanvi Raju

Online Privacy, Offline Consequences

Have you ever been to a country where anyone with a credit card at any given time could track everywhere you have physically been with disturbing accuracy? Somewhere where malicious forces could buy sensitive personal data that they use to target and endanger you?

Somewhere you could be constantly surveilled even if you only use technology for the most basic daily functions? Sounds like a pretty dystopian place. Guess what! That's the United States.

The daily apps that we use on our devices for our convenience in services related to transportation, navigation, shopping, dating, deliveries and even the weather collect and use our location data for legitimate purposes. However, many of these apps also sell this data to other entities. Entities that can

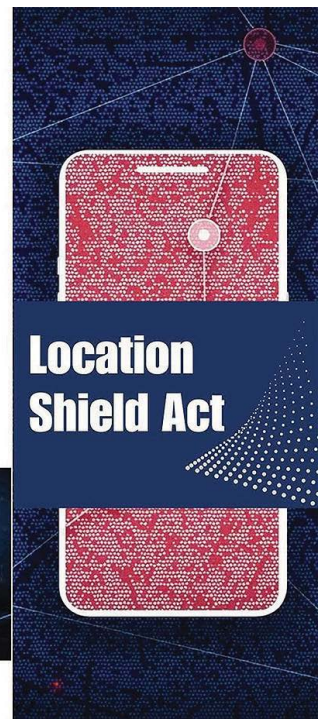
Storybook

Location Shield Act



Bill H.86, S.D. 197

- The act prohibits the sale and distribution of location-based, cellular data to third-parties.
- This bill would prevent companies like Waze, Tinder, and Uber from selling location data to any paying party.
- This bill is pivotal for protecting consumer privacy and protecting vulnerable groups.



"I don't think most people tend to understand, the significance of location data and the gravity behind what they're really giving. I think our generation is very much desensitized to being exploited in ways that we don't even understand, or think that we're being exploited in."



Sarah Jafary
Brandeis University
Student, Massachusetts
Resident, and President of
Pro-Bono and Justice

"Reclaiming a little bit of privacy for everybody is a fantastic thing. We can see the consequences of malicious third actors; they have tipped the scales in elections, brought about unconstitutional rule. The regulations haven't kept up with the evolving technology, and anyone with a mobile phone is impacted."



P.H.D. Cynthia Tschampl
Immediate Past Chair of
Stop TB USA and Professor
at Brandeis University

The Problem

- Mobile applications like Uber and Waze collect and utilize your location data to provide services to users
- Location data is often sold to third-parties and used for purposes other than the service
- These third parties include domestic abusers, anti-trans and anti-abortion extremists, foreign governments, and employers.
- These parties have used the data to target and harass migrants, the LGBTQIA+ community, individuals seeking abortions, and more



Massachusetts Poll Results
(Courtesy of the ACLU, 2024)

What Can You Do?

Reach Out:

- Write or call your Legislator in support of this legislation*

Spread Awareness:

- Stay informed and discuss the legislation
- Volunteer with a local advocacy group

Help us bring attention to this important bill and support Massachusetts in becoming the first state to prohibit the sale of location data!

*Find your legislators here:
<https://malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator>

and have used location data to threaten and harass people. Entities that have absolutely no business knowing where you choose to go, or what you choose to do.

Essentially, your location data can be sold to anyone and can then be weaponized against you.

The fact that bad actors like radical organizations and political organizations have weaponized location data means that this is no longer simply a question of consumer protection. It has become a question of safety. Safety of immigrants, people seeking reproductive care, domestic abuse victims, the LGBTQIA+ community, the police, and really, the safety of us all.

It is absurd that the tradeoff for using basic digital tools on the devices we use every day comes at such a high cost. You aren't just looking up the temperature or playing a game on your phone. You're providing your exact coordinates to companies and by extension to anyone who wants to access them, for a price. If you weren't already concerned about the various ways in which you are exploited online, know now that a lack of privacy online translates directly to a lack of privacy in real life. The consequences of the information we give out through our devices is tangible. I think it's high time we strengthen the restrictions around the sale and distribution of our personal data, to reclaim some of the privacy we have lost.

The Location Shield Act (H.86/S.197) is a piece of legislation that can help protect our safety by prohibiting the sale and distribution of location data to third parties in Massachusetts. If this bill is made into law, not only will it preemptively stop bad actors from targeting residents of the state based on their location information, it will also serve as an example for other states to enact similar laws. This bill already has widespread bipartisan support, which given the times is rare. Clearly, stopping insidious encroachments into our safety and privacy is one of the few things we can all agree on.

What's missing now is a sense of urgency from our legislators. It's up to us to convey to those in power to make a change that this bill is a priority. After all, what is more important than protecting the residents of Massachusetts?

Take a step towards protecting yourself and the people around you by reaching out to your local legislator and asking them to vote favorably on the Location Shield Act. Make it clear to Massachusetts lawmakers that it's not ok that your location data is up for sale.

David Tuan

Parallels Between Parents and Privacy

"Where are you?!?!?" Throughout high school, when my phone died, my mother would often text me these three words in panic, as is the case for many students. The source of her anxiety was always the same; where in Boston could I be? Attending high school in the city, but living in the suburbs, meant that as a teenager, I had an immense amount of freedom. Armed with a T-Pass with unlimited entry, my friends and I could go anywhere in the city, any day of the week. On a whim, we could eat a snack in Chinatown, play football on Boston Common, walk through Harvard Square, or study at the Boston Public Library. To ensure my utmost education and safety, my parents added me on Find My iPhone, like many parents at the time.

This app allowed them to track me anywhere, at any point in the day. They could see if I was where I was supposed to be, doing what I told them I would be doing. They could see if I was at school, hanging out with friends, studying at a library, or waiting for the train.

Through my location alone, they learned a lot about me. They could watch my daily routine, where I ate, and where I would hang out with friends. In this manner, they learned what stores I liked to visit, what type of food I liked, and what I did for fun. This information proved valuable to them in conversation as I was very secretive, like most teenagers.

Because I was in high school, and they were my parents, sharing this very intimate information was more than reasonable. They have my best intentions in mind, they granted me my freedom, and they were responsible for my safety. Now that I am older, I still share my location with them to provide peace of mind that I am safe, but every now and then, I will turn it off. When I do, I am not trying to hide anything obscene, dangerous, or something that they would disapprove of. Rather, sometimes, I just want to avoid questions, ensure a surprise, or avoid "running into them." I am an adult, my location is intimate information, and the world – especially my parents – does not need to know everything about me.

Given that I do not always share this information with my parents, why would I agree to publish this information online for everyone else to see? The fact is, almost everyone agrees to this, including myself. If you have ever ordered food from UberEats, swiped on Tinder, called a ride on Lyft, or even checked the weather in the Weather App, you have agreed to these companies lengthy list of terms and conditions.

Buried in that giant blob of text is an agreement with the company that permits them to collect your location,

even if you are not actively using the app, and sell it for a profit to anyone who wants to buy it. These companies will do their best to ensure that you agree to this arrangement no matter what. They will hide the button to opt out, worsen the quality of their features, or outright require your agreement to use their service. When asked about the collection and sale of location data, they say it improves their technology, ensures reasonable prices, and guarantees an overall better experience.

Although these reasons may seem well intentioned, it is important to note that these companies are not your parents. They do not have your best intentions in mind,

Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Payano,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is David Tuan/Tanvi Raju, and I am an undergraduate senior/sophomore at Brandeis University and a proud voter of [town] Massachusetts.

As a concerned resident of Massachusetts, I believe that a conversation would prove fruitful regarding the great strides in technology Massachusetts has witnessed and contributed to in recent years and the need for regulation in relation to such. This need proves especially true in the case of consumer location data and is addressed in the Location Shield Act (S.197/H.86) by prohibiting the sale and distribution of location data to third parties.

The infringements upon our day to day lives associated with the sale of location data not only hurt all residents of Massachusetts, but they disproportionately strike at the dignity, health, and safety of vulnerable communities by facilitating bad actors who seek to weaponize this data against them.

It is apparent to me that support and protections for digital privacy and vulnerable communities are already at the forefront of your agenda with your support for a prior version of the Location Shield Act last session. Given your role as vice-chair of the committee on Advanced Information Technology, Internet and Cybersecurity, your perspective and leadership on this matter would be incredibly beneficial for all Massachusetts residents. Hence, we would greatly appreciate your continued support for this important piece of legislation with a speedy hearing and a favorable vote.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Best regards,

David Tuan/Tanvi Raju

nor are they responsible for your safety.

Typically, this information is bought by companies to advance their technology and target advertisements.

However, in recent years, this publicly purchasable information has been used to target everyday people. The Catholic Church used it to oust a gay priest, the Heritage Foundation used it to track undocumented migrants, and anti-abortion activists used it to harass practitioners and patients.

In response to these infringements on everyday life, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) advocated for the Location Shield Act (H.86, S.197). This piece of legislation seeks to prohibit the sale and distribution of location data, thus preventing your location from being publicly purchasable when in Massachusetts. Furthermore, the legislation restricts the collection of this location data and reinforces consent and opt-out infrastructure for terms and services. In essence, this piece of legislation protects the rights and livelihood of all Massachusetts residents.

While the Massachusetts legislature works on this issue, thankfully, my parents are not as technologically savvy. They have not learned yet how to fill the two to three days a month I keep my location off. Then again, it is only a matter of time. In the age of the internet, all you need is a few YouTube videos and a blog post to learn how to do just about anything.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Tanvi Raju

Literature Drop-Off with the ACLU prior to AITIC hearing:

The first Joint Committee on Advanced Information Technology, Internet and Cybersecurity hearing for the Location Shield Act this session took place in room A-1 of the statehouse on April 9th. This hearing was chaired by Sen. Michael Moore and Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier. In preparation for this hearing, I volunteered with the ACLU to distribute literature to all the legislators' offices to bring this bill to their attention.

The House was in session at this time, so I primarily distributed materials given to me by the ACLU (a fact sheet and a *Boston Globe* article) to receptionists, or alternatively left them in the legislators office mailboxes. By distributing this literature, I assisted in notifying all legislators, regardless of whether or not they were on the committee, as to the importance of this particular bill so that they are aware

of it when it is put to a vote on the house or senate floor.

I additionally provided written testimony online through Reproductive Equity Now, and attended the hearing in person. I found it very insightful to hear the legislators' perspectives and support as well as the oral testimony provided by various experts and organizations that consider this bill a priority.

From this experience I learned that most legislators' offices are very welcoming and receptive towards advocacy even if it is just dropping materials off, and several offices thanked me for my advocacy. Since this was the first hearing I attended, I also learned a lot about the process and the atmosphere of hearings as well as the ways in which people provide testimony.

David Tuan

Meeting with Casimir N. Dahrouch, Legislative Aide to Senator Dooner

...Tanvi and I dropped into Senator Dooner's office. We attempted to contact her via email, but the office noted that they could not assist us and to reach out to my Senator Rebecca Rausch. Upon knocking on Senator Dooner's office, we were greeted by Casimir N. Dahrouch, one of the senator's aides.

After introducing ourselves, we discussed the legislation in terms of police and abuse victim protections. Mr. Dahrouch responded by noting that this type of data has been very useful for development of public transport but in understanding the need for protection. He further noted the office would look into the policy, before asking questions about who we were. In this line of questioning, we built a small connection as he was a Brandeis alumni who studied politics, also discovering that we had a few favorite professors in common. ...

Especially from this last encounter, I found that it is not just the lobbyist's reputation nor the organization's reputation that influences the validity and convincing nature of arguments, but also the individual's identity themselves. Because our backgrounds did not connect to the issue and those affected in a positive manner, the aide seemed more inclined to dismiss what we were saying.

Next Steps

As of May 1, 2025, the Location Shield Act is awaiting a report from the Joint Committee on Advanced Information Technology, the Internet and Cybersecurity. The legislation received its hearing on April 9th and is likely to receive a favorable report given vocalized support by both Chair

Michael O. Moore (D) and Chair Tricia Farley-Bouvier (D), as well as a wide array of committee members being cosponsors. In the case of Farley-Bouvier's statement, she noted special thanks to Vice-Chair Pavel M. Payano (D) for discharging the legislation from the Joint Committee on Consumer Protection and Professional Licensure which he chaired.

This maneuvering in favor of the legislation demonstrates further support from the vice-chair. In terms of the hearing itself, the legislation was the primary subject for an overwhelming majority of those testifying. Furthermore, those in support for the legislation drastically outweighed any opposition.

Assuming the legislation receives a favorable report, the next step is a vote in the House. Given the unanimous vote in the previous session, the current bipartisan sponsorship, and the lengthy list of House cosponsors, the bill is in good standing as is. That said, given the minor changes in seat holders as a result of the last election, as well as continued lobbying by companies who profit off of location data, further advocacy in the House would prove advantageous.

Ultimately, the major obstacle for this legislation is in the Senate. In the previous session, the Senate did not act on the legislation nor demonstrate significant sponsorship. This inaction is partially attributable to the Senate's lack of knowledge regarding the issue and the bill's solution. This session, the bill has demonstrated more Senate support with increased sponsorship from the legislative body. In order for the bill to succeed and ensure further support, lobbying pressure on senators must continue.

One approach to garnering further support in both legislative bodies would be to partner with police unions and law enforcement advocacy groups. Given the inherent dangers and confrontational nature associated with their occupation, these individuals demonstrate immense vulnerability as a product of the distribution of location data. Their support could prove highly valuable in convincing Republican legislators to support this legislation, especially since current talking points on immigration and health prove significantly less convincing.

Continued efforts by advocacy organizations could also prove beneficial in ensuring passage in the Senate. With support from influential advocacy organizations like the ACLU, Reproductive Equity Now, Planned Parenthood and more, the Location Shield Act has gained a lot of momentum in the legislature. The fact that these organizations have flagged the Location Shield Act as a top priority bill in response to the inability of the Senate to bring it to the floor for a vote in time last session is promising in terms of a positive outcome.

However, there are some potential issues these lobbyist organizations might be forced to overcome. One challenge is the lobbying power of the opposition from the tech industry. Although the testimony provided by opposition in the AITIC hearing was questioned, ridiculed and even dismissed by legislators as being insufficiently strong arguments, we learned from legislative aides that tech industry lobbying played a large role in why the bill was not passed last session. It is therefore important to continue to take into consideration the power of the tech industry, and continue to put effort into educating and convincing legislators of the importance and urgency of the Location Shield Act.

Looking to its potential implementation, the Location Shield Act, as is, is a comprehensive piece of legislation when it comes to restricting the sale of location data. However, on its own it is simply not enough. The issue of data privacy and companies profiting off of consumer information is one that needs to be urgently addressed, especially due to the growth of consumer online presence and their sensitive personal information.

Additionally, even though this bill is a sweeping piece of legislation within Massachusetts, the people it protects cannot truly be safe from the harms of the sale of location data until similar legislation is enacted in other states. Although the Location Shield Act is an incredible step in the right direction, advocacy for the issue that this piece of legislation addresses must continue beyond the bill to ensure that it has real impact.

In essence, we are optimistic that the Location Shield Act will receive a favorable report from the AITIC committee, and will move through the state legislative process with the newfound momentum and awareness it has had this session. Despite the potential roadblock of the current federal administration's stance, we believe that most Massachusetts legislators will view supporting this bill as a

means to demonstrate to their constituents that they oppose the actions of anti-abortion extremists, ICE raids, and threats to communities that are now more vulnerable than ever.

In terms of our own advocacy efforts, we intend to continue attending and supporting events hosted by the ACLU and Reproductive Equity Now related to this bill. Considering the expertise we have developed on this legislation, we will continue to educate people about its importance to garner support. We have submitted our video to the ACLU and Arline Isaacson, and hope to have our op-eds published in Brandeis University student newspaper *The Justice* to further spread awareness. If all goes well, the Location Shield Act will be passed this session and will pave the way for more urgent data privacy legislation.

Update

As of July 9, 2025, the Senate bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means, and the House bill had a hearing by the Joint Committee on Advanced Information Technology, the Internet and Cybersecurity on April 9, 2025.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.197: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S197

H.86: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H86

Organization or Coalition support:

Reproductive Equity Now: reproequitynow.org

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

Cora Boothby-Akilo '25
Tajah Browder '25



Tajah Browder and Cora Boothby-Akilo

The “I AM Bill” (H.2483/S.1549) is a legislative initiative aimed at increasing access to disposable menstrual products in prisons, homeless shelters, and public schools across Massachusetts. The I AM Bill would require these institutions to provide free, accessible menstrual products in a manner that minimizes stigmatization. Sponsored by Senator Patricia D. Jehlen and Representatives Jay D. Livingstone and Christine P. Barber, the bill seeks to eliminate barriers to menstrual product accessibility, address period poverty, and promote dignity, health, and equal opportunity for all menstruators.

The Bill

H.2483/S.1549: *An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products*

Elevator Speech

Hello, my name is Tajah and I attend Brandeis University. I’m a Massachusetts voter with a passion for public health, both locally and nationally. I’m here today with my colleague Cora, who also studies at Brandeis. Together, we are advocating for menstrual equity by urging your support for the I AM Bill.

Now, close your eyes for a moment. Imagine you’ve just finished eating a messy meal; BBQ ribs, a juicy burger, or a salad drenched in your favorite dressing. You reach for a napkin, only to find none are available. When you ask the waiter, you’re told napkins cost a quarter! Who even carries quarters anymore?

This is what it feels like for many menstruators, your mother, sister, daughter, neighbor, when they find themselves without access to period products it’s uncomfortable, undignified, and completely avoidable.

The I AM Bill, Bill H.2483/S.1549, would mandate free access to disposable menstrual products in all public schools, shelters, and correctional facilities across the Commonwealth. This legislation affirms our state’s commitment to equity, dignity, and the well-being of all residents.

Too many people across Massachusetts are forced to miss school, suffer health issues, or improvise with unsafe alternatives simply because they cannot access something as basic as a pad or tampon. This isn’t just a student issue. People experiencing homelessness and those incarcerated also face daily challenges maintaining their health and dignity without these products. It’s a public health failure and a violation of basic human rights.

Menstrual products are as essential as toilet paper. By passing the I AM Bill, Massachusetts can set a precedent for compassionate, practical public policy. We urge you to support this bill and vote favorably to ensure that no one is left behind because of a biological necessity.

Storybook

I AM BILL

An Act to Increase Access to Menstrual Products in Prisons, Homeless Shelters and Public Schools (H.2483 & S.1549)

PERIOD POVERTY/ THE PROBLEM


- Menstrual products need to be seen as necessities in MA just like food, shelter, and education
- Inadequate supply of menstrual products in schools causes students to miss out on their education
- Menstrual Products are some of the most essential supplies that are difficult to access due to cost and availability

I AM BILL/ THE SOLUTION

- Requires public schools, homeless shelters, prisons, and jails to provide free, easily accessible menstrual products
- Safeguards that no one has to leave class, barter, or go without basic hygiene due to a lack of menstrual products
- Improves access to essential products and also stipulates provision in a convenient and non-stigmatizing manner


ADVOCATES AND THEIR STORIES

CHAROLETTE POWLEY



- As a teacher in NYC, Powley saw students struggle to access menstrual products.
- In Massachusetts Powley partnered with MASS NOW, Boston Public Schools nurses, and the Office of Health and Wellness to advance menstrual equity.
- Her research found that menstruation is starting earlier, making education and access more urgent.
- From high school teacher to social epidemiologist, her work ensures menstrual products are seen as essential, not a privilege.

DAVID WEINSTEIN



- Weinstein is a leading advocate for education equity in the Boston area and Assistant Director of ENACT at Brandeis University.
- His time on the Cambridge School Committee has focused on improving menstrual product accessibility in Cambridge schools.
- "I am proud that we as a district made this commitment and are leading on this. In practice, we are falling short of that commitment, though not through any intention."

Op-Ed

Cora Boothby-Akilo

Periods Don't Pause for Poverty, Pass the I AM Bill Now!

Imagine being a high school student, already exhausted from the state of the world, and your fluctuating hormones. It's a struggle to make it to class when you suddenly feel a debilitating pain in your abdomen. Ugh. It's your period. The search for a tampon begins, since you weren't expecting to need one today. In the rush to not miss any class time, a trip to the bathroom turns into a trip to the nurse when you find that the tampon dispenser in the bathroom is empty, again. In addition to missing even more class time this trip to the nurse results in humiliation when she asks how heavy your flow is.

In Massachusetts, menstrual products are not accessible to everyone. Now, next to being a high school student in need, imagine being incarcerated, earning a few cents per hour, and being forced to choose between a bar of soap or a box of pads at the commissary. Or being unhoused, having to reuse paper towels or tissues during your period.

These examples aren't the exception. It's a reality for thousands of people in Massachusetts experiencing period poverty.

The I AM Bill, An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products, is our chance to change that.

Period poverty is a term that encapsulates a lack of access to products, education, and/or hygiene facilities needed to manage menstruation safely and with dignity. There are many individuals who struggle to afford menstrual

supplies, and this lack of access contributes to the stigma and shame felt about periods. The I AM Bill would require all public schools, homeless shelters, and prisons in Massachusetts to provide free, accessible menstrual products in a manner that minimizes stigmatization. This mandate is simple, necessary, and long overdue. Menstrual equity is not just a women's issue. It's a public health issue. An education issue. A human dignity issue.

Menstruation is a natural biological process, just like needing water, and having to use the bathroom. But unlike the easy access to clean tap water, toilet paper and soap, menstrual products in Massachusetts are often treated as optional, stigmatizing, or worse, profitable. While Massachusetts has made headway in menstrual equity by making menstrual products tax-exempt in 2013, there has yet to be state policy requiring the provision of menstrual products for the people of the Commonwealth. Programs like SNAP or WIC don't cover hygiene products so that means if you rely on these programs, your period becomes a monthly crisis.

According to the Mass Gov Rehousing Data Collective, there are over 25,000 people unhoused, furthermore the Massachusetts Childrens League found that one in seven children in the Commonwealth lives in poverty, and in a 2023 study by Mass Now found over half of school nurses in Massachusetts report that students regularly miss class to find pads or tampons. From these statistics it's clear that when institutions fail to provide these basic supplies, people suffer. In a 2020 I AM Bill advocacy video by Leah Trachtenberg she found that some kids without access to products had to improvise with unsafe alternatives, stretch products too long, or go without altogether, risking serious infections and trauma

The I AM bill is an unfunded mandate, and yes, that means it currently doesn't come with designated state funding. But the cost of providing pads and tampons in restrooms is minimal compared to the toll of period poverty on education, health, and dignity. This isn't about luxury. It's about justice. Furthermore, just like free and assumed access to toilet paper and water, menstrual products can be put into the budgets of the institutions the bill aims to address as a part of basic hygiene products.

The truth is, we already know how to fix the problem of period poverty. Massachusetts has made strides by no longer taxing menstrual products, and local organizations like the Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition (MMEC) and Boston University student groups are stepping up to fill the gaps with product drives and education campaigns. But these situational solutions aren't enough. Charity should never be the only safety net for basic human needs.

It's time we codify Massachusetts's commitment to reproductive equity into law. In 2023, the I AM Bill passed in the Massachusetts Senate. As of March 2025, the bill has been re-introduced to the legislature, and sits with the Committee of Public Health, so now is the moment to speak out. Whether you're a student, a teacher, a healthcare worker, or simply someone who believes in fairness, you can help. Email your representative to support the bill. Thank your senators if they have agreed to co-sponsor or support the bill. Tell lawmakers that you care, and that you're watching.

Because no one should have to choose between school, food, shelter, and basic hygiene. Because periods don't stop for poverty. And because dignity should never come with a price tag.

Tajah Browder

Addressing Period Poverty in Massachusetts with the "I AM Bill"

Imagine this: You've just eaten your favorite meal. It's messy and delicious, and you've savored every bite. But now, you're expected to be somewhere in 15 minutes, and there are no napkins or paper towels to clean up. How would you manage the situation? You'd probably feel frustrated, uncomfortable, and maybe even embarrassed. Now, imagine someone enduring a similar situation with a menstrual cycle, and they have no access to the products they need. This is the reality for many individuals across Massachusetts, particularly in prisons, homeless shelters, and public schools. The "I AM Bill" is a critical step toward changing this.

The "I AM Bill," sponsored by Senator Jehlen and Representatives Livingstone and Barber, aims to increase access to disposable menstrual products in Massachusetts prisons, homeless shelters, and public schools. By addressing period poverty, the bill seeks to eliminate barriers to menstrual product accessibility and provide dignity, equity, and the opportunity for all individuals to participate in society fully.

Menstruation is a natural process that half of the world's population experiences. Yet, it is often marginalized, with products like tampons, pads, and sanitary napkins not classified as essential care items. This lack of recognition places an undue burden on those who need these products the most.

Currently, in public institutions, menstrual products are not always readily available. They are often seen as an afterthought or luxury rather than a necessity, which is why people, particularly students, incarcerated individuals, and those in transitional housing, are forced to choose between period products and other essential needs.

In Massachusetts, as many as 1 in 7 adolescents experience period poverty. This situation worsens in schools where menstrual products are often only available in the nurse's office, not in bathrooms. Even then, students may need to rely on a teacher, administrator, or school nurse for access. This delay, discomfort, and lack of privacy often result in missed school days, affecting academic performance and mental health.

Periods don't stop during crises – whether it's a pandemic, economic hardship, or the daily struggles of homelessness. Yet, a lack of access to menstrual products makes an already difficult situation worse. The I AM Bill is a solution to this crisis, one that goes beyond the distribution of physical products. It is about human dignity and ensuring equal access to health care for all. When we fail to provide menstrual products, we send a message that those who menstruate do not deserve the same rights and privileges as others. This is particularly evident in public spaces like schools, where students should feel safe, comfortable, and empowered to learn, not ashamed of their natural bodily functions.

In my own experience, as a student at Brandeis University, I've encountered the countless ways in which systemic neglect contributes to period poverty. These issues are not just confined to one segment of the population. Menstruators come from all walks of life – mothers, daughters, wives, friends – and they deserve access to essential products without shame or hesitation. It is not just a question of fairness – it's a matter of ensuring every person can participate in society to the fullest.

Moreover, the legislative conversation around menstrual products needs to shift. There is an opportunity here to remove any bureaucratic barriers that prevent menstrual products from being treated like the essential care items they are. Products like tampons and pads should not be subject to political gridlock or seen as optional. They must be directly available in bathrooms in schools, shelters, and prisons, without requiring intermediaries or a complicated process. No one should have to ask for these products in an already stigmatized environment; they should simply be available.

This menstrual equity bill has an emphasis on funding and its status as a legislative priority is crucial. As a community, addressing this issue is not just a matter of convenience – it is a necessary step toward creating more equitable public systems.

When the government allocates resources for menstrual products, it makes a statement that we care for all citizens, especially those facing financial hardship or navigating institutional systems that have long neglected their needs.

Excerpt from Campaign Journals

Cora Boothby-Akilo

Meeting with Anna-Marie, Legislative Staffer for Representative Reid

Anna-Marie, a staffer for Representative Sean Reid. After sending outreach emails to multiple legislators, Anna-Marie was the only one to schedule a meeting with us. Tajah and I met her at the State House. We came prepared and provided a thorough overview of the I AM Bill, emphasizing its potential impact on Representative Reid's constituents in Lynn. The conversation became personal and powerful as we all shared stories about navigating menstruation in school and work settings. We transitioned into discussing the importance of the bill for marginalized communities, including those in homeless shelters and prisons. Having done research on Representative Reid, I knew about his background in education and his personal experience with poverty. These connections made our conversation even more meaningful. Anna-Marie seemed genuinely invested in bringing our information back to the Representative and helping move the bill forward in committee. This was our most critical advocacy meeting. All the work I had done, research, class engagement, and on-campus organizing, came together in a way that felt impactful and purpose-driven.

Next Steps

The I AM Bill represents a crucial step toward achieving menstrual equity in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. It mandates public schools, prisons, and homeless shelters to provide free menstrual products in a non-stigmatizing fashion.

Over the course of this legislative session, our advocacy efforts have focused on framing this bill not only as a public health and education issue, but also as a matter of dignity, equity, and fiscal responsibility. Our work has included meetings with legislators, student mobilization, policy research, and community discussion to gauge support for the bill.

Through this portfolio, we have underscored that menstruation is not a choice, and that access to menstrual products should not be treated as a privilege. During our Present and Defend community discussion, one concerned citizen said they would not vote for the I AM Bill because the language of the bill was not specific enough to account for logistical concerns of free menstrual product

implementation in schools. However, these concerns were dismissed as we articulated that the bill was not meant to regulate implementation, instead the bill is a step forward to state-sanctioned health equity.

This is one of the main issues we have come across when people have had critiques of the bill. During these times it is necessary to reiterate that having the I AM Bill passed is a crucial step forward towards other legislation that may fund the implementation of menstrual products.

At this time, the I AM Bill is stalled in committee, as the Committee on Public Health has not yet discussed the bill in public hearings. This pause in progress reflects broader challenges in the legislative process, especially lengthy bureaucratic procedures, competing legislative priorities, and the current political climate in regards to the federal government. Still, we believe the path forward in getting this legislation past is both achievable and clear. The remainder of our work this session, and into the next if necessary, must focus on strategic lobbying, grassroots mobilization, and continued advocacy work.

The most immediate next step is to target our lobbying efforts toward moving the bill out of committee with a favorable vote from committee members. Specifically, we need to build strong, consistent communication with the Joint Committee on Public Health and the Committee on Ways and Means. Members of these committees, especially those in leadership positions, need to hear directly from constituents and experts about why this bill matters. Although the bill has passed unanimously in the Massachusetts State Senate in previous sessions, it has repeatedly stalled in the House and the Committee on Ways and Means.

This pattern suggests that while the lack of public opposition points to broad appeal, the current political climate means that legislation concerning gender and bodily autonomy can still face quiet resistance or be deprioritized, even when it appears to have widespread support. In this case it has been difficult to pinpoint which legislators remain undecided or hesitant, and this, in turn, has weakened our argumentative response directly to their concerns.

However, in theory, if fiscal hesitation is seen as a barrier, it is crucial to emphasize that this bill is an unfunded mandate, which means it does not require state spending and can be implemented with existing local resources or in partnership with private sponsors. Positioning the bill as a low-cost, high-impact initiative will be key in these conversations.

In parallel with lobbying, we must expand our coalition of support. Connecting and networking with student groups like PAD as well as cities and towns like Cambridge and Boston that have tried implementing free period products can amplify our message through shared testimony, data, and operation strategies. Furthermore in an effort to show the wide range of constituent support for the bill, organizing lobby days that center young voices or creating advocacy campaigns that are led by affected students, menstruators in shelters and/or the formerly incarcerated, would show legislators that this bill is important to those that they represent. Their stories and presence provide a compelling case for why menstrual access belongs in schools, shelters, and prisons. By building a diverse, intergenerational coalition, we can show legislators that this bill reflects widespread public support across gender, race, class, and geography.

Another essential part of our next steps involves anticipating implementation challenges and addressing substantive concerns in the bill. One potential issue is the uneven distribution of products and quality standards across facilities. To get ahead of this, we could combine advocacy efforts for bill S.1483 and H.2375 which focus on menstrual product ingredient disclosure. It would be great if both of these bills passed in order to strengthen state-sanctioned health protections. Furthermore S.1483/H.2375 would support the I AM Bill in making sure that menstruators utilizing free products were also fully aware of what they were putting in their body.

One of the big focuses of the I AM Bill is ensuring that “disposable menstrual products shall be available in a convenient manner that does not stigmatize the individual seeking such products” (Mass Gov). In order to support the language in the bill, our advocacy efforts could include launching a public education and media campaign to normalize conversations around menstruation and elevate the importance of menstrual equity. Through additional op-eds, short-form videos, and student-created content, we hope to drive broader awareness and reduce stigma. These efforts will create pressure from outside the legislature, making it politically advantageous for lawmakers to act.

If the bill does not pass this session, we are committed to reintroducing it in the next legislative cycle. We will work closely with current sponsors to strengthen the language where necessary, and submit the bill early. In the meantime, we could advocate across the state for municipal-level pursuit of pilot programs to demonstrate

the feasibility and benefits of local implementation. These local efforts could serve as a powerful model for eventual statewide rollout and help sustain momentum.

In summary, the work surrounding the I AM Bill is far from over. Our next steps involve targeted lobbying, expanded coalition-building, public storytelling, and contingency preparation for the next session. Through consistent effort and an unwavering commitment to equity, we are confident that Massachusetts can, and will, lead the nation in ensuring menstrual products are treated as essential, not optional.

Update

As of July 9, 2025, the bill had a hearing by the Joint Committee on Public Health on June 11, 2025.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.1549: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S1549

H.2483: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H2483

Organization or Coalition support:

Mass NOW: massnow.org

Raising the Age for Juvenile Detention

Marieleen Exantus '25
Gretta Nijimbere '25



Gretta Nijimbere and Marieleen Exantus

Under current law, young adults aged 18 to 21 face adult sentences, often resulting in severe consequences such as incarceration in adult facilities, higher rates of recidivism, and limited access to rehabilitative services. Research has shown that brain development continues into the early twenties, particularly in areas responsible for impulse control and decision-making.

Treating these young individuals as adults disregards the scientific evidence that they are still undergoing cognitive and emotional growth. As a result, many young offenders struggle to reintegrate into society and are more likely to reoffend, perpetuating a cycle of incarceration rather than rehabilitation.

To address this issue S.1061/H.1923: *An Act to promote public safety and better outcomes for youth* (“Raise the Age”) aims to incrementally incorporate 18 to 21-year-olds into the juvenile justice system, allowing them to receive age-appropriate services designed to support rehabilitation rather than punishment. By shifting away from a punitive model, the bill seeks to reduce recidivism rates by providing young offenders with access to educational programs, mental health resources, and vocational training, which are often unavailable in the adult system.

The overarching goal is to ensure that young individuals who come into contact with the justice system are given the opportunity to reform their behavior, develop essential life skills, and successfully reintegrate into society without the burden of a permanent criminal record.

A key change to existing law under this proposal is the gradual extension of juvenile jurisdiction to include 18 to 21 year olds over a five-year period. This change builds upon past reforms, such as the 2013 decision to raise the juvenile jurisdiction age from 16 to 17, which was implemented successfully without overwhelming the system.

The expected outcomes of this legislation include a significant reduction in recidivism, lower incarceration costs, and an increase in opportunities for young individuals to secure stable employment and higher education. Additionally, the bill aligns Massachusetts with other states, such as Vermont, that have successfully expanded juvenile jurisdiction without negatively impacting public safety. By recognizing the developmental differences between young adults and fully mature adults, Massachusetts would take a step toward a more rehabilitative and effective approach to juvenile justice.

The Bill

S.1061/H.1923: *An Act to promote public safety and better outcomes for youth*

Elevator Speech


G: A strong community uplifts, protects, and invests in its youth. By providing opportunities for growth, rehabilitation, and second chances, we create a safer, more resilient society where everyone can thrive. At a given point in our lives, we've all made mistakes in one way or another (a lot of times when we were young).

Can you imagine being forever defined by the mistakes you made growing up? This is the reality for today's children,

especially those aged 18 to 20 wasting away in the adult criminal justice system.

M: When placed within the adult correctional system with little to no resources to actually turn their lives around, the rate of re-offending increases, further adding to the spending and social consequences that come with it. This is further inflated by their proximity to seasoned adult offenders. This cycle doesn't just harm them – it impacts our communities, our economy, and our future. It is essential that we pour into


Storybook



BETTER OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH

H.1923/S.1061

This bill, better known as the "Raise the Age Bill," aims to expand the current juvenile court in Massachusetts to include 18–20 year olds in order to **reduce recidivism**.




THE PROBLEM

- 18–20 year olds have the **highest recidivism** rates
- This group is an **extremely vulnerable** population.
- They are **highly susceptible** to adopting **harmful** behaviors and mindsets from **prolonged exposure to the adult prison** environment.

HOW DOES RAISE THE AGE SOLVE THIS PROBLEM

The proposed bill...

- gradually** includes 18 to 21-year-olds in the juvenile justice system
- Shifts focus from punishment to **rehabilitation**
- Lowers recidivism** by providing
 - education
 - mental health support
 - job training
 - improved access** to reform resources



WHAT OTHER STATES HAVE DONE

Vermont

- Successfully raised the age** of juvenile jurisdiction to include 18 year-olds up until their 19th birthday.
 - Observed a **decrease in** the number of **youth on probation**.
 - Plans to include 19-year-olds up until their 20th birthday come 2027.



TERESSA MITCHELL

Assistant Professor of Psychology at Brandeis University, Specializes in Developmental Cognitive Neuroscience and Psychology

"When you are 25, 26, 27, the **reward system** isn't as **sensitive to environmental cues** and you've got a much more well developed sense of **self control**, **inhibition**, the consequences of behavior. Those benefits come with older age that the **18–21 age group** just **has not developed**. It's not their fault. It's the developmental stage they are in!"



ROSALIND KARRHEL

Chair of the Brandeis Legal Studies Department, Co-Director of the Brandeis Educational Justice Initiative, and Practicing Attorney

"Let's come back to the fundamental question of **why should we raise the age?** I'd ask: why shouldn't we? Emerging adults are the **most likely age group to reoffend**, and neuroscience tells us that **19 year olds** are **more similar to juveniles than adults**. Why shouldn't they benefit from the **rehabilitative services** **already available in juvenile detention** that will help them not re-offend? It seems like that's a **win for public safety** all around."



WHAT CAN YOU DO!

- Advocate** within the Judiciary committee
- Discuss** Raise the Age with your Constituents
- Encourage** fellow legislators to learn about Raise the Age
- Commit** to voting YES!

our youth to give them the best shot at a better future.

Uplifting this age group of youths doesn't mean going easy on them. It means shifting the focus from punishment to rehabilitation. Research has shown how education, mental health support, and vocational training can help young offenders contribute positively to society.

G: Allowing these youths to enter the juvenile justice system gives them access to all of this. It lowers crime rates, reduces taxpayer costs, and ensures that mistakes made in youth don't define someone's entire future. At the end of the day, we all want better for our society and that starts with raising the age.

M: Our youth deserve a second chance, and our communities deserve policies that actually improve safety and ensure long term success. We urge you to support this bill and we ask that you vote favorably for it in committee. In the end, investing in our youth today allows us to build a safer and more just future for us all.

Op-Ed

Marieleen Exantus

Forgotten and Discarded: When Will We Pay Attention to Our Condemned Youth?!

Empathy is free, and there is a special population in desperate need of as much as you can spare. While sentencing 18 to 21-year-olds to life in prison may be prohibited in Massachusetts, this group remains condemned to a different type of life sentence that's just as harmful.

As May approaches, I along with others my age across the state have begun preparing to complete that highly anticipated walk across the stage to receive our degrees/diplomas.

Devastatingly enough, many of our peers who should be joining us on stage have fallen through the cracks of the criminal justice system. One encounter with the law is all it took and all it still takes to rob them of their futures. They should be joining us as we apply for jobs, search for apartments, apply to higher education, and plan our future careers.

Of course, I'm not saying they haven't made mistakes, but are they truly so incapable of change that we should cut them off from society? Do we not owe them a fair shot at a second chance?

S.1061: *An Act to promote public safety and better outcomes for youth*, better known as "Raise the Age," is our opportunity to give this special population a shot at a second chance. It would gradually include 18-year-olds up until their 21st birthday in the juvenile justice system.

When placed in adult correctional facilities, research done by Citizens for Juvenile Justice (CJJ) shows this at-risk population has a 55% reconviction rate. This is 36% higher than the 26% reconviction rate they experience when in the juvenile justice system.

The prison environment, limited access to rehabilitation services and the challenges they face reintegrating into society catapult this vulnerable group into an endless cycle of reoffending, a life sentence. Their criminal record prevents them from getting jobs, renting, holding professional licenses, and becoming positive contributing members of society.

Critics fear that this change would mean going easy on crime, but I assure you that is not the case. It has already been scientifically proven that this age group is at a stage of development where they have very sensitive reward systems and underdeveloped impulse control, making them especially susceptible to risky behavior.

We have acknowledged the vulnerability of this population as a society but have not taken the necessary steps to protect them. "Raise the Age" is a necessary step, one that needs to be taken now. A future is lost every day we wait.

Please, help me prove to the youth that their lives don't have to be forever defined by one mistake. Contact your legislators and urge them to support An Act to promote public safety and better outcomes for youth (S.1061), better known as "Raise the Age." Their beginning should not also be their end. Together let's put an end to their horrible life sentence.

Gretta Nijimbere

From Mistake to Redemption: Why Massachusetts Must Raise the Age

Picture this: you're 18, still figuring life out, and you make a bad decision – something reckless, immature, maybe even illegal. Now imagine that one mistake follows you for the rest of your life. That's the reality for a lot of young people in Massachusetts, where 18-year-olds are automatically treated as adults in the criminal justice system.

But there's hope and a real chance to make things right.

The "Raise the Age" act (officially known as S.1061) is a new bill that would gradually increase the age limit for the juvenile justice system from 18 to 21 over five years.

Why does this matter? Because the juvenile system is built to support growth and rehabilitation. It offers things like education programs, job training, and mentorship, all tools that help young people turn their lives around. The adult system, on the other hand, focuses mostly on punishment, which often leads to more harm than help.

This isn't just theory. Massachusetts has done this

before. In 2013, we raised the age from 16 to 17, and the system handled it just fine. Other states, like Vermont, have also expanded juvenile jurisdiction without putting public safety at risk. In fact, research shows that young people who go through the juvenile system are *less likely* to commit more crimes compared to those pushed into the adult system.

Now, some people worry that certain crimes still need “adult consequences.” And yes – accountability is important. But that doesn’t mean we should write off someone’s future for one youthful mistake. Science tells us that the brain doesn’t fully develop until around age 25, especially the parts that control decision-making and impulse control. So it makes sense to treat 18 to 20-year-olds in a way that reflects that: not as fully grown adults, but as young people still learning and maturing.

Massachusetts is known for being forward thinking. But on this issue, we’re falling behind. Raising the age isn’t about being soft on crime, it’s about making sure our response is smart, fair, and based on what actually works. If we want safer communities and better outcomes for everyone, investing in young people and giving them a real shot at redemption is the way to go.

It’s time for lawmakers to step up and pass “Raise the Age.” Everyone deserves the chance to grow beyond their worst mistake.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Marieleen Exantus

Meeting with Senator Edwards

On April 8, 2025 Greta Nijimbere and I walked into Senator Edwards’ office at the Massachusetts statehouse to discuss the Raise the Age bill with her. She is the chair of the Joint Committee On the Judiciary. We met with a member of her staff who informed us she was unavailable at the moment. We told her we were there to discuss the Raise the Age bill and she was familiar with it. She told us Senator Edwards was a big advocate for the bill but does not co-sponsor any bills in her committees to ensure everyone feels heard. After hearing this the conversation turned more towards discussing the challenges the bill is facing and how we as advocates can help it overcome said challenges.

During our conversation with her staff member, Senator Edwards walked into her office and we were able to introduce ourselves to her. She repeated what her staff member had said regarding her support of the bill and we continued discussing the challenges of the bill.

Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Jehlen,

My name is Marieleen Exantus. I am currently attending Brandeis University and I am a resident of Massachusetts. This semester I have been studying H.1923: *An Act to promote public safety and better outcomes for youth*, otherwise known as “Raise the Age.”

Science has proven that as we age, so do our brains, and they do so in different stages. Executive function refers to the cognitive abilities that allow us to regulate our actions and emotions. These abilities are still in a stage of development in young adults aged 18 to 21. So when considering this group’s increased sensitivity to excitement and underdeveloped inhibitory abilities, there’s no question as to why they are such a vulnerable population.

The courts have recognized this age group’s vulnerability in other areas, a very prominent one being the legal drinking age. A more recent example is *Commonwealth v. Mattis* (2024), where the court decided that imposing a life sentence without parole on those aged 18 to 20 to be unconstitutional due to the vulnerabilities we have discussed.

The courts not only recognized this population’s lack of impulse control, heightened risk-taking behaviors, and increased susceptibility to peer influence attributed to their current stage in development, but they also recognized their capacity for growth.

“Raise the Age” is the next step that allows them a true chance at growth. When incarcerated in the adult correctional system, these youth do not have access to the resources they need to overcome the challenges that lead to their initial involvement with the justice system.

Research has shown that education, mental health services, vocational training, and mentorship can improve their outcomes. By incrementally placing those aged 18-years-old up until their 21st birthday into the juvenile justice system, we can give them access to the resources they need to turn their lives around.

Critics argue that doing so would be “going easy on them,” but I can assure you it’s not. What we are doing is shifting the focus from punishment to rehabilitation. We shouldn’t cut this age group off from society when they still have such great potential to become productive members of our communities.

This is why I urge you to please vote favorably for H.1923: *An Act to promote public safety and better outcomes for youth*, otherwise known as “Raise the Age,” when it is presented in the Joint Committee on the Judiciary.

Thank you for your time and consideration!

Best Regards,

Marieleen Exantus

Our conversation ended with suggestions of other legislators we should speak to and a helpful piece of information that most of the Senate supports the bill and the House is where it needs help getting passed. I think this meeting went very well, it was quite informal but still meaningful.

Gretta Nijimbere

Meeting with Brandeis Democrats

Our fourth meeting took place at the Shapiro Student Center at Brandeis University, where I had the opportunity to present Bill H.1923 to the Brandeis Democrats, a student-led political organization on campus. This setting was a bit different from our previous meetings with legislative staff, as it was more peer-focused and interactive.

I began by explaining the key points of the bill, its goals, the issues it aims to address, and why it matters on both a policy and personal level. After the presentation, I encouraged club members to take action by writing letters to their legislators in support of the bill. Many students expressed interest. What made this experience especially meaningful was the energy and engagement in the room. It opened my eyes to the many different forms that advocacy can take. While speaking directly with policymakers is crucial, grassroots support, especially from young people, is just as important in driving change.

Mobilizing fellow students to get involved gave me a new appreciation for the power of collective action and community organizing. By this point in our advocacy efforts, I found that I had grown much more comfortable with public speaking and articulating the purpose and importance of the bill. This meeting served as a personal milestone in my development as an advocate and reminded me of the strength and influence we have when we empower others to join us in the fight for change.

Next Steps

Marieleen Exantus

Legislative Status

An act to promote public safety and better outcomes for youth, H.1923/S.1061, better known as “Raise the Age,” has been sent to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary and is awaiting a hearing. When it comes to the implementation of the bill, there is one area of major concern.

While the juvenile justice system has better programs and opportunities for rehabilitation than the adult correctional system, they aren’t perfect. In order for the

bill to be as effective in improving outcomes as we would like it to be, the Department of Youth Services must take rehabilitation very seriously. Especially with the influx of new people, they must ensure they are able to work with the youth on an individual basis and provide them with the resources they need to truly thrive.

In terms of advocacy, we’ve heard feedback from legislators that personal stories would be very compelling, so bringing more criminal justice-involved youth to the forefront of this conversation might prove very helpful. Additionally, continuing to persuade other parties, such as businesses and healthcare companies/workers, how beneficial the bill would be for them would prove helpful. Continuing to spread awareness of the bill, why it’s urgently needed, and encouraging action is still the best course of action in terms of advocacy.

From our meetings, we’ve been told that most of the Senate supports the bill as it passed through the Senate last session and the House is where the issue lies. When it comes to lobbying efforts, time would be best spent speaking with representatives and addressing their concerns surrounding Raise the Age.

At the beginning of our advocacy efforts in January, Vermont was set to raise the age of the juvenile jurisdiction to include 19-year-olds in April 2025. They have since pushed the date back to 2027. Given this situation, some might suggest increasing the time period between each phase of the Raise the Age bill in Massachusetts.

Gretta Nijimbere

Advocacy Status

As the “Raise the Age” bill moves forward, the next steps should focus on making sure it’s put into action smoothly, building strong partnerships, and handling any pushback.

One big challenge will be getting the juvenile justice system ready to take in 17-year-olds – this means more space, more staff, and better training for everyone involved. Judges, probation officers, and police will need to learn how to work with older teens in a way that makes sense for their age and development. At the same time, we’ll need solid systems in place to track what’s working, what’s not, and how to improve.

On the advocacy side, now is the time to bring in schools, mental health providers, and community groups to make sure young people have all the support they need – not just in court, but in life. It’s also really important to listen to the youth and families most affected by these changes – they should have a say in how things are rolled out. Setting up a coalition of experts, advocates, and community voices can

help keep everything on track and make sure the bill doesn't get watered down later.

Of course, there's still going to be some pushback. Some prosecutors and police groups worry about public safety and losing the option to try certain teens as adults – but the bill still allows that for serious cases. Sharing success stories and data from other states can help calm those fears.

There may also be complaints about the cost, but advocates should point out that helping young people early on saves money in the long run and leads to better outcomes for everyone. In short, passing the bill is just the beginning – what comes next will decide how much of a difference it really makes.

Update

As of July 9, 2025, the bill has been referred to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.1061: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S1061

H.1923: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H1923

Organization or Coalition support:

Citizens for Juvenile Justice: cfjj.org

Emergency Housing for Families Experiencing Homelessness

Noah Levy '25

Devin Yuan '26



Devin Yuan and Noah Levy

Massachusetts has a “right to shelter,” which seeks to prevent anyone from spending a night under the sky instead of a roof. For the past 70 years, the emergency housing program has provided this service. Funding it has been popular, and yet its services have been diminishing as its need has been increasing.

However, deadlines complicate the process for those who can barely keep their head above water. Paperwork results in administrative burdens on individuals experiencing housing instability, including during natural disasters, disproportionately affecting the homeless population.

An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness (S.136/H.216) would extend emergency assistance to nine months from the current six months and would establish support from an ombudsperson’s office for emergency housing assistance program patrons navigating the bureaucracy.

The Bill

S.136/H.216: An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness

Elevator Speech

My name is Noah Levy. My name is Devin Yuan. We are working with the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless to alleviate the circumstances of those experiencing homelessness in our community.

Everyone in Massachusetts values safety, and we should ensure the safety of our streets in a dignified way. In the past year, there has been a 25% increase in homelessness, associated with a spike in open-air drug use that has plagued many parts of the state.

Bureaucratic hurdles are endemic on the path to rehabilitation preventing those affected by homelessness from accessing the resources that would land them on a better path and bring safety to the entire community.

Adding an ombudsperson unit helps families navigate the bureaucracy and receive the help they need to stay off the streets. People sleeping outside die at three times the rate of the general public, so families that can be helped must be helped. *An Act improving emergency housing assistance* allows deserving families to be eligible for housing for enough time to get back on their feet; without this bill, Massachusetts risks pushing the homeless further back in their lives and costing the state more by perpetuating the problem.

I encourage you to co-sponsor and vote favorably on *An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness*, effectively ameliorating homelessness and ensuring the safety of our country and state’s future.

Storybook

Improving Emergency Housing Assistance for Families Experiencing Homelessness (HD 4123/SD 2347)

"You cannot expect a person to better their life by sticking them into **emergency housing only to become homeless again**. You risk losing all their progress... It is not just starting over again; it is **starting even further back** because you have traumatized a person again... **You can't get a voucher in six months.**"

Chloe-Rose Brandenburg

Operations Director, Community Day Center of Waltham

"If you fall through the cracks, there is **not enough of a support system to get out.**"

Tomas Salazar

Community Organizer, WATCH CDC Waltham
Developer, 2Life Communities

The Problem

- **6 months** of service is **not enough time** for a homeless family to **get their lives back on track**
- **Strict eligibility requirements** restrict families deserving emergency housing assistance
- People **sleeping outside die** 3 times as much as the general population

The Solution

- **Extended** emergency assistance **beyond 9 months**
- Most Massachusetts residents support **the right-to-shelter**, which **isn't being provided**
- The law will **support the right-to-shelter**
- Cut artificial bureaucracy to **ease access** to the program

Community Support

- The Mass Coalition for the Homeless
- League of Women Voters Massachusetts
- Homes For All Mass
- Horizons For Homeless Children
- Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness
- Rosie's Place
- Children's Health Watch
- St. Francis House

We urge you to co-sponsor and vote in favor of passing An Act Improving Emergency Housing Assistance for Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness

"Once you are outside it is very hard to crawl back up."
- Chloe-Rose Brandenburg

Op-Ed

Noah Levy

A Paycheck Away from the Brink

I planned on baking cookies, until I came across the most dreaded word on the ingredients list: eggs. At \$9 a dozen, I was better off going with Chips Ahoy. Eggs weren't the only staple that skyrocketed in price this year. Housing in Massachusetts followed suit, becoming 5.1% more expensive this year, earning the recognition of being the third most pricey state in the U.S.

I can do without homemade cookies, but no one should have to forgo a roof over their head. And yet, Massachusetts experienced a 54% annual increase in homelessness. Moreover, in response to the housing crisis, right-to-shelter entitlements to those most in need were cut by over half. The state must reverse course and expand emergency access to housing for families to avoid creating an entrenched generational cycle of homelessness.

Massachusetts deserves praise for its leadership in research, academia, and innovation, but these contributions highlight the advancement of select systems and individuals

leading these initiatives. The median annual income in Massachusetts is \$56,284, with an average cost of living of \$53,860. A medical procedure, a car accident, or a missed paycheck puts one in the red. 56% of people in the region live paycheck to paycheck, rising to 69% of those near a city.

The status quo is unsustainable. I applaud the State's efforts to address structural inadequacies, but these efforts do not meet the basic demands of most Massachusetts residents, especially those who are currently unhoused.

The Director of the Waltham Community Day Center, Chloe-Rose Crouch, faces the homelessness dilemma daily. Her organization provides lunch and does casework for the unhoused. Following the announcement of reducing the emergency access to shelter program's length of care from nine to six months, Chloe-Rose Crouch commented that she doubted any families could transition to long-term housing in such a short time. She said, "They risk losing all their progress... it is not just starting over again; it is starting even further back because you have traumatized a person again. Six months is enough to save a little bit. You can't get a voucher in six months."

State Representative James O'Day learned from his decades of work and told me that helping the near and newly

homeless is crucial to solving this growing crisis. People aren't provided the resources to get back on their feet once they fall behind in the system. These everyday people could be helping you or me find the baking aisle at the store, the day before they tumble into homelessness.

State Representative Marjorie Decker and Senator Adam Gomez introduced *An Act improving emergency housing assistance* (H.216/ S.136). It would cut red tape, eliminate arbitrary deadlines, extend the period of service, and serve as a stopgap to prevent the newly homeless from falling further. These measures would provide the peace of mind and material support necessary to maintain and advance Massachusetts residents' economic standing.

Critics rightfully mention the state's budget restraints, but are wrongheaded in their concern. This bill would maintain the 2024 spending levels. Critics fail to realize the greater risk in having more people fall into poverty. Residents of Massachusetts have been affected by inflation 30% worse than those in other states, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Most residents can't sustain the shock to their finances currently underway. We risk many of these families falling deep beyond the possibility of immediate recovery.

It costs exponentially more to lift them back into self-sustenance once they become homeless. It also subjects children to conditions that lessen their prospects of success. The experts agree with this prescription, as eight homelessness policy groups endorsed this bill, and the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless conducted an economic study modeling the harms of failing to act now.

It isn't all doom and gloom. You can make a difference. The opposition to this bill is not insurmountable. If you care about this issue, please make your voice heard by calling your state representative and senator, who are available at malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator. A mere call, text, email, or all three, in support of *An Act improving emergency housing assistance* (H.216/S.136) adds to a tally in their offices that affects their vote.

So, let Massachusetts stay true to its identity as a commonwealth and ensure it maintains an environment where everyone can survive and thrive with the security that the Massachusetts right to shelter has ensured for 70 years.

Devin Yuan

A Home Run for Homeless Families

Meritocracy does not exist. Privilege does. Sorry, but the understanding of someone's hard work and merit guiding their life outcome is not always true. While hard work certainly matters, it is rarely the case that someone's hard

work alone will determine their life outcomes. Luck and arbitrary circumstances matter just as much or even more. Especially for people dealing with homelessness.

Those experiencing housing instability have higher instances of adverse childhood experiences than the general population, according to a publication in the *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* journal. Additionally, people sleeping outside in Massachusetts die at three times the rate of people sleeping in shelters and around ten times the rate of the general population, revealed by a study from the American Medical Association.

The response to homelessness is not blaming the homeless for their "self-inflicted" problems. It is getting the homeless off the streets and putting them in shelters for long enough for them to find permanent housing solutions.

Growing up, I noticed people's hesitation to offer money to those experiencing homelessness because they did not want them to buy drugs. Where money was the only form of help being solicited from an individual, the uncertainty of how their monetary help would be used by a homeless person discouraged donations.

But helping the homeless is a lot easier when the channels of help are clear. What if there was a way to help homeless families by giving them a temporary place to stay in an emergency housing shelter? There, homeless families would be able to utilize the security of housing to get back on their feet. Housing allows people to focus their time and resources on other important parts of their lives, such as getting a job, recovering from a drug addiction, or even getting enough sleep.

Massachusetts ostensibly meets this need with its Emergency Assistance (EA) program, which provides eligible families experiencing homelessness with temporary shelter for up to six months. The nature and intent of this program was to buttress the Right to Shelter Law adopted in 1983, effectively guaranteeing a right to shelter in Massachusetts.

However, the de facto reality of the EA program differs from its intent. Eligibility requirements are strict, families are not cognizant of the mechanisms of the program, applicants are presumed ineligible – thus having to self-verify their identity prior to receiving crucial shelter – and the shelter duration of six months is not long enough to enable people to find long-term housing. For some people, the six-month duration of emergency housing is so short that it risks traumatizing a person and setting them back further than they were before. Any progress a person makes during a six-month stay in an emergency shelter can be lost as soon as they lose the shelter.

When it is a matter of life and death, as living on the street is, navigating the complex and protracted bureaucratic hurdles is not the primary concern; survival is.

There is a legislative answer that ameliorates homelessness and the EA program itself: *An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness* (H.216/ S.136). This act increases the duration of stay for eligible families from six to nine months, introduces an ombudsperson unit that helps applicants navigate the application process and circumvent the bureaucratic gymnastics that stymie families from getting the help they deserve, and tracks data that can be used to cut excessive costs to the program in future iterations. It aligns the de jure intent of the Right to Shelter Law with its de facto effectuation.

As of now, the Massachusetts EA program is like someone giving a homeless person food or money and recording the good deed to post online for clicks. The intent is there, but the execution is not.

The aforementioned bill correctly positions the intent of helping homeless families with the help itself. If you want to help homeless families better access the help available to them and for long enough to situate their lives, call your local state representatives and ask for a favorable vote on H.216/S.136. Or encourage members on the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities to co-sponsor the bill. I want your help. Homeless families need your help.

Food. Water. Air. Shelter. These are the basic physiological needs that humans need to survive. But human subsistence should not be the standard. Society should flourish, not simply survive. While I recognize how the cost of the program along with the uncertainty of federal funding can deter additional appropriations for the EA program, the funds are crucial to ensuring the safety of the American people. Without the program, people's lives are at risk. Shelter is a matter of livelihood, not politics.

Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

Our names are Noah Levy and Devin Yuan and we are students at Brandeis University studying politics, legal studies, economics, and business. Thank you for being an undeterred champion of affordable housing. You endorsed the homelessness bill of rights, bolstering the housing supply, and have served as chair of the most critical committee on this issue. Your record shows a deep commitment to lifting the left behind with dignity. *An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness* (S.136) is currently on the docket, to sustain the sacrosanct right to shelter.

Massachusetts stands out among its peers with robust programs to support the unhoused. In the past, the duration of the service was sufficient to chart a new path forward. Since the emergency shelters were instituted, the environment surrounding them changed. The housing stock stagnated while middle-income families were pushed either into destitution or out of the state. This bill would match the supply to the growing need for temporary shelter.

One of your constituents had a stable job at a store until this year. He lost his work and home, so was pushed onto the street. To numb the pain of the cold, he resorted to light drug use while attempting to put his life back together. He checked into The Community Day Center of Waltham for help, where Chloe-Rose Crouch helped him get situated. A week later, he died in a tragic accident while unhoused and outdoors. This is just one of the many stories of those who fell through the cracks in the system.

Many argue that this bill would cost too much, which we recognize is a constraint. However, the current six-month limit only perpetuates the problem. Yet people that work at local community shelters have told us that it is not nearly enough time to obtain housing vouchers or get back on track. Passing this bill would temporarily increase costs, leading to less government spending in the future. This program seeks to arm the homeless with self-sufficiency, rather than serving as a handout.

As you are an experienced champion in the area, we trust your vision and hope it aligns with ours. We attached a brief pamphlet highlighting some of the bill's core components. Please consider co-sponsoring and voting in favor of S.136, as this critical assistance will save lives.

Thank you,

Noah Levy and Devin Yuan

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Devin Yuan

Meeting with Rep James O'Day

This meeting was virtual with Representative James J. O'Day. This meeting was significant because Rep. O'Day is on the Joint Committee of Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities, the committee to which our bill was referred.

This meeting was our most successful. Rep. O'Day was extremely friendly. We talked about our backgrounds, his journey, and why he does what he does today. It was refreshing to talk candidly about life with a legislator that is just like us – we all wanted to connect as authentic regular people. Then, we described our bill and its function.

It was not until we mentioned the story we heard from our interview with Chloe-Rose Crouch, the Operations Director at the Community Day Center of Waltham, that Rep. O'Day voiced his ardent support for the bill. Once Rep. O'Day heard the reason behind the tragic passing of a man once in emergency housing and learned that the short duration of housing left the man on the street where he turned back to drug use and [had a fatal accident] ... Rep. O'Day ... shared some emotional stories that he himself has heard from constituents over the years. Rep. O'Day sided completely with our bill and underlying problem of homelessness. He assured us that he would vote favorably on the bill in committee.

I learned that gaining the support of a legislator does not always need to occur in the format of a professional pitch with a hook, problem, solution, and call to action. Sometimes it can occur informally and more organically, such as by sharing your personal journey, school, studies, etc. Sometimes getting the support of a legislator on a specific bill requires building a rapport with the legislator on a personal level. If they like you as a person, they are more likely to support your advocacy efforts.

Meeting with Community Day Center of Waltham

This meeting was at the Community Day Center of Waltham (CDCW). Noah and I went to the day center with the intent to volunteer in any way we could. We used a prior interview with Chloe-Rose Crouch (Operations Director at the CDCW) in our storybook detailing her perspective that a duration of only six months in emergency housing risks traumatizing a person again and setting them back even further than they were before. So we met her in person for the first time on Friday, April 4, 2025. To start, Noah and I were briefed with the safeguarding policies and procedures detailing the

standards and rules we had to abide by as a volunteer. These rules prohibited “talking about politics or religion with CDCW guests and “asking personal questions about guests’ housing status, family, friends, documentation status, etc, if it is not essential to do so (i.e., for case management appointments or translation).

Then, Noah and I helped someone get the clean clothes (underwear, t-shirt, and socks), towel, shampoo, and soap he needed to shower. When we brought him to the shower, we passed an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting happening upstairs with some of the CDCW guests. Once he was done showering, we went back to get him a paper bag that he could put his dirty clothes in before leaving. As a Brandeis student, I hear others complaining about the size and cleanliness of our showers relative to people's showers at home. But understanding the privilege of even having a shower to clean yourself, let alone a comfortable home with a shower, is imperative for understanding the salience of legislation that targets homelessness.

Chloe then offered the opportunity of sitting in on a case-management meeting...

The safeguarding policy prohibited our advocacy idea of having people sign a letter urging legislators to co-sponsor and vote favorably on our act. However, it does not mean that our advocacy efforts would end as soon as we agreed to the safeguarding policy. ...Sometimes, advocacy goes beyond advocating for legislation or a specific cause. It starts with talking to people and hearing their stories to use as fuel in the fight for a greater cause. Understanding the depths of those personally afflicted can drive you to fight harder for necessary legislation.

Next Steps

It was a pleasure working on this bill. We learned the ins and outs of it to a previously unimaginable level. At first, we noticed some hurdles to passage, but with the knowledge we acquired since, we see more serious barriers to passage and steps that must be taken.

There simply isn't support for expanding the social safety net. Massachusetts' budget has been struggling for the past few years, and residents are frustrated with taxes, economic stagnation, and homelessness. Independent from the federal funding environment, the budget experienced massive cuts this year because of shifting priorities. Housing is far too expensive, and inflation is hurting people in the state. Public transportation and propping up businesses for growth are being considered more important. Far more drastic measures to clear the streets have been adopted with popular support that don't warrant the spending levels that our bill proposes.

Our bill's structural issue is that it doesn't address the homelessness program in the way people are most empathetic towards. "Emergency housing" seems like a short-term solution. Representatives and their staffers emphasized the importance of voucher programs receiving more funding than emergency housing. Popular literature, such as *Evicted* by Matthew Desmond, highlights voucher programs as the most effective and important priority for homelessness alleviation. With the emphasis on vouchers, there is less capital available for our program.

The political system doesn't adequately represent people utilizing emergency housing. They don't have housing or secure access to the internet, so making their voice heard is difficult. Day centers like the Waltham Community Day Center should amend their rules to have clients call and write to politicians to highlight their cause. Over time, repeated contact with political offices plays a real role in the lawmaking process, and it could highlight their plight with the decision makers.

The Waltham Community Day Center run is also coming up. We are looking forward to a Brandeis delegation attending. This would strengthen the message to politicians and the public to support programs focused on immediate harm reduction for the homeless population, which are the first step for longer-term solutions.

Lobbying our bill has been mostly pleasant, but a selection bias certainly played a role. The only representatives and senators willing to meet with us were in a specific category. They were either outspoken proponents of our issue or significant decision-makers.

All but one of our meetings were with representatives and senators who are the primary sponsors of their own homelessness legislation. They have histories of supporting every bill on the issue and expressed support very early in our meetings. If we had walked into every office without a meeting and asked legislators about their thoughts on our bill, I suspect our reception would be different.

Some legislators shared concerns about funding, exacerbated by the uncertainty of federal funding, as a third of the state's social safety net budget.

Also, our bill establishes a nine-month minimum before someone can be kicked out, de facto making it a permanent arrangement, and we heard from legislators who cited studies finding six months sufficient to put people into longer-term solutions, and thus did not see the need to expand on that.

However, a media campaign can label the program as universal government-supplied housing. This can be done due to the lack of a limit. Such a campaign would be

sure to turn large swaths of the public against the bill and would cost lots of political capital from legislators if they supported it.

For this reason, we support a spin-off bill. Most of the bill's language modernizes antiquated language and clarifies what the law does. This can be the first part of a new bill. Additionally, an ombudsperson office should be considered in the secondary legislation. This relatively cheap measure would significantly ease access to the programs homeless people are eligible for. The individual burden is borderline unrealistic for people without a sense of stability.

The data collection segment of the bill is vital to the program's efficiency. There are presently few to zero measures for collecting statistics on any avenue of emergency housing. A problem that many cite with the bill is that it allows some illegal immigrants. There is no way to confirm the extent of their patronage because there isn't specific data available. Regular audits of the program and effectiveness-driven modeling would be a universal win.

The new bill shouldn't contain the expansion of availability and shouldn't consider the program's cut. Both parties overwhelmingly denied these measures in a recent bill slimming the emergency housing program.

The only type of progress that can be enacted by homelessness policy advocates is through pragmatic progressivism. The tight budgetary environment, uncertain federal funding, and shifting priorities necessitate this strategy. The movement will fade into obscurity if it doesn't realize the direction the wind is blowing. The bill's sponsors should create a new bill with the popular measures of the existing one. After this one passes with strong support, they could continue to advocate for more drastic measures, which may regain popularity at some point in the future. For now, we should cut our losses and claim our wins.

Update

As of July 9, 2025, the Senate bill has been referred to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means and the House bill had a hearing by the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities on May 13, 2025.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.136: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S136

H. 216: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H216

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless:
mahomeless.org

Ensuring Equitable Health Coverage for Children

Andrew Zeiler '25



Andrew Zeiler

An Act ensuring equitable health coverage for children, also known as “Cover All Kids,” would expand comprehensive coverage under MassHealth to any Massachusetts resident under the age of 21 who would otherwise be ineligible solely due to their immigration status. In effect, this reduces the barriers to healthcare coverage for those immigrating legally and provides an opportunity to access healthcare for those who are not legally present in the United States.

This would cost nearly \$150 million and \$200 million annually, however, it will also reduce resource expenditures within the health system by providing between 31,000 and 48,000 Massachusetts residents with comprehensive coverage, improving preventative care, and thereby reducing the frequency of emergency room visits.

Coverage carries significant implications for physical, financial, academic, and emotional wellbeing. In some ways, this bill goes against federal policy as established in the Social Security Act, rendering it largely ineligible for federal funding. However, 14 states have already passed similar legislation, and have established best practices for maximizing federal funding, which can be readily provided for authorized immigrants below the age of 21 and can be provided as reimbursement for emergency procedures regardless of immigration status.

The Bill

S.855: *An Act ensuring equitable health coverage for children*

H.1303: *An Act to ensure equitable health coverage for children*

Elevator Speech

I’m sure you’d agree that Massachusetts has a duty to protect its residents, and provide its community with equal opportunities for success. The people of Massachusetts pride themselves on this state’s commitment to equitable healthcare coverage. However, around 40,000 residents of Massachusetts under the age of 21 lack access to comprehensive coverage solely due to their immigration status.

H.1403 (S.855) *An Act to ensure equitable health coverage for children* will address this contradiction by extending MassHealth coverage to all otherwise eligible residents of Massachusetts under 21, regardless of their immigration status.

For these reasons, we’d like to encourage you to report favorably on this bill in committee, support it as a co-sponsor, and, when the time comes, vote in favor of its passage.

Op-Ed

Andrew Zeiler

Those Left Behind: The Betrayal of Massachusetts' Healthcare

Massachusetts' healthcare is in grave danger from the Trump administration's reckless funding cuts. While all citizens will feel this damage, there are many residents for whom this feeling will not be new, and they will only plunge the most vulnerable into worse situations. As it stands, a large portion of non-citizens in Massachusetts are excluded from MassHealth coverage. Not only are adults affected, but also some 40,000 children and older youth. This large gap is a betrayal of our state's belief in healthcare and is frankly unacceptable.

You may think that this problem does not affect you, but as with most policy issues, it does. Families who are uninsured delay seeking healthcare until they require costly ER visits. This forces them into heavy medical debt that prevents them from properly contributing to the economy and their communities, which ultimately inhibits the increase of your wages and salaries.

The Cover All Kids proposal in the state legislature seeks to fix this injustice by extending MassHealth coverage to the 40,000 non-citizen kids and older youth who are currently excluded. This proposal is nothing groundbreaking – in fact we'd be late to the party. States like Minnesota, Illinois, New York, and Oregon have made expansions much larger than this. California-administered Medicaid program Medi-Cal has expanded to cover every California resident regardless of immigration status.

On the economic front, it will put
continued on the next page

Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

I am writing to you today to ask you to cosponsor S.855, An Act to ensure equitable health coverage for children, a bill that I, as a constituent of yours, feel very strongly about.

As it currently stands, around 40,000 youth residents of Massachusetts lack access to comprehensive healthcare coverage solely due to their immigration status. Anyone who has had to go through a string of doctors to treat a medical issue can imagine how horrible it must be if you are uninsured.

This lack of coverage is not just morally wrong but also has financial implications for all Commonwealth residents. Whether a Massachusetts citizen wants to pay for the healthcare of immigrants, they are paying for the healthcare anyways right now. When someone enters medical debt, the hospital knows they are going to get that money back quickly if ever, so they push the costs off onto health insurance, raising everyone's premiums. S.855 seeks to fix this by extending MassHealth coverage to all residents of Massachusetts under the age of 21 regardless of immigration status.

This is also more important for the time we are in right now. The Trump administration is bragging about their inhumane treatment of immigrants through showing images of immigrants handcuffed to planes or deporting legal immigrants and having to make up evidence in order to avoid bringing them back. This administration also has made clear its intent to gut federal spending, including to MassHealth. I think now is a critical time for Massachusetts, a state that is a leader in healthcare, to take a stance on this. To take a stance for our immigrants, and to take a stand for our healthcare.

While concerns may exist over the spending and documentation over the bill, these are minor compared to the fact that it will expand coverage to 40,000 young residents while lowering costs paid by the average citizen in the long run.

On spending, the estimated \$200 million is minor compared to the \$20.3 billion we already spend on MassHealth. The cost of healthcare for youth is low compared to any other group, and as the moral hazard subsides after the first year, the cost of the expansion should decrease.

And for the concerns over documentation, Massachusetts already has a built-in solution. In question 4 on the 2022 ballot, Massachusetts voters voted to allow undocumented immigrants to obtain driver's licenses. This works by having a separate and more confidential system for these applicants. A system like this can easily be carried over to these immigrant children to protect their records from agencies like ICE while still collecting them.

All of this is why I am writing to you about S.855. This bill makes moral sense, financial sense, sends a message we need to send right now, and most importantly, it's just common sense to pass it. That's why I must ask again for you to vote for and cosponsor S.855 to get it codified as law in Massachusetts.

Sincerely,
Andrew Zeiler

more money into your pockets. When immigrants are put into this cycle of debt from seeking necessary care, they cannot escape, and your local economy suffers. Local economies cannot thrive when members have to contribute to debt they will never pay off instead of spending money investing in their communities. Not to mention, you must make up the cost to hospitals as they shift that debt onto your insurance premiums.

So, whether you want to pay for the healthcare of non-citizens or not, you are paying for it right now anyways. Expanding MassHealth will lower the costs of healthcare for these non-citizens, meaning that you will end up keeping more of your own money. In the long run, the money you save from slower increases in insurance premiums will be more than the money you will pay in taxes for MassHealth.

I must urge all readers to write or call their state legislators to support this common-sense legislation and bring up their support to leadership. If we want to continue to take pride in our healthcare, we need to put our money where our mouth is, especially when it means more money in our pockets. It's not just the right thing, but also the smart thing.

Excerpt from Campaign Journal

Meeting with Staffer Dan Gessen from Sen. Cyr's Office

My third advocacy meeting was with the office of Senator Cyr. At his office I met with Dan Gessen, Senator Cyr's policy fellow, to discuss Cover All Kids. The meeting went really well with it being made clear that the bill was likely to see Senator's support and potential advocacy, which is very important since he's the Senate Assistant Majority Whip. I [visited] the office and informed Dan Gessen of what the bill did and all the arguments for it.

Since it was the first real meeting I had with a legislator, I learned a lot. I was afraid they would give me pushback, but they all seemed pretty won over by my points, although it is their job to listen. Overall, the major lesson I learned was simply how easy it was to talk to an office, how important it was for me to know what I was talking about, and the need to speak with confidence.

Next Steps

Currently, the bill stands in the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing. From what I was told by a staff member in the office of Senator Cindy Friedman, the Senate Chair of the committee, the bill is very likely to make it through that committee. Looking at the previous history of the bill, this tracks. As previous history shows, the House version of the bill will soon be incorporated with the Senate version before moving to the Senate Ways and Means committee. Every time this bill has made it to the Senate Ways and Means Committee it has stalled there.

When this was brought up to the staffer we met on the first state house visit from the office of the House bill sponsor, Representative David Rogers, they told us that they hoped there would be the momentum this year with the Trump administration's actions for it to make it past the Senate Ways and Means Committee and onto the full floor votes and passage. The staffer told us that if it doesn't pass this session, they are considering lowering the age of who coverage would be expanded to in order to lower the fiscal impact of the bill, which they believe is what has been making it stall.

When I asked the staffer from Senator Friedman's office about how to help it get passed, she gave me more advice about what can be done in this session. She told me that the problem wasn't really about funding but that so many bills make it to the Senate Ways and Means Committee that this proposal simply gets buried under it. She told me that in order to get the bill to make it out of committee, consistent, sizable, and dedicated advocacy is needed so the bill can make it to the top of the pile.

If the bill actually passes there will certainly be funding concerns over potential penalties placed on Medicaid funding by the Trump administration. While the current Supreme Court holds that if execution of a bill raises "big questions," if it actually follows the bill's intent, the execution is unconstitutional, their refusal to just shadow docket all of these cases make me worry that they might allow this behavior to continue. The rulings should be in June, and the state should adapt accordingly. If the Trump administration's actions are deemed as unconstitutional, they can keep with their current path

of using federal funds to partially pay for this expansion. If the Trump administration's actions are deemed constitutional, they'd have to move to using state funds, which would increase the price tag.

The implementation of the bill can also pose problems. Many people might not take advantage of it, out of fear they'll be documented, and that information will be used against them, like the IRS has done recently. While carrying over the driver's license system Massachusetts already has for undocumented immigrants fixes this on the practical side, it might not do much to assuage fears of immigrants.

Update

As of July 9, 2025, the bill has a hearing scheduled by the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing on July 15, 2025.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.855: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S855

H.1403: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H1403

Organization or Coalition support:

Health Care For All: hcfama.org

Lifting Kids Out of Deep Poverty

Danny DeMilia '25

Stina Mei '26



Danny DeMilia and Stina Mei

S.118/H.214: *An Act lifting kids out of deep poverty* has been circulating within the General Court since 2019, currently in its fourth cycle. The bill, sponsored by Senator Sal DiDomenico and Representative Marjorie Decker, aims to amend two financial aid programs: Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) and the Emergency Aid to Elderly, Disabled, and Children (EAEDC).

Given the increasing costs of living in the state of Massachusetts, many families are falling behind financially. The current federal poverty line is \$2,220 monthly for a family of three. This category reportedly includes roughly 10% of the state's residents. Meanwhile, families with an income of less than \$1,110 per month fall even shorter, placing themselves in the category of deep poverty. According to Senator DiDomenico, there are roughly 70,000 children below this threshold.

The current proposal intends to raise the monthly benefits of these two financial aid programs to the eventual goal of maintaining families above the deep poverty threshold, requiring that the monthly aid increase alongside inflation.

The Bill

S.118/H.214: An Act lifting kids out of deep poverty

Elevator Speech

All individuals in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts deserve an equal opportunity to experience life to its fullest potential. With that said, children, disabled individuals, and the elderly are among some of the most vulnerable groups within society – impacted by monetary stressors and likely to fall below the federal deep poverty threshold, they risk a diminished quality of life.

Currently, various programs such as the TAFDC, or Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children, and the EAEDC, Emergency Aid to Elderly, Disabled, and Children, provide those in need with monthly benefits. However, the benefits provided fall far below the federal deep poverty threshold – for comparison, the TAFDC's maximum allotment is \$783 per month, whereas the deep poverty threshold is a monthly income of \$1,110.

These individuals are not only in poverty, bringing in less than \$2,220 per month, but find themselves with a monthly income of less than half of that number, indicating a severe lack of financial stability. With this low monthly income, families struggle to pay for necessities such as rent, utilities, and groceries.

Given this, the Lift Our Kids Out of Deep Poverty Bill aims to amend this dire situation, increasing the ceiling of monthly benefits. Should the bill pass, the monthly benefits will increase by 10% each fiscal year, until they reach the deep poverty threshold, where they will then adjust in the following years for inflation.

This legislation acts as a pathway towards financial security for the most vulnerable members of society. Not only does this bill represent a decision of policy, but it ultimately acts as a moral imperative, working to ensure equal opportunity for every individual within the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We are asking for a speedy hearing and a favorable vote from you.

Op-Ed

Danny DeMilia

Take a moment to think back to your childhood.... As summer faded, the sun's warm embrace gave way to the crisp chill of autumn. With this shift came a familiar ritual. Families with children packed into their cars, prepared for the frenzy ahead. It was time for back-to-school shopping. Some anticipate back-to-school shopping with excitement, eager to walk each and every aisle of their local supply store. For wealthier families, this annual event is a simple errand. A quick trip to the local Staples, just grabbing the new variety of Sharpie Highlighters, color-coordinated backpacks, notebooks, and more.

On the other hand, some families experience mounting anxiety, wondering how they will pay for the seemingly endless list of necessities. For families experiencing financial hardship, this single outing can produce an irreparable toll on their monthly budget. The textbooks, notebooks, pens, and more come with a rather hefty price tag. Oftentimes costing hundreds of dollars per child, families with multiple children will easily spend up to one thousand dollars on this ritual. This necessary shopping trip can act as a financial barricade to stability – all to claim the fundamental right to education for their children.

In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, countless families struggle with financial hardship, making back-to-school shopping a daunting challenge. According to WelfareInfo.org, in 2023, 12.7% of the commonwealth's children between the ages of 5 to 17 were living in poverty, indicating that thousands of students struggled to receive necessary school supplies.

Of these school-age children, some experience what is classified as deep poverty. The federal poverty threshold rests at a monthly income of \$2,220, whereas those experiencing deep poverty typically accrue less than \$1,110 per month. In other words, some wealthier families spend in a single back-to-school shopping trip what other struggling families utilize to make ends meet.

Storybook

S.118
HD1353

COMMONWEALTH OF
MASSACHUSETTS

LIFT OUR KIDS OUT OF DEEP POVERTY

What to Know:


Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC)
Monthly benefits currently sit at \$783 per month for a family of three, below the federal deep poverty level of \$1,110.

Emergency Aid to Elderly, Disabled, and Children (EAEDC)
Monthly benefits to an individual are currently only \$652.



Moving Beyond

- Children suffering from financial instability are disproportionately more likely to fall behind in school.
- Support is needed to increase the monthly allotments by 10% each year until they reach the deep poverty threshold, providing necessary footing.
- Numerous other states have expanded monthly benefits, resulting in compounding benefits such as improvements in education and access to healthcare.



Senator Sal DiDomenico
Middlesex and Suffolk

Representative Marjorie Decker
25th Middlesex

S.118
HD1353

COMMONWEALTH OF
MASSACHUSETTS

LIFT OUR KIDS OUT OF DEEP POVERTY

**Anonymous PhD Candidate
Studying Cash Assistance**

- "The IRS data shows how a little under a quarter of the families in poverty were children living in a mixed status household.."
- cash assistance programs have influence in reducing the intergenerational disparities



**Anonymous Advocacy
Organization Employee**

"Children are aware of more than they let on. They know when their parents are struggling financially and it can negatively impact their performance in school"



Thankfully, there are numerous programs in place in Massachusetts to support these families experiencing financial hardship. One such program, the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC), provides those in deep poverty with a monthly allotment of up to \$783. While this money is helpful, given the discrepancy between the maximum monthly allotment and the threshold for deep poverty, the TAFDC fails to effectively support these families.

In order to improve the conditions for these families, the Lift Our Kids Out of Deep Poverty bill aims to increase the monthly benefit available for families in deep poverty. With the steadfast conviction that all families deserve an equal opportunity in mind, the monthly allotment would increase by 10% of itself each year until equalling the federal poverty threshold of \$1,110. Upon reaching this amount, the monthly allotment would then adjust, annually, taking into consideration the increase in cost of living resulting from inflation.

This bill, crucial for the livelihoods of our neighbors – and the education of our kids – must pass through the legislature this year. To ensure its passage, citizens must actively engage in its support, by contacting their local state senators and representatives. The message, that Massachusetts residents believe that no one deserves to live in deep poverty, must be effectively conveyed.

While the bill has been in play for numerous years, its passing in this fiscal year is crucial due to recent actions taken by Governor Healey. Despite legislative action resulting in a 10% increase to TAFDC benefits for the months of April, May, and June, the support is set to revert back to its prior amount in July. Governor Healey has decided to roll the increase back, after three months of additional aid, in order to cut state spending. This rolling back of aid will be extremely detrimental to the commonwealth's poorest families; those who will have become comfortable with their increased allotments, and may not be aware of the negative change near, are likely to be impacted the most.

Should this bill pass, thousands of children across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts would experience much-needed financial relief. While this bill will not entirely eliminate the struggles these families face, it will provide them with a more stable foundation. Every child deserves the opportunity to receive a quality education, and no family should feel overwhelmed by conducting the yearly ritual of back-to-school shopping.

Stina Mei

Lift Kids Out of Deep Poverty Bill: Changing the Trajectory of America's Most Vulnerable

We go about our daily lives: Wake up, get ready, eat breakfast, go to work or school, and so on. We don't consciously think about the number of expenses racking up for each action we take – as many of us have the privilege to live our lives without egregious monetary struggles. Unfortunately, that is not the case for everyone.

Given the increasing costs of living in the state of Massachusetts, many families are falling behind financially. The current federal poverty line is \$2,220 monthly, for a family of three. This category reportedly includes roughly 10% of Massachusetts's residents. Families with an income of less than \$1,110 per month fall even shorter, placing themselves in the category of deep poverty. According to Senator DiDomenico, this issue has placed nearly 70,000 children below the deep poverty threshold.

The Lift Kids Out of Deep Poverty Act is a solution to this issue. Intending to increase the amount of monthly aid and providing a strong enough financial foundation for which families can stay afloat, it tackles the most urgent issue that policymakers and society as a whole haven't yet adequately addressed: deep poverty.

The bill, sponsored by Senator Sal DiDomenico and Representative Marjorie Decker, aims to amend two financial aid programs, namely: Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) and the Emergency Aid to Elderly, Disabled, and Children (EAEDC). Kids, the elderly, and people with disabilities who rely on these programs are growing up in homes where food insecurity, inadequate healthcare, and a lack of educational resources are daily realities. They are more likely to face poor health, struggle academically, and ultimately be trapped in the cycle of poverty as the years go on. It's about prioritizing those kids who are most likely to fall through the cracks and ensuring they have the support they need to thrive.

Opponents of this bill argue that it's too expensive, that it would be a burden on taxpayers, or that it will foster dependence on government programs. Governor Healey herself has rolled back on the agreed upon increases for the monthly cash assistance grants awarded to families, citing that the state of Massachusetts should live within its means. But the truth is, these arguments are hollow. We spend billions of dollars every year on other policies while children in low-income families and other vulnerable communities continue to suffer. There needs to be a re-prioritization of our goals as a state if we are to claim that we are working towards the common good for all.

Poverty costs us all – through higher healthcare costs, lost productivity, and the perpetuation of inequality. The bill’s provisions for expanded support for families are investments that will pay off in the long run. Children who grow up healthy, well-educated, and with opportunities to succeed don’t just thrive as individuals – they contribute to the economy and the future of society. The heart of the issue is that if we are to call ourselves a just society, we must provide a path out of poverty for our most vulnerable populations – regardless of their background. Anything less is a betrayal of the values that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts holds.

The bill’s passage would be a step forward in the fight against inequality. But it won’t happen unless we demand it. It’s up to all of us – voters, citizens, activists – to make our voices heard. If you are passionate about protecting the vulnerable and strengthening our community as a whole, the Lift Kids Out of Deep Poverty bill wants your support.

The time to act is now. Join the Lift Our Kids Coalition – get involved and educated. Write to your representatives and urge them to vote favorably for this bill. Let our representatives know that we will not stand idly by while millions of people are left to struggle in poverty. We must demand that our legislators prioritize the future of our society as a whole and support the Lift Kids Out of Deep Poverty bill.

A favorable vote for this bill means a favorable vote for a society where everyone has the equal opportunity to live life to their fullest potential.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Danny DeMilia

Meeting with Thomas, Senator O’Connor’s Aide

Going into this meeting... we planned to be firm in our statements, especially taking into account that Senator O’Connor is a Republican. Given this, we assumed he may be against the bill. We had checked the Massachusetts legislative website prior to entering the office to check if he had ever sponsored/cosponsored any similar bills and did not find anything, further leading us to believe he was not in support of financial assistance.

We could not have been more incorrect. Upon entering, Thomas told us that Senator O’Connor had cosponsored this bill in its history (we either must have missed it when searching, or it was in a previous year and we did not go back far enough – we only looked at this current session and the one session prior). Thomas told us about how Senator

Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett (Third Middlesex District),

I hope this letter finds you well.

My name is _____, and I am writing to you as a concerned citizen of the town of Waltham, represented within your district. As an undergraduate student of Brandeis University, living off-campus in Waltham, I have found myself enveloped in its culture and intricacies.

While Waltham is oftentimes thought of as a town of prosperity, filled with people deserving of equal opportunities, I have become aware of how roughly 5% of its citizens live below the federal deep poverty threshold, producing a monthly income of less than \$1,110. Many of these residents, children within the school systems, are facing the harsh realities of this systemic issue, and are statistically more likely to experience poverty throughout adulthood.

As you may be aware, given your routine co-sponsorship over the years, a solution to this problem can be found within the proposed “Lift Our Kids Out of Deep Poverty Bill.” Aiming to increase monthly benefits for those on cash assistance programs such as the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) by 10% each fiscal year, until reaching the federal deep poverty threshold, then routinely increasing by an account for inflation, this bill would provide an opportunity for families to ground themselves financially. Currently, the TAFDC only provides a maximum monthly benefit of \$783 to families of three, prohibiting families with children from receiving the necessary aid to support themselves.

While Governor Healey opposes this bill due to its financial implications in the state budget, this bill would increase the economic mobility of those in your district, reducing reliance on other public programs. For the sake of your constituents, you must support the passing of this bill, and more money must be allocated towards the TAFDC and similar programs.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

O'Connor was actually deeply devoted to assisting those struggling the most economically, and it was generally an extremely positive meeting. ...In a weird way, I would not necessarily say we did much advocating in this meeting; it was just casual. We briefly explained the logistics of the bill, but Thomas seemingly knew most of the information we came to relay, and we felt very positive about the Senator's support.

While this meeting was not heavy on its advocacy, it did teach me a valuable lesson. Stina and I made such negative assumptions about Senator O'Connor and his office due to his political affiliation, which ultimately were not true. I think in this day and age, people see "Republican" and automatically assume they support the current federal administration, which is not always the case. There were Republicans before the current federal administration, with rather different values, and Senator O'Connor is seemingly one of them.

In an odd way, this was the most impactful meeting for me. It really [drove] home the idea to not judge a book by its cover. While I doubt Senator O'Connor and I would see eye to eye on every single issue, it was wrong to assume he would push back against the Lift Our Kids bill just because of his political affiliation – some issues are morally impactful and do not fall along party lines.

Stina Mei

Meeting with Sen. Rausch's Legislative Aide

This meeting was one where we had given a longer spiel about our bill as the aide wasn't as familiar with the bill as much. Alex had also said that in a previous legislative session (the one prior to this current one), Sen. Rausch had been a co-sponsor and is likely to potentially co-sponsor as well in this legislative session. The last meeting we had that day was the meeting with Sen. Kennedy's legislative aide, Olivia. Due to the time constraints, we weren't able to have too long of a meeting but we had made sure to get her as much information on the bill as possible. She had expressed her concerns on the financial concerns of the bill but for the most part, she was mainly supportive and had said Sen. Kennedy is likely to favorably vote for the bill.

Next Steps

Given the Lift Our Kids Out of Deep Poverty bill's continuous cycling throughout the Massachusetts legislature and its fiscal implications, it is unfortunately relatively unlikely that the bill will pass. This will prove detrimental to the families currently receiving the increased support (an additional 10% per month) from the TAFDC in the months of April, May, and June, as this increased support is scheduled to be revoked, beginning on July 1st.

On a more positive note, Senator Sal DiDomenico has shared that he is having/has been having numerous meetings with Governor Healey about this issue. With these challenges in mind, there must be a continuation of the mobilization of advocacy; constituents must continue to engage in community efforts, spreading awareness of this issue, and contacting their legislators to voice their opinions.

A relatively pressing issue many may have regarding this bill is the lack of transparency in where the allocated money is being spent. Legislators are hesitant to give monthly benefits to struggling families when there is not yet evidence of how this money helps. In other words, (while a small amount), does the current allotment help families financially? Is there a system in place, or a set of regulations in place, ensuring the allocated benefits are improving the livelihoods of the dependent children, as they are designed to? An addition that may assist in the bill receiving support, as was brought up during my oral defense, is a manner in which accounts can be kept on where the money is spent. To add, perhaps current TAFDC recipients providing forms of testimony to the commonwealth's legislators, demonstrating the efficacy of the program, would increase sentiments towards it, ultimately resulting in increased allotments. These testimonies could serve to provide evidence of the positive financial and social impacts of the bill.

An important piece of context to take into account is the current national political climate. Given the potential loss of federal funding, it could be assumed that legislators are hesitant to provide people with more money, void of any regulations regarding how the money is spent. A change that could be proposed to the bill that may alleviate this issue, is some form of requirement that the money

be spent towards the benefit of dependent children. This seems plausible given that those families receiving the monthly benefits are eligible for such, due to the presence of the children.

Another change that could be proposed to the bill is some form of transparency regarding the eligibility requirements. As it stands, the only eligibility requirements are residency within the commonwealth, citizenship, a monthly income less than \$1,110, and a dependent child. While these requirements are sufficient, given the scope of the program, the process itself could be more transparent to the legislators. Legislators may want to know how long the process takes, or perhaps how many people who apply do/do not receive the money. Ultimately, it could be argued that the bill, while only focusing on an increase in the allotments, should also propose some administrative improvements. It is difficult to convince legislators, who are attempting to maintain a budget, to give more money to families when the legislators themselves do not see the benefits.

Update

As of July 9, 2025, the bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, and both the House and Senate concurred.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.118: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S118

H.214: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H214

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute: mlri.org

Protecting the Civil Rights and Safety of Immigrant Residents

Isabel Hon-Anderson '25
Niyati Patel '26



Niyati Patel and Isabel Hon-Anderson

The Safe Communities Act aims to ensure safety for all residents of Massachusetts regardless of immigration status. The act protects immigrants from unwarranted immigration inquiries by enforcement authorities, ensuring that victims and witnesses of crime feel safe to seek help without fear of deportation. The act safeguards rights during ICE interrogations by requiring that individuals are given written informed consents that allow them to refuse interviews or have legal representation during the interviews. The SCA also prohibits initiation of contact between local and state agencies and ICE except in cases where individuals are released after incarceration on criminal convictions. Finally, the act ends 287(g) contract compliance that deputizes local officials as federal immigration agents, at state's expense – except for correctional facilities – to decrease spending of local resources on federal immigration law enforcement.

The Bill

S.1681/H.2580: An Act to protect the civil rights and safety of all Massachusetts residents

Elevator Speech

Niyati: My name is Niyati Patel and I am here with Isabel Hon-Anderson, we are students at Brandeis University. Our greatest value and responsibility is to treat each other as human beings with dignity. It has been enshrined in our traditions, and one such tradition was codified in *Miranda v. Arizona*, which protects our right to be educated on the constitutional protections that we have in the event of detainment or interrogation.

Isabel: Under our current laws, the new federal administration can use every tool available to deport members of our immigrant communities, including our state police and courts. This can lead to a public safety issue because it increases distrust between immigrant communities and the public institutions that protect and serve them. Everyone, regardless of their immigration status, deserves to be treated with dignity. The reversal of priorities in federal immigration enforcement has fueled racial profiling and detainment at places of work, and venues of justice like courts, police stations, and public buildings. Unlike everyone else, immigrants are not informed of their rights upon detention.

Niyati: The Safe Communities Act would prohibit questioning about immigration status by court and police officials. This would enable immigrants to report abuse and other crimes to authorities without fear of immigration consequences. The act would require that law enforcement agents inform everyone, regardless of immigration status, of their rights and obtain informed consent before conducting an interview. The act ends 287(g) contracts that deputize local officials as federal immigration agents, at state's expense. Instead, these resources must be used to catch criminals and strengthen trust between local law enforcement and communities by fairly carrying out justice. Studies have shown that the public values procedural justice over fairness of

outcomes. One way to ensure procedural fairness is to treat everyone with respect and dignity by offering them a fair chance and access to justice.

Isabel: Will Senator/Representative X vote favorably on the Safe Communities Act in the Joint Committee for Public Safety and Homeland Security?

Op-Ed

Isabel Hon-Anderson

Feeling helpless? Here's something you can do to actually help immigrants!

Nowadays, the news is always flooded with new stories about a university student with a visa being detained for protesting, or a massive ICE raid, or the escalation of the showdown between Mayor Michelle Wu and “border czar” Tom Homan. Regardless of your politics, immigration is a hot topic in the so-called “land of the free,” and Massachusetts is in no way exempt from the conversation.

Narratives about dangerous undocumented criminals flood the headlines but it has become increasingly clear that

these aren't the only people who should be afraid. Stories like that of Rumeysa Ozturk, a student getting her doctorate from Tufts who was detained and moved to a detention center in Louisiana, have made it clear that the safety of even immigrants with legal status is not ensured. A woman in Fall River – who notably is a citizen – was forced to show federal law enforcement officials three forms of identification before they allowed her to pass.

All of this has led to deep-seated fear in the hearts and minds of Massachusetts residents and beyond. An undocumented student told me how he is constantly looking over his shoulder in fear of becoming the next easily forgotten news article about yet another deportation. Despite paying taxes and contributing greatly to the commonwealth's economy, oftentimes working jobs that no one else wants to do, our undocumented community members and all who care deeply about them are terrified about what the future holds.

It's not just ICE officers people are afraid of. Current policies allow ICE to use our local law enforcement officers as instruments to carry out the federal government's agenda, rather than serve their communities in a constructive way.

Storybook

SAFE COMMUNITIES ACT (S.1681/H.2580)

THE PROBLEM

- The federal government leverages Massachusetts's public safety resources to identify and deport immigrants
- Victims and witnesses of crime are less likely to report crime due to fear of deportation
- Constant fear negatively impacts ability to go to work, access to preventative care and keeps kids from going to school

THE SOLUTION

- Protect all people, regardless of immigration status
- Prevent unwarranted immigration inquiries by enforcement authorities
- Require informed consent for ICE interrogations
- Allow funding to go to other issues for the people of Massachusetts such as shelters for the homeless, health care, etc. instead of federal immigration enforcement

Vote favorably on the
Safe Communities Act
(S.1681/H.2580)

Dear Senator/Representative X,
I am writing to you today to express my support for the Safe Communities Act (S.1681/H.2580). I believe this bill is a crucial step towards protecting the rights of all people in Massachusetts, regardless of their immigration status. I urge you to vote in favor of this bill.

SAFE COMMUNITIES ACT Hear Their Stories

DOUG SMITH

Legal Studies Professor at Brandeis University
Founder of The Right to Immigration Institute

"This act will allow everyone to **feel safe reporting to the police**. This act publicizes everyone's right to go to the police and **report incidents without fear**."

UNDOCUMENTED STUDENT

This student's family **escaped corruption** and have **built a better life** here. His parents are **upstanding residents** who have worked hard to educate their son.

"This act is a great way to **take pressure off our shoulders**. I know **the feeling of looking over your shoulder** every time you step out of the house. You don't know when you can be stopped by an immigration officer and what to do in a case when you are detained. If this bill passes, **people will be aware of their rights** and **feel safe to leave their homes**."

OTHER STATES

A similar law in **California** has not increased crime rates. Comparable laws in **New Jersey** and **Illinois** have increased trust between law enforcement and the community.

The Safe Communities Act seeks to restore some of the trust in local law enforcement that has been lost by placing limits on the communication it is able to have with ICE. If it passes, local law enforcement officers won't be able to ask someone about their immigration status unless it's actually relevant, and the contracts allowing ICE to use them will all be ended.

The Safe Communities Act also works to protect the rights of everyone, regardless of immigration status, by requiring officers to tell a person their rights before detaining them, and mandating that detained persons sign a consent form before any ICE interrogation can be conducted. These measures work to ease our community members' fears and send the message that their local law enforcement isn't out to get them.

While opponents have spread concern that this act interferes with federal immigration officers' abilities to carry out their duties or allows dangerous criminals to remain on the streets, this is far from reality. In six other states, similar legislation has passed and the world did not end. A study from UC Irvine found that the California Values Act had no impact on the crime rate and stood up to examination by the U.S. 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in 2019, which determined that it did not impede federal immigration officers from carrying out their jobs.

Being afraid of the people who protect us makes us all less safe and if you, like me, have been exhausted by the constant influx of these tragic news stories and just want to know what you can do as an individual, I urge you to talk to your representatives. Tell them that you are counting on them to support the Safe Communities Act, whether you want to email, write a letter, call, or show up at their office in person.

Our community members are depending on you to speak up for them, and wouldn't it be refreshing to wake up one day to a positive headline, like "Massachusetts chose to stand up and defend immigrant rights with the Safe Communities Act."

Niyati Patel

More To Come: The Promise to Revoke All Rights and Liberties that Our Nation Has Provided Immigrants, Including Our Forefathers

You just got home from work and see three men waiting around the corner. They call out your name, and the moment you answer, your hands are behind your back, and handcuffs are being put on. You have a family, but how will they find you, and what will happen to them? Once you are detained and interrogated, you beg them to allow

you to make a phone call to let someone know you are alive and need help. You have to beg relentlessly before you are allowed to make a call.

Meanwhile, you are held in one of the detainment centers, given a folded sheet of aluminum foil and a mat. Your family cannot find you, and your lawyer cannot locate you because you are just a number lost in the system. You are to spend your time in a tiny, freezing cement cell until someone cares about you and wants to hear your story.

You must be thinking that the American justice system cannot be that cruel, and it is not. The system I am writing about is the immigrant detention system, which is muddy enough that even the most talented lawyers struggle to navigate it. The scene I wrote for you is not out of a fictionalized movie or book, it is our reality. People of our communities are disappearing off the streets, and it is becoming harder to ensure that immigrants do not become numbers reported and forgotten about.

Immigrants are one of the most vulnerable groups in our communities because they are not afforded the same basic dignities. The law does not require that immigrants are informed of their right to hire an attorney or their right to decline an interview. 287(g) contracts deputize local law enforcement officers to act on Immigration and Customs Enforcement's orders. In the past, this has often led to a widespread fear of authorities in immigrant communities, and they fear reporting and seeking help for abuse and crime from authorities meant to protect our communities.

In the past, innocent members of our communities were not targeted by immigration enforcement agencies, but federal priorities have reversed. No one is safe. On March 23, 2025, federal immigration officials detained over 370 people, and while they claimed that 10 of them were criminals, they have failed to provide us with any evidence of criminal convictions.

Immigrants with valid visas are not safe either; on March 25, a Turkish PhD student, Rumeysa Ozturk, with a valid F-1 visa, was detained by people in masks. The number will keep increasing if we don't do something to protect our community members as soon as possible.

The Safe Communities Act will ensure that everyone is protected regardless of their immigration status. The act will prohibit unwarranted immigration status inquiries and require informed consent before any interrogations. The act will end 287(g) programs statewide to ensure that law enforcement's resources are spent on catching criminals and not residents of our communities. To be clear, the act will not protect criminals; most of the provisions have exceptions for migrants convicted as criminals and will not work to endanger our communities.

The Trump administration's appointed Immigration and Customs Enforcement director, Tom Homan, has already promised that he will be bringing hell to Boston – the same man who has publicly claimed that “I don't care what the judges think.” If honest and hard-working immigrants cannot rely on court protections, the state must step up to create the boundaries needed to protect all residents.

The Safe Communities Act will make our communities a safe and welcoming place. Take action today: call your representatives and tell them why supporting the Safe Communities Act is important and matters to you, their voters.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Isabel Hon-Anderson

On attending an ENACT Event and meeting with a legislative aide to Representative Homar Gómez

Early in the process of advocating for the Safe Communities Act, I attended ENACT and VoteDeis' “It's Not All About the President: Engaging in Local and State Government” event. This was a panel discussion with Waltham Mayor Jeanette McCarthy, State Representative Thomas Stanley, and Waltham City Councilor Paul Katz aimed at highlighting the experiences of public officials at different levels of state government.

At the end they asked attendees if they had any questions for the panel, and I asked if immigration was an issue that their constituents were concerned about, and if so, what they were doing about it. I learned how pressing this issue is, because Mayor McCarthy made it clear that the citizens of Waltham are worried and that she is doing everything in her power to make people feel safe in her city. Likewise, Representative Stanley echoed her sentiments, telling me that many of his constituents were concerned about what the federal administration may do concerning the immigrant community, documented and otherwise.

While that first experience was mainly one for learning and gathering information to be used during my lobbying sessions, the real advocacy began during our first lobbying session at the State House.

Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

My name is Niyati Patel and I am writing to you with my colleague Isabel Hon-Anderson. We are students at Brandeis University and residents of Waltham. Your commitment to protecting vulnerable populations and ensuring Massachusetts remains a welcoming place for all has been crucial. Thank you for co-sponsoring the Safe Communities Act (S.1681), which promotes safety, dignity, and trust within our communities and law enforcement. Your past co-sponsorship of the bill is evidence of your commitment to protect immigrants in our communities.

Currently, federal immigration law enforcement has started targeting innocent members of our communities. I come from a family of immigrants who worked hard to raise me and support my college education. Unfortunately, immigrants today fear sending their children to school. Federal immigration enforcement authorities have experienced a reversal in their groups of priority, and this means that innocent and vulnerable groups are once again at risk for deportation. Racial profiling is on the rise within law enforcement procedures, and immigrants are one of the most vulnerable groups at risk with these policy changes. Public schools in Massachusetts have already started seeing spikes in school absences as fear of deportation continues to grow.

The Safe Communities Act (SCA) is a step forward in advancing public safety policies by ensuring local law enforcement continues to protect communities rather than enforcing immigration laws at state expense. A 2023 study from the Center for American Progress found that sanctuary policies are associated with lower crime rates and higher median household incomes compared to counties that cooperated with ICE. SCA will lead to increased trust between immigrant communities and law enforcement, allowing them to feel safe in reporting abuse, exploitation, and crimes without fearing consequences.

Despite the clear benefits, opposition to the Safe Communities Act remains, and it is fueled by the misconception that it prevents law enforcement from addressing crime. In reality, the bill ensures that police prioritize protecting all residents of a community without allowing immigration policies to discourage victims and witnesses from coming forward. Similar laws have been passed in California, New Jersey, and Illinois, which have helped increase trust between law enforcement and the community.

As the legislative session progresses, we ask that you continue to advocate for the Safe Communities Act by urging members of the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security to schedule a prompt hearing for the Safe Communities Act. Once the bill advances out of committee, lend us your voice and vote in favor during the Senate floor debates to ensure successful passage.

During this visit, Niyati and I met with the legislative aide of Representative Homar Gómez, a woman named Veronica Frantz-Eggleston. While we were originally scheduled to speak to the Representative himself, he ended up tied up in a last-minute meeting in his district, and we were still able to have a constructive conversation with Veronica.

A major takeaway from this meeting for me was the importance of asking about the positionality of the legislator on the bill before launching into the elevator pitch. While Veronica very patiently listened to Niyati and I as we lauded the improvements that this bill could make for Gómez's district, she quickly informed us when we finished our speech that he would most likely co-sponsor this bill....

While waiting for our second meeting with his office, this time with the Representative, his name was added to the list of cosponsors, so our follow up was spent offering any information that may help him advocate for this bill to his colleagues in the Joint Committee of Public Safety and Homeland Security.

On participating in Immigrant's Day at the State House

The day after this first lobbying session, MIRA [the Massachusetts Immigrant & Refugee Advocacy Coalition] hosted their annual event: Immigrant's Day at the State House.

...Niyati and I were tasked with visiting several legislators on the 5th floor, but since none of them were present, we only were able to drop off MIRA's fact sheets.

The moment in which I felt I was able to make the most personal impact was when a woman asked if I could help her get to Representative Amy Mah Sangiolo's office, because she was one of her constituents and wanted to speak to her. This was particularly memorable for me because I had just gone to Rep Sangiolo's office the day prior attempting to drop in and found it empty, but was immediately confronted with one of her actual constituents who arguably holds a greater capacity to sway Sangiolo's vote.

From this experience, I learned how powerful connections with other people can be in advocacy work, because while I didn't end up speaking to Sangiolo, I was able to discuss the Safe Communities Act with one of her constituents, helping her go over important talking points.

An hour later, I spotted Sangiolo in the crowd of people listening to speeches in the Great Hall of Flags, and when I met with Rep. Sangiolo on April 8, she was a cosponsor.

Niyati Patel

On attending an Immigrant and Refugee Briefing

The Immigrant and Refugee Briefing event was held on Zoom [on March 4, 2025] and included many attendees, such as Senator Eldridge, Senator Comerford, Senator Adam Gomez, Representative Christine Barber, Representative Cruz, Representative Sousa, and Representative Mindy Domb. Some of the other attendees included Javier Luengo-Garrido from ACLU Massachusetts, immigration attorney Dan Berger, Amy Grunder (Director of State Affairs at MIRA), the Center for New Americans, Ari Keigan (Pioneer Valley Workers Center, Kelly Morgan, and Sara Bedford (Central West Justice Center).

The event was a large community gathering to introduce old and new bills filed this session to protect the immigrant communities in Massachusetts. There was a sense of urgency and panic in the voices of the state legislators and coalition members who spoke that night. They were expecting that immigration rights and policies are in danger in the upcoming times, and one story that floored me was Senator Eldridge's story about a constituent...[who] was racially profiled by ICE and arrested. He was not informed of his right to hire an attorney, and because of that, he was transferred to a detention center in Texas and separated from his family. The story moved me.

This was the moment when I realized that my effort was needed to increase awareness about this issue. This was a turning point in my campaign journey, I found myself zealously calling representatives and senators in the future to try and set up meetings to offer research-based evidence and exemplary states who have passed similar bills to educate them on the issue.

Meeting with Veronica Frantz-Eggleston, Legislative Aide to State Representative Homar Gómez

Isabel and I met with Veronica near Conference Room B on the ground floor. ... Rep. Gómez was busy in the district, but our meeting with Veronica proved to be useful and important. Veronica told us that Rep. Gómez was born and raised in Puerto Rico, and immigrant rights and issues would be important to him. Veronica kindly reminded us that she and Rep. Gómez were not familiar with the Safe Communities Act.

During our meeting with Veronica, we informed her of the bill's important provisions, current issues, and why we need Rep. Gómez's support for the bill. She had assured us that Rep. Gómez would support the bill and asked us if we had any specific requests. We had the opportunity to ask her to request Rep. Gómez for co-sponsorship, a

public statement in support of the bill, and a request to his colleagues and the chair of the committee for an expedited hearing on the Safe Communities Act.

Veronica had taken notes and let us know that they will be publishing a piece in their newsletter in support of the bill upon Rep. Gómez's approval. Our efforts seemed to have been successful, for a few weeks later, Representative Gómez co-sponsored the bill and agreed to a remote meeting with us to further discuss next steps for advancing the bill.

Next Steps

With the semester ending, there is still much in the way of the Safe Communities Act becoming law. The bill remains in the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security. The current primary objective is to get a hearing scheduled for the Safe Communities Act.

Our best bet to accomplish this is to stay in contact with Representative Cahill, the Chairperson for the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security, and his legislative director, Alexandra Rodriguez. He has demonstrated approval of the general idea of the bill, since he just recently led debates with Representative Sousa (sponsor of the House version of the bill) regarding proposed budget amendments that would do the opposite of the Safe Communities Act. He made a statement calling the proposed amendments, which would let local law enforcement voluntarily assist ICE with warrantless detentions of undocumented immigrants, "a constitutional problem." Our conversation with Alexandra Rodriguez led us to believe that Representative Cahill will be fair and open to hear arguments to schedule a hearing for the bill.

Once a hearing is scheduled, the Safe Communities Act will still not be safe from opposition, but informing legislators arguing in its favor is crucial to its success. Some legislators we talked with asked if we would be willing to provide oral or written testimony. This is a potential future advocacy step. The testimony would be based on the work that we have conducted over the course of the semester in addition to further research.

Currently, immigration has become a topic that is quickly gaining traction in the Massachusetts State House as more people are detained and losing their liberties. Meanwhile there are other states who continue their litigation or political battle with the federal government regarding policies that safeguard their immigrant communities.

Past this step, the Ways and Means Committee may be a potential roadblock. Even in the years that the Safe Communities Act was voted favorably out of the Joint

Committee, it struggled to gain favor in the Ways and Means Committee, where it was sent to study.

This will require speaking with legislators on the committee and explaining why this bill is worth the smaller costs. The bill's long-term fiscal benefits such as reduced deportation-related costs must be relayed to the committee. The members must be informed of the threat that the current climate poses to the basic human rights of immigrants in our communities. The longer this bill is stalled, the more people are unfairly detained without due process.

It should be noted that even if this bill were passed, there is no guarantee that it would be properly implemented. The bill gives local law enforcement offices 12 months to implement the changes into their training programs, and this transition time leaves a lot of room for injustice to continue to impact the communities that the Safe Communities Act aims to protect.

Throughout all of this hypothetical future work, it is important that we remain connected to MIRA and MIRA's Political Director Maroni Minter in order to work together on this bill's passage. With their connections to legislators and concerned citizens, they have a lot more power behind them, and these resources can be used in conjunction with our advocacy efforts to maximize our impact.

Update

As of July 9, 2025, the bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security, and both the House and Senate concurred.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.1681: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S1681

H.2580: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H2580

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA): miracoalition.org

Ensuring Access to Representation in Immigration Proceedings

Kai Kibilko '25
Alex Miller '25



Alex Miller and Kai Kibilko

In the United States, citizens facing criminal proceedings are guaranteed the right to an attorney to help navigate the complexities of the legal system and ensure a fair trial. However, immigrants facing deportation proceedings are not given this privilege and are often unable to afford the large costs associated with hiring an attorney. Legal representation is not guaranteed for most civil proceedings, including deportation proceedings. While many states have legal aid programs, in most states these programs do not exist for immigration-related trials. In the state of Massachusetts, the majority of immigrants facing possible deportation do not have access to a lawyer.

The Immigrant Legal Defense Act seeks to establish a state fund with the purpose of awarding grants funding legal representation for low-income immigrants facing deportation proceedings. This bill intends to support Massachusetts immigrants by improving access to legal services for those unable to afford them. This bill would establish a diverse committee to determine eligibility and manage the fund.

The Bill

S.1127/H.1954: An Act ensuring access to equitable representation in immigration proceedings

Elevator Speech

We are in the midst of a crisis in which valued members of our community are facing imminent threats to their livelihood. Many immigrants in our communities are at risk of immediate deportation without any access to legal expertise. Due to the extreme complexities of the legal system, navigating a legal framework without any formal assistance puts individuals at risk of unjust trials without a strong understanding of their rights and protections.

Those facing deportation with legal representation are 10 times more likely to win relief from deportation compared to those without representation. And those without representation are not a small minority. They, in fact, make up 55% of immigrants facing deportation in Massachusetts.

This significant disparity can be attributed to extreme costs of legal representation that places an undue burden on immigrants. While US citizens facing civil or criminal charges are granted the right to an attorney for various reasons, the same right is not given to immigrants despite their significant contributions to our country as community members and taxpayers.

With federal legislation committed to mass-deportations, now is the time to act to protect our immigrants at a state-level. As a community, we should support our immigrant families through passing the Immigrant Legal Defense Act and establishing a fund that would be used to provide no-cost legal services for low-income immigrants facing imminent deportation.

Can we count on you for a favorable vote?

Op-Ed

Kai Kibikko

If They Come for Our Neighbors, Who's Next?

Immigrants without status in Massachusetts are living in constant fear. With a hostile federal administration, something as simple as walking on the sidewalk or being pulled over for a traffic stop has led to detention and potentially deportation. Such is the story of Lucas Dos Santos Amaral, who was pulled over and very nearly deported despite not having a criminal record or being the person ICE was looking for.

If it can happen to him, who's really safe? This is why having legal representation available to immigrants facing deportation who cannot afford it is more necessary than ever. Massachusetts shouldn't wait any longer. It's time to join other states and ensure real protection is available to families and community members across the Commonwealth who are at risk of imminent deportation.

Without representation, the deportation process is widely known to be confusing, scary, and traumatic. Imagine trying to defend yourself in court, in a different language, with no lawyer and your future on the line. Worse yet, instances of family separation have been documented, which can leave permanent psychological scars.

Opponents to such a bill argue that it would place an undue burden on taxpayers and that creating a bill would create a right guaranteed to immigrants that does not exist for U.S. citizens. But the facts speak for themselves: these arguments collapse under scrutiny. Passing this bill is not just common sense. It is a necessary step to protect immigrants who add immeasurable value to our communities.

A major misconception about the Immigrant Legal Defense Act and similar bills passed in other states is that it creates a "right" to legal defense for people facing deportation, like the Sixth Amendment guarantees for U.S. citizens in criminal court.

That's simply not true. These bills don't guarantee legal counsel. What they do is establish a framework to fund legal services for people who can't afford them, giving more immigrants a fighting chance. It's not a sweeping right. It's a targeted, practical step toward basic fairness.

And it's not just about fairness. It's about value

— human and economic. Immigrants contribute so much to their communities: they work, care for families, build lives. But they also contribute financially. In Massachusetts, immigrants without status paid nearly \$650 million in state and local taxes in 2022, according to the Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. That money helps fund schools, health care, and other public services that everyone relies on.

So how much would this bill cost? Just \$5 million to start. That's less than 1% of what these same residents are already contributing. There's no burden being placed on citizen taxpayers. In fact, immigrants without status are paying hundreds of millions into systems they often can't even access.

And the disparities this bill would address are serious. Representation matters. Immigrants with lawyers are ten times more likely to win relief from deportation than those without. Think about that. The outcome of a deportation case often comes down to whether someone has a lawyer by their side. This isn't a small-scale issue either. In

Storybook

S.1127 / H.1954

IMMIGRANT LEGAL DEFENSE ACT

Problem

- 55% of MA immigrants facing deportation **do not** have a lawyer
- Those facing deportation without a lawyer are **10 times** more likely to be deported
- Similar bills exist in other states such as California & Colorado and have shrunk the gap in outcome disparities. **Why not Massachusetts?**

Solution

Write to legislators or vote in favor of the Immigrant Legal Defense Act to help give immigrants facing deportation with **legal support they deserve**

What does the bill do?

The Immigrant Legal Defense Act creates a framework for legal services to be made available to low-income immigrants facing deportation who otherwise would not be able to afford them. This helps keep them in Massachusetts and in the communities they contribute so much to.

- A patchwork of immigration laws on different levels leaves **gaps** for people to fall through.
- "These folks [immigrants] are **putting a lot of money in...** they are paying your grandma's social security checks"
- "Immigrants fund schools, work in local restaurants... are **valuable community members** across Massachusetts"

Cynthia works in health policy and poverty alleviation at the Heller School for Social Policy.

Cynthia Tschampl

Immigrant

She came from Ecuador as a child and overstayed her Visa. She received legal support to navigate the DACA renewal process.

- Many immigrants **do not understand** the legal system
- It's "**risky**" to fill out immigration-related legal paperwork without legal assistance and it's very easy to "**miss something**"
- It is crucial that those facing deportation have access to legal support to **understand their rights and the legal process**

For additional information:
<https://miracoalition.org/news/immigrant-legal-defense-act/>

MIRA Massachusetts Immigrant & Refugee Advocacy Coalition

Massachusetts, 55% of people facing deportation don't have legal representation. That's not a gap. It's a crisis. And this bill would directly help close it by expanding access to legal support for thousands of people at risk of being removed from the only communities they know.

So what needs to be done? The bill needs to be passed, of course. But in order to make that happen, there is action that needs to be taken on all of our parts. If you live in Massachusetts, go to malegislature.gov to find who your representative and senator is, and check if they are co-sponsoring the bill. If they are not, then writing to them with a clear, direct address about why Massachusetts needs this bill to be passed is of utmost importance.

This bill cannot wait. Colorado passed their version of the bill the first time it was introduced, so why not Massachusetts? Speak up and be vocal about the need to protect immigrant communities bringing so much to the Commonwealth.

Alex Miller

The Need for the Immigrant Legal Defense Act in Massachusetts

"I feel hunted and persecuted." This is the reality for many living in the United States right now, including our community members, classmates, coworkers, and for some, family members.

The Trump administration is committed to carrying out "mass deportations at a never-seen-before scale" and while the administration's target is stated to be criminals and those residing in the country illegally, in reality, this is a small fraction of those whose livelihood is under attack. Currently, we are seeing cases of lawful residents being kidnapped and abducted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) throughout the country. This list of lawful residents includes young adults holding student visas, spouses of US citizens, and individuals who have lawfully resided in the US with visas for years.

Despite these injustices, there are steps that states can take to protect their immigrant communities. The Immigrant Legal Defense Act aims to create a fund in the state of Massachusetts to help low-income immigrants facing deportation proceedings access legal representation. Immigrants represented by legal counsel are ten times more likely to win relief than those who are not, and it is more important now than ever that we offer legal assistance to our residents facing deportation proceedings.

In Massachusetts, 55% of immigrants with pending cases are navigating deportation proceedings without a lawyer, including some of the 369 Massachusetts residents

currently in federal immigration detention as of January 2025. Navigating an immigration case, especially deportation proceedings, can be extremely unclear and confusing. This is particularly true for those from different cultural backgrounds who may not have a complete understanding of the United States legal framework or their rights. If this wasn't difficult enough, some immigrants facing deportation proceedings do not speak fluent English, let alone are able to understand complicated legal jargon.

Frankly, it's shocking that there is no guaranteed access to legal representation for deportation proceedings; US citizens facing serious legal penalties have the right to legal representation, and so should immigrants. This is especially true now, a time when even lawful residents are facing serious threats due to the federal government's agenda.

Unfortunately, immigration policy has become a controversial issue in our country; however, fair legal processes should not be. This bill is not a government handout, but a correction of a broken and unfair system.

Massachusetts would not be the first state to establish a fund for this purpose; California, Colorado, Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, and Washington already have similar programs. It is time for Massachusetts to join this list and pass the Immigrant Legal Defense Act to protect our community members, workers, and families.

Undocumented immigrants are valuable members of our state who contribute roughly \$650 million in tax dollars annually and are responsible for 5% of the workforce, despite not benefitting from state programs, like Social Security or Medicaid. This is an invaluable contribution to our state, especially compared to the \$5 million goal for the Immigrant Legal Defense Fund. This initial amount will come from judiciary budget allocations as well as private donations, and it will be used to pay for legal costs and fees for lawyers, paralegals, and law students offering pro-bono representation. Through this fund, the state of Massachusetts will be able to provide no-cost legal services for those most in need.

This act should be a no-brainer in Massachusetts to uphold our state's values and show consistent support for all of our community members in a time of crisis. I urge all Massachusetts citizens to call, email, and write letters to their legislators to support or become a cosigner of the Immigrant Legal Defense Act.

This bill has recently gone to the judiciary committee and in order for it to become law, it must be voted on favorably by legislators in our districts. To achieve a favorable vote, legislators need to hear a call to action from constituents like you!

Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Rush and Senator Eldridge,

We hope that we can count on your support for S.1127, more commonly known as the Immigrant Legal Defense Act. Senator Rush, as someone who has family members who came to the US in search of providing a better life for themselves and their loved ones, we're sure that you understand how immigration to the US improves lives. And Senator Eldridge, as someone who has provided free legal services to the poor and the elderly, we're sure that you understand the profound impact that having free legal counsel can have for someone facing a legal case. This bill works to bridge both of these crucial experiences that are so important to both of you.

In Massachusetts, approximately 55% of immigrants facing deportation do so without access to legal services throughout their proceedings (MIRA: Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, 2025). They are at far greater risk of deportation compared to those with legal services, who are five times more likely to win relief from deportation when represented by counsel (MIRA, 2025). Deportation isn't just sending someone back to the country they came from, but it often separates families and leads to irreparable trauma and harm to families and communities.

This is where the Immigrant Legal Defense Act steps in. This bill is a major first step towards a solution for deportation without understanding what is happening to them (language barriers, etc) and family separation, just to name two issues. The bill establishes a fund that can be used to pay for legal services for immigrants facing deportation so that they understand their rights and can fairly tell their story in court and argue for why they should be granted relief from deportation.

Some people argue against bills like these as they work to use taxpayer funds to provide legal services for immigrants without status, and the initial goal for this bill is \$5 million. A study found, however, that immigrants without status contributed nearly \$650 million to Massachusetts taxes in 2022 alone, and so these concerns are unwarranted (Institute on Taxation & Economic Policy, 2024). This bill will also source funding from corporate & non-profit donations, so the cost to the state will likely be less than \$5 million.

Additionally, some people feel that this bill "encourages" immigrating without status, but in today's political climate, undocumented immigration is actually down and so this bill would likely work to serve those who are already in Massachusetts.

We ask that you vote in favor of this common sense bill, to protect families and valuable community members across the commonwealth.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Kai Kibilko

Tabling Event in the Shapiro Campus Center

The second event, which I organized, was a tabling event in the [Shapiro Campus Center at Brandeis] immediately following our last State House visit on the 8th. It was myself and Alex, along with Danny and Stina advocating for the Lift Kids out of Deep Poverty bill. We held this event to help raise awareness of the bill on the Brandeis campus, as well as collect more signatures on the extra letters we had before potentially sending them in to other legislators.

...We attempted to get people's attention as they were walking by in order to get the signatures and raise awareness, and it was somewhat tricky at times. Thankfully the size of the Brandeis campus made it easy to run into people we know frequently and stop them to get their signatures. Having Danny and Stina there helped too.

...Something I noticed that led to more people stopping, and speaking to my advocacy efforts in real time, was what I said to people as they were walking by. For example, I started the tabling event with "Want to learn more about a bill currently at the Massachusetts State House?" or something like that.

But that did not get many people to stop, and I realized it was so broad that it could mean anything, so I had to tailor it to explicitly address something that would resonate with people, so I changed it to "Do you want to provide a signature in support of immigrants and expanding access to services they could benefit from?" or something along those lines, and I noticed that people stopped much more often when specifically mentioning immigrants and helping support them. The connections were much stronger this way.

Alex Miller

On meeting with Ravi, Legislative Aide to Representative Carmen Gentile

Ravi is both a Brandeis alum and a resident of my hometown so we were able to form a very positive connection. During this meeting Kai and I began with a similar pitch to the one we gave Senator O'Connor's legislative aide....He shared that Representative Gentile would be co-sponsoring

the bill if he was not already, and we were able to discuss immigration policy and this bill in particular at greater length.

As it was quickly established that the representative supported this bill, we focused our conversation on discussing concerns about passing the bill. We primarily talked about budgetary issues and the anti-immigrant sentiment present in the country as a barrier to its passing. However, Ravi shared our confidence in Massachusetts being a pro-immigrant state and that constituents and legislators alike will be receptive to this bill.

Because this meeting ran smoothly and we did not need to persuade Ravi of the importance of our bill, we were able to spend some of our meeting discussing other topics, such as attending Brandeis and his role as a legislative aide. We also bonded over him having previously taken “Advocacy for Policy Change” with Professor Stimell which was an excellent connection to have.

In this meeting, we also were able to gain some insight into Ravi’s career path and learn more about his work with Representative Gentile. ...We ended the meeting by talking with Ravi about some internship opportunities with Representative Gentile and it was overall a very positive experience and a great networking opportunity.

While our initial goal was to discuss the Immigrant Legal Defense Act and gauge Representative Gentile’s stance on the bill, we ended up gaining far more from this interaction.

Meeting with Legislative Aide to Senator Patrick O’Connor

We had the opportunity to meet with Senator O’Connor’s legislative aide, Thomas, on our final State House visit. This was an unplanned meeting and due to a lack of responses to our scheduling efforts, we decided to stop by the offices of senators on the committee that our bill has been sent to who were not already co-sponsoring it.

We were initially somewhat intimidated to stop by this office, especially unannounced, as Senator O’Connor is a Republican senator and we anticipated that he would push back on the bill more than the other legislators who we spoke to. Furthermore, due to the current political climate in our country, I was somewhat nervous at the prospect of talking about immigration law with a member of the Republican party.

However, this meeting was a pleasant surprise as Thomas was very friendly and receptive to learning more about our bill as well as our perspectives and opinions on its importance. Given we had already attended numerous

meetings to discuss our bill at this point, we felt much more confident giving him a rundown of the bill and sharing our personal opinions on it.

...We were pleasantly surprised to hear that Senator O’Connor is paying close attention to legislation involving immigration protections right now and Thomas even brought up the example of the detained Tufts student as a case showing the importance of our bill. This allowed us to segue into our experiences as students and share how fellow students and members of our community at Brandeis feel threatened by federal immigration policy. We further elaborated on how this bill seeks to provide protections at the state level for Massachusetts residents, including students like ourselves.

...[T]his meeting gave us hope that Republicans on the committee may vote favorably on our bill, despite it being in closer alignment with more “liberal” political ideologies. Lastly, this meeting demonstrated to us that collaboration across the political aisle on controversial topics is possible even at such a polarized time in our nation.

Next Steps

The Immigrant Legal Defense Act still has not been passed through all of the steps in the State House, thus it is imperative that advocacy efforts for this bill continue. Massachusetts residents must come together and continue fighting for this bill by reaching out to legislators on the Judiciary Committee and generally to ensure a favorable vote if they are not already sponsoring or co-sponsoring the bill.

We have consistently seen a massive turnout in Massachusetts on behalf of immigrants rights, with multiple protests in support of this bill and other immigration-related legislation at the statehouse. It is crucial that these efforts continue and are accompanied by more direct messages and conversations with legislators to further push for this bill.

Aside from advocacy efforts, the next steps for this bill lay predominantly in the hands of state representatives and senators who are members of the Judiciary Committee, and members of the state legislative process broadly, as well as Massachusetts Governor Maura Healey.

While the Massachusetts Immigration and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA) has set a starting goal of \$5 million for the Immigrant Legal Defense Fund, further advocacy efforts will be needed in achieving our goal starting budget. Even if the budget of \$5 million is unobtainable, Massachusetts can use a similar approach to Colorado in that they can pass the bill and start with a smaller budget before progressively increasing the amount over time.

In addition to this, it is important to consider the

implementation challenges that may arise if the bill passes. The state will need to develop a clear system for distributing the funds and setting up the legal infrastructure needed to support immigrants effectively across the Commonwealth. That means establishing guidelines for who will receive the funding, how legal services will be offered in different regions of the state, and which organizations will be tasked with actually carrying out the work.

We must make sure that these systems are fair, transparent, and accountable, and that they do not overlook those who face additional barriers to access or fall in the cracks based on eligibility.

This work cannot be done alone; while MIRA has been a central voice in this effort, we should continue building broader coalitions that bring in people and groups from all different backgrounds. These coalitions will be key not just in pushing the bill forward, but also in making sure it's implemented well once passed. Other states like Colorado and California have already taken steps to fund legal defense for immigrants, and we can and should learn from them, potentially building relationships with advocacy groups and legislators in those states to share strategies and best practices.

That said, we also need to prepare for potential pushback. There may be lobbying efforts from anti-immigrant groups or fiscal conservatives who argue against the use of public funds for immigrant legal defense. Some legislators may support the idea in principle but hesitate on the cost or scope, which is where community pressure becomes essential. We need to continue writing, calling, and showing up in person to let them know this matters. We should also uplift stories of directly impacted individuals, such as Lucas Dos Santos Amaral, to show why access to legal defense is a matter of basic fairness and due process.

There are also some substantive issues in the bill we should keep our eye on. We have to make sure the eligibility criteria for services are inclusive enough to cover those who need help most, but also realistic enough that the program

can deliver what it promises. If the bill ends up excluding large portions of the immigrant community or doesn't come with proper oversight and reporting mechanisms, we risk undermining the long-term success of the effort. Advocates and lawmakers should work together to strengthen the bill wherever needed, even if that means revisiting the language or adding new accountability provisions.

Finally, we should continue to be flexible about the budget. The \$5 million goal is a strong and needed starting point, but if that number proves difficult to secure, we should not let this make or break the bill. A phased approach, where we start with a smaller amount and grow the fund over time like Colorado starting at \$100,000, is a realistic path forward, as long as the political will and public pressure remain strong.

No matter the size of the initial budget, the creation of this fund will be a critical step toward ensuring that all immigrants in Massachusetts have access to the legal representation they deserve.

Update

As of July 9, 2025, the bill was referred to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary, and both the House and Senate concurred.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.1127: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S1127

H.1954: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H1954

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition (MIRA): miracoalition.org

Ensuring Funding for the Agricultural Healthy Incentives Food Program

Sophia Davidson '26
Divya Nandan '26



Sophia Davidson and Divya Nandan

Fresh, local produce has become somewhat of an inaccessible luxury to many communities across Massachusetts. Rising costs and geographic barriers have led several of the commonwealth's most historically underserved communities to limit their intake of fruits and vegetables (Massachusetts Food System Collaborative, 2025). To address these issues, Massachusetts implemented the Healthy Incentives Program, or HIP, which provides dollar-for-dollar reimbursements to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) clients when they use their SNAP benefits to purchase locally grown fruits and vegetables.

However, funding for HIP has been insufficient in past years, leading to freezes in the program. The legislature has been prompt about passing supplementary budgets to continue the program, however, the freezes still have meant that SNAP recipients would suddenly find themselves without access to money they were depending on to access produce and feed their families.

In an attempt to stay within budget and increase consistency for recipients, the monthly cap of HIP money each household can spend has been reduced. Previously, it scaled from 40 to 80 dollars depending on household size, but this past December, it became 20 dollars for all families (Project Bread, 2025). This severely limits clients' spending, farmers' sales, and can create an overall distrust in the program.

An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program, S.104 and H.222, would codify the Healthy Incentives Program and create a specific fund to combine money from public and private sources. This act would also task the Department of Agriculture with expanding the program to more local vendors to participate, boosting their consumer base and their sales. This bill supports local individuals, families, businesses, and the environment in a reliable way.

The Bill

S.104/H.222: An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program

Elevator Speech

Everyone deserves the support required to access the basic necessities for a healthy life. However, especially given the current high costs of living in Massachusetts, more and more families are struggling to make ends meet.

Healthy food, such as fruits and vegetables, is often one of the necessities on the chopping block when households work to make their money last as far as possible, given how far pantry staples can stretch in comparison to produce. Though this may be convenient, the lack of accessibility to a balanced diet can have severe consequences for a person's overall health and wellbeing. For example, diets heavy in quick carbohydrates and low in fruits and vegetables

can lead to fatigue and “brain fog”, which can hinder performance in work or school.

Helping families and individuals access crucial nutrients from fruits and vegetables through programs like the Healthy Incentives Program to support the purchase of healthy foods and grant a little extra money to SNAP recipients every month has considerably affected people’s food access. However, this program has had issues in the past with establishing consistent funding. Because it is currently funded entirely through the state budget, fluctuations in the budget can often lead to sudden, dramatic decreases in the amount of reimbursement that a SNAP client is given through HIP.

It is crucial to ensure the people who depend on it receive the benefits reliably, which will help to guarantee that families can accurately budget out their groceries month to month without any sudden changes in their finances. Assisting *An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program* through committee, and voting favorably on it in the future, would be instrumental in helping combat food insecurity and supporting the families across the state that haven’t had access to the resources they need to succeed.

Op-Ed

Sophia Davidson

Whether choosing to pass on a new pair of jeans even though old ones are wearing thin, choosing to take on extra shifts, work overtime, or miss the concert of a favorite artist, everyone has to make decisions on how to make their money stretch. For many, these moments have become more frequent as the economy looks more and more unstable. While for many families, this may only mean skipping out on vacation for a year, for others, it means skipping meals. No kid deserves to go hungry. Too many do.

SNAP benefits, a federal program that gives money to families in need for the sake of purchasing food, do help reduce food insecurity. However, many families receiving these benefits still struggle, and have to budget their money tightly. It is nearly impossible to purchase a filling, balanced diet on the available benefits.

This means tough choices: should parents ensure their children eat the recommended servings of fruits and vegetables, or even as many servings as possible, every

Storybook

Bill HD. 2197/SD 829: *An Act Relative to an Agricultural Healthy Incentives Program*



“An increase in the scope of SNAP benefits have been shown to correlate with a decrease in Medicaid hospitalizations, which reduces costs for the state. HIP’s reimbursements allow for more SNAP benefits overall.” - A researcher at Brandeis University

“Access to a diverse, nutritious diet has tangible benefits. For example, simple carbs are often the most inexpensive food source, but students who eat mostly carbs without fruits, vegetables, or protein are more prone to spikes and crashes of energy. This leads to brain fog, which can negatively impact their performance in school” - Cathy Carlson, Brandeis Food Pantry



“Local crops can offer people much better taste, freshness, and quality... programs like SNAP and HIP are highly beneficial to the consumers. It makes our produce accessible to a wide, wide range of people”- Marsha Nourse, Nourse Farm

HIP : Facts to Know

-----The Program :-----

The Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) has worked to combat food insecurity since 2017. With almost a third of Massachusetts households experiencing food insecurity, fruits and vegetables being particularly inaccessible, and the current worries over the economy and the future of federal governmental aid, supporting HIP is more necessary now than ever.

HIP provides SNAP reimbursements up to a cap when used to purchase fruits and vegetables from participating vendors.

SNAP benefits are often insufficient for families to afford healthy food, so HIP is essential in supporting people’s access to a nutritious diet.

HIP also supports local agriculture by connecting farmers with more customers.

-----The Problem :-----

Despite the importance of HIP, the funding has been irregular and insufficient. The program has been frozen multiple times over the years it has been running, leaving people suddenly without access to fruits and vegetables. This inconsistency is particularly harmful for the low income people HIP serves. Travelling all the way to a registered vendor, expecting to be able to purchase produce, but finding out on location that HIP has run out of funding for the month, wastes time, money, and effort, for people who are already struggling. Therefore, it is essential to find additional *reliable* sources of funding for the program and otherwise ensure that it can continue operations consistently throughout the entire year.

-----The Solution :-----

Passing bill HD.2197/SD.829 would:

Ensure the permanence of this essential program to continue to combat food insecurity

Create a specific fund to combine money from public and private sources, hopefully increasing the budget and helping to expand the program

Establish consistency in funding and incentives, necessary for allowing low income families to reliably get the food they need.

day? Or should they ensure their kids do not go to bed with their stomachs rumbling? It is much cheaper to buy pantry staples such as rice in bulk than to purchase fresh fruits or vegetables. Additionally, carbohydrates have many more calories per pound than other foods. This is why they are typically considered unhealthy, but when struggling to afford enough food, every calorie is another speck of energy to get through the day. However, carbohydrates also lack many of the essential nutrients for life. Supplements and vitamins cost money. So do doctors visits. What starts as an unaffordable few dollars to purchase vegetables escalates into a few hundred dollars in medical care.

It is financially efficient and effective to intervene early, providing more money to support families' ability to access the nutritious food they need. Fortunately, in Massachusetts there is a program to do just that. The Healthy Incentives Program, or HIP, provides one-to-one reimbursement on purchases of fruits and vegetables made with SNAP benefits, up to a monthly cap. This is a program that originated in Massachusetts after a pilot, and has spread to other states since.

HIP demonstrates the commonwealth's commitment to care for all members of its communities, one of the ways in which Massachusetts is an inspiration to the rest of the country. Despite that, due to the current federal situation and uncertain funding at the state level, this program is under threat.

HIP has been historically run via the state budget, which means the state has no obligation to continue the program, as it is not established into law. In past years, the program has struggled to receive adequate funding, culminating in a reduction of the monthly cap to a measly 20 dollars this past December. Twenty dollars is a notable amount – anything helps – but is a far cry from the previous 40 to 80 dollars allocated to families depending on the household size.

Ideally, the program could receive more funding and be restored to its former value. However, this can not happen if the program does not get the chance to continue at all. While HIP is a successful and popular program, given the current struggle to adjust to the new budget concerns based on federal changes, it is quite possible that HIP may not be funded in the coming years. There is no law obligating lawmakers to ensure the program continues.

If it does not continue, that would mean thousands of families across the commonwealth suddenly losing out on the money they need to access healthy food, on top of likely cuts to the SNAP budget from the federal level. This is a drastic threat to the health and safety of our community members.

In this time of economic uncertainty and political fears, it is essential that we band together to protect each other. That means supporting those in need, which can be done with steps as simple as calling your legislator and letting them know how important bill S.104, *An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program*, is for our communities.

This bill is essential for people facing economic hardships. For local agricultural business owners who rely on community members using HIP money to purchase produce to keep their business in the green. For kids who are hungry and need access to nutritious food to grow up strong. For these kids who will be our future.

Divya Nandan

It's a pretty universal experience these days: you realize you're running a bit low on your groceries for the week, so you stop in to the store on your way back from work or on a weekend just to grab a couple things. You might have five or six items in your cart – it's not like you're hosting a nine-course holiday dinner for your entire extended family; you're just trying to feed yourself... and somehow your total is \$78.42.

With the price of basic groceries like produce, dairy, and in particular, eggs, having skyrocketed recently, it's getting harder and harder to try and follow a balanced diet, especially when the PopTarts are only \$2.49 a box. Considering this, it's no wonder that low-income families and individuals who are reliant on SNAP benefits struggle to incorporate fruits and vegetables into their weekly meal plans.

The state has introduced the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP) to try to address this by providing dollar-for-dollar reimbursements on SNAP benefits when they are used to purchase local produce, helping SNAP clients diversify their diets and save on other grocery costs, and increasing the customer base for local farmers in the process.

It's proven to be an effective program when it works correctly, having reimbursed purchases of over \$81 million in local produce, but it's currently entirely funded through the state budget, which fluctuates. If HIP is given enough funding to support reimbursements up to \$80 for one month, they may only have enough the following month to reimburse up to \$20 – which is hardly enough for a single grocery trip for one individual, let alone produce for a month for a family of four.

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Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Donahue,

My name is Divya Nandan, and I am currently in my junior year at Brandeis University. My classmate, Sophia Davidson, and I have been researching and advocating for bill S.104/H.222, *An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program*. Both versions of this bill have been referred to the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities, of which you are a member.

As a member of this committee, I am sure you can recognize the importance of ensuring that every individual in the Commonwealth, especially the most vulnerable, deserves every opportunity to improve their circumstances.

This relates to the Healthy Incentives Program (HIP), which provides dollar-for-dollar reimbursement on SNAP benefits when they are used to purchase local produce, supporting both healthy eating for SNAP clients as well as local agricultural businesses.

Food insecure individuals and families often do not have access to enough produce to support healthy eating habits, as they are typically more expensive and perishable than pantry staples. However, a diet that is lacking in fruits and vegetables has been shown to hold serious consequences for both mental and physical health. For example, students suffering insufficient nutrition often experience “brain fog”, or a feeling of lethargy and reduced concentration that can negatively impact school performance.

Food insecurity is a persisting problem within the district; according to the Westborough Food Pantry, over 450 individuals rely on the food pantry for their weekly groceries.

Though this is an existing program, its current funding, which comes from the state budget, is subject to dramatic decreases with any updates to the budget. Most recently, HIP’s monthly cap went from \$80 a month in reimbursement to just \$20 per month. This reduction may undermine trust in the program and limit its ability to support local vendors.

The fund, which according to the bill would be established and managed by the Department of Transitional Assistance, would create more stability in HIP’s funding, as well as working towards expanding its vendor participation. As a part of our research, we spoke with Marsha Nourse of Nourse Farm in Westborough, who told us that Nourse Farm has not been able to participate in HIP due to the limits on the number of vendors the program can take with its current funding, but emphasized that such programs are beneficial to local farms by broadening their customer base, and noted the environmental benefits of supporting local produce, as it reduces shipping emissions and packaging waste.

Although initial funding from the state will be required, the investment is worthwhile. Local agriculture generates \$600 million annually for the state, and this number will continue to rise as farm sales increase. According to the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative, every dollar spent through HIP represents a \$2 return to the local economy. Additionally, a Brandeis University researcher found that increasing SNAP benefits could reduce Medicaid costs, suggesting that investing in HIP could result in long-term savings for the state.

Given the social and economic benefits to this bill, it is our hope that you will advocate for it within the Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities. Your support would be crucial in getting this bill passed, which will then be instrumental in supporting local individuals, families, businesses, and the environment.

Best Regards,

Divya Nandan and Sophia Davidson

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This is why the legislature has introduced bill H.222/S.104, *An Act relative to an agricultural healthy incentives program*, which would codify HIP into law and set up a Healthy Incentives Fund to stabilize the monthly reimbursements the program can provide. This fund would be established and managed by the Department of Transitional Assistance and supplemented by federal and state grants, as well as private donations. The act would also task the Department of Agriculture with expanding the program to more local vendors to participate, boosting their consumer base and their sales. Furthermore, an increased market for local produce as opposed to imported would be way more environmentally friendly, saving on emissions from transportation and materials from packaging.

This Act would be an expense, and critics are concerned that it would be one that the state could not afford. However, this bill is well worth the investment. Local agriculture brings in about \$600 million to the state annually, but farmers have been losing land because of rising costs and declining sales. Investing in local farms and agricultural businesses through this act will help increase sales, allowing local farmers to maintain and expand their businesses.

Current studies by the Massachusetts Food System Collaborative suggest that every \$1 spent on HIP represents a \$2 investment into local agriculture, meaning that at some point, this fund will end up paying for itself. Additionally, research done at Brandeis University suggests that as SNAP benefits go up, healthcare costs go down. Supplementing SNAP through HIP could lead to savings on healthcare, especially considering the established health benefits of a balanced diet. Those savings may free up some room for the state to place its financial support into other things, like dealing with whatever's causing the eggs to be \$7 a dozen.

This bill is a win-win-win situation for businesses, constituents, and the state. Supporting the local economy and food-insecure households with one piece of legislation would be hugely beneficial to everyone in the commonwealth.

If you want to support social programs, businesses, or public health, *An Act relative to a healthy incentives program* could be the way to go. Call your representatives and advocate for this bill to be passed, because nobody should have to take out a mortgage to make a salad.

Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Sophia Davidson

Meeting with Olivia, an Aide to Senator Robyn Kennedy

Olivia was very kind, and this was one of the most productive meetings. Sen. Kennedy is the senate chair of the committee our bill is in, and has supported the bill in the past. This meant that her aide knew the basics of the bill from past years, so the conversation was easy, but also there was space for real impact, as hearings were soon to be scheduled.

Olivia informed us that it was likely the reason Sen. Kennedy hadn't cosponsored the bill was because it would be before her committee, and agreed to talk to her about prioritizing HIP. We also had the chance to speak to her about why this bill would be helpful now in particular, and how the fund established by H.222/S.104 would help alleviate the funding issues the program faces – which was one of her concerns with pushing this bill at this particular time, given that federal funding is uncertain and the state budget is tight.

Positioning this bill as a way to relieve money issues from the program rather than a bill that would create more definitely seemed to create an impact – and made me reflect back on [a previous meeting with a legislator]. If I had said something similar then, would it have changed their minds? I am not certain.... Regardless, I wish I could go back in time to try.

On a Letter-Writing Event Run by Brandeis Democrats

We each made presentations and passed around notecards and everyone wrote a miniature letter based on each presentation to send out to targeted legislators.

...The idea that advocacy requires 100% effort is part of the reason it has been so hard for me to participate: I never feel like anything I have done is enough to matter. I can't be certain any of the letters I wrote in support of other people's bills mattered. I can't be certain anything they wrote in support of my bill mattered either. I can't be certain that the little presentation slide I wrote to give people a summary of the bill was helpful. But I did it. That feels good.

It was weird to think about how people were writing for things that were not their personal top issue. It really clarified the power of advocacy for me: it isn't only convincing people, it is bringing subjects to their attention. There are so many bills per legislative session that even legislators struggle to know what's on the docket, let alone regular people with 9 to 5 jobs taking up a lot of their time.

After this, I tried just bringing up SNAP and HIP to

more people in conversations around campus, and found that often people were really supportive of the bill, but rarely knew what HIP was beforehand.

While I doubt that has made any notable difference, as I'm sure people aren't immediately turning to go call their legislators or anything, it still feels good at least. Maybe if there is a related event in the future, they will remember and offer some support.

Divya Nandan

On Attending Agriculture Day

During our State House visit on March 18th, my teammate and I spent a lot of time at an event that was going on in the State House that was relevant to our bill. This event was for local agriculture in the state, which was a good opportunity to talk to some of the people that this bill directly impacted.

We were able to gain a lot of insight into how this bill may impact local farmers and businesses, which was information that we can use while advocating in the future. We also spoke to some people who didn't know a lot about this bill and were able to share the information we had, which seemed to broaden the amount of supporters that the bill had. We handed out our storybook flyers to several tables at the event and had several people saying that they would look into advocating for it to their legislators, which I consider to be a major success.

However, I would have liked to get into direct contact with some of the people we met there and go more in depth with what this bill could mean for them, since that can ensure participation in this bill rather than just open a possibility for it.

On Meeting with the Office of Representative O'Day

We were interested in this meeting because [Representative James O'Day] is on the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities. ... [Alexis Vaillancourt, the Representative's Chief of Staff] was very attentive and receptive to our pitch; she mentioned that the Representative had been a supporter of the bill in the past and would continue to look out for it as it was presented in and left the Committee. She even mentioned that, while the Representative had yet to finalize his cosponsorships, she would notify him of our bill so that it could potentially be one for him to look into.

Overall, I felt that this meeting went very well. We had decently memorized all the most important parts of our script, made all the points we needed to make, and the staffer was largely supportive of our bill. She did not have

any caveats or rebuttals towards our presentation, and I also believe that the Representative's office in particular may have been extra supportive due to their involvement in our class's first State House visit earlier in the semester.

However, following that meeting, the major area that I thought we could have improved upon was ironing out exactly who was going to say what and when before the meeting. Specifically, even though we both knew what had to be said, I opened with the introduction to our pitch and then stopped to allow my teammate to add on, but we hadn't discussed what exactly she was going to say, so I think deciding on an order beforehand would have helped our pitch to flow better.

After the meeting, we made sure to follow up with a thank you note and reiterated that we firmly believe in the benefits of this piece of legislation. Although we did not receive a response to the thank you note, I still believe that we made an overall positive impression on the office and made good points towards our bill.

Next Steps

Currently, our bill remains in committee. No hearings beyond the initial informational hearing have occurred in the Joint Committee on Families, Children, and Persons with Disabilities. While legislators responded positively to the idea of prioritizing this bill when it comes time to have hearings, whether or not they will follow through with that remains to be seen.

This suggests one initial step for continuing our advocacy could be to email or otherwise reach out again to check in about ensuring that S.104/H.222 gets scheduled for as early of a hearing as possible. Additionally, keeping up with when the hearings will be, and potentially attending, will allow us to understand where to target future advocacy efforts.

Historically, this bill has been able to pass through the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities, but has ended up stuck in the Committee on Agriculture, Committee on Health Care Financing, or Committee on Ways and Means.

If the bill progresses through the first committee, it would be important to take time to speak with members of the Committee on Ways and Means. Speaking with the legislators or their aides would allow us to better understand why this bill has struggled to pass before, and any concerns they may have about it that we could assuage or consider how to address.

Getting back in contact with an advocacy organization like Project Bread to talk about what their current approach

is would be helpful. We heard in many conversations with legislators that they had received information from others about HIP, so being better informed about what was being said and what main points other advocates were trying to make would have been useful in creating stronger talking points. Similarly, reading through other opinion pieces has been helpful in better understanding how to sell the bill.

Despite this, the questions about our bill remain the same. We have spent the semester searching for evidence of pushback against the bill, and for financial information about the program, and found little certainty in both areas. The main issue seems to be cost, however, we have not had the opportunity to hear any explanations of why this program would not be worth the money. There is almost no opposition posted about the bill online. This is one of the reasons why speaking with the Ways and Means Committee would be an essential part of future advocacy plans. Better understanding their thought process enables better persuasion.

The situation of this bill should not be complicated. Current budget strain and federal program uncertainty both make passing it more difficult, however, ultimately the question remains one of funding. Even if SNAP eligibility

was severely reduced, HIP would not be hard to maintain if the state allocated it proper funding. The issue is money – and money worries are a difficult barrier to overcome.

However, this means that the battle is relatively straightforward: convince legislators that this program is not only good, but essential, financially feasible, life-saving, and importantly, heroic.

Update

As of July 9, 2025, the bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities and both the House and Senate concurred.

For more information

View the bill (Massachusetts legislature website):

S.104: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/S104

H.222: malegislature.gov/Bills/194/H222

Organization or Coalition support:

Project Bread: projectbread.org



Teaching Democracy Through the State Legislative Process

The mission of ENACT: The Abraham Feinberg 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.

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

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: traveling to their state capital, meeting with legislators, strategizing with community 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.

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.

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

The ENACT course taught me to not be afraid of taking a risk and stepping out of my comfort zone. **ENACT transformed my perspective on civic engagement both at a local and state level.** I gained valuable skills that opened doors for me to talk with public officials, work on local campaigns, and intern for a state legislator."



– Tomas Cruz Villalvazo, University of Utah class of 2025, 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.



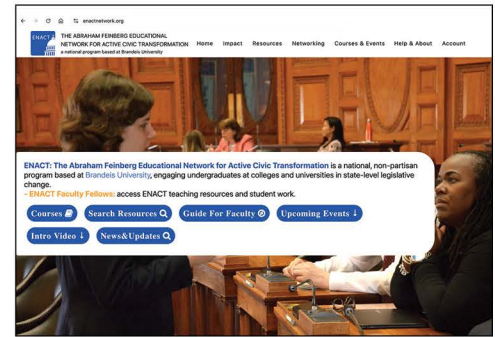
– Prof. Victor Eno, ENACT Faculty Fellow, Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, Florida

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, former ENACT Student Delegate Mentor

Connect with ENACT



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