



Advocacy for Policy Change

*Brandeis students work to reform
Massachusetts law*

June 2023



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR
ETHICS, JUSTICE AND PUBLIC LIFE
Brandeis University

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*Norbert Weissberg and Judith Schneider
at "Present and Defend: Projects from
Advocacy for Policy Change,"
April 2011.*

For more information about the projects in this report,
visit www.enactnetwork.org

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

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Introduction

Melissa Stimell



In the spring semester of the 2009-10 academic year, I embarked on an experiment with 13 dedicated Brandeis University undergraduate students and the logistical, financial and intellectual support of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life, and the Legal Studies Program at Brandeis University. Together we created “Advocacy for Policy Change.”

This course combines an investigation of the ethical dilemmas that arise in the process of lawmaking with hands-on advocacy work at the state level. Students are encouraged to think deeply about the complexities of shaping laws for constituents who hold diverse viewpoints about what is right and good for society and how best to progress through the legislative process. Students choose existing laws they feel could be credibly challenged on ethical or moral grounds, and advocate for state legislative change.

“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 2023, we anointed 23 citizen advocates for such issues as food insecurity, homelessness, gun control, healthcare access, juvenile justice, and immigrant rights.

Working in teams, the students research their chosen issues and design and implement models of legislative advocacy. State legislators and advocacy organizations advise each team to help them understand the lawmaking process, connect with colleagues, and set realistic goals. Each student completes a series of assignments related to the project, in formats relevant to advocacy work, such as an “elevator speech,” an op-ed, and a short video. (The full list of assignments is on page six.) 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, now Director Emeritus of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life, took the kernel of a unique idea and made it a reality. Ethics Center Board member and former Massachusetts State Representative Jay Kaufman ’68, MA ’73 helped me to create a course worthy of Brandeis University. Massachusetts State Senator Becca Rausch ’01 and her staff have been invaluable: hosting us at the State House, speaking to the class, and making introductions to her fellow legislators. An exceptional list of teaching assistants ensures that the course runs smoothly each year. This year’s TAs, Kaitie Chakoian and Jamie Morgan, were indispensable.

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

Students in ENACT courses, like those in “Advocacy for Policy Change,” learn how to work with state legislators, legislative staff members, and community organizations to advance policy. With Assistant Director of ENACT, David Weinstein, we have developed a robust national network of faculty, students and alumni that includes an online platform for resource sharing and collaboration. 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 these courses and in their careers.

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

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

Melissa Stimell

Director, ENACT: The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation

Professor of the Practice in Legal Studies

Chair, Social Justice and Social Policy Program

A Message from ENACT Distinguished Legislative Mentor Jay Kaufman, '68, MA '73



*Representative Kaufman visiting
"Advocacy for Policy Change"
in 2014.*

As the United States faces 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.

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

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

Jay Kaufman is a member of the International Advisory Board of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life. He is an essayist, writing about public life, leadership, and leading a good life 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.

A Message from David Weinstein



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

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

In the 2022-23 academic year both ENACT Student Delegates, Elaina Pevide '20 and Tyler Carruth '23, visited ENACT courses across the United States via Zoom and “Advocacy for Policy Change” at their alma mater in person. They had lively conversations with students about networking opportunities, career paths in policy and government, and the resources accessible to ENACT students on enactnetwork.org.

Elaina and Tyler also hosted an ENACT Alumni Networking Night, an annual online event. Alumni panelists share advice with ENACT students on course work, post-graduation plans, and connections for future work.

Elaina, herself serving as Special Projects & Media Coordinator for the City of Fall River, Mass., moderated this year’s discussion. ENACT alumni guests included Kate Alexander, Brandeis '12, Policy and Campaigns Officer at MADRE and Board Chair of Peace Action Fund of New York State; Myeisha Boyd, University of Hartford, Connecticut '17 Senior Analyst, Goldman Sachs; Zosia Busé, Brandeis '20 J.D. Candidate, University of New Hampshire School of Law; and Erin Chambers Brandeis '20, Digital Account Executive at communications firm BerlinRosen.



ENACT Student Delegates Tyler Carruth '23 (left) and Elaina Pevide '20 visit “Advocacy for Policy Change” in February 2023.

In the 2023-24 academic year, Elaina will continue to serve ENACT as the ENACT Student Delegate Mentor, guiding the two newest Student Delegates, whose work you can find in this anthology: Lucca Raabe '23 and Vishni Samaraweera '23. I am excited to work with them as they follow in the footsteps of Elaina, Tyler, and the many other former ENACT Student Delegates!

David Weinstein
Assistant Director
ENACT: The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation

More about the ENACT Student Delegates:
brandeis.edu/ethics/enact/people/studentdelegates

Required Project Components

The reports in this volume are excerpted from the material required of each student team in “Advocacy for Policy Change” (Legal Studies 161b) in Spring 2023. The assignments were designed to develop and demonstrate the students’ understanding of the issues and the advocacy process.

Storybook

One of the most crucial components of the advocacy process is the sharing of personal stories. For this assignment, students were directed to connect with individuals impacted by their issues and collect and recount their stories.

Research Report

The legislative research report is an in-depth analysis containing facts and figures of the bill that a legislator or staffer can reference during the legislative process.

Elevator Speech

A prepared advocate should be able to give someone a general idea of the issue and a plan of action within about 30 seconds – the time it takes to ride an elevator. Students were instructed to imagine riding an elevator or walking a hallway at the State House with a legislator or aide.

Letter to the Legislator

Ten handwritten (or typed) letters to a legislator have more impact on him or her than 100 emails. The main purposes of this letter to the legislator are to convey that constituents are watching his or her actions on an issue, and to recommend a legislative course of action.

Script for an In-Depth Meeting with House Ways and Means Staff

All bills pass through the House Ways and Means Committee for an analysis of their impact on the state budget. For this assignment, students were to write up an accessible and personalized speech to be given in a 5-10 minute meeting with the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee.

Campaign Journal

The campaign journal was an opportunity for students to reflect upon at least two substantive meetings with coalition organizations or policymakers.

Op-Ed

The op-ed section of *The Boston Globe* presents a wide array of opinions from community members. Students wrote their own op-ed pieces, sharing their opinions on their advocacy issues in 750 words or less.

Advocacy Video

Using either original footage or existing YouTube films, students created “media mash-ups” to present their issues through video.

Next Steps

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

Final Oral Presentation: “Present and Defend”

Bringing everything together, on April 25, 2023, students gave brief oral presentations of their legislative advocacy projects and responded to questions from audience members.

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

Amanda Lanciault '23

Vishni Samaraweera '23



Amanda Lanciault (left) and Vishni Samaraweera

H.534/S.1381, An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products, seeks to diminish the effects of period poverty. The I AM Bill would increase access to disposable menstrual

products across the states' schools, homeless shelters, and prisons. The bill intentionally uses inclusive language such as "menstruators" and ensures that the products will be distributed in a manner to eliminate stigma for those who use these products. The legislation hopes to equate period products with any other hygienic product offered in public settings, such as toilet paper or soap, and to destigmatize menstruation itself and open the door to further menstrual equity legislation in the future. While environmental and cost concerns have been raised from opponents, the legislation has historically popular support in the Massachusetts legislature and current representatives are optimistic that the 193rd Session will be the one to pass the I AM Bill.

■ The Bill

H.534/S.1381: An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products

■ Elevator Speech

Good morning and thank you for your time. Our names are Vishni Samaraweera and Amanda Lanciault, and we are two Massachusetts voters and advocates who would like to speak with you about H.534/S.1381, or the I AM Bill, which aims to increase access to disposable menstrual products to menstruators across the state's schools, homeless shelters, and prisons. As menstruators and public health students, we believe that it is unacceptable that menstrual products are not offered equally to all citizens of Massachusetts.

Every day in our community, menstruators are forced to choose between necessary healthcare products and other essential items like food, housing, and clothes. Menstruation is a normal bodily function that many Massachusetts residents face, but period products are not treated as an essential item such as toilet paper or soap.

In 2019, I [Vishni] collaborated with students and town meeting members who are menstruators in my hometown of Brookline to pass legislation mandating period products be provided in the bathrooms of all K-12 public schools and public buildings in town. Current students say that this legislation has made them feel less ashamed about menstruation and at ease when they get their period.

The average menstruator spends between \$150-\$500 a year and uses between three to six menstrual products a day. However, Brookline's legislation demonstrates that with just an annual cost of \$2.95 a year per menstruator, this legislation will have a marginal cost to districts with immense benefits to the community. No one should have to go without products they need – but currently, the State of Massachusetts forces menstruators to make this decision over and over.

We encourage Massachusetts legislators to hold a hearing for the I AM Bill and allow menstruators to have equitable access to this fundamental health necessity.

End Period Poverty in MA. Support the I AM Bill!

Increase Access to Disposable Menstrual Products in Prisons, Homeless Shelters and Public Schools: H.534/S.1381, or the I AM bill, provides access to free menstrual products!

The Problem

- 56% of school nurses report students **miss class** because they don't have menstrual products.
- Over **9k** people who menstruate **experienced homelessness** in MA last year.
- MA is one of **26 states** that does not provide free menstrual products in prison.



Here's What MA Voters Had to Say:



"Having that **easy, reliable access**—knowing where something was, being able to get it for free, having quality period products...can definitely **save people who menstruate a lot of anxiety and stress** while they're trying to learn."

-Esther, 21, a menstruating person who attended Massachusetts Public Schools K-12.

"Menstruators who are already going through difficult situations and shouldn't have to go through even more **hurdles to receive basic care**...When everyone can have their **basic minimum needs** met, they can do a lot w their lives and situations. **Nobody deserves to be living in shame**".

-Grace Lasila, (pictured on the right), Advocacy Chair of Period Activists at 'Deis (PAD)



What We Know

- Non-menstruating people go into a bathroom expecting their **basic bodily needs** will be met (toilet, toilet paper, soap, water etc.) – this is not the case for people who are menstruating.
- Both reported that period products in school would have **improved their education and reduced shame around menstruation**.



How Can I Help?

See who has signed ActionWork's petition to pass the I AM Bill.



Schedule a hearing for the I AM Bill this legislative session.

Join the MA Menstrual Equity Coalition.



■ Op-Ed

Amanda Lanciault

How Massachusetts' Period Product Bill Hopes to Promote Equity and Reduce Stigma Around Menstruation

In March of 2023, during a time of extreme housing insecurity, increasingly unreasonable food costs, and a climate crisis, the Florida legislature chose to push forward in their legislature one particular bill banning students from discussing menstrual cycles. This proposed legislation (HB 1069) would ban educators in elementary schools from teaching about periods and students from discussing it with their teachers. The bill has moved out of committee, and in an increasingly conservative state legislature, has a chance of becoming law.

Florida, amongst other states, displays that, while we have come far, period stigma is alive and well in the United States. This stigma prevents individuals from discussing a normal, regular body function that millions of Americans face. Stigma is a huge issue facing menstruators, and due to this, inequality in access to these products arises, commonly known as period poverty. Period poverty is defined as the struggle or inability for a menstruator to obtain period products. Often, this can cause individuals to use methods of managing menstruation that are not hygienic or are medically dangerous to the individual. While all menstruators have periods, not all have access to products to manage them.

According to a 2019 survey by the Massachusetts chapter of the National Organization for Women, more than half of school nurses said they assisted students who missed class so they could obtain menstrual products. The average menstruator spends between \$150-\$500 a year and uses between three to six menstrual products a day. This can be an unreasonable expense for communities, such as those experiencing homelessness or the incarcerated, that rely on fixed incomes or donations from others to manage their periods.

To combat the rising prevalence of period poverty, other states have implemented their own legislation to normalize periods and offer free menstrual products in public spaces. In 2018, New York passed legislation requiring free menstrual products be available in all middle and high schools across the state. While the state led the charge in providing period products for one of the most prevalently vulnerable populations, they have lagged behind in recent years in extending this right to other communities such as the incarcerated and homeless. This legislative session, Massachusetts has put forward the I AM Bill, which would

offer free menstrual products for menstruators. When someone uses the restroom, they have the reasonable expectation that toilet paper will be waiting for them. However, for those who menstruate, they have been left to fend for themselves.

No one should be ashamed to menstruate in public. Legislation such as Massachusetts's I AM Bill could not only provide access to thousands in the Commonwealth, but could move the needle of public perceptions of periods, taking us from Florida's situation to a world where periods are seen as just as normal as any other bodily function.

Vishni Samaraweera

"Ewww, what's all over your butt?" My best friend Sarah quickly looked over her shoulder as she and I were filing out of our school's auditorium in suburban Massachusetts. Her white pants were stained with a large red blob. Panicked and confused, she grabbed my hand and we left as a group of middle school boys cackled away. I went with Sarah to our favorite teacher Ms. McAllen's classroom to ask her for advice. Once we arrived, Ms. McAllen quickly noticed Sarah's pants and distraught expression. She came over and comfortingly explained to Sarah that she likely just got her period and that nothing was wrong. Ms. McAllen reached inside her desk for pads and explained how to wear them and then she told Sarah to go to the nurse's office for a change of pants.

If Sarah didn't have a connection with another teacher like Ms. McAllen or a nurse, she likely would have had to go to the bathroom and use a wad of toilet paper as a make-do pad. For the next couple of hours, Sarah would have had to sit through classes fearful of bleeding out while feeling incredibly uncomfortable. If menstrual products were available in Sarah's public school bathrooms, she would have had an accessible and private option for menstrual hygiene. Over 56% of school nurses in Massachusetts report that the inability to access menstrual products has caused students to miss out on class time to seek products.

Not only are there advantages to having accessible products in the school bathrooms, but it also provides students whose families are undergoing financial burdens relief with regard to products. The average menstruator uses between three to six pads or tampons every day and spends up to \$50 a month. This expense for a normal bodily process is excessive. Sixty state laws have been enacted across 26 states that have passed menstrual product access legislation across the United States – and Massachusetts is not one of those states.

Massachusetts has a chance to act by passing the I AM Bill (S.1381/H.534) which will mandate free menstrual

products in all public schools, homeless shelters, and prisons. When we go into a bathroom, we expect there to be products that we can use to take care of our bodies: toilet paper, soap, paper towels, etc. As menstruators, our bodily needs should still be met with products that we need, like pads or tampons. At the low cost of around \$2.95 per menstruator, we can end period inequity in public schools, homeless shelters, and prisons.

The I AM Bill is a step forward in changing the narrative around period stigma which is currently being threatened nationwide. While Massachusetts currently has no statewide legislation, states like Florida are attempting to pass legislation putting menstrual equity even further out of reach. Republican-backed legislation in Florida aims to ban teachers from talking to students under the state-sanctioned age of menstruation about periods. When Sarah bled through her pants in our school auditorium, we were in the fifth grade. She was eleven years old. If this legislation passed, and we were in Florida, Sarah and I would not have been able to seek the help of our teacher Ms. McAllen legally.

Massachusetts is supposed to be a pioneer in equity and healthcare rights but has failed to pass menstrual equity legislation for several sessions. Incarcerated menstruators suffer from prisons using menstrual products as bargaining chips against them, often leaving no choice but to use unhygienic alternatives. Meanwhile, homeless shelters report that menstrual products are the least donated item that they receive.

With restricted access to menstrual products in prisons and a post-pandemic rise in homelessness in the state, the passage of the I AM Bill is no longer a subject that can be pushed to the next legislative session. Menstruators in Massachusetts deserve accessibility to menstrual products as it is a matter of healthcare dignity with respect to a natural bodily process.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Feeney,

My name is Amanda Lanciault. I am a public health scholar, a member of your district, and a menstruator. My partner, Vishni Samaraweera, and I believe that period poverty is a health equity issue, and I urge you to call a speedy hearing concerning S.1381/H.534, or the I AM Bill, to provide free menstrual products to Massachusetts public schools, homeless shelters, and prisons.

No one should have to choose between taking care of their bodies and other necessities such as food and shelter – but for many Massachusetts menstruators, this is a reality. Menstruation is a normal bodily function that many

Massachusetts residents face, but period products are not included as an essential item such as toilet paper or soap. The average menstruator spends between \$150-\$500 a year on products. For many, this is an unreasonable expense that can send them further into financial insecurity and poverty. In a time of increasing cost of living, The I AM Bill hopes to combat the rising crisis of period poverty by providing period products to some of the state's most vulnerable populations.

Vishni, a Brookline resident, worked with students of Brookline and residents to pass an act that would allow for menstrual products to be provided for free in all public schools and buildings in town. This process was empowering and helped menstruators like Vishni combat the ingrained stigma and shame we had. This pilot program only cost the district \$2.95 a year per menstruator in Brookline, and has shown great improvements in reducing shame around menstruation. Having this legislation at a state level for all schools, homeless shelters, and prisons will be monumental in moving reproductive legislation forward.

As one of your constituents, I know that you are passionate about healthcare equity and inclusivity within your district and beyond. As a member of the Joint Committee on Healthcare Financing, we would like to collaborate with you in ensuring that this bill will be enacted into law this legislative cycle. We urge you to become a champion of the I AM Bill and follow the leads of states such as New York in ensuring that a necessary piece of healthcare is available to all Massachusetts residents.

Sincerely,

Amanda Lanciault

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Vishni Samaraweera

On meeting with Representative Christine Barber

Prior to our first meeting at the State House, Amanda and I met with Representative Christine Barber, a co-sponsor of our bill, the I AM Bill. We met with Representative Barber over Zoom and discussed our meeting plans and hopes for what we could do for the bill and then asked her what information is relevant and how we can help.

After writing the financial section of the legislative report and further understanding the funding scheme of the bill, I wanted to ask Representative Barber some clarifying questions in regards to where money will come from. She explained to us that there will be a grant for providing homeless shelters with menstrual products. She said the grant will be set up so that qualifying shelters under the bill can apply for funds through the grant based on the

demographics of their shelter. This information was not accessible to the public and therefore incredibly helpful to know prior to our meetings at the State House.

In addition, Representative Barber told us that if there was anyone who had questions, doubts, or concerns, they should come to her because she would be happy to answer and address any of their issues.

I found it helpful that we were able to name-drop her and let other legislators know they could go to her just because she was a co-sponsor. This meeting taught me the significance of meeting with co-sponsors of a bill and establishing relationships with them to truly be able to help with the bill and let them know they have a resource if needed.

I thought that Amanda and I explained our personal connections and passion for the bill very clearly and Representative Barber appreciated our efforts. I think meeting on Zoom was a bit awkward at times and would have been better in person. In addition, I wish that I had asked who specifically we should have reached out to in the House if she had known since it had not passed in the House previously.

Amanda Lanciault

Meeting with Dave Swanson, Chief of Staff in the Office of Sen. Friedman

Our meeting with Dave Swanson at the Massachusetts State House on March 14th went swimmingly. He told us their office supported the I AM Bill, calling it a “no-brainer” and was optimistic that this session will be the one to see this bill through. I remember [him] taking notes on the funding scheme section that Rep. Barber pointed out in the previous meeting.

It was interesting to see how, despite their positions, these [legislators] and their peers are people and that it often can be effective to refer a [legislator] to [a bill's] sponsor to address concerns, however much they might appreciate advocacy from constituents or concerned parties.

In hindsight, I am not sure if we necessarily needed to visit this office, as the Senate passed the I AM Bill unanimously last session, but considering it was our first visit to the State House, I think a supportive ear was helpful for us to learn the flow of our pitch to legislators and feel more prepared for potentially more contentious conversations. Ultimately, the meeting was a positive yet expedient meeting where we were able to advocate for the bill without addressing any concerns on the part of the Senator's office.

■ Next Steps

As we leave this project, the I AM Bill's House version has been sent to the Education Committee and the Senate version to the Public Health Committee. Since this bill passed unanimously in the Senate last session, we are optimistic that this trend will continue, and would recommend that lobbying efforts be concentrated within the House, as it is going to a committee it never has before.

Our understanding from speaking with policymakers on either side of the aisle is that the legislature is generally optimistic about the I AM Bill's passage this legislative session. The Women's Caucus placing the I AM Bill as a legislative priority shows promising signs of this, showing that coalitions are ready to push this bill forward and not allow it to become victim to legislative inertia as it has in the past. We believe that this bill, due to its no-brainer, common sense response from legislators often makes it not as much of a priority as more emotionally charged issues. As COVID becomes more integrated into our day-to-day, we believe that the time is now to pass the I AM Bill.

In terms of our efforts, we are passing on resources to Period Activists at 'Deis (PAD) to potentially create an event inviting Waltham legislators to Brandeis to discuss the I AM Bill and also further promote PAD's efforts in providing free menstrual products in dorms across campus. While we were not able to organize this event this semester, we have put PAD's E-Board in touch with these legislators to hopefully create a dialogue that can lead to this event coming to fruition in the next academic year.

If passed, the I AM Bill will be the most comprehensive piece of menstrual equity legislation in the United States. While the bill highlights inclusivity and equity, the primary issue with the physical text of the bill is that it has no explicit funding scheme. The major points of opposition to this bill are in regard to the financing aspects. This will likely present problems when the bill is on the floor of the State House which can cause delays and debates which have repeatedly

occurred in past legislative sessions. While Representative Barber explained to us that there will be a public grant for homeless shelters to apply to, this is not public information. We felt privileged to know this and communicate this message to other legislators; however, this information needs to be disclosed to the public.

Moving forward, with the passage of the I AM Bill this legislative session, hopefully, it is essential that there is an oversight committee founded to ensure that the expectations of the bill are followed. While the text of the bill states that free menstrual products should be provided in all public schools, homeless shelters, and prisons, it is crucial that these institutions are held accountable and inspected for compliance. An oversight committee could be a part of the Department of Public Health as this is a public health issue. The Department of Public Health can also use its resources in collaboration with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, homeless shelters, and the state prison system to collect data on the impact of providing menstrual products in these spaces. Monitoring and evaluating the effects of this bill are critical for developing future improvements based on the needs of Massachusetts menstruators.

■ Update

As of June 26, 2023: There was a hearing for the bill in the Joint Committee on Public Health on June 6, 2023.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.1381: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S1381

H.264: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H534

Organization or Coalition support:

Mass NOW, the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization for Women: massnow.org

Increasing Homelessness Prevention Assistance

Rachel Judson '23

Ruby Siegel '23



Ruby Siegel and Rachel Judson (right)

H.1312/S.856, An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults, supports households most at risk of housing instability and homelessness. The goal of the bill is to provide early assistance for housing or utility crises, so families can avoid the trauma of having to leave their home. Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) is the primary homelessness prevention program in the state. This bill would ensure RAFT can continue to provide preventative support to residents most at risk of housing instability and homelessness, all with the goal to better promote upstream homelessness prevention.

■ The Bill

H.2354/S.2730: An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults.

■ Elevator Speech

Hi. My name is Ruby Siegel, and I am a student at Brandeis University advocating on behalf of Bill H.1312/S.856: An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults.

As a nation, our collective goal should be to ensure that everyone has safe, stable, and affordable housing. Unfortunately, however, this is not the current situation in Massachusetts.

In Massachusetts, there are roughly 18,000 homeless individuals on any given day. Black, Latinx, and other people of color are disproportionately impacted by housing instability. A 2021 study found that roughly 40 percent of Latino and Black households with children (who rent or have a mortgage) reported a lack of confidence they could make their next housing payment.

Compounding the issue of affordability is that MA is considered the third most expensive state in the nation, and we have a severe shortage of affordable housing. In fact, nearly 45 percent of renters across Boston pay 30 percent or more of their income on rent. It is simply not right that many households are struggling and are priced out of living in our state.

Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) is the primary homelessness prevention program in the state. This bill would ensure RAFT can continue to provide preventative support to residents most at risk of housing instability and homelessness. The bill also includes new provisions to streamline the application process, end administrative barriers, solidify the 10,000-maximum benefit, and track data to ensure funding is provided equitably, all with the goal to better promote upstream homelessness prevention.

This bill requires a strong champion. Your backing is vital to keeping people in their homes. I urge you to support this bill and to ask your fellow chairs on the Housing Committee to report favorably on the bill.

The Solution

This Bill would:

- Ensure earlier assistance to families and individuals facing a housing or utility crisis
- Preserve the RAFT program to help keep residents in stable housing
- Streamline RAFT to provide emergency funding before a crisis turns into an eviction
- Track program spending to ensure funds are equitably distributed



Upstream Solutions Breakdown Barriers to Assistance

"The moment we have the legal system involved, which is when you get the more formalized notices, it adds a huge stress level to the impact of households. It's starting to show up on their records which prevents future access to housing, and it's actually costly for the landlord because it costs money to get the courts involved."

Dr. Tatjana Meschede, expert on housing and homelessness



TAKE ACTION on Bill S.856/H.1312

- Bring the Upstream Prevention Assistance Bill to a hearing and vote favorably for the RAFT program.
- Ask your fellow chairs on the Housing Committee to report favorably on the Bill.

AN ACT TO PROVIDE UPSTREAM HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION ASSISTANCE TO FAMILIES, YOUTH, AND ADULTS

Bill S.856/H.1312

PROTECT RAFT

Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) is a homelessness prevention program that serves as the primary resource for individuals and families to avoid eviction and utility shut-off



- 1,805 households from the Greater Boston area received RAFT funding from June 2019 to July 2020
- RAFT helps low-income families most at risk of experiencing homelessness
- RAFT will expire without action

Massachusetts

3rd

Highest Housing Wage

\$37.97/hr

Required to afford a 2 bedroom rental home

107 hrs/wk

Hours of work needed at the minimum wage (to afford 2 bedroom rental home)

From National Low Income Housing Coalition

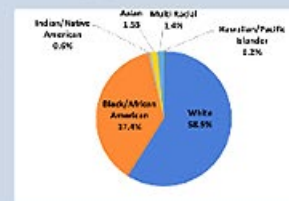
THE PROBLEM

- Protections for renters to ensure housing stability and avoid eviction can end at anytime unless RAFT is put into state statute
- In MA roughly 18,000 individuals experience homelessness on any given day, with people of color disproportionately affected
- Massachusetts renters pay more than 1.5 times the national median rate making the Commonwealth one of the most expensive places to live in the country

Who Does RAFT Support?

"Half of the people we serve at the Y2Y Harvard Square Shelter are from historically marginalized communities of color and 40% identify as LGBTQ - almost everyone at the shelter is an abuse victim"

-Employee at a Cambridge-based homeless shelter: Y2Y Harvard Square



RAFT Households by Race
July 2018 - Jun 2019

From the Regional Housing Network

FOR MORE INFORMATION: RACHEL JUDSON
AND RUBY SIEGEL

■ Op-Ed

Ruby Siegel

Protect Homelessness Prevention Assistance in Massachusetts

Work 87 hours per week and you can afford stable housing in Massachusetts. This number is no joke nor a typo. 87 work hours per week at minimum wage is the number of hours required to afford a 1-bedroom rental home in Massachusetts, a far cry from the 40 hour work week and an even greater leap for people unable to work.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is in a housing crisis. We are seeing increased housing costs, emergency shelters filled to capacity, and families forced to stay in motels. Our residents are active community members and taxpayers, yet they cannot afford to live in the state they call home. We must invest in proven policies and programs which provide stable housing to residents most at risk of housing instability and homelessness. Bill H.1312/S.856, An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults, solidifies and strengthens the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT). RAFT is a homelessness prevention program that serves as the primary resource for individuals and families to avoid eviction and utility shut-off. The program is a lifeline for low-income families most at risk of experiencing homelessness. The RAFT program, however, is not in state statute, meaning it is vulnerable to end at any moment. This bill calls for new provisions to put RAFT into state statute, streamline the application process, track data to ensure funding is provided equitably, and solidify the \$10,000 maximum benefit provided to RAFT recipients.

Homelessness prevention is especially pertinent in our state. Massachusetts is the third most expensive state to live in the nation. Compounding this issue, our Commonwealth suffers from a lack of affordable housing and holds the sixth largest gap between average renter wage and a two-bedroom housing wage. This means that many households, regardless of earning minimum wage or a higher salary, do not have the income required to afford rent in our state.

Solidifying RAFT is the right decision for the well-being of our residents, but it is also a commonsense solution to rising housing prices. RAFT acts as a cost saving measure. For every family placed in emergency assistance, it costs the Commonwealth \$46,000. Conversely, if a family received the maximum RAFT benefit of \$10,000, this is \$36,000 in savings for the state. For context, Governor Maura Healey recently released a \$55.5 billion dollar state budget plan, showing that the maximum RAFT benefit of \$10,000 is pennies to the Commonwealth.

The state can afford the RAFT program. It is simply a matter of choosing to act.

Let's keep more people in their homes and out of emergency situations by investing in preventive services. Contact your local representatives and ask them to support Bill H.1312/S.856, An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Thomas M. Stanley,

In Massachusetts, there are roughly 18,000 homeless individuals on any given day, with 12,000 people in families with children. Families should not be put on the street when there are proven and cost-effective programs to keep people housed. Government assistance during the Covid-19 pandemic provided an example of how it is possible to support our most vulnerable populations. Massachusetts is a leader in democratic principles, with a proven history of serving all constituents. We must continue the legacy by proudly showing that housing is a human right.

Bill H.1312/S.856, An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults, seeks to combat our homelessness issue by providing early assistance to households in a rental or utility crisis. This program serves our most vulnerable populations including the elderly, people with disabilities, families, children, and unaccompanied youth. Housing costs are one of the main factors driving homelessness. Massachusetts is considered the third most expensive state in the nation, with the issue further compounded by a severe shortage of affordable housing. This means that many households do not have the income required to afford rent in our state.

Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT), administered by the Department of Housing and Community Development, is the state's primary homelessness prevention program, serving residents most at risk of housing instability and homelessness. This lifesaving program, however, is not currently in state statute, allowing for the program to be cut at any time.

This bill is calling to enact RAFT into state statute, streamline the application process, end the notice to quit restriction, track data to ensure funding is provided equitably, and to solidify the 10,000-maximum benefit for RAFT recipients. Although the bill is asking for an increase in preventative funds, this program is a long-term cost saving measure.

In FY 2018, the state spent an average of \$46,000 for each household that entered the state's family shelter program, a substantial difference from the \$10,000

maximum benefit. This would represent at least an average savings of \$36,000 for each family that avoided homelessness through the RAFT program, in terms of shelter costs alone. Preventative assistance is a cost-effective solution.

I ask that you speak with the members of the Housing Committee and ask them to give the bill a favorable report. Please support Bill H.1312/S.856 by standing with Representative Decker, Senator Crighton, your fellow co-sponsors, and the families, youth, and individuals who are experiencing homelessness in Waltham, Lincoln, and across Massachusetts.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ruby Siegel

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Ruby Siegel

On meeting with Andrea Park, Director of Community Driven Advocacy at Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

After the Legislative Advocacy Day, I was able to connect with Andrea Park, Director of Community Driven Advocacy at Massachusetts Law Reform Institute. She started by providing some history on RAFT and discussed its current financial situation (Governor Healey proposing to drop the \$10,000 maximum benefit over a 12-month period to \$7,000 over a 24-month period in FY24 budget). She also provided useful context information. The reasoning behind such a change is that less money can serve more people. With the remaining time, I asked a couple of questions I had prepared.

First, I wanted to know if she knew how many people RAFT had served in total [in] this most recent fiscal year. Unfortunately, she said she did not and that to her knowledge RAFT was not required to compile this data. Her estimate is that RAFT serves 5,000 to 10,000 households a year, but of course that is just a guess. Of course, this lack of information was not her fault, but it was certainly frustrating to learn the Commonwealth does not track what seemed to me as basic data - the amount of people using the service.

Looking back, I wish I had led the meeting a bit more. At the beginning Ms. Park talked about the history of the bill and gave some new information, but this ended up being mostly information I already knew. By the time she was done talking I had less time available to ask my prepared questions. For what went well, I was able to

receive information on the bill I did not previously know, particularly in regard to finances and data collection.

On meeting with Representative Consalvo and Emily Carrara, Legislative Aide

I messaged Emily and was expecting to meet with just her, but Representative Consalvo was in the office, so we were able to meet with them both. I introduced [the] bill, but we didn't get into a ton of specifics because he already knew the program quite well. Our meeting was definitely more conversational than a pitch. Representative Consalvo [discussed] other bills and [gave] advice on the lobbying process. ... I could tell early on that Representative Consalvo was in favor of the RAFT program, so I figured it would be better to listen to what he [wanted to share] in the hopes he would then listen to what I wanted.

At the end I asked him for a speedy committee [hearing] and to ask his colleagues to support the bill. Representative Consalvo is not a co-sponsor, so I did ask if he [and] anyone on his team have any concerns about the bill and they do not. It sounds like they are strong supporters, but that he only likes to co-sign a certain number of bills per year. Representative Consalvo pointed us in the direction of Sheila A. Dillon, Chief of Housing, and Director of the Mayor's Office of Housing to get Mayor Wu's stance on the issue.

■ Next Steps

Bill H.1312/S.856, An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults is currently in the Joint Committee on Housing. Based on history of similar legislation and the support of RAFT among state legislatures, the bill should make it past the Housing Committee. A more contentious battle most likely awaits in the House Ways and Means Committee.

Governor Maura Healey recently released her Fiscal Year 2024 state budget proposal. Despite requests of \$250,000,000 for the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program, Healey allocated \$162,602,462 (Shupin, 2023). She also proposed decreasing the RAFT maximum benefit from \$10,000 over a 12-month period to \$7,000 over a 24-month period. These debates surrounding how much money RAFT is allocated will take place in the House Ways and Means Committee.

Massachusetts has shown a preference for funding shelters and Emergency Assistance (EA) instead of preventative services and affordable housing. RAFT may continue to receive money from the budget process rather than being put into a state statute.

Also, even with the strong support from legislators and housing organizations, there is no guarantee RAFT makes it through the House Ways and Means Committee. The RAFT program does not have strong opposition from any one group. In fact, its greatest opposition may be itself – a housing bill that costs money. Landlords are a prominent group that one might expect to oppose a government-supported housing program. For the most part, however, RAFT is supported by local landlords. The RAFT program actually makes sure landlords get paid, basically providing insurance for times when their tenants are struggling to afford rent or other costs. The money allocated to a household is sent directly to the landlord, not the renter, making this a relatively popular bill among this group.

While RAFT certainly has support from the majority of state legislators, it does face the challenge of getting lost in the large number of housing bills. Constituents, advocates, and organizations are constantly calling for attention to their bills. To get passed, RAFT requires a few strong supporters who will make sure the program does not get lost in the shuffle of the various housing programs and who understand the need for an allocation close to the requested amount.

During this semester, I did not have a chance to interact directly with people experiencing housing instability and homelessness, but I expect the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless and other housing organizations include such people in their advocacy work. People who have direct experiences in the struggles of affording rent and the trauma of losing their home are invaluable to getting this bill passed. There will be opportunities for people to testify at a hearing for this bill, which is a great time to hear from those most directly impacted. During our meeting with Representative Consalvo he also suggested Rachel and I testify in support of the bill. I will continue tracking the bill's movement through the State House and see if an in-person or video testimony is possible.

Assuming H.1312/S.856 does become law, there are a few implementation concerns. While this bill does utilize policy to streamline the application process, policy and implementation are not the same. First, the RAFT program faces questions regarding the application process. According

to RAFT application data from April 2020 to April 2021, 57 percent of applications were rejected (“Landlords Should”, 2021; Vickery, 2021). There are also reports of people being told their applications were filled out incorrectly and of delayed turnaround times to send out relief to tenants (Howard, 2020; Vickery, 2021; Betancourt, 2021; “Does Someone”, 2021, Rau, 2021). RAFT may also be more difficult to obtain for non-English speakers and for those whom English is a second language (Rau, 2021). Finally, many RAFT recipients do not receive the full \$10,000 maximum benefit. According to the Department of Housing and Community Development, the average amount per new household served in March 2023 was \$5,100 (DHCD, 2023).

Strengthening the RAFT program requires a strong support staff and detailed data collection, with a willingness to improve upon findings. RAFT requires a multilingual workforce who can assist people in understanding the process and in filling out an online application. The bill's new provision for data collection is also extremely important for the improvement of RAFT. This program must track who is receiving funding, how much funding, and why people are getting rejected. RAFT must continually work to ensure racial equity is built into its preventative rental assistance program, as the high rejection rate of 57% is disproportionality impacting Black and Latinx households. And last, an improved RAFT must make this program truly “upstream,” getting support to households before an emergency situation.

■ Update

As of June 26, 2023: There was a hearing for the bill in the Joint Committee on Housing on June 26, 2023.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.2730: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S2730

H.1312: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H1312

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless:
mmecoalition.com

Providing Access to Identification for the Homeless

Eveline Silva '23

Oona Wood '23



Oona Wood (left) and Eveline Silva

Bill H.3360/S.2251, also known as the “Everyone Needs ID Bill,” seeks to remedy the burdens of prohibitive fees and required documentation by waiving those requirements for those who are homeless. Furthermore, the bill would allow such an ID applicant to meet the proof of residency requirement by presenting documentation issued by service providers such as a homeless shelter.

■ The Bill

Bill H.3360/S.2251: An Act to provide identification to youth and adults experiencing homelessness

■ Elevator Speech

Good Morning,

Thank you for meeting with us today. Our names are Oona and Eveline. We are both students at Brandeis University. I grew up in a neighborhood where homelessness was common. Two years ago, my brother became homeless. He has lost his belongings many times, including his identification and this has affected him in many ways. One day, he overdosed and someone called 911 and when they arrived, they tried to ID him. Luckily, one of my cousins passed by and recognized my brother. He shared my brother’s information with medical personnel so that they could safely transport him to a hospital. Without an ID, people cannot access medical care and they are more likely to have negative or even violent interactions with law enforcement. They are unable to access state support, including housing assistance. Obtaining a state identification card is a critical first step for youth and adults experiencing homelessness to access opportunities.

In Massachusetts, over 20,000 people are currently experiencing homelessness and have trouble affording the \$25 RMV fee for IDs or having documents that prove they live in our communities. Currently, the process of acquiring an ID is the same for everyone. This bill makes identification accessible to everyone with two small changes. The bills waives ID fees and allows service providers to confirm individuals’ presence within their establishment. My brother’s story is only one example of what countless homeless men, women and children experience every day. Will you hold a speedy hearing in support of the Act to Provide Identification to Youth and Adults Experiencing Homelessness?

■ Op-Eds

Eveline Silva

Endlessly Homeless Without ID

I have witnessed my brother experience homelessness for the past two years. I realize how easily a person can become homeless. My brother did not ask for this to be his experience, and I am sure that if he was able to prevent it he would. It has been difficult for him to live in the street, and it has also been difficult trying to overcome all the barriers to finding a permanent home. He

EXPERT OPINIONS

Without ID, individuals cannot apply for housing programs.

Society should want people to have IDs.

Tatjana Meschede
Expert on housing instability and homelessness

Most homeless people do not have IDs. There are also many financial barriers to obtaining them. People often need the Day Center to hold documents for them.

Amalya BenEzra
Waltham Community Day Center
Volunteer

"Lack of access to housing should not preclude residents from receiving valid identification and families trying to stay united should not face undue burdens from archaic laws. I was proud to support both bills."

Senator Cindy F. Friedman
Vice chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means

NEXT STEPS

**Please consider co-sponsoring
H. 3360/S.2251**

**If you have any additional questions,
do not hesitate to contact us**

EVERYONE NEEDS ID

(H. 3360/S.2251)

THE PROBLEM

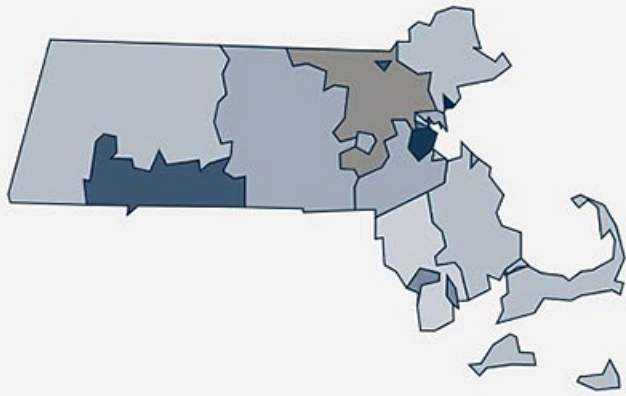
Identification allows individuals to access vital services, stay safe, and fully participate in society.

20,068

people homeless on a given night

29

homeless per 10,000 people in
the general population



Source: National Alliance to End Homelessness

THE SOLUTION

This bill will waive all RMV fees and allow people to provide proof of residence from a service provider. Consequently, those experiencing homelessness will have access to medical and housing assistance. It will improve individuals' interactions with law enforcement. Similar bills have been introduced or enacted in other states (ex. California in 2014).

also deals with mental health issues, as well as substance abuse. These are both critical issues in the way of helping him out of homelessness.

For my brother to be able to seek the necessary help, either mental health-related or substance abuse, he will need a photo ID. An ID is essential for all resources provided by the state. For people to apply for housing they must show a photo ID. The same goes for applying for food stamps and going to the doctor. Not having an ID can also put people in danger with law enforcement. For people of color especially, being homeless with no ID can cause an instance of mistaken identity. This can lead to their imprisonment or even death.

The federal urgency for Real IDs is causing us all to provide proof we are who we say we are. As identity documents become more difficult to obtain, we must ensure everyone has access to essential identification. We find great value in Real ID, so imagine how much more value the homeless put on a state ID, which they will only use to obtain living essentials. Having a state ID would give them a head start into getting a Real ID whenever they are able.

Cost is a major barrier for equitable access to IDs. New Jersey, California, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, Nevada, North Carolina and South Carolina, have all waived fees for homeless individuals looking to get state identification. California passed their legislation in 2015, and it continues to be implemented today. If this legislation is passed in Massachusetts, unhoused individuals will have the chance to apply for whatever services they may need as well as be able to save their money for more essential things, like food.

A Massachusetts ID costs \$25, which can last a homeless person a few days for food and drink. In addition to the \$25 fee, taking public transportation to an RMV would also cost between \$2.40 - \$9.75. Obtaining a Massachusetts ID is currently impossible for those without housing. Most homeless individuals, if not all, do not have a steady income or permanent place to stay. In Massachusetts, to acquire an ID a person is required to pay a fee and show proof of address, which is not likely an option for a homeless individual.

Due to this difficulty, the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty discovered that 54% of homeless people without photo IDs were denied access to shelters or housing services, 53% denied food stamps, and 45% denied access to Medicaid or other medical services, in a given month. (Teresa Wiltz, "Without ID, Homeless Trapped in Vicious Cycle," The Pew Charitable Trusts; May 15, 2017.)

How do you prove you are a resident when you do not

have a home? Massachusetts lawmakers along with Hawaii, West Virginia and Texas in 2017 introduced legislation that would support homeless individuals obtaining identification, by eliminating the paperwork required. Meanwhile, California and eight other states in the U.S. have passed this legislation. Normally, the state asks for multiple documents that are proof of an address, such as a utility bill, W2 or any other federal document that can verify your legal residency. This would be extremely difficult for individuals who are homeless because it is hard to save these documents in a safe place when you don't have a permanent place to stay.

It is time that Massachusetts joins the other states to make obtaining state IDs easier for homeless people. We used to lead the country in these decisions and this time we failed to do so. We have seen from states like California that this legislation is in fact effective. A resident of California, Christopher Morrow, says he was homeless in 2014 and after being able to get an ID, in 2019 he was working as Genesis Coordinator for The Mission at Kern County.

These states took action to stop homeless individuals from giving up on ID and ultimately giving up on resources. Being able to obtain a Massachusetts ID will serve as a source of hope for better living circumstances. Most homeless people have been experiencing homelessness for a few years and possibly lost their ID and other belongings. They probably have tried to get assistance in different places and were turned down for not having identification, and that shatters hope.

Having an ID allows the homeless to imagine themselves taking the next steps, like applying for a job, getting medical assistance, getting admitted into rehab, or tackling whatever other obstacle in their way. Making state ID possible for the homeless is giving them access to more resources, which gives back hope that they can overcome their current hardship. As a person experiencing homelessness, being turned down in multiple places for not having an ID, then being able to get an ID, they would become hopeful again now that the power to change their lives is finally in their own hands (Lezla Gooden, 2019).

I have learned from all this that being stuck within a homelessness cycle is a result of lack of sustainable support. It is easy to become homeless, but it is not easy to get out of it. And you too could become homeless.

So, Massachusetts, let's make it happen here too. Let's get Representative Khan's bill H.3360 passed by speaking more about this issue and actively advocating for the bill. Your advocacy will help make living easier for people experiencing homelessness.

Oona Wood

Statewide Access to IDs: A Solution to Massachusetts's Homelessness Crisis

As a resident of Los Angeles, I witnessed firsthand the implications of gentrification, inadequate social services, and the rising cost of living crisis. Each night, people built an encampment mere blocks away from my home. Surrounded by immense wealth and privilege, thousands of residents lived in squalor without access to health care or temporary shelter. Despite the circumstances, many wealthy residents and politicians in the area turned a blind eye to their suffering.

Following the murder of Kelly Thomas, a homeless man, legislators recognized the need to address the state's inhumane approach to the homelessness crisis. Inspired by his death, Assemblymember Sharon Quirk-Silva co-authored a bill that makes it easier for homeless people to obtain state identification cards.

To remain at the forefront of progressive politics, Massachusetts must enact similar legislation. Fueled by the COVID-19 pandemic, situations in big cities like Los Angeles and Boston only deteriorated. In January 2022, over 15,000 individuals were classified as unhoused. Many of them rely on basic social services for survival. However, identification is an important, if often overlooked, barrier to accessing basic social services. Individuals experiencing homelessness often do not have a safe place to store crucial documents and may not have resources to replace misplaced identification.

We are all intimately aware of the panic of misplacing a state ID or passport. Without them, we are faced with the inability to access basic services like healthcare. Currently, homeless individuals who wish to obtain an ID are faced with prohibitive fees and documentation requirements. Their inability to obtain ID can make it virtually impossible to escape homelessness.

Massachusetts prides itself on being one of the most progressive states in the nation. However, the legislature has failed to adequately address the aforementioned issue. Fortunately, Representative Kay Khan has proposed a solution to this problem: "An Act to provide identification to youth and adults experiencing homelessness." The bill would waive all RMV fees for individuals experiencing homelessness. Furthermore, it would allow such an ID applicant to meet the proof of residency requirement by presenting documentation issued by service providers such as a homeless shelter.

The vibrancy and long-term wellbeing of the Commonwealth depends on our ability to adequately address the homelessness crisis in Massachusetts. Governor Maura

Healey laid the groundwork for a comprehensive housing policy during her campaign. She also recently unveiled a \$282 million supplemental spending plan that includes \$85 million to help pay for the state's emergency assistance program.

As constituents, it is crucial that we continue to hold our politicians to their campaign promises. The legislature must reduce administrative barriers for residents, especially those who are marginalized, undocumented, or experiencing homelessness. It is crucial that lawmakers in Massachusetts consider the potential implications of this bill and work to ensure that it is implemented in a way that is fair, equitable, and effective.

I urge you to ask your state representatives to support H.3360. If you do not know who your state representative or senator is, go to <https://malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator> and type in your home address. Together, we can ensure that all Massachusetts residents have access to IDs!

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Stanley,

My name is Oona Wood and I reside in Waltham, Massachusetts. As one of your constituents, I would like to thank you for your tireless efforts to address critical issues in the district. I would like to ask you to support Representative Kay Khan's bill "An Act to provide identification to youth and adults experiencing homelessness" (H.3360/S.2251).

State identification cards are an essential, though often overlooked, barrier to accessing basic social services for many marginalized communities in Massachusetts. Without an ID, individuals cannot access medical care and they are more likely to have negative or even violent interactions with law enforcement. This bill seeks to remedy these burdens by waiving fees for individuals experiencing homelessness.

Furthermore, the bill would allow such an ID applicant to meet the proof of residency requirement by presenting documentation issued by service providers such as a homeless shelter. This bill would address some of the chronic issues people experiencing homelessness regularly encounter. For example, homeless individuals are often unable to provide identification when approached by law enforcement, thereby increasing the likelihood of police brutality and wrongful arrests. Furthermore, the lack of identification is also a barrier to medical care and housing. Among many other issues and circumstances, this bill would also help address chronic poverty in Massachusetts.

I understand that this issue is particularly important to you as you recently co-sponsored S.75. Though Senator DiDomenico's bill aims to address childhood poverty,

Representative Khan's bill addresses this issue by providing unaccompanied homeless youth with the opportunity to enroll in school and apply for jobs. This bill is, in many ways, an extension of Senator DiDomenico's bill.

Currently, there is no opposition to the bill. However, it has not passed due to a lack of active support from state representatives. Therefore, I urge you to cosponsor and vote in favor of H.3360.

Sincerely,
Oona Wood

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Oona Wood

On meeting with Representative Brian Murray

We met with Representative Brian Murray and his legislative aide on Zoom. We wanted to meet with him because he is the vice chair of the Joint Committee on Transportation. We discussed the financial, social, and political implications of the bill. We then asked him for a speedy hearing. Following our short presentation, he asked multiple insightful questions. Most of them centered around the need to clarify whose address would be listed on any IDs issued by the state. At the time, we didn't have the answer to all of his questions. Without consulting additional resources, it is unlikely that we would be able to answer them now either. It would have been nice to meet him in person. Overall, I think the meeting went very well.

Eveline Silva

On meeting with Senator Keanan

This was not a planned meeting, we walked in and his assistant was right at the door and we introduced ourselves and I handed her the storybook and then we started talking about the bill itself.

Then the Senator walked in as we were talking [and] we started to speak to the both of them. The Senator then asked how we got involved with this work and we explained that we are taking a class on advocating for public policy.

...I told him that I specifically wanted to work on this issue because of where I am from and what my brother's experience has been in the past two years. He responded "oh so it's personal for you." ...[He] asked questions on the bill which we were able to provide. He wanted to know about the financial implications, which Oona was able to provide.

Then Oona talked about what is going on in California and so he wanted to know [about] other states, and I told

him of the two other states that I knew that had passed the similar bill.

This meeting went very well; I felt like we gave all the information we had on the bill and he also asked us to send over anything we have written on the bill so that he has that information, which shows that we were able to catch his attention, and got him more interested in the issue than he might have been before.

■ Next Steps

The bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Transportation. We reached out to representatives and senators who are on this committee. For further progress we hope that we have convinced them of the importance of this bill and that they would vote favorably for the bill. Aside from the Transportation Committee, what can be done next is to continue to advocate for the bill and keep the [conversation] about this bill going.

We will need to spread the knowledge and message so that the bill does not lose its importance. What is most important at this point is making sure that there is a lot of talk about this issue so that when legislators get other bills they don't push this one to the [bottom] of the pile.

Also, next would be for Representative Khan to propose more details of how the ID would [work]. A few legislators and other people we have encountered asked us about the technicalities of the bill. They wanted to know whether the ID would have a photo and what address would the ID have. These are important to address.

Finally, a stronger impact would be made if legislators on House Ways and Means Committee were provided with a more detailed budget for the bill.

■ Update

As of June 26, 2023: There was a hearing for the bill in the Joint Committee on Transportation on June 13, 2023.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.2251: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S2251

H.3360: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H3360

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless:
mahomeless.org

Providing Access to Full Spectrum Pregnancy Care

Bridget Pickard '23
Sammy Shortall '23



Bridget Pickard (left) and Sammy Shortall

Massachusetts residents are burdened by the high cost of pregnancy. Several insurance plans in the Commonwealth require people to pay out of pocket until they reach an insurmountable deductible. Families are forced to forego prenatal and postpartum care because the cost-sharing expenses are too high. Full spectrum pregnancy care ensures healthier outcomes for both parents and infants. This bill is a step toward addressing the high rates of maternal and infant mortality in communities of color by easing financial barriers related to birthing that disproportionately affect low-income women.

■ The Bill

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

■ Elevator Speech

This legislative session, Massachusetts has the opportunity to eliminate financial barriers for pregnancy-related care. Equitable health care is vital for Massachusetts families. Full spectrum care includes prenatal care, miscarriage care, childbirth, and postnatal services. The cost of full spectrum pregnancy care should not impact health outcomes and access to medical services, but this is often the case for people in Massachusetts who have high-deductible health insurance plans. The high cost of pregnancy care dissuades Massachusetts residents from starting a family. This disproportionately impacts women. High costs of healthcare prevent families from receiving the full spectrum pregnancy care that they need, potentially leading to worse health outcomes such as low birth weight, and maternal and infant mortality. Those who cannot afford full spectrum pregnancy care should not have to face worse health outcomes solely due to cost. An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care would require all Massachusetts health insurance plans to cover every aspect of pregnancy-related care without families bearing the burden of cost-sharing. This would increase premiums by only a fraction of a percent. Will you hold a committee hearing as soon as possible to support full spectrum pregnancy care?

■ Op-Eds

Bridget Pickard

Protecting Massachusetts Mothers and Our Future Generations: Ensuring Access to Full Spectrum Pregnancy Care

Less than three months ago, three children lost their lives in Duxbury Massachusetts. Their mother murdered them and attempted to end her own life by jumping out of the window of their home. Lindsay Clancy was loved by both her family and her coworkers, and her husband claims that at the time of the killings, this “wasn’t the real her.” Clancy had spent five days in a mental hospital only three weeks before her children died - she was struggling, as many mothers have, with perinatal depression. Insurance companies often do not cover sufficient perinatal depression care – meaning if the parent is

determined no longer suicidal by the health care provider, then the insurance coverage ends, even if further care is needed.

Perinatal depression and overall maternal mental health is a topic not nearly talked about as much as it should be. Lindsay Clancy's struggle with perinatal mental health issues is not the only one: 1 in 5 women will experience some sort of perinatal mental health condition, according to the World Health Organization. Maternal depression is the most common pregnancy complication, as well as the most expensive. Beyond expenses, access to mental health services is also clouded by stigma: many parents do not want to reach out for help as they feel weak or deem themselves parenting failures. This needs to change: all mothers in Massachusetts should have affordable and consistent access to mental health services throughout their postpartum mental health journey.

Pregnancy care is expensive – in 2018, out-of-pocket pregnancy costs averaged \$1,372 in Massachusetts, according to ChiaMass. Maternal mental health services are often grouped into overall pregnancy costs, as seen in organizations like Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Program for Moms (MCPAP) and Massachusetts General Hospital Center for Women's Mental Health. For a state that prides itself on an equitable health care framework, \$1,372 is incredibly expensive.

An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care is a bill that would remove all cost-sharing for families that need pregnancy-related medical services – including mental health. This means insurance companies will take on the fiscal responsibility of health services that families cannot afford. Big corporations can afford to take the hit.

Massachusetts families like the Clancys have suffered as a result of not receiving the health care they needed. This bill closes the gap for people who are ineligible for Massachusetts state insurance but are still unable to access health care because of their high-deductible health insurance plans. People who experience perinatal depression access health care at higher rates, resulting in increased medical expenses. Removing cost-sharing reduces financial barriers and encourages those who are struggling to secure the support they need.

Lindsay Clancy's situation was entirely preventable. If the Massachusetts state government had invested more resources in pregnant people and their health, perhaps the Clancy children would still be alive today. Tragedies like Lindsay Clancy's should not be a norm in Massachusetts. There is a solution to this problem, and bills like H.1137/S.646: An Act ensuring access to full spectrum

pregnancy care will help Massachusetts take the next step towards preventing perinatal depression-related tragedies.

Broken families should not be a result of insufficient funding for mothers and their mental health. Now is the time to contact your Massachusetts legislators in the Committee on Financial Services and ask them to hold a hearing! Allowing mothers, children, and families to suffer is unacceptable: speak up now.

Bridget Pickard

We've Already Eliminated Copayments for Abortion Care. What's Stopping Us from Eliminating Them for Pregnancy Care, Too?

During the Commonwealth's last legislative session, the legislature passed a bill to cover all abortion-related care under state-mandated insurance plans. This action came in the wake of the *Dobbs v. Jackson* case last summer.

Massachusetts often takes pride in being a progressive leader in the U.S., being ahead of its time in issues such as health care reform and shield laws protecting abortion providers and seekers. So, how can we build upon our success? The next step is an uncontroversial one: eliminate co-payments for full spectrum pregnancy care, not just abortion care, for all state-mandated insurance plans.

Full spectrum pregnancy care encompasses prenatal care, miscarriage care, childbirth, and postpartum care. The bill H.1137/S.646, An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care, would cover about 40 percent of Massachusetts residents. Such a bill is so important because every pregnancy has its own challenges, and everyone deserves access to every step of pregnancy care to provide for all health needs.

The cost of pregnancy care can be debilitating. Cost is a critical concern for the 36 percent of Massachusetts residents with high-deductible health plans who make too much money for state insurance and too little to afford expensive medical bills. As of 2018, the out-of-pocket cost for full spectrum pregnancy care in Massachusetts was \$1,372 on average and continues to increase (Mass.gov, 2022).

Those who cannot afford the full spectrum of pregnancy care should not have to suffer worse health outcomes and huge medical bills when starting a family. Such costs may dissuade Massachusetts families from starting a family, and access to essential services may be limited for communities of color. Due to racism this disproportionately impacts communities of color (Thompson et al., 2022). Maternal mortality rates are three times higher for black women than white women, and forgoing essential pregnancy care contributes to this gap.

The Commonwealth has often proved through past legislation that healthcare is a right. However, this is not currently the case for every step of pregnancy care. The high cost of spectrum pregnancy care is a barrier to vital services that ensure healthy outcomes. For example, low birth weight is a detrimental health outcome that is preventable. Low birth weight can cause a 40 times higher mortality rate than normal birth weight infants, including a higher risk of developmental and neurologic conditions.

These conditions can put even more of a financial and emotional burden on parents, as ongoing health conditions cost even more money to treat. Not only are these tragic health outcomes that can affect health throughout an infant's life, they can also destroy families' livelihoods because they cannot afford the care they need to resolve these health conditions. A study in Virginia showed that for every case of a low birth weight infant prevented, it would save anywhere from \$14,000 to \$30,000.

Yet, to much surprise, this bill failed in the House last legislative session, despite the successful passage of the abortion-related care portion. The next step for the Commonwealth should be to provide a safe haven against increasingly burdensome reproductive costs. The bill likely did not pass due to the cost of the bill more than anything else. Eliminating co-pays for every stage of pregnancy actually saves the Commonwealth money in the long run. While the bill may lead to increased monthly premiums by only a fraction of a percent, having access to essential health care improves health outcomes, avoiding costly health complications. In addition, with every dollar spent on prenatal care, there is a savings of \$3.38 when providing care to low birth weight infants.

H.1137/S.646 will save a significant amount of money for families and health insurers, so potential costs of the bill should not have to get in the way of its passage.

The bill was recently assigned to the Committee for Financial Services. Call and write to your legislators today to express your support for H.1137/S.646, An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care. To find out who your legislators are and their contact information, click the link: <https://malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator>.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Representative McMurtry,

My name is Bridget Pickard and I am one of your constituents from Westwood, Massachusetts. I currently attend Brandeis University to study health sciences and legal studies. At Westwood High School, I was a part of the legislative council, which you visited a few times! These visits were incredibly meaningful, and have inspired me to become politically involved, especially in the sector of public health.

As a young woman in my twenties, I want to live in a state that will allow me to grow a family. While this is not in my immediate future, I want the security of knowing that I will be able to have access to affordable health care when the time comes.

Across the state of Massachusetts, many residents, specifically women, are dissuaded from starting families because of the hefty full spectrum pregnancy care costs. Full spectrum care includes prenatal, miscarriage care, childbirth, and postnatal services. High costs of healthcare prevent families from receiving the full spectrum pregnancy care that they need, potentially leading to worse health outcomes such as low birth weight, and maternal and infant mortality. An Act ensuring access to full spectrum pregnancy care would require all Massachusetts health insurance plans to cover every aspect for pregnancy related care without families bearing the burden of cost-sharing. This would increase premiums by only a fraction of a percent.

While a premium increase and a general concern for rising costs is usually a valid issue, this bill is far more important than an extra dollar or two per month. As Hannah Wilcove, a Masters student in public policy at the Heller School said, "a human life is more important than a two dollar premium increase in a month."

Passing this bill would bolster racial equity in health care and further reproductive justice efforts by allowing pregnant people to receive the full spectrum of pregnancy care they need without paying out of pocket. Additionally, though quarterly costs increase due to this bill, perhaps overall costs will decrease, as there will be more preventative care taking place, addressing potential emergency situations that are often more expensive than routine checkups.

I am urging you to vote in favor of this bill. Last legislative session, this bill died in the House, and we need representatives like you to support access to full-spectrum pregnancy care.

Best,

Bridget Pickard

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Bridget Pickard

On meeting with Senator Moore

The location of this meeting was at the State House in Room 109-B with Senator Moore's general counsel, Mark Zlglobicki. Sammy was in this meeting as well. We met with Mark to ask him to urge Senator Moore to hold a speedy hearing for our bill, Ensuring Access to Full Spectrum Pregnancy Care.

We gave Mark a general rundown of our bill, trying to adhere to our elevator pitch. We were sitting at a long wooden table in what seemed to be the conference room of Senator Moore's office, and I noticed that these "sit-down" meetings were mostly specific to pre-planned meetings, which makes sense, but still something I mentally [noted]. Sitting down while meeting a staffer made things feel more formal, and I always felt like we, as advocates, were taken more seriously. Maybe this was a result of just having a staffer make the time commitment to sit down with us, but I really did feel like it made a difference.

After we gave the rundown of our bill, Mark asked us a few questions about finances and its legislative history, which we were able to answer. He let us know that he thought it was a good idea we were only focusing on one bill and that we should consider testifying. I would say this was a worthwhile and productive meeting, and while there was not a particularly strong connection made, I feel like we made our point and that Mark was receptive. Senator Moore is the vice chair of the Committee on Financial Services, so this meeting was an important one.

One thing that could have gone better was being more timely – we were a few minutes late because we were unsure if we could just walk into the office if the door was closed, which we eventually ended up doing after knocking on the door.

On meeting with Soumia Aitelhaj, Legislative Director for Senator Oliveira

This meeting took place with Soumia Aitelhaj, the legislative director for Senator Oliveira. It took place in room 416-B in the State House, and Sammy was present as well. We met with Soumia to ask her to urge Senator Oliveira to hold a speedy hearing for our bill, Ensuring Access to Full Spectrum Pregnancy Care.

We gave our elevator pitch to Soumia, and she seemed to listen closely, but advised that we target the chairs of the Committee on Financial Services, as Senator Oliveira would

not hold as much power in trying to hold a hearing. She was also intent on determining which senator represented the district in Massachusetts with the most people impacted by this bill, or the most people on state-mandated health insurance. While we didn't have that information at the State House, we later sent an email explaining how the South Coast Region would probably be the region most impacted by this bill based on data from the late 2010s.

...I think this meeting went especially well overall – Soumia seemed genuinely interested in what we had to say, and asked us questions about our future career paths. Although Senator Oliveira is not a chair or co-chair of the Committee on Financial Services, he is a member. Soumia seemed intrigued by my decision to go to grad school in the UK, and we talked about that for a few minutes which seemed pleasant and conversational from my standpoint.

When we left, she said "Bye Bridget!" which really doesn't seem like it would be a big deal, but it was meaningful – although we introduce ourselves to these staffers, I would be willing to bet they don't remember our names over the course of our meetings, just because they are incredibly busy people with a roster of names they need to keep track of day-to-day. While it was a small gesture, Soumia made me feel important, which is empowering as an advocate.

■ Next Steps

We may attend the first scheduled hearing for the bill on May 2 from 10am – 1pm, which consists of health insurance matters. The hearing is in the Joint Committee on Financial Services. Reproductive Equity NOW is encouraging their supporters to testify, especially those who are impacted by the bill most. They are collecting testimony via a Google Form so that they can submit the testimony via the supporters' behalf, while also giving the option to participate in person or via Zoom.

We hope that there will be future hearings on the bill and that it will come to a vote and pass in the Financial Services Committee, especially since it died in this committee in the last legislative session. If the bill finally comes to the Ways and Means Committee, Bridget and I have our monologue prepared to appeal to committee members' fiscal concerns.

One potential lobbying problem is that Bridget and I did not get to meet with potential opponents of the bill. We focused our lobbying efforts this semester on meeting with potential supporters instead, to encourage them to cosponsor the legislation and urge a speedy hearing, which we were able to achieve. However, we did not meet with any

Republican legislators. This may be a problem because we were not able to listen to specific concerns about the bill, and we did not get to practice defending our bill before our defense on April 25th.

Learning what the opposition feels about our bill would have helped to develop more counterarguments and would test our skills of pitching the bill.

■ Update

As of June 26, 2023: There was a hearing for the bill in the Joint Committee on Financial Services on May 2, 2023.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

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

H.1137: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H1137

Organization or Coalition support:

Reproductive Equity Now: reproequitynow.org

Strengthening Gun Control

Benton Ferebee '23

Yael Perlman '23



Benton Ferebee and Yael Perlman

Massachusetts leads the country in gun safety and community violence intervention strategies. In 2021, Massachusetts had the lowest gun death rate per 100,000 people in the country with 247 deaths. However, Massachusetts also has a large issue of trafficking guns into the state. In 2021, Massachusetts imported four times as many crime guns from other states as it exported, according to the Giffords Law Center. The Commonwealth also faces the challenge of regulating one of the largest centers of federally licensed gun dealers in the United States. An Act to strengthen gun control directly responds to this crisis by tightening loopholes in current gun legislation to define and ban the selling of ghost guns. The bill would place language into the law surrounding ghost guns and would also centralize gun licensing to create safer gun purchasing within Massachusetts.

■ The Bill

S.1508: An Act to strengthen gun control

■ Elevator Speech

Hi, thank you for meeting with us today. My name is Yael Perlman and I will receive my degree in politics with a minor in economics from Brandeis University this May. Gun violence is a uniquely American problem that has had an impact on countless communities across the country, including my campus community in Waltham. Gun violence is the leading cause of death for young people in the US, people like me, my friends, and my classmates.

While Massachusetts has some of the strictest gun laws in the country, it also is home to the largest federally licensed gun dealerships in the country. You have probably driven through the quiet farming community of Littleton on your way to western Mass. The tiny town off 495 is home to 10,000 people and 86 gun dealers. Many of the Littleton gun dealers openly sell illegal assault weapons through loopholes that allow banned weapons to be sold in parts.

Dealers selling piecemeal guns, or “ghost guns,” are not required to conduct background checks or issue licensing. Ghost guns are untraceable due to their lack of a serial number. This is a very dangerous issue in our state and makes it easy for abusers to purchase harmful weapons.

Bill S.1508: An Act to strengthen gun control, would address this dangerous issue by tightening loopholes around ghost guns and making it illegal to sell weapons in parts. It would also centralize and provide further guidance for gun licenses.

We hope you will join us with your full support for this bill and urge your fellow legislators to bring the bill to a hearing in this upcoming legislative session. With your backing, we can save thousands of lives by tightening gun laws and making Massachusetts safer overall. Thank you for your time.

AN ACT TO STRENGTHEN GUN CONTROL

S1508

Senator Jamie Eldridge



THE PROBLEM

The piecemeal sale of guns means that people can legally buy and assemble pieces of a gun to make outlawed weapons. These "ghost guns" do not require background checks or serial numbers which deems them untraceable, easily allowing access for abusers.

STOP GHOST GUNS

Prohibit the sale of gun parts, aka ghost guns, and centralize annual gun dealer inspection through a state agency to protect guns from entering the wrong hands.

REDUCE VIOLENCE

Reduce violence by closing loopholes in existing gun legislation to limit guns to responsible owners by suspending gun licenses upon a court issuing a restraining order.

CALL TO ACTION

We urge you to schedule a hearing on this bill in the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security to prevent future gun tragedies in MA

COMMUNITY VOICES

The Littleton gun mill is actively selling illegal assault weapons through legal loopholes.

JASON GUIDA

It is an open and brazen challenge to the attorney general.



Previous Director of the State
Firearms Records Bureau

Boston Globe Sept 2022

WILHELMINA ULBRICH

This is not a situation we would have chosen. The fact that this kind of industry is allowed to happen in this country is mind-boggling.



Inheritor/Current Owner of the
Littleton Gun Mill Building

Boston Globe Sept 2022

BRANDON SAMUELS

Gun violence is a uniquely American challenge that permeates every part of society... it's scary because despite the layers in law, there will still be incidents and things that happen.



Brandeis Students Demand
Action Treasurer



■ Op-Eds

Benton Ferebee

Just a few short months ago, Massachusetts witnessed a tragedy that sadly could happen at any moment. On the morning of February 9th in the city of Andover, less than 20 miles away from Brandeis University, the police found the bodies of a family of three dead in their home. The father, a 56-year-old man, had taken the lives of his wife, a 55-year-old woman, and his son, a 12-year-old boy, before taking his own life.

The killing came after a history of domestic violence by the father, and the weapon used to carry out the murder-suicide was what is known as a ghost gun. A ghost gun is a gun that is purchased in parts and later assembled by the buyer. Ghost guns are an issue across the country. They are being sold all across the United States as a way to get around the gun laws. This issue has found its way into the state of Massachusetts.

While the state of Massachusetts is on the forefront of gun violence prevention laws, these ghost guns are becoming quite popular in the state because they are able to skirt the stringent gun laws of the state. At the moment, the Massachusetts gun laws do not explicitly disallow the sale and purchase of these ghost guns. Residents are currently able to buy gun parts from a dealer or 3D print their own parts at their homes to assemble these deadly weapons.

One of the most prominent examples of these sales comes from the town of Littleton, Massachusetts. Littleton is the home to the largest concentration of gun dealers in the country. The Littleton Gun Mill houses 86 gun dealers in a single warehouse. Many of these dealers are selling parts of guns that can be used to assemble assault weapons. Assault weapons have been banned since 1998, but these dealers have found a loophole in the system to allow their customers to buy what they are seeking. This mill has dealers and buyers coming from all over the country due to the quantity of guns and gun parts they are able to sell.

This is an issue that State Senator Jamie Eldridge, a Democratic Senator over the Middlesex and Worcester area, has to confront daily. The number of ghost guns reported by the Massachusetts police departments has steadily increased over the past few years. The ghost guns are difficult and almost impossible to track because the gun and gun parts do not carry a serial number like legally purchased firearms do. The lack of serial numbers coupled with the fragmented inspection process of gun dealers by Massachusetts has led to the increased popularity of ghost guns in the state. The inspection process currently consists of several different

offices inspecting different regions of the state. The state also lacks an all-encompassing registry of the findings of the inspections.

Senator Eldridge has drafted a bill that I believe can solve some of the issues the state of Massachusetts is facing. The bill is SD 1508 or An Act to strengthen gun control. The bill would tighten up the loopholes that these dealers and buyers have been exploiting for years. It also provides provisions for stricter penalties for dealers or buyers that are found to be breaking the law with up to \$5000 in fines and up to 2.5 years in jail. These offenders cannot be allowed to continue to skirt laws on technicalities. Even those who have decided to take matters into their own hands and 3D print their gun parts would be subject to the penalties because ghost guns do not just have to be regularly manufactured parts under this bill.

The bill also centralizes the inspection process by putting all inspections under the office of the attorney general. This will allow one governing body to carry out all inspections and will also make it easier for a registry to be kept for the infractions found during the inspection. In regards to the Andover tragedy, the bill also allows the court to revoke gun licensing privileges to anyone who has a restraining order against them or those who have proven they are not worthy of the right of holding a gun license. This also includes people with a proven history of domestic violence.

Massachusetts has long been on the forefront of gun violence prevention laws, but at the moment it is being passed by other states seeking to keep their residents safe. As of April 2022, 11 states have passed laws banning or severely restricting ghost guns. These states include California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Washington D.C.

In order to keep the residents of the state of Massachusetts safe, I implore everyone to call your representatives and senators to push this bill forward. We do not need to endure any more tragedies in this country than we already have.

Yael Perlman

Massachusetts Has a Ghost Gun Problem

Guns are the leading cause of death for young people in America. The rate at which children in America are killed by high capacity guns is far greater than any other developed country in the world.

In Massachusetts, anyone can wake up, drive to their local gun dealer, and buy a deadly assault weapon. It does not matter whether one has a gun license, insurance or

even a background check. The deadly weapon does not need to be registered or have a serial number attached. These assault weapons have one purpose: to kill people at a high volume, designed for intensifying battlefield casualties in wartime. These wartime weapons, which have no civilian necessity, are proliferating throughout the state with no legal repercussions. Despite the Massachusetts state ban of assault weapons in 1998, it is currently completely legal to buy an assault weapon in the state, according to the Massachusetts government website. Dealers are openly selling these weapons throughout the Commonwealth. Ghost guns make this possible.

Ghost guns are a threat in the state of Massachusetts despite the state's historical commitment to upholding safe and regulated gun ownership. The issue of ghost guns, or guns sold in piecemeal parts, is a legal loophole that allows people to purchase these dangerous weapons under completely legal conditions. Right now Massachusetts law does not specify that weapons sold in parts also qualify as firearms, meaning that someone can easily buy these parts online or in person and assemble them to create the deadly effect of a traditionally manufactured weapon. 3D printed guns are also becoming increasingly popular in the state, meaning anyone with access to a printer can make and distribute deadly weapons legally, according to the Middlesex District Attorney's Office.

While Massachusetts is known to have strict gun laws, it is also home to the largest center of federally licensed gun dealers in the country. In September of 2022, the Boston Globe did an investigation into the Littleton, Massachusetts gun mill, which hosts 86 gun dealers, and found that many of the dealers had been openly selling assault weapons, despite an enforcement notice from the state Attorney General on the assault weapons ban. In 2022, the gun mill reported selling 4,600 legal firearms to the state. Right now, prosecutors have no legal ability to stop these deadly gun sales due to the lack of formal language on the topic.

It is difficult to determine exactly how many guns are being sold in this way, due to their untraceable manner. Boston police, however, reported an 80% increase in the number of ghost guns they recovered in the last three years. In 2019, there were 15 ghost guns recovered while 58 ghost guns were seized in 2021. This number covers just a fraction of the actual sale of these gun parts since they are difficult to trace back to their original owners. In Springfield, Massachusetts the police chief reported in 2020 that two percent of the illegal firearms they retrieved were ghost guns. A year later, that number jumped to 10 percent of all illegal guns retrieved. As of October 2022, Springfield police had seized 22 ghost guns that year, according to MassLive.com. As these guns multiply, the capacity for them to render harm has grown.

There is a simple solution to this dangerous problem: write piecemeal sale of guns into our legal code. Senator Jamie Eldridge, of Middlesex and Worcester, has proposed bill S1508, An Act to strengthen gun control, which would tighten loopholes surrounding ghost guns by putting language about these firearms into the law.

By writing the law to include weapons sold in parts, we can easily create legal penalties for those who defy it. Cracking down on ghost guns has the potential to save thousands of lives taken by gun violence every single year. It would ensure that every part of a gun purchased or manufactured through 3D printing is regulated.

Maintaining good gun laws ensures that guns are kept in safe and capable hands, and limits total fatalities. As of April 2022, 11 states including California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Illinois, Maryland, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Rhode Island, and Washington D.C. had passed similar legislation. Massachusetts must follow the example of this growing list of states in banning ghost guns in order to reduce our contribution to the epidemic of gun violence in America.

I hope you will join me in urging your legislators to push bill S1508 to a hearing and ensure that Massachusetts creates this common sense measure to help eradicate gun violence in our country.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Stanley,

I am writing to you today to address the pressing issue of gun violence in our community. As a student in Waltham, Massachusetts I have grown up seeing the effects of gun violence in every stage of life, whether it was Sandy Hook in elementary school, Parkland in high school, and now MSU in college. Each of these deadly shootings has deeply affected me.

While I am thankful to attend a school in the state with the strictest gun laws in the country, Massachusetts still has more to do to protect children and the broader community from the gun epidemic plaguing our nation. Most recently in Andover, Massachusetts a 12 year old child and his mother were killed in a murder suicide by his father with an expired gun license. These killings might have been prevented had proper enforcement been in place for the expired firearm.

As an elected official I know you care about the safety of the children of Massachusetts and would do anything to keep them from harm's way. Littleton, Massachusetts is home to the largest center of federally licensed gun dealers in the country and is openly selling illegal assault weapons through piecemeal sales. These guns, deemed "ghost guns" are sold without serial numbers and do not require a background

check or licensing, meaning they can easily end up in the hands of abusers.

An Act to strengthen gun control would tighten these loopholes surrounding ghost guns to make it illegal to sell firearms in parts, and to require registration for any parts sold. It also enforces and centralizes gun licensing in order to make safer gun purchasing in the state.

While some may argue that the act will not be effective since people can easily buy guns from other states, it is your responsibility as a Massachusetts legislator to ensure that illegal guns are not proliferating from within our state. The Littleton gun mill is an attractive destination for gun buyers across the country and enforcing these laws in Massachusetts will reduce illegal weapons nationwide and create ripple effects in other states.

I hope that you will join me with your support for this bill and urge your fellow legislators to make gun violence prevention a top priority in this upcoming legislative session. With your support, we can bring this bill to a hearing and save thousands of lives from gun deaths in the years to come.

Sincerely,
Yael Perlman
Waltham, MA

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Yael Perlman

On meeting with Connor Green from the Office of Representative Linsky

After being at the big Coalition meeting, we went down to some of the offices of the members of the public safety committee and saw someone we recognized from upstairs. We met Connor Green who works for Representative Linsky's office, a big supporter of gun violence prevention work. We explained to him what we were doing and he was eager to listen and [to] help. He suggested that we reach out to Destiny who is the research director for the committee on public safety.

Connor was supportive of the ghost gun ban, though he noted that language is very important for our bill which is currently called, "An Act to strengthen gun control." He said that gun control is a term that activists tend to stay away from as it can be manipulated by the opposing party to sound too controlling and against...constitutional rights. Framing it as gun violence prevention puts the emphasis on the violence that guns create and trying to minimize that

rather than directly putting it on the guns.

While I was aware of this discussion from the gun violence prevention world, there was not much we could do about the title of the bill given that Senator Eldridge's office has already filed the bill. We also discussed some of the other upcoming legislation with him and [he] was overall helpful in getting a [sense] of the state politics surrounding this issue. I learned how to approach someone, even if we weren't giving the formal pitch for our bill.

Benton Ferebee

On meeting with Caitlyn from the Office of Senator John Velis

On our trip to the State House on April 4th, we stopped by the office of Senator John Velis who [represents] the Hampden and Hampshire districts. When we got there, we were eagerly welcomed by a staffer in his office named Caitlyn.

We told her what our bill was about, and she provided us time to talk with her while she took notes. We told her about our bill and why it meant so much to us. She was very receptive on the matter and even asked us a few questions about our bill.

I believe that any time someone asks us questions it gives us a chance to expect what might be asked of us in the future during our Present and Defend at the end of class. She was very welcoming to us overall. She helped us because that was one of our first meetings of the day at the State House.

I am fairly quiet in general but having someone so open and welcome to us...really helped me open up for the rest of our day at the State House. Before we even sat down with her, she told us that she had other meetings with Brandeis students (I believe Ruby was after us) that day and that she had talked to Brandeis students in the past. She was impressed with the knowledge that Brandeis students as a whole came into the meetings. It was a nice affirmation to have at the beginning of our day before we had several other meetings with staffers. One good meeting started the day off very well for us.

■ Next Steps

If we were to continue our work advocating for our bill S1508, there are a number of steps I would want to pursue in making sure that this bill gets passed. First of all, in consultation with Senator Jamie Eldridge, he suggested talking to the Judiciary Committee, which he chairs and which also houses much of the gun legislation in the State House.

Since this bill will likely be placed into an omnibus bill, it is important to make sure that all officials are on board with tightening loop holes surrounding ghost guns. Despite the bill currently being in the Committee for Public Safety, it is likely that other committees would also have to hold a hearing on this.

Therefore, speaking to more elected officials and getting them on board with the issue would be beneficial towards eventually passing the bill. As we heard from our guest speaker in class, senators really do care about constituents and advocacy groups reaching out and sharing their concerns and priorities for legislation.

Another step I would recommend to the writers of the bill is to change the language of the title of the bill. Under recommendations from some of the staffers at the State House and my own experience in the advocacy world surrounding guns, the language of “gun control” is generally frowned upon. The main argument from the opponents is that gun legislation is unconstitutional due to the Second Amendment rights which protect freedoms surrounding gun ownership. By phrasing it as gun “control” it implies control of the weapons that people have the right, as Americans, to own.

Using the language instead of “gun violence prevention” places the emphasis on the violence aspect rather than the actual guns themselves. As the bill is currently named, “An Act to strengthen gun control,” I would recommend that they consider renaming it to take out the gun control language and [replacing] it with either “Gun Violence Prevention” or be more specific with language in the title about ghost guns.

While this is obviously more of a technicality, language does in fact matter when trying to advocate for specific laws. Replacing the language would make it more accessible to opponents of gun legislation. It would also allow the bill to be more specific about what exactly it is trying to accomplish rather than just saying “gun control” as a general concept.

Though I do not think this bill will come to a hearing soon, I hope that our discussions and advocacy in the State House show our legislators how important the issue of gun

violence prevention is in the state of Massachusetts. Even in the course of this class, there have been a number of high profile mass shootings, such as in the elementary school in Nashville. Each time there is another tragic event like this in our country, I am reminded [of the importance] of gun violence prevention [advocacy].

It was encouraging to see both Moms Demand Action and Mass Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence hold advocacy days during the beginning of the legislative session and show their representatives the importance of this issue. There are so many people in this state who care about the issue of gun violence prevention and the passing of more legislation in this upcoming session will reflect the hard work of all those advocates.

I am planning to stay in the Boston area next year and would love to continue working within state politics. It will be gratifying to see the fruits of our labor in the upcoming months and as this legislative session progresses, though it is clear that state politics certainly do not work quickly.

One of the first staffers we met made it clear that despite the overwhelming amount of support for this bill, it still could take many months for anything to be pushed through. Until then, I hope that people continue to fight and advocate to make our voices heard on this important issue.

■ Update

As of June 26, 2023: The Senate referred to the Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security on February 16, 2023.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.1508: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S1508

Organization or Coalition support:

Mass Coalition to Prevent Gun Violence:
mapreventgunviolence.org

Promoting Effective Drought Management

Gianna Bruno '23

Amelia Chen '23



Gianna Bruno (left) and Amelia Chen

An Act relative to maintaining adequate water supplies through effective drought management seeks to solve the issues of the patchwork drought management plan by unifying Massachusetts under one management system. When a drought is declared, water conservation efforts will be uniform throughout the state. It is important to note that this bill will only require water conservation methods relating to non-essential outdoor watering, for example, limiting one from watering the lawn just to keep it green. All essential uses such as business, agriculture, or indoor water use will not be affected by the bill. One legal change the bill will introduce besides a uniform system will be that citizens who have their own private water source, such as a well, will be subject to the same outdoor water conservation procedures that other citizens will be following. This is an important addition because those with wells are still pulling water from the same larger water sources that any other citizen would be using, therefore, the bill requires uniformity across the state, not just from some citizens. Proper water conservation is essential now more than ever because of the intensity and long lasting nature of the droughts currently affecting the Commonwealth due to climate change.

■ The Bill

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

■ Elevator Speech

Good morning. Our names are Gianna Bruno and Amelia Chen and we are residents of Massachusetts as well as advocates for the Drought Bill. Last year, Massachusetts experienced a statewide drought, and climate change will only increase the number and severity of the droughts the state will experience.

What is needed now are water conservation policies regarding non-essential outdoor watering that will ensure that the state will always be able to have water for essential purposes such as general household use, irrigation for farmers, and business needs.

However, right now Massachusetts has a fragmented drought policy, and each town in a region decides its own water conservation requirements. For example, neighboring towns that use water from the same water source are not required to follow the same drought policies, so one town may strictly enforce a ban on watering one's lawn, while the other town does not, thus creating no positive impact on the already struggling basin.

The Drought Bill would give the drought management task force the authority to require water conservation methods across the region during a drought without having to wait for the governor to declare a drought emergency. The state will therefore be proactive in saving water during droughts by standardizing conservation across regions rather than town by town: one responsible plan for all communities.

We sincerely hope you hold a hearing for the Drought Bill as soon as possible.

The Drought Bill S. 475/H.861

To Maintain Adequate Water Supplies Through Effective Drought Management

Problem

Seasonal drought is predicted to return every summer and we do not have a common plan in the Commonwealth to conserve our state rivers, wildlife, and water supply. We have one water source and need one plan.

Impact

- Drought led to crop failure with a net loss of \$18 million in 2016.
- 1 in 5 streams regularly run dry in the summer from excessive water withdrawals.
- Low flows endanger a million young river herrings because they were trapped in ponds and unable to migrate, which is necessary for their survival.

Solution

Invest in drought management with a standing task force that considers the changing needs of our many regions and responds to our climate crisis.

Call To Action

We ask that you hold a hearing for the Drought Bill as soon as possible.



Both towns above pull from the same water source, but Massachusetts' patchwork drought system allows each town to decide their own water conservation measures during drought. Therefore, some towns impose stringent measures, while others do nothing at all.

Op-Eds

Gianna Bruno

How the Water Rich State Could Run Out of Water

After the hours of rain and snow Massachusetts residents experienced during our most recent nor'easter, it could be hard to believe the state is trending towards more frequent and severe droughts. The issue is that during the winter and spring seasons, there is a large amount of rainfall, but in turn, the summer and fall seasons are becoming more dry. While the state still experiences rain and snowfall, it is not enough to replace all the water that is currently being used in the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts does have a drought management plan, but it does not suffice, which is why a new, better managed drought management plan as detailed in the Drought Bill is more than necessary in this climate.

The first iteration of the Drought Bill was introduced back in 2016 while the entire state of Massachusetts was suffering a 48-week-long drought between June 2016 and May 2017. No drought management plan could have ended the drought. However, if Massachusetts had had one, unified plan (rather than the fractured plan they currently have) that consolidated the state under one water conservation plan, then more water would have been preserved and then used for essential uses, such as for farmers who needed to water their crops.

Since that 2016-17 drought, Massachusetts has continued to experience intense periods of drought that have dried up streams, parts of the iconic Charles River, and even private wells. There are currently regions in Massachusetts that are experiencing mild to significant droughts. While that range does not necessitate an emergency, how inconvenient is it that parts of Massachusetts have to suffer the consequences of those uncontrollable drought conditions?

Due to a lack of a unified plan, those citizens are forced to consider the possibility of running out of water even during non-emergency level droughts.

Let us focus on that line again. Due to a lack of a unified plan, those citizens are forced to consider the possibility of running out of water even during non-emergency level droughts. In the short term, droughts are inconvenient because water sources are running low so that means farmers have less water to effectively sustain their crops. During droughts, farmers experience an extreme loss of crop due to the lack of water which translates into a major loss of money due to the lack of crops to sell.

However, in the long term, there is not a group of people

The Drought Bill S.475/H.861

To Maintain Adequate Water Supplies Through Effective Drought Management

Rebecca Spinner, Students for Environmental Action

The Drought Bill is absolutely necessary. There is less attention on droughts in Massachusetts because there is an assumption that the state is water rich so this story gets pushed aside



Massachusetts River Alliance

The Drought Bill allows states to be proactive in saving water during a drought, rather than waiting until an emergency strikes.

Paul Willard, Owner of Willard Farm

The drought of 2016 yielded our worst crop to date. We did not just have poor production, we had fields of crops that were dying.



For more information, please contact:
and Gianna Bruno

Amelia Chen

who would not be affected by droughts, because depleted water sources means no water for houses to use for washing or drinking as well as no water available for fire control.

Sadly, droughts are uncontrollable and are getting worse now due to climate change. The only recourse for dealing with a drought is to let it run its course, but without a drought management plan that actually conserves water, the plan is unproductive; therefore, a water emergency could be seen in the foreseeable future without action now.

It appears to be a pretty cut and dry situation, pardon the pun: droughts are bad (and are getting worse) so there needs to be a plan set in place in order to conserve water for essential purposes. While Massachusetts has a drought plan, it is so fragmented and confusing that it is producing the opposite of what it intended to do: it is not conserving our state's water!

Let me break it down. In Massachusetts, every town within a region has a different drought management plan. So, right now when a drought is declared, each town decides whether or not non-essential outdoor water uses are either banned, limited, or completely allowed, even though they are all pulling from the same suffering water source. The drought management plan provides us with essential guidance on when and how to make simple changes with a big impact to conserve water when we are running low. For example, all that is asked is that you skip a car wash or refrain from watering your lawn during drought periods.

The current system is as follows: House A (Waltham) and House B (Watertown) are right next door to each other and use water from the same well. When a drought is declared, House A is told that it is not allowed to water its lawn nor wash the cars, but House B is told that it is perfectly fine to water its lawn and wash the cars. So not only is their shared water source depleted because of the drought, but it is also drying up even more because House B is not conserving any water at all. This example demonstrates the necessity of having neighbors cooperating in order to conserve vital resources such as water.

The Drought Bill is essential. It creates one, unified drought management system across the regions. The proposed unified system is necessary because it will be consistent across the regions and will stay updated to handle the various needs in a changing commonwealth. Once this system is in place, when a drought is declared, all towns across a region will be conserving water, which means Massachusetts will be able to conserve water rather than continuing to deplete its precious, yet finite resource.

The Drought Bill has been passing through the Massachusetts legislature since 2016. Email, call, or go talk

to your representatives and let them know that this bill needs to be passed ASAP, before Massachusetts is stuck facing a water emergency.

Amelia Chen

If I ask you to picture a drought-ridden area in the United States, you would probably conjure up some image of Arizona or California. I'm picturing my home state of Massachusetts. We have a real drought problem in the Commonwealth, and even worse, we have a drought management problem. The misconception that the Bay State is water-rich diminishes the severity of our drought problem, and consequently, diminishes regard for the drought management problem in Massachusetts.

As climate change conditions continue to grow more severe, drought conditions worsen. Global warming leads to both wetter and drier global extremes, causing more intense rainfall and more severe droughts. This topic of the dire consequences of global warming continues to be ever-present in our society, and has majorly impacted Massachusetts' economy.

Farmers lost \$18 million because of the 2016 drought. This major loss in crops negatively affects the community, since businesses and people that depend on farming will also lose business and money. Further, because Massachusetts has many rivers, recreational businesses that offer kayaking and fishing supplies suffer from drought due to the low flow. The cost of drought is too high, and we need a drought management system that can address these effects of climate change.

Currently, Massachusetts has a fragmented drought management system. Each town in each region is able to decide what water conservation methods it wants to use during a time of drought, while all pulling from the same struggling basin. So, the city of Boston could require a total ban on all lawn watering, while the town of Waltham could have no water conservation methods at all. This patchwork system does not allow for effective water conservation during a period of drought. Instead, our current system reveals that there cannot be any productive change when Massachusetts is struggling! Climate change is only going to make drought periods longer and more severe, so there must be a change in how Massachusetts conserves water during these drought-ridden times.

The solution to our drought management problem is simple: we must support the Drought Bill (SD. 475 / HD. 861) and push for this bill to be passed. Essentially, the Drought Bill will eliminate our current patchwork drought management system by unifying the state under

one water conservation system. This bill is a crucial first step into improving the drought management system in Massachusetts.

As residents of Massachusetts, or just as socially-conscious citizens concerned with climate change, you must reach out to legislators now and tell them to support “An Act relative to maintaining adequate water supplies through effective drought management.” Earth Day is less than a month away, and what better way to show your compassion for Mother Earth than to protect the life-giving finite resource of water through better drought management?

Call your representative before April 22nd in honor of Earth Day’s celebration of the protection of our natural resources for future generations.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

Your office has the opportunity to protect Massachusetts rivers, wildlife, and water supplies for generations. Last year, Massachusetts experienced drought that affected the entire state, and these drought conditions will continue to worsen as climate change persists. As you are the Vice Chair for the Senate Committee on Global Warming and Climate Change, I understand that the effects of climate change are of great concern to you. As residents of Massachusetts, we are asking for good stewardship over our public resources.

Right now, the state has a fragmented drought system. Each town in each region has the authority to decide what water conservation methods regarding non-essential outdoor use to require during a drought. For example, the town of Waltham could require a total ban on any and all lawn watering, while a town over, Lexington could have no ban at all. Since these two towns are a part of the same region, they are getting their water from the same suffering water source during a drought, which means one town is taking more water than the other and depleting the region’s water source, which is not fair. Every town should be held to the same standard when it comes to a shared resource and in this instance, water conservation should be uniform across regions.

The Drought Bill proposes the unification of Massachusetts under one water policy which would cause a net positive effect on the state’s water sources. According to the language of the bill, the Drought Management Task Force would have the authority to enact two things. First, the task force could declare drought conditions and subsequent water restrictions without waiting for the governor to declare a drought emergency. Second, those restrictions would apply to an entire region that is being affected by a drought, rather

than towns deciding for themselves. These measures are absolutely necessary in order to prevent a water emergency in Massachusetts.

There is widespread support for this bill across the state. Young people wish to mitigate the effects of climate change by having plans set in place to protect our water. Advocates wish to maintain the sanctity of Massachusetts water sources, and local farmers need to ensure that they will always have enough water to maintain their crops. There is not enough support in the climate deniers organization to stop the momentum of this bill.

I implore you to vote favorably for the Drought Bill during this session and pass this necessary law to protect Massachusetts water sources.

Sincerely,

Gianna Bruno & Amelia Chen

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Gianna Bruno

On meeting with Mark Zglobicki, General Counsel for the Office of Senator Moore

...Amelia and I met with Mark Zglobicki who is General Counsel for the Office of Senator Moore. I thought we had a great meeting. We were able to share the Drought Bill and Zglobicki had a copy of the bill in front of him as well so he was able to point to aspects of the bill as we were discussing it.

What was interesting was that Senator Moore was not originally a co-sponsor, but Zglobicki insisted that the Senator would be very interested in the bill because a major water basin in Massachusetts lies in his district. Right as I thought the meeting was over, Zglobicki confirmed with us that the Drought Bill has been reported favorably a couple of times but has died each time. After we confirmed he suggested that the sponsor of the bill, Senator Eldridge, introduce the bill as an amendment to the transportation and environmental bond bill. He told us that if it is introduced as an amendment and gets the co-sponsors to co-sign to the amendment, then there was a chance that the bill could be put to a vote faster. Of course, he stated, we only had 9 senators co-sponsoring the bill at the moment which is about 1/4 of the senate, so he suggested getting at least a majority of the Senate [to co-sponsor] because it would be harder for the leadership to deny something with such support.

I did not realize there was another possible call to action besides asking for a speedy hearing or requesting a cosponsorship, so learning about this option really changed

my perspective on the legislative process. This was the first time either Amelia or I had heard of this option so we made sure to ask clarifying questions and Zglobicki was very helpful in informing us about the process and we made sure to confirm his email address before we left as well.

I really appreciated how he did not treat us like students but like advocates coming into his office to discuss a bill and he seemed very interested in moving the bill forward.

Amelia Chen

On meeting with Valerie, the Policy Advisor for the Office of Senator Tarr

Synopsis of the substance of the meeting: During this meeting, which is our first lobbying session at the State House, we met with Valerie, who seemed to care a lot about the drought issue, as well as other environmental issues in Massachusetts. We started off by introducing ourselves and Gianna started off talking about the drought management problem in Massachusetts, and I explained the Drought Bill as the solution, with our call to action being to ask for a speedy hearing. Valerie spoke to us about the environmental advocacy work that she is a part of and her passion for improving the environment.

Reflection: I think the way that Gianna and I introduced ourselves, the problem, and the bill was very smooth and effective. I was very nervous about meeting with these staffers and speaking with them, and since this was our first meeting of the day I was especially nervous. I was worried that I would trip up on my words or that they would ask us a question I did not know the answer to, but after how smoothly this first conversation went, I felt much more confident for our next meetings of that day.

Valerie was clearly more knowledgeable and experienced about environmental issues than other staffers we met with that day, which is probably attributable to the fact that she has more experience since she is older and talked about working in the private sector before coming back to work at the State House.

I think Gianna and I effectively connected with Valerie because she seemed to also be very excited about the Drought Bill and creating environmental change. I think she admired that we were students advocating for this bill, since at the end of our meeting she gave us some life advice. She told us that if we have a conflict or issue now that we will not care about in five years, then we should not let that issue bother us now. I think she told us this because we connected with her well and she might have found it endearing that we are students.

Something that could have gone better might have been to stay on track on the main point of the conversation more, which is to talk about the Drought Bill. Our conversation got more side-tracked when Valerie started talking about other environmental issues she was interested in – like the plovers (an endangered species) and the excellent water filtration system in Aruba. I think it was good to talk to her about these things because I think this helped us establish a connection with her, but tying some of the things she said back to the Drought Bill and the drought issue happening in Massachusetts would have worked even better.

■ Next Steps

The Drought Bill is currently in the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources and the first hearing for the bill this session is Wednesday April 26, 2023. The Drought Bill has been circulating in the Massachusetts legislature since 2016 and each time the bill has been reported favorably but dies once it reaches the Ways and Means Committee.

The bill is well supported by legislators, advocates, and citizens alike, but there is a lack of momentum that prohibits the bill from getting passed in a timely manner. There is a lack of urgency surrounding the bill especially because Massachusetts is not experiencing a debilitating drought. Massachusetts is currently experiencing drought conditions near the southern and eastern regions, but since they are minor, there is little public concern. In the short term, there is no concern for these low level droughts, but this bill seeks to manage the long term effects that droughts will have on the state.

The most difficult aspect of this bill is that it is preventative in nature. Since there is no current emergency we can turn to in order to prove the necessity of the bill, most advocacy asks people to consider the future and the consequences of a broken drought management plan in the long term, which is unrelatable and intangible to most.

Between discussion with advocacy organizations and legislators, as well as the state of climate change having an effect on the nature of droughts in Massachusetts, it is clear that the Drought Bill needs to be passed before Massachusetts experiences a water emergency in the future. Therefore, a new call to action is required in order to get the bill passed this session.

Upon recommendation by the general counsel for Senator Moore, the next step is to push the bill's presenter, Senator Eldridge, to submit the bill as an amendment to

the Transportation and Environmental Bond Bill. As an amendment to the bond bill, this bill would move quicker through the legislature as an amendment and push for support from legislators through a roll call.

After getting the bill submitted as an amendment to the bond bill, the next step would be to get more senators to sign onto the amendment, with the goal of getting at least half the senators to sign on their support. The Drought Bill currently is sponsored or co-sponsored by 9 senators, ...about 1/4 of the Senate. Our goal would be to get at least a majority of the Senate to co-sponsor the amendment because that would make it harder for leadership to deny something with so much support.

■ Update:

As of June 26, 2023: There was a hearing for the bill in the Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources on April 26, 2023.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.475: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S475

H.861: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H861

Organization or Coalition support:

Mass River Alliance: massriversalliance.org

Raising the Age for Juvenile Detention

Terrell Brown '23

Micah Seigel '23



Micah Seigel (left) and Terrell Brown

Raise the Age states that people aged 19 to 20, who previously would be tried as adults, instead go through the juvenile detention system. They would be housed in facilities designed for their unique needs, with age-appropriate education, healthcare, and rehabilitative services, and given tools that are proven to better help reduce recidivism for young people.

■ The Bill

H.1710/S.942: An Act to promote public safety and better outcomes for young adults

■ Elevator Speech

Terrell: Hello, our names are Micah and Terrell, and we are young Massachusetts residents advocating for the bill to raise the age of juvenile detention in Massachusetts. We believe that every young person deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential. Micah: Did you know that currently in Massachusetts, 18-year-olds are automatically tried as adults and can be sent to adult prisons? This means that young people who make mistakes and are still developing can be housed in facilities with adult offenders and be subject to violence, abuse, and trauma.

Terrell: Being a young black man, I have experienced the injustices of being profiled throughout my life and understand how easy it is for one mistake as a young person and as a person of color to completely change the trajectory of someone's life. I understand the disparities within the prison system, where minorities are incarcerated disproportionately compared to the overall population. We need to create a system that promotes rehabilitation and second chances for young people of color, not a system that targets young minorities and turns them into statistics.

Terrell: The solution we are advocating for is to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to 21. This would mean that 18- to 20-year-olds would be treated as juveniles and be housed in facilities designed for their unique needs, with age-appropriate education, healthcare, and rehabilitative services.

Micah: Several studies on juvenile detention have also indicated that in the long term, putting young people through juvenile detention rather than through the adult system will save states money, due to lowered recidivism rates. By raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction, we can help young people get back on track.

Terrell: To make sure that Massachusetts becomes a leader in justice reform in this country and works to help young offenders, not just lock them up, we ask that you vote yes on the Raise the Age bill when it comes to the floor. Thank you.

RAISE THE AGE

HD.3510/SD.428

WHAT DOES RAISE THE AGE DO?

- Young offenders up to age 20 (instead of 18) would be processed through the juvenile justice system.

WHY RAISE THE AGE?

- **Lowers recidivism rates**
- **Lowers crime rates**
- **Lowers administrative strain on the adult prison system**
- **Lowers COSTS to the state and to taxpayers**

HOW WILL RAISE THE AGE IMPACT MASSACHUSETTS?

- The Juvenile Justice System is best equipped to meet the developmental needs of young people resulting in lower recidivism rates
 - This lowers recidivism rates
- Lower recidivism rates = fewer people in prison
- Fewer people in prison = less money required from the taxpayer

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Inform constituents and fellow elected officials about the importance of this bill, including the **FINANCIAL** and **SOCIETAL** impacts.

**Vote "Yes" on
HD.3510/SD.428**

Massachusetts voters and experts want to Raise the Age.

DANIEL BREEN, PH.D.

Professor of Legal Studies at Brandeis University

"One thing that makes us want to raise the age is everything we know now about the psychology of the human brain that we didn't know when our common law was being pioneered...Rehabilitation can't be performed to the highest level if youth offenders are in adult prisons."



SAMUEL ADUSI

Massachusetts Voter, age 21

"As someone who has been in the wrong place at the wrong time, you understand how fearful the idea of prison is...All youth deserve a chance to learn from their mistakes, we are not going to get everything correct on the first try, but that is why we have adults in our lives to guide us in the right direction...if we then choose the wrong path we should be held accountable."



Massachusetts Prosecutors Want to Raise the Age

RACHAEL ROLLINS

Attorney for Massachusetts and former District Attorney of Suffolk County

"The record shows that young people treated in the juvenile justice system fare better and the community becomes safer...By pushing these young people, who research tells us are still developing, into the adult justice system, we are willfully ignoring decades of data and developmental science and failing to protect the health and safety of communities as public servants are sworn to do."



DAVID SULLIVAN

District Attorney for Franklin County and Hampshire County.

"It's time to learn from science and experience to implement strategies aimed at rehabilitation rather than harsh punishment and retribution."



The people and the leaders of Massachusetts have spoken. It is time for our justice system to use scientifically proven best practices to help young people and our communities.

Vote "YES" on HD.3510/SD.428

CONTACT TERRELL BROWN AND MICAH SEIGEL FOR MORE INFORMATION

■ Op-Eds

Terrell Brown

What will Become of our Future?: Raising the Age of Juvenile Jurisdiction

Imagine your youth and how it felt to be in high school during one of the best times of the year, summer vacation. You do not know exactly what each day is going to look like, but the freedom from class and school work entices you more than the unplanned days. On one particular summer day you actually make plans to spend time with your friends in your town.

Everything is normal until you are stopped by law enforcement. You do not know why you are being stopped, but you overhear these words, “we have found the suspect, an 18 year old.” Seconds later, you are being forced on the ground and handcuffed for absolutely nothing. What would be going through your mind at the time? Would you be fearful? Would you cry? As you lay on the ground the officer gets news that they have the wrong person, so they release you and leave you with these words, “Get out of here, and stay out of trouble.”

This exact situation happened to me the summer before going into my sophomore year of high school at the age of 15. I was never arrested or charged with a crime; however, I felt like I was. Even though I was minding my own business I was still seen as a threat. If the officer had never been able to find the actual suspect of the crime committed, my situation may have been immensely worse, especially being a black man.

Though it may not seem like it, everyone at one point in their life was categorized as youth. Everyone’s youth is different based on their circumstances, but we can agree that during this time period it was a lot easier for us to learn from our mistakes, with less scrutiny and more reformative tactics. As we grew older our mistakes also grew with our age. It is known that people are susceptible to making stupid decisions, (if you never have I applaud you) and today’s youth are no exception to this.

What if that one boneheaded mistake in your adolescence meant that every job you applied for in your future would reject you, or that you wouldn’t be able to graduate college? Would this be fair? Would it give you hope for better days to come? The answer is a firm No. According to the Massachusetts Coalition for Juvenile Justice Reform, criminal offenders from ages 18 to 20 spend 10% to 20% more time incarcerated in Houses of Correction than any other age group. They also have the highest recidivism rate

of any group in the adult system – with 76% re-arraigned within three years. In these prime years of development and education, people in this age range are being recycled through our adult justice system. This is because 18- to 20-year-olds are highly impressionable by their environments, and being incarcerated in an adult prison can lead to more offenses in their future.

The proposed Raise the Age bill (S.942/H.1710) aims to change this cycle. This bill would gradually raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to incorporate 18-, then 19-, then 20-year-olds. This bill will not only reduce the amount of people incarcerated in Massachusetts’ prison system, but it will also improve the overall economic prosperity of the state.

Emerging science about brain development reveals that most people don’t reach full maturity until the age 25. This evidence suggests during the ages of 18 to 20, even though their brains are still developing and maturing, adolescents are not at full maturity and therefore they may be prone to immature decisions.

As a country, we already treat these age groups differently than the majority. The juvenile justice coalition explains that our society and our laws grant young people access to positive and pro-social activities and then gradually allow access to more risky and dangerous activities. For instance, an 18-year-old can sign contracts, go to the military, and give medical consent but can’t be a firefighter before age 19. A young person can’t drink alcohol, smoke tobacco or marijuana, gamble or serve as a police officer in Massachusetts until age 21.

As a society, if we still restrict young people ages 18 to 20 from participating in activities for which they are deemed too young, then why are they not deemed too young to be housed in adult prisons? Adult prisons do not cater to the transition ages. They focus more on punishment than true rehabilitation. Allowing youth offenders to be housed in juvenile facilities will give them access to age-appropriate education, healthcare, and rehabilitative services.

Giving youth offenders a chance to get back on their feet and become exceptional members of society is a main goal of the bill. With age-appropriate education, they will be able to join the Massachusetts workforce, which would also help the economy, because those who may have been incarcerated will now be able to get jobs in turn bringing the state more money. It is also important to take into consideration that Massachusetts policy makers raised the age of juvenile court to keep 17-year-olds out of the adult system in 2013. Since then, juvenile crime has declined by 34%, and youth offenders are still being held accountable, addressing one of the biggest opposing questions raised.

When you consider your stance on this issue, you should first think about your childhood, and if you have children think of them. If either of you had not been able to learn from your mistakes, would you be where you are today? If you or your child had to learn how to be an adult on your own without guidance would you be as successful as you are right now? Finally, if you knew there was a way to be held accountable and still have a chance for a future, but couldn't obtain it, would you be content? If you answered "No" to any of these questions then please do your part and advocate to your respective officials to raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction to include 18 to 20 year old offenders.

Micah Seigel

Pass 'Raise the Age' to Help Young People and the Economy

In a few weeks, tens of thousands of young people will graduate from college in Massachusetts. The state is the most educated in the country, and prides itself on its commitment to learning and research.

And yet in 2023, it has a justice system which ignores well-established and researched best practices, leading it to horribly fail young people. Today, high school seniors or college freshmen can commit a non-violent crime and be sent through a system that is extremely likely to turn them into a lifelong criminal. There is one solution. The juvenile detention system has been proven to be a superior alternative to rehabilitating young people and ensuring that they become productive members of society in comparison to the adult legal system. There is legislation awaiting approval from the state government right now known as the "Raise the Age" bill. If passed, this bill will gradually allow for young people aged 18, 19 and 20 who are sentenced to non-violent crimes to serve their time in the juvenile justice system, not the adult system.

Under current Massachusetts law, anyone over the age of 17 must be processed in adult systems, regardless of the crime's severity. Unfortunately, entering the adult prison system increases the likelihood of reoffending and perpetuating the vicious cycle of incarceration.

An 18- or 19-year-old deserves another chance. Not just because they have their entire life ahead of them, and not just because we now know that their brains are not fully developed to allow them to make proper decisions but also because it makes financial sense for Massachusetts.

Studies out of North Carolina and Wisconsin indicate that within a few years, if Raise the Age legislation is passed, Massachusetts and other states will be spending less money on the prison system. Young people in the juvenile system have access to resources to help them obtain a

proper education and learn from their mistakes. They are about 7.5% less likely to reoffend than young people who go through the adult system, leading to safer streets and less overcrowded prisons. Smaller prison populations mean less is required from the taxpayer. Additionally, with more young people turning into contributing citizens, the state's economy will benefit.

While this bill will require an initial investment by the Massachusetts community, it will ultimately pay back what was put in. This bill isn't some wishy-washy statement letting people off the hook, and it isn't ignoring the realities of our criminal justice system. The fact is that no matter who you are, we can all agree that our prison and justice systems are broken. And the juvenile system can help.

Don't let the talking heads and pundits mix you up. The answers aren't all so mysterious, and we can help. We know what we can do: we can catch young people at risk of turning one-time mistakes into a lifetime of crime and use established best practices to help them. As young people, we make mistakes, but we are all capable of change if given the chance.

So why aren't we doing what we can? Why are we failing so many young people, when this is the state that prides itself so much on its leadership and commitment to science-based reasoning? We have an opportunity here to help young people and to help each other.

This is a bill that needs to get passed, and unfortunately the right thing isn't going to happen without a big push from all of us. If Massachusetts passes this bill, other states will be watching, and you can be sure that they will follow. Legislators aren't necessarily aware that this is what their constituents want – like with so much in Massachusetts, this is all new. So, call them and let them know how you feel about the Raise the Age bill that awaits their vote.

For every young person in your life who you care about, for their friends and classmates and their families, make sure your support is known. We can help this rising generation and be remembered as the ones who didn't accept the existing failures in our system and took a stand for change.

■ Letter to the Legislator

To State Senator Edward J. Kennedy,

I am writing to you today regarding Bill S.942/H.1710, which will raise the age of juvenile detention from 18 to 21. I am reaching out to you as one of your constituents, as an advocate, and as a young person who is impacted by the way our justice and prison systems are ill-equipped to process youth offenders.

Today in Massachusetts a high school senior can be arrested as a first-time offender for a non-violent crime and be processed into the adult prison system. When placed into this system, they are exposed to a potentially unsafe environment that has minimal opportunity for formal diversion and alternatives. Simply stated, our current criminal justice system is outdated, and focuses too much on incarceration rather than rehabilitation, especially for young people ages 18 to 20.

I know that you yourself have children and grandchildren and must understand the fear that every parent has of losing their child to a naive adolescent mistake. I am urging you to be a catalyst for change and aid the efforts to amend our current legislation and create a system based on scientific backing and data. Doing so would be to consider that not only is a person's brain still developing proper capacity for risk-taking until their mid-20s, but also that young people in adult prisons are far more likely to go from single offenders to repeat offenders than if processed through the juvenile system.

There is concern that the juvenile prison system will not be able to handle the resulting influx of youth offenders. The Raise the Age bill allows for this, by gradually integrating older youth offenders into the system, like other raise the age legislation in states like Vermont and California. In fact, prior Raise the Age legislation in Massachusetts led to declining caseloads for both the Juvenile Court and the Department of Youth Services.

Some critics claim this bill doesn't hold 18- to 20-year-olds accountable for their actions. This is ignoring the fact that the juvenile justice system is still a method for holding people accountable; it just puts more of an emphasis on lowering recidivism and helps them in a way that allows them to learn from their mistakes while also becoming productive members of society once again.

Critics also raise the problem of costs. While this bill requires an initial investment in our communities, it is an investment that will pay off innumerable in the long term. The lowered rates of recidivism that will result from this bill will ultimately lead to smaller adult and juvenile and prison populations, meaning lowered costs to the government and

the taxpayer. And those young people who now have a better chance of reentering society will be able to meaningfully contribute to the Massachusetts economy.

This bill ensures that young people are given the proper help and attention and are set on the right path, rather than being doomed by one fateful error. I hope when the time comes you consider this letter as you vote for this bill on the Senate floor. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Thank you,

Terrell Brown

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Terrell Brown

On meeting with Michael Musto from the Office of Representative Day

On March 21, 2023 my advocacy partner Micah Seigel and I were blessed to be able to meet with Michael Musto from Representative Day's office. The reason for our meeting was to give our elevator speech, and then further advocate for ... the Raise the Age Bill. We arrived at the Massachusetts State House at around 10:30 Tuesday morning, giving us ample time to locate Representative Day's office. Micah and I had a little difficulty trying to decipher the map of the State House, however once we did we were able to locate the office with enough time to calm our nerves before our 11 o'clock meeting. The office itself was a large space and the staffer we spoke with, Michael, had a quaint space located in the back of the office. Before the beginning of the meeting I was nervous because I wasn't sure if I would remember all my points once the conversation started, but once we began I felt at peace.

We started off by just introducing ourselves which segued into giving our elevator pitch and advocating for our bill. Michael had some prior knowledge on the bill so we really just answered questions that he had for us... One question...which we had difficulty answering was that of the fiscal implications regarding the bill.

On a professional level the meeting was a success and Micah and I both felt good about our conversation. ...On a personal level we also enjoyed connecting with Michael. We discovered that he was a Brandeis alum, and that he also played baseball for the University when he attended. I actually found this interesting because I wanted to know more about his process...from being a student athlete at Brandeis to working within government, as I have been exploring future opportunities within the government.

One aspect of the meeting that I do wish we could have

improved on was the closing. I think that we were too busy talking at the end to see that our next meeting was starting right after we finished.

Micah Seigel

On meeting with Brittany Webb from the Office of Senator Creem

We were able to arrange a meeting with Brittany Webb, the staff attorney for Senator Creem. We arrived to our meeting a minute or so late because we were having trouble finding the different offices, which was too bad. Fortunately Brittany was very nice about it and I don't think it affected the meeting too badly.

Immediately it was clear that Brittany was very well aware of our bill, and we were able to spend most of the meeting talking back and forth about the intricacies of Raise the Age. We asked her a little bit about what she thought the financial impact would be, as there is still no official estimate.

...A lot of the benefit of the meeting for us was confirming a lot of what we already knew. But she also told us some new information that I think was helpful in our final meeting. She told us that this was a big priority and that Sen. Creem was focusing on this bill in the current session.

We realized from this that we needed to adjust our expectations a little bit. Since we are talking about a bill that a lot of people already know about, we need to shift a lot quicker to the emotional appeal and focus less on explaining the information.

We made sure to advocate as well, explaining that we were intimately connected to the bill as young people, and I think that it had an effect on her. Relating it back to the emotional aspect I think was powerful and she emphasized that this was something [on which] she and her office [were focusing]. Sen. Creem is the head of the Judiciary Committee so meeting with her was very important to us.

■ Next Steps

We are hopeful that by the next legislative session, this bill will have gained enough traction to be successfully signed into law. Nearly every person we talked to in the state capitol building had some awareness of the legislation. Senator Creem heads the judiciary committee and is probably one of the most impactful and important people in terms of this bill's future. When we spoke with a staffer from her office, we were told that this bill is top priority, and that the judiciary committee would be forming a subcommittee dedicated to juvenile justice, with a specific focus on this bill.

Given this, it can be hoped that this bill will reach the right people within the next session.

A big question is if there will be a misunderstanding in the public, possibly as a result of an intentional distortion of the bill from its detractors. This could cause legislators to pull their support.

If we were to continue to advocate for this bill, we would want to meet more with the people who are critical of the bill in the hopes of swaying them and understanding their perspective. Also, given that it might be easy to falsely sway public opinion against the bill, it would be important to hold informational meetings and to generally find ways to get the message across to the public.

This could include partnering further with Citizens For Juvenile Justice to help [its] considerably larger platform and to collaborate with bigger names and organizations that might be interested in getting involved in the communications process.

There are also other bills that, if this bill were to be passed, would be similarly important. For example, legislation to increase education for inmates dovetails well with this bill. If this legislation is passed, the next step would be to make sure that that legislation and further legislation helping young people in prison is passed next.

■ Update

As of June 26, 2023: The bill was referred to the Committee on the Judiciary on February 16, 2023.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

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

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

Organization or Coalition support:

Citizens For Juvenile Justice: cfjj.org

Healthcare for Children Regardless of Immigration Status

Adrian Karwowski '23

Julian Knight '23

Leah Mandel '23



(From left) Julian Knight, Adrian Karwowski, and Leah Mandel

The “Cover All Kids” act will address urgent problems related to equitable access to health care, child health and well being, and long term health care savings. There are wide gaps in health care coverage for undocumented immigrants. A family that is eligible for Medicaid based on economic status could still be excluded from the Federal Health Insurance Marketplace solely due to their immigration status. Undocumented immigrants are currently ineligible for Medicaid or marketplace subsidies. Even legal immigrants are at risk for being uninsured, and cannot participate in Medicaid until they have been in the country legally for five years. “Cover All Kids” will ensure that children and young adults under 21 will have access to affordable and appropriate health care, thus closing the major gaps in coverage based on immigration status.

■ The Bill

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

■ Elevator Speech

Childhood health and well being lay the foundation for lifelong prosperity. I think we can agree that happy and healthy children are a priority for the state of Massachusetts. Unfortunately, the most vulnerable children in our healthcare system, those who fall through the gaps in state subsidized health plans, lack access to essential and fundamental services.

Without access to quality, affordable healthcare early in life, young people in Massachusetts are left vulnerable to medical and financial crises. Tens of thousands of Massachusetts children lack access to healthcare even though they meet the eligibility criteria of MassHealth. Lacking access to healthcare is associated with unidentified health conditions, financial issues due to severe medical expenses, and poorer health outcomes compared to those who have health insurance.

The solution is clear: expanding the definition of who is eligible for MassHealth will increase access to essential services in the state of Massachusetts and improve the health and well being of children across the commonwealth.

This legislative session, you should support An Act to ensure equitable health coverage for children (H.1237/S.740). This bill will increase eligibility for MassHealth benefits and improve the health, well being, and overall quality of life of all children in our state.

Give Massachusetts children the best chance to succeed by ensuring their access to high quality, affordable health care and the best opportunity for a happy and healthy future. Reach out to your representatives and let them know that access to healthcare for Massachusetts children is important to you. Encourage them to co-sponsor this bill, hold a hearing as soon as possible, and turn this bill into law!

■ Op-Eds

Adrian Karwowski

The Struggle for Healthcare as an Immigrant

Eight years ago, my mother and I faced one of the greatest challenges of our lives: starting anew in the United States. We hoped for a brighter future, but our journey was far from easy. As we settled in, I quickly realized that my mother's struggle for a secure life was far from over. Despite her hard work to provide for me, my mother could not afford to provide me with the preventive healthcare visits, primary doctor, or even emergency room visits I needed.

The excessive costs of healthcare made it nearly impossible for me to access the care I needed. I had to learn how to stay healthy as long as possible, often avoiding necessary treatment until my health concerns spiraled into emergencies. My mother has always put my health first, but with limited financial resources, it has been a constant struggle. We have had to avoid regular check-ups and preventive care, and often have had to rely on expensive

emergency room visits when health issues arose.

But my mother is not alone in this struggle. There are parents of over 30,000 undocumented children who are only eligible for limited healthcare coverage. That is why I am in full support of bill H.1237/S.740, which would expand access to healthcare coverage for all children in Massachusetts, regardless of their immigration status. As an immigrant who migrated in 2014, I understand the challenges that immigrant families face when it comes to healthcare. Many immigrant families live in fear that if something awful happened to their children, they would not be able to help them feel better.

By removing the citizenship requirement for healthcare coverage under MassHealth, this bill would ensure that all children in Massachusetts have access to the care they need. It would also provide relief for parents like my mother who struggle to afford the high costs of healthcare.

This bill is not just about ensuring access to healthcare. It is also about investing in the future of Massachusetts. Access to healthcare coverage for all children, regardless of

COVER ALL KIDS

H.1237/S.740

Safeguarding the health of ALL of Massachusetts' children



The Problem

Despite paying hundreds of millions in state taxes, **undocumented immigrants are excluded from MassHealth**. These residents are not properly insured, making it near-impossible for families to pay for healthcare.

Children and young adults without adequate access have worse educational and lifelong outcomes than their insured counterparts.



The Bill

"Cover All Kids" would expand MassHealth to include **all income-eligible residents under 21, regardless of immigration status.**



Why This Bill

Access to healthcare at an early age is essential to long term health and well being of the entire Commonwealth.

Insured residents are healthy residents, and healthy residents contribute to a safer and more economically productive Massachusetts.



Taking Action

Vote favorably so that "Cover All Kids" can move directly to the House Ways & Means Committee and have a chance to become law!

This will help vulnerable Massachusetts residents access the care they need and deserve, and boost health across the Commonwealth.



COVER ALL KIDS

MA - H.1237/S.740

What Stakeholders Say:

"It's stressful not getting certain things getting checked out. You cannot get any elective procedures such as braces. I **have experienced difficulties in seeking healthcare** too, like growing up I had four impacted wisdom teeth and I couldn't afford to get them removed. **Health definitely suffers as a result of [being uninsured]**, overall health... I would say it's **difficult and stressful** knowing we are not having the best care."

— Anonymous undocumented interviewee, residing in Waltham, MA

"Society at large benefits from a healthier population and members of society who have the opportunity to be productive. **The state also benefits in the long term by preventing emergency health care costs and the financial burden of chronic illness.** Chronic disease and medical crises can be expensive, but they can also be prevented. **Health equity is a fundamental question of right and wrong; caring for the most vulnerable children in the healthcare system is fundamentally the right thing to do.**"

— Dr. Deborah Garnick, Professor at Brandeis University specializing in insurance reform

"Financial toxicity is the negative impact of high cost medical expenses on a person's quality of life. Early adults, people in their 20's, are more prone to financial toxicity which is associated with higher risk of mortality. **Early access to healthcare would mitigate financial toxicity** for people at the cusp of financial independence"

— Beck Gold, radiation oncology researcher at Mass General Hospital in Boston.

"To really improve health equity in Massachusetts, **we need to distribute health care dollars in a more equitable way.** Our healthcare system works well for many, but the disparate effects of the pandemic provide a somber reminder that **our system fails to equitably serve communities of color.**"

— Maura Healey, 73rd Governor of Massachusetts

Contact for more info:

Leah Mandel
Julian Knight
Adrián Karwowski



immigration status, would result in healthier children who are better able to thrive and succeed in school and in life. It would also lead to a reduction in healthcare costs in the long term, since preventive care and early intervention can prevent more serious health issues early on.

I urge lawmakers in Massachusetts to support bill H.1237/S.740 and make healthcare coverage for all children a priority, so that no more parents such as mine have to see their child ill, and be unable to help them. I also urge residents of Massachusetts to call or email their local legislators, and ask for their support in the passing of this bill.

It is time to put the health and well being of our children first, and ensure that they have access to the care they need to lead healthy and productive lives.

Julian Knight

The Time for Universal Healthcare for Children is (Still) Now

For most of us, annual check-ups with the pediatrician are a cornerstone of our childhood – we were dragged by our parents to be poked, prodded, vaccinated, and maybe scanned. If a problem was found, it was dealt with promptly, and we (usually) went about our childish lives afterwards. But imagine if, after the doctor found something wrong, our parents were forced to acknowledge that information and do nothing. Or, worse, never even visit the pediatrician in the first place.

Even with the most loving parents, a low income and lack of insurance coverage can create a crippling situation such as this, in which families are forced to choose between immediate expenses like food, and equally critical ones like healthcare. And this is just one example. What if you had, as a child, developed an acute condition that arose suddenly, with no time for a pediatrician to see it at an annual check-up? How would you see specialists? What hospital network would you use? Most importantly, how would you pay for these most expensive emergencies?

Right now, this lack of coverage is especially pronounced among children whose immigration status interferes with their ability to obtain state health insurance – a vital necessity for low-income families, and yet one that they currently don't qualify for due to this one qualifier.

It's no secret that the U.S. healthcare system is the most expensive in the world, with spending that far outpaces that of all other developed nations (an ER visit alone can cost thousands of dollars, not including subsequent inpatient stays or additional procedures), in spite of lagging life expectancy. In fact, the only way these extreme prices can

be anything but crippling to the average American's wallet is through health insurance, a paradoxical "service" that is optional in theory but necessary in practice.

Even worse, our nation has yet to adopt a system of universal insurance coverage (which in itself would drive down costs through government price negotiation, as already occurs to a lesser extent with Medicare and Medicaid). As a result, the ability to pay for treatments and stay healthy is directly dependent on one's ability to obtain health insurance, which itself is contingent on education, family background, and income. While COVID-19 outcomes, for example, were not directly influenced by a patient's ability to pay, the disease certainly preyed upon existing disparities in the social determinants of health (e.g. unmanaged preexisting conditions) that were exacerbated by underinsurance or uninsurance.

Massachusetts does, fortunately, provide insurance coverage to qualifying low-income families via MassHealth (the Commonwealth's Medicaid program), but residents lacking a formal immigration status (for example, recent arrivals, those who have applied for citizenship and are awaiting approval or undocumented immigrants) usually do not qualify and would thus need to rely solely on their own income or job to provide insurance. As these residents are already more likely to not have employer health insurance, or the savings to cover even basic procedures or visits out of pocket, this often forces them to avoid seeking treatment or preventative care entirely – something most of us are fortunate enough to find hard to imagine.

This is especially damaging for children, who are especially vulnerable and at greater risk of negative consequences if any medical care, preventative or otherwise, is delayed or withheld. The Children's Medical Security Plan (CMSP) does, in principle, attempt to close this gap by at least providing uninsured children with some coverage; however, it is extremely inadequate, and fails to cover even ER visits, mental health care, rehabilitation, or inpatient stays – arguably the more expensive services.

Either way, the net result is clear: Massachusetts is grossly failing to adequately cover the most vulnerable population of one of its most vulnerable demographics: low-income immigrant children – which is, by extension, a failure to invest in their families, communities, and the future of the Commonwealth. This group alone accounts for some 30,000 uninsured children who are at risk of falling through the gaps in the safety net.

In one example, a blind eight-year-old with severe developmental disabilities and other congenital issues relies exclusively on his mother for in-home care (making her unable to work), and goes without essential medicines due to

their inaccessible out-of-pocket cost.

In another, an undocumented resident living in Waltham was unable to access necessary preventative care or braces as a child, forcing him to go without.

Fortunately, a simple solution is available to cover these children, and is already in committee on Beacon Hill: the Cover All Kids bill (H.1237/S.740), which will ensure that immigrant residents under 21 are covered by MassHealth. This will not only provide them with the comprehensive benefits afforded to all other similarly-positioned residents of the Commonwealth, but afford them equal opportunity to become healthy, successful, and productive adults.

Contact your state representatives and encourage them to vote favorably for this bill in committee to ensure its swift passage into law. For while Massachusetts has a lot to be proud of regarding the quality of care available statewide, this surprisingly wide gap in coverage proves how dire the need for insurance reform continues to be.

Leah Mandel

“Cover All Kids” Legislation Helps Massachusetts Families Breathe Easier

The cost of living in the state of Massachusetts seems to get higher and higher every day. Gas prices fluctuate day by day, rent and utilities have to get paid, and don’t get me started on the price of eggs. For some families, unexpected medical events drop a weight on their chests and make it harder to breathe.

Take something simple, like an asthma attack, for example. When I was a kid, any number of things could make it impossible to breathe: spring pollen, a dusty carpet, or a particularly active recess on the playground. When I had asthma attacks, I was lucky to have my rescue inhaler nearby. For other kids, it would be a medical emergency.

The average cost of an ER visit in the state of Massachusetts is over \$1,000. Throw in close to another \$1,000 if the issue requires medication. If you’re a parent, you may have to pick your kid up from school and drive them to the ER, unless you’d like to pay \$1,000 more for the ambulance ride. You have to take time away from work just to make sure your child can breathe, but now you’re suffocating under the weight of thousands of dollars of medical expenses. For the 30,000 families in Massachusetts who are excluded from MassHealth benefits, it’s nearly impossible to catch their breath.

These families would be eligible for MassHealth, the Medicaid program for the state of Massachusetts, if it weren’t for their immigration status. While they meet the economic

criteria, their status as undocumented immigrants renders them ineligible for MassHealth benefits, which would provide coverage for regular checkups, early screening, and countless essential services.

Massachusetts officials have come together to propose a solution: An Act to ensure equitable health coverage for children, a.k.a “Cover All Kids.” This bill would make all young people in Massachusetts under the age of 21 eligible for MassHealth regardless of their immigration status, provided they meet the income-based criteria. A dozen other U.S. states have adopted similar legislation, and Massachusetts needs to keep up.

Deborah Garnick, a professor at the Heller School for Social Policy and Management at Brandeis University, has decades of experience researching health care quality and performance measures. In a recent interview, she outlined the positives of expanding eligibility for MassHealth benefits. Garnick explained that “everyone benefits from health care coverage... young people who need services... parents [who] don’t have to worry about their child not being able to breathe. The healthcare system benefits because a kid with asthma who has regular exams and gets an inhaler doesn’t need emergency hospital visits that put a strain on the family as well as the time and resources of hospitals. Society at large benefits from a healthier population... and the state benefits long term by preventing emergency health care costs.”

Expanding eligibility for essential healthcare will lower rates of uninsured children in Massachusetts, as it has done in other states. Access to healthcare early in life lowers risk of long term, severe medical conditions. The COVID-19 pandemic has also demonstrated the importance of vaccination against viral disease. Access to pediatric care helps immunize thousands of children against harmful diseases from measles and hepatitis to the common cold and flu. Helping our community’s children be their healthiest selves is of utmost importance.

The basic ability to breathe, to be healthy, and be secure in the state of Massachusetts is not guaranteed. An Act to ensure equitable health coverage for children is currently being reviewed by your senators and representatives. Let them know how important it is for you, your children, and your community to have access to health care.

Health is a fundamental right, not a privilege only people with health insurance can afford. This bill, when passed, will help thousands of Massachusetts families breathe a little easier and focus more on the price of eggs.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator DiDomenico,

I hope this letter finds you well. I'm Julian Knight, a lifelong resident of Cambridge, fellow alumnus of Cambridge Rindge and Latin School, and a senior at Brandeis University majoring in health policy and neuroscience. I, along with two of my fellow students – Leah Mandel and Adrián Karwowski – are writing to you to discuss critical legislation related to the health of the Commonwealth.

As I'm sure you would agree, this is a critical matter, and all the more so when children are involved. We strongly believe it is essential that they are provided with the resources to ensure long-term health and success, and that they deserve to lead healthy lives. Throughout our educational careers, we have seen time and again how children who have access to comprehensive healthcare are given an unmatched advantage, and we believe that this privilege should become a universal right.

While Massachusetts does have programs to insure low-income children via MassHealth, current laws prevent qualifying children from being insured based solely on their immigration status. Greatly limited coverage is technically available through the Children's Medical Security Plan (CMSP) as an emergency measure, but the services covered do little to secure a child's health in practice. For instance, emergency room visits, ambulance rides, and all inpatient care are not covered, meaning that all but the most basic preventative services (e.g. dental cleanings) must be paid for out of pocket, thus defeating the purpose of a state insurance program for low-income families. These families are then forced to either sacrifice necessities like food, housing, and education to pay for necessary care, or to sacrifice care to cover necessities – circumstances that have untold impacts on future health outcomes and the family's security and stability overall.

The necessary coverage systems are already in place; some two million residents are already covered by MassHealth. By simply removing immigration status as a qualifier for coverage, these already-vulnerable children will be able to access the care they deserve, and that their family's tax dollars already pay for.

SD.740, An Act to ensure equitable health coverage for children, aims to do exactly this, and I am pleased, as a constituent, to see that you are a lead sponsor for this bill. The remarkable quality of healthcare in the Commonwealth is offset only by its high costs, and insurance – private or public – is virtually required to protect most patients from financial ruin. This act will help to eliminate the current paradox created by MassHealth qualification gaps, helping

the most vulnerable children access the care they need the most, without sacrificing the financial security of their families. As such, it is also a key component of any effort to reduce disparities within the Commonwealth, not only in health but in the dependent spheres of education, income, employment, and housing.

Such a measure will naturally require the allocation of funds, but any coverage expansion should be viewed not in terms of how much it will cost, but how much it will save. Financial instability drives patients to neglect chronic conditions and defer care, often to a point where eventual treatment is far costlier than if caught early – an issue no residents, regardless of immigration status, should be forced to confront. Uninsured families are often forced to use emergency rooms as doctors offices, with nowhere else to go, despite facing high bills that would not be currently covered.

This act will work to fix this, ensuring that these children will not need to delay their care, thereby reducing the direct and indirect costs to their families and to society. Insured residents are healthy residents, and healthy residents contribute, regardless of immigration status, to a safer and more economically productive Massachusetts. By making the Commonwealth work for them, we make it work for everyone.

We applaud your efforts to support the health of all Massachusetts residents, and encourage your continued support of this bill by getting it prioritized for committee hearings and a favorable vote out as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Julian Knight

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Adrian Karwowski

On meeting with the Timothy O'Neil from the Office of Representative John J. Lawn

My advocacy team and I first met with the legislative staff of Representative John J. Lawn's office. Before attending this meeting, my team was aware that Representative John J. Lawn is one of the chairmen of the Committee on Health Care Financing. Therefore, we knew that it was vital for this bill to pass the committee on healthcare financing, before we even got to thinking about making it to the Ways and Means committee.

[We met] with Timothy M. O'Neil, one of John J. Lawn's staffers. Upon meeting him, we delivered to him our elevator speech and answered any questions he may have had for us. As soon as we informed him about our bill, Timothy told us

that Rep. Lawn's office has been aware of this bill and has promised to support this bill once it is up [for a] vote.

Julian Knight

On meeting with Suzanna Curry, Behavioral Health Policy Director at Healthcare For All Massachusetts (HCFA)

At the conclusion of our advocacy efforts, we reached out to Suzanne Curry, the Behavioral Health Policy Director at Healthcare For All, to update her on our progress. We had met with Ms. Curry previously, prior to beginning to lobby for this bill, and thought this would help to continue our advocacy efforts after the course concludes.

In our email, we detailed which legislators we met with and how they responded, highlighting their proposed plans and our efforts moving forward, as well as recurring questions. For example, the majority of legislators we met had questions about the cost of the bill and where funding would come from, and mentioning this helped emphasize to Ms. Curry and HCFA that this is a relevant issue to anticipate. As a whole, committee members seemed to either already support the bill, or else were interested in planning to do so (if even just politely).

In her response, Ms. Curry thanked us for our meetings and we continued our earlier conversation about cost estimates for this bill, which remain around \$100 million but are somewhat outdated. She reiterated the difficult but ongoing effort to update these numbers, and agreed with our assessment that the most critical next steps are getting the bill to a hearing. [She] also thought that written testimony from us "would be great" to send along for an eventual hearing, so we may send some of our work along with the video and storybook.

Overall, this was a productive meeting, and it was helpful to be able to circle back and revisit our initial lobbying efforts.

Leah Mandel

On meeting with Tim O'Neill from the Office of Representative John Lawn

We focused our campaign efforts on the Health Care Financing Committee because that's where Cover All Kids has gone in past sessions, and it was sent there again this Spring. Our first meeting at the State House was at the office of Representative John Lawn. Lawn is the House Chair of the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing.

We were optimistic going into this meeting because in the past, Rep. Lawn has supported and sponsored bills relative to child wellbeing, reducing costs of medical care,

and expanding services covered by insurance. While Lawn himself was out of the office at an event, we met with his Legislative Director, Tim O'Neill. Tim was very receptive to our elevator pitch. He said that this type of bill is something that Representative Lawn would be interested in and that he has supported HCFA initiatives in the past.

It was a brief meeting because he didn't ask a lot of questions. Because it was our first meeting, I didn't know how to keep the conversation going, but he said he would pass this along to Representative Lawn. I think we could have been more assertive about our call to action and tell him that Representative Lawn should prioritize this bill and hold a hearing on it as soon as possible.

Overall it was a good meeting and Tim O'Neill made it seem like Representative Lawn would support this bill whenever it does get a hearing. The only drawback was that since he was already familiar with the bill and with HCFA, we had a very short conversation and it didn't feel like we were telling him anything new.

■ Next Steps

"Cover All Kids" has been assigned to the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing. A hearing for this bill has yet to be scheduled. Based on our meetings with the state senators and representatives who serve on this committee, and our correspondence with Health Care For All (HCFA) representative Suzanne Curry, we are optimistic that "Cover All Kids" will receive a favorable review whenever it does get a hearing.

A potential obstacle that we anticipate is that this bill will run into opposition when it gets to Ways and Means. It has been unsuccessful in Ways and Means in previous years because of the large number attached to it and the apprehension of many legislators to commit such a large amount of money to expand Medicaid for undocumented immigrants. In our discussions with Suzanne Curry from HCFA, she said her organization is still trying to get another cost estimate from MassHealth, but as of right now this bill will likely cost around \$100 million. Curry clarified that this will come exclusively from the state of Massachusetts. No federal funding will go towards this program. This will probably affect support of this bill in Ways and Means as well.

The implementation of this bill may have a few issues. An unintended consequence that is feared with this bill is that it will increase demand for healthcare services and could put a strain on the healthcare system, leading to longer wait times, decreased quality of care, and shortage of healthcare providers. However, New York's "Child Health

Plus” program creates a great example of why this should not be a concern. The program noticed an increase in quality of health care after implementing CHPlus such as improved quality of primary care, including preventive visits, immunization rates, use of the medical home for health care, compliance with preventive guidelines, and parent-reported health status of the child.

It might be helpful to reach out to collaborate with advocacy groups from the other states where this legislation passed. They could offer helpful insights into their legislative process and give us strategies to successfully move this bill along. This could come from HCFA-type lobbying organizations and coalitions or even legislators from those states where the bill has passed.

A potential pushback to this policy is that taxpayers might not want to pay for undocumented immigrant’s healthcare. However this point is already proven to be inadequate as Massachusetts taxpayers are already paying for emergency visits that are covered by Medicaid. By ensuring children and young adults under 21, regardless of immigration status, get healthcare coverage, it will increase the amount of preventive visits. These visits are more inexpensive than emergency visits, and will also keep the general public healthy.

There are fears that private insurance companies will lose money by expanding healthcare coverage to any child or young adult under the age of 21— an issue that is not necessarily the most critical, but could theoretically have economic implications (for instance, as insurers are forced to lay off employees). However, as stated in the legislative report, Howell notes that of 22 separate studies, only four reported statistically significant declines in private insurance enrollment. Therefore, there is little concern of private insurance companies losing business by expanding coverage.

Furthermore, there are hurdles to seeking out healthcare services since the people that are uninsured are less likely

to have private insurance to begin with, and therefore their demand is untouched. Finally, this bill specifically targets a population of only around 30,000 children in the Commonwealth who are already uninsured, making such a problem very unlikely.

This bill will benefit Massachusetts in the long run by bringing down spending on healthcare. This reduction in individual spending not only lessens the economic strain on low-income families; it reduces the strain on the healthcare system as a whole. With access to insurance, families can ensure that their children are given the best chance possible at a healthy life – a life where they remain productive citizens, rather than becoming deficits that drain welfare systems already in place. By providing people – including immigrants – with health insurance under MassHealth, we will see an improvement to public health as a whole, both among the families it directly benefits, and among those in their communities.

We have the means to pass this legislation, and it is only through political will that legislation can be passed that will ultimately benefit everyone.

■ Update

As of July 28, 2023: The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing on February 16, 2023. A hearing was held on July 25, 2023.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

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

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

Organization or Coalition support:

Health Care For All: hcfama.org

Free School Meals for All Children

Sara Goldstein '23

Rose Pena Rios '23



Rose Pena Rios (left) and Sara Goldstein

Bill H.603/S.261, sponsored by Senator Sal DiDomenico and Representative Andres Vargas, seeks to establish a more permanent set of legislation regarding school meals. Schools would be able to use federal funds to provide free school meals by enrolling in the federal Community Eligibility Provision to maximize federal funding for these school meal programs. Funding that is not covered by the federal government would be provided by the state's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

■ The Bill

H.603/S.261: An Act relative to universal school meals

■ Elevator Speech

Hello, my name is Rose, and I am a Massachusetts voter. Hi, I'm Sara and as a student studying inequality and social policy, I am passionate about creating effective equitable public policy. We know that you too care about creating a more just world. We all care about children and their health and wellness. Yet, sadly, 1 in 11 children in Massachusetts experience hunger. School meals are essential to providing nutritious food to children.

Massachusetts has supported a universal school meal program since 2020, but it is not permanent. After this academic year, schools will return to the previous ineffective tiered pay system for school meals. Many families do not qualify for free meals, which will leave students hungry and unable to focus in class.

Bill S.261/H.603 has been introduced to permanently establish free school meals for all students. By passing this bill, Massachusetts will be closer to ending child hunger. We urge you and the Committee on Education to hold a hearing as soon as possible, and to vote favorably on this bill.

■ Op-Eds

Sara Goldstein

The Partisan Politics of Fighting Childhood Hunger

On March 26th, 2023, Governor Healey tweeted: "Free school meals mean full stomachs, more time in the morning, and more money back in the pockets of parents..." Governor Healey's new 2023-2024 school year budget includes funding for free school meals for all students, but the future of free school meals remains precarious.

Governor Healey's expanded funding is a band-aid fix. It extends the program for one year without any further commitment. Yet, previous efforts to make this program permanent have been unsuccessful. We can't pretend that child hunger only occurred during COVID, and that the problem will now magically go away. In Massachusetts, one in four children are hungry. An Act relative to universal school meals (Bill S.261/H.603) aims to make permanent a policy that began in the COVID era, providing free school meals to all

Massachusetts children no matter their family income. The bill was proposed in the last legislative session and never passed; we can't allow partisan politics to let this happen again.

Providing food for children should not be controversial. From all perspectives, it's a good thing. For administrators, it means less work processing paperwork to assess which students qualify for free or reduced-price meals and chasing down overdue charges. For teachers, healthy, well-fed students have better classroom behavior and make for a more productive learning environment. For parents, free school meals on average help families save \$1,200 a year.

The benefits to school children are critical. Universal free school lunches combat the stigma associated with receiving government-subsidized food and help hungry students feel comfortable eating in the cafeteria. Due to the short-term universal free school meals program, Massachusetts has about 56,000 more children eating lunch each day. Hungry students are impacted in many areas – they have lower math and reading test scores, challenges to their emotional well being, and concerning health outcomes.

On its own, the need to feed hungry children should indicate the crucial importance of universal free school meals, but opponents still resist this bill on financial grounds. This pushback is simply not grounded. The positive financial benefits of free school meals vastly outweigh its price tag. The program cost, at \$175 million, is only 0.33% of Massachusetts's budget.

It is natural to worry about an increase in taxes, but this program won't increase taxes. Since 2020, Massachusetts has been funding this program, and we still run a surplus. Starting in 2023, the new millionaire's tax will provide roughly \$1 to \$2 billion a year in extra tax revenue for transportation and education. Also, the extra money in family pockets will benefit all Massachusetts, as it will function as an economic stimulus. Massachusetts can afford free school meals for all without a significant financial burden. The financial counterargument is weak, at best.

I have described the benefits to school administrators, parents, teachers, and students and how this program is proven to be successful and financially viable, so how could a legislator reasonably oppose this bill? Is stopping childhood hunger really that hard to support? What is holding legislatures back is an outdated conservative fear of expanding any government benefit. While universal school meals on the surface might just seem to be expanding the current subsidized school meal system, it just simplifies and better an already existing school meal distribution process. Viewing this bill as just another liberal attempt to expand services is ridiculous.

Now let's try a thought experiment. What if this program was a simple expansion of benefits? Let's remember what the benefits are: feeding hungry children and helping our school system. These are basic services for a vulnerable population. Come on.

Politicians need to focus on improving the quality of life of their constituents and not simply oppose a bill because it sounds "woke." Let's hope that child hunger, if anything, can make legislators forget their liberal-phobia and remember to care for their constituents.

Reach out to your representatives and let them know that you support An Act relative to universal school meals and that you count on them to vote yes on this bill.

Rose Pena Rios

Why Means-Testing Meals Makes No Sense: A Case for Universal School Meals in Massachusetts

In March, Governor Healey proposed a supplemental budget bill that includes \$171 million to extend the state-funded universal school meal program for the upcoming academic year, 2023-2024. Thanks to this program, schools are able to offer free meals to the approximately 900,000 children enrolled in Massachusetts. But what happens after that? As of right now, universal meals are not permanent or guaranteed. If the state returns to the previous system of means-testing for meals, thousands of students will be left hungry. This is unacceptable.

Early on during the 2020 COVID pandemic, the USDA implemented a federal, nationwide waiver that allowed for schools to serve free meals to all students. This was intended to keep children fed in the face of the challenges due to the pandemic. Originally planned to only apply to the 2020-2021 academic year, it was then extended to cover the 2021-2022 academic year. It has since then expired, and it has been left to individual states to decide how to move forward.

Those who are against establishing universal meals argue that the previous system of checking for eligibility worked just fine. After all, if a family has a high enough income they should pay for their children's meals, right? Well, things are more complicated than that. Taking a moment to look at the USDA requirements and how it applies to Massachusetts reveals just how absurd it would be to return to the previous system, where families would have to prove they qualify by meeting a federally set household income threshold.

In order to qualify for reduced meals a household of three must make no more than \$45,991 annually. For free meals, the threshold is even lower. This is an absurd requirement, considering the cost of living in Massachusetts

consistently ranks high compared to other states. Families in the state have to have a higher income in order to live here, meaning they can't qualify for free or reduced price meals. And as time goes by, inflation starts to add to this complicated equation of eligibility.

Before the pandemic, one in ten families with children experienced hunger. Now, that rate has increased to one in six. Yet 20% of food insecure families do not qualify for free or reduced price meals. Returning to the old model of school meals would be a statewide disaster, which is why it is essential that Massachusetts state legislators do not leave the universal school meal program to be renewed on a year-by-year basis. It needs to be made permanent, and this needs to happen now. Other states such as California, Colorado, and Maine either already have or are going to implement permanent free school meals for the coming academic year, and many more states are in the process of passing legislation regarding universal meals.

In Massachusetts, bills S.261 and H.603 outline how the state would make universal school meals permanent. These bills are currently in the Joint Committee on Education and are awaiting a hearing.

To take action, call your local representatives and urge them to not only vote favorably on these bills, but to cosponsor them and push for a speedy hearing in committee. We must all work together to assure that all children are fed and healthy!

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator DiDomenico,

I hope this letter finds you well. My name is Rose Pena Rios and I am a student at Brandeis University as well as a Massachusetts voter in the city of Everett. I am writing to you in regards to bill S.261/H.603 on universal school meals.

I would like to thank you for working with Representative Vargas on presenting both the House and Senate versions of this bill. As someone who has grown up in the Massachusetts public education system, I know how important school meals are. It is clear from other bills you have sponsored and cosponsored that you truly care about the common good of your constituents and that you are working to give an equal opportunity to all who live in Massachusetts.

As you are aware, hunger and food insecurity is a concern in need of solving in Massachusetts. According to Feeding America, one in eleven children in our state experience hunger. For many children, school offers

nutritious meals that they otherwise could not access. While thus far Massachusetts has extended its universal school program, it is not permanent and will end after this academic year. If schools return to the ineffective tiered payment system of the past, many children whose families do not meet the threshold for free meals will be left hungry.

Hungry children cannot learn. This, of course, is unacceptable. Universal free school meals must be established permanently. This is where S.261/H.603 comes into play. If this act on school meals is passed, school meals can be secured for all children at no cost. This would be a huge win and a step forward in ending child hunger in Massachusetts and ensuring a level playing field for all children to get the most out of their education.

However, there are those who argue that school meals should not be universal. Opponents of the bill argue that people who can afford to pay for school meals should pay for them. However, we both know that Massachusetts is an expensive state to live in, which means a higher income is needed to pay for necessities. Since the required income thresholds for free and reduced meals are set according to the federal poverty level and not on a state-by-state basis, this leaves many who may benefit from free meals unable to qualify.

Another common argument against universal meals often presents in the form of a question: "What about the wealthier parts of the state? Why should we pay for them?" While it is true that many cities in the state may have more well-off families, universal meals not only reduce stigma by making sure no kid is excluded because of the inability to pay, they feed more kids. Sure, a child from a wealthy family may not notice the difference financially between a full price meal and a free meal. If even one more kid eats who was not able to before thanks to universal meals, then all of the efforts to pass this bill will have been worth it. In the end, these counter arguments should not stop this bill's progress.

As the Vice Chair on the Joint Committee on Education where bills S.261/H.603 have been referred, I urge you to push for a speedy hearing so that the legislative process can move forward.

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Sara Goldstein

On meeting with Brendan Berger, Chief of Staff for Senator Mike Barrett

Rose and I met with Brendan Berger in Senator Mike Barrett's office, Room 109-D. When we entered the office, Brendan was just on the way out and seemed ambivalent about if he should talk to us, but he then agreed to a short conversation about our bill. He agreed by saying, "I guess I have a moment."

Rose and I researched Sen. Barrett and knew that he... [represents] Waltham and that he was dedicated to environmental justice. We framed Sen. Barrett's dedication to environmental justice as [caring] for future generations and explained how that value is relevant to our bill which aims to eradicate childhood hunger. We then presented the problem the bill aims to address and how it is an effective solution. Lastly, we asked for a speedy hearing and for Sen. Barrett's support.

At the start of our elevator pitch, I introduced Rose and myself but didn't say where we were from. Brendan cut us off to ask where we are from and said we should be sure to introduce ourselves in the future, especially given that we live in Waltham. Brendan taught me the hard way the importance of a complete introduction at the start of the meeting. He then let us go through our whole pitch and seemed to be truly listening to us. I think it is likely he didn't know about the bill. At the end of the meeting, Brendan asked if we had a pamphlet for him. I was so happy that we had our printed storybook to share with him.

I feel that we did a good job of connecting on a personal level with Brendan. ... Rose shared their personal story about how they benefit from free school lunches which added a meaningful personal touch. From this meeting, I learned the power of personal stories as Rose sharing this experience facilitated a personal connection with Brendan.

Our conversation about the positive effects of the bill could have been more clear and more concise. When nervous, I ramble and can forget my train of thought. As Rose and I moved on to other State House visits, we tried to touch base prior to meetings and review our pitch.

Rose Pena Rios

On meeting with Dennis Burke from the Office of Senator Jason Lewis

The first meeting that Sara and I had on our own was with Dennis Burke, who is one of the staff in Senator Jason Lewis' office. We contacted Sen. Lewis' office since he is the Senate chair of the Joint Committee on Education, and we wanted to speak with him about getting a hearing on the bill.

Dennis was very kind to us and I personally felt like he didn't treat [us] like children, even though we were obviously nervous. We went through our pitch, and it was super shaky since it was the first time we were saying it to someone not from our class.

Dennis gave us some tips on how to navigate the State House in terms of talking to people about our bill, which was super helpful. We gave our storybook to him and he promised to leave it at the senator's desk. According to him, our bill was actually on the mind of the senator and it was of high priority on the agenda of bills to pass. Lastly, Dennis told us that while there wasn't a plan as to when the committee would hold a hearing, he would contact us if there was an update. He also told us that we could contact him if we need any help regarding lobbying for our bill.

Overall, it was a very nice first meeting and I think it helped calm my nerves to have someone who genuinely was interested and wanted to help us. Sara and I wanted to visit Dennis again, but couldn't manage to find time since he was very busy.

■ Next Steps

Since mid-February, bill S.261/H.603 has been stagnant in the legislative process. It was referred to the Joint Committee on Education, just like its previous version S.314 in 2022. There has yet to be a hearing planned for this bill, which is the next main step in moving the legislation forward.

Because of the legislative process, it is common for bills to either get stalled or die in committee. This was the case with the previous version of the bill, where it was delayed until now due to the universal school meal program being extended for another year making the bill a less urgent matter. However, this bill cannot afford to be put off indefinitely.

In order to push forward, it is important for Massachusetts voters to contact their legislators asking to cosponsor bill S.261/H.603 and call for a speedy hearing in committee. If one's legislators are on the Joint Committee on Education, it is also important to ask them to vote favorably on the bill.

In terms of feasibility, it is likely that the bill will pass this year. Not only have many legislators cosponsored the bill, but Governor Healey has shown support for universal school meals. For example, Governor Healey tweeted on April 4th, "I'm proud that the first major bill I signed into law will make sure every child can count on free, healthy meals through the end of the school year – and we want to keep the program going long-term." (@MassGovernor, 2023)

Earlier this year, she submitted a supplemental budget bill to add \$65 million to the already \$110 million allocated to school meals to make sure that there would be enough funding for the 2022-2023 academic year. On top of that, in mid-March Healey introduced another supplemental budget bill extending the program for the following academic year.

Additionally, the House Ways and Means committee approved a proposed budget for FY24 that included making universal school meals permanent (WCVB, 2023). This budget will be sent to the Senate Ways and Means in May, and if it passes there as well will move on hopefully to be signed by the Governor early this summer.

While it is not clear if this will be done by approving bill S.261/H.603, it would accomplish the goal of making school meals universal, though not necessarily using the same process, specifically when it comes to funding. In the bill, funding would come primarily from federal funds, with the rest being paid by the state taxes, notably the new so-called "millionaire's tax" that recently passed (Lannan, 2023). The language of the Ways and Means budget suggests that the program will be funded on a state level.

Many states have passed legislation to ensure universal school meals. This includes California, Maine, and New Mexico (Linscott, 2021). If Massachusetts passes this bill, which it seems likely that it will, it will put pressure on other states to do the same. If enough states across the country implement universal school meals programs, it would show that the bill is legally viable and feasible. The bill's passage also shows that there is enough political momentum and public support for it to be passed in other states. Future lobbying might connect groups across states and push for the passage of a federal law.

■ Update

As of August 10, 2023: The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on February 16, 2023. On August 10, 2023 Governor Maura Healey signed a state budget that included permanent universal school meals.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S261: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S261

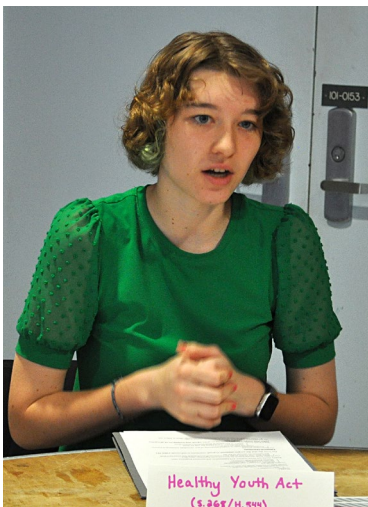
H.603: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H603

Organization or Coalition support:

Project Bread: projectbread.org

Increasing Access to Sex Education

Savannah Johnson '23



Savannah Johnson

The Healthy Youth Act (H.544/S.268) seeks to dismantle the stigma around sex and close the knowledge gap in Massachusetts. Studies have found this sex education gap to be large among youth.

■ The Bill

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

■ Elevator Speech

My name is Savannah Johnson, and I am an advocate who has worked with REACH, an emergency domestic violence shelter in Massachusetts. I saw firsthand that over 10% of high school students experience some form of sexual or dating violence, a statistic that is even higher for LGBTQ+ students.

We can all agree that Massachusetts has a responsibility to prevent this unacceptable level of violence. The YWCA states that approximately 4500 people experience sexual assault each year in the state of Massachusetts. Research indicates that medically accurate and inclusive sex education can vastly reduce sexual assault rates.

This is what the Healthy Youth Act aims to achieve. By ensuring that all sex education provided in schools is medically accurate, age-appropriate, and inclusive, the Healthy Youth Act will reduce sexual and dating violence, STI transmission, and unwanted pregnancy rates.

The Healthy Youth Act has been in the Massachusetts legislature since 2011. Since then, over 50,000 people have experienced sexual assault that could have been prevented by the passage of this act.

I implore you to advocate for a speedy hearing for the Healthy Youth Act, knowing that for every day that this act goes unpassed, 12 people experience sexual assault within Massachusetts.

■ Op-Ed

Savannah Johnson

1-800-656-4673 Isn't Enough for Our Youth!

1-800-656-4673, a number called by five hundred thousand people in 2020, was perhaps the most important number of the year. This number belongs to the National Sexual Assault Hotline, where callers who may have experienced or are experiencing sexual assault or abuse can receive confidential help from a trained staff member. However, this is only a small percentage of the national population that experiences some type of dating or sexual violence, or abuse.

In Massachusetts, about 10% of high school students experience some form of sexual or dating violence, a statistic that is much higher for LGBTQ+ students. Additionally, with the increased spread of STDs, Massachusetts youth ages 15-24 account for half of the 26 million new cases reported. The quality and safety of our Massachusetts youth's relationships affect their ability to feel comfortable, confident, and loved later in life.

Providing our youth with medically accurate, age appropriate and inclusive sex education that dives deep into the topics of healthy relationships,

HEALTHY YOUTH ACT

S.268/H.544



AN ACT THAT AIMS TO:

Keep MA youth safe
by disrupting
misinformation
around sex and
relationships

KARYN M. SOLKY

MD, ASSOCIATE CLINICAL CHIEF OF GYNECOLOGY- CEDARS-SINAI DEPARTMENT OF OBSTETRICS & GYNECOLOGY

"Proper education about anatomy helps people take care of themselves so they know when to seek medical care appropriately, and education clearly prevents disease and undesired pregnancy. For example, understanding that STIs do not necessarily cause symptoms is important in the screening of disease, as well as treatment and prevention; accurate information about birth control options...is important for preventing the medical complications that come with pregnancy and late pregnancy terminations."



The Problem



- Sexual violence rates among teens are **rapidly rising**, especially among LGBTQ+ communities
 - 10%** of high school students have experienced sexual assault in MA
- Increased spread of STD's
 - youth **ages 15-24** account for half the 26 million new cases reported
- Increased rates of unintended pregnancies
 - 45 per 1,000 women **aged 15-44** experience unintended pregnancy

MA COLLEGE STUDENT LGBTQ+ COMMUNITY MEMBER, AGED 19

"Having an inclusive sex education would have been really validating and helped me to feel included! It also would have helped prevent bullying, as the LGBTQ+ community would have been more normalized among my peers."



LEGISLATURES, WE ASK THAT
YOU HELP TO BRING THE HEALTHY
YOUTH ACT A SPEEDY HEARING
AND VOTE FAVORABLY.

vote
YES!
for our **KIDS!**

IN OTHER STATES

Versions of the Healthy Youth Act have been passed in California, Illinois, North Carolina, and Washington

The State of Sex Education

U.S. state policies on sex ed in schools (as of July 2019)



Buchholz, Katharina, and Fella Richter. "Infographic: Sex Education Mandatory in Half of U.S. States." Statista Infographics, 20 July 2019. <https://www.statista.com/chart/18025/state-law-on-sex-ed-in-the-us/>.

SOLVING THE PROBLEM WITH A CURRICULUM THAT:

provides medically
accurate and age
appropriate
information

teaches about
healthy
relationships
(consent +

is inclusive of
LGBTQ+
identities and
experiences

TO LEARN MORE:

Please reach out to Savannah Johnson

or

Visit: <https://www.healthyyouthact.org>



boundaries, and consent, is the only way to properly equip them. The Healthy Youth Act aims to do exactly this. As parents, guardians, and mentors of our youth, let's ask ourselves: are we providing our youth with the tools and resources they need to stay healthy and safe as they develop relationships?

Imagine a child, or your child, feeling isolated and stigmatized due to bullying about their sexuality or gender expression. Imagine a child, as a grown adult feeling unsafe in their own home because their partner is threatening them. Imagine your child experiencing health complications due to unintended pregnancy or contracting chlamydia or AIDS because they didn't know how to properly protect themselves. Today, these are all common scenarios for Massachusetts youth. But this doesn't have to be the case!

With proper sex education we can better prepare our youth, helping them to make educated decisions when it comes to relationships and sexual activity. April is Sexual Assault Awareness Month, during which many advocacy groups including the Healthy Youth Act Coalition are working to help our youth and get the Healthy Youth Act passed. This month serves as a huge reminder that our youth are in need of our help.

1-800-656-4673 can only provide so much help. We must take the next steps towards properly providing our youth with sex education so that everyone can experience the love they deserve, safely.

Contact the Healthy Youth Act Coalition to find out more information. Also, call your local legislator and encourage them to prioritize the Healthy Youth Act by advocating for a speedy hearing.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Howard,

My name is Savannah Johnson, a former domestic violence shelter worker. I am a resident of Waltham and am writing to you regarding H.544/S.268, An Act relative to healthy youth. I want to thank you for your sponsorship of the Healthy Youth Act and appreciate the hard work you have done in attempting to pass this bill so far. Your dedication to this bill is clear and greatly appreciated. Despite this hard work, I am writing to highlight the urgency of passing the Healthy Youth Act.

In my work with survivors of domestic violence, I have seen firsthand the deep impact of misinformation around topics such as consent, sexuality, and healthy relationships. In a state where over 10% of high school students experience some form of intimate partner violence, it is unacceptable

that medical accuracy is not a necessary foundation of sex education curricula, given the wealth of evidence that indicates accurate sex education works to decrease intimate partner violence rates. Given the drastically higher rates of intimate partner violence experienced by LGBTQ+ youth, it is even more distressing that existing sex education curricula do not have to be inclusive of diverse sexualities, genders, or disabilities.

Sadly, two of the highest-ranking areas for domestic violence rates (per 1,000 residents) in Massachusetts are in Marlborough and Framingham of Middlesex County, at 5.3 and 3.9, respectively. Therefore, your constituents of Middlesex County are in desperate need for proper resources and education around the topics covered by this act.

The Healthy Youth Act aims to address these issues by ensuring that all sex education provided in schools is medically accurate, age-appropriate, and inclusive. In doing so, the bill will reduce sexual and dating violence, STI transmission, and unwanted pregnancy rates, as we have seen in states such as California, Illinois, North Carolina, and Washington, where versions of this act have already been passed.

This bill has limited drawbacks. The financial consequences are minimal, with training and curricular materials being estimated to cost between \$200,000 - \$370,000, with only a \$200 cost associated with continued education for providers when employing more instructors. Further, this bill continues to protect parental rights by allowing for parents to opt their children out of sex education and review curricular materials.

I know that you are deeply committed to the passage of the Healthy Youth Act, and I implore you to utilize your position in the Joint Committee on Education to advocate for a speedy hearing. In the case that the bill is voted out favorably, as it has been in previous sessions, I ask that you work to ensure a fast hearing in the House Committee on Ways and Means.

In order to prevent the Healthy Youth Act from dying in review yet again, I ask that you write in support of this bill to the chair, Representative Aaron Michlelwitz and the vice chair, Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante.

Thank you,

Savannah Johnson

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journal

On meeting with Christie Young, Chief of Staff for Senator DiDomenico

On March 21st, I had a meeting scheduled... with Christie Young, Senator DiDomenico's chief of staff. First, I asked her a little bit about the process of passing a bill that her office has sponsored in the general sense. She talked about how most bills die in the Ways and Means Committee because they are competing with so many other priorities. To pass they need to be "super clean and perfect."

I asked her if there was anything with the Healthy Youth Act that was making it hard to pass. She mentioned that the phrasing "medically accurate" in the bill has had some controversy. I also asked if there are any main groups opposing the bill. According to Christie, Massachusetts Citizens for Life is the only major organized opposition the bill is facing. She was very optimistic that the bill will pass this year.

I felt this meeting was very helpful in gaining some more knowledge around the bill and why it is important to her office and Senator DiDomenico. I also was able to make a strong connection with Christie and she gave me her email and personal phone number for future contact. We also set up a meeting for my next visit to the State House on April 4th so that I could meet with the Senator, speak with him ... and get a video of him.

I also gave Christie some copies of my storybook and asked her to pass them along to the Senator and advocate for a speedy hearing for this bill. She was very adamant about thanking me for reminding her about speedy hearings and wrote herself a note to make that a priority for the Senator.

On meeting with Claudia Chung, Legislative Aide for Representative Steven Ultrino

On our trip to the State House on April 4th, I stopped in several offices of members of the Education Committee to advocate for a speedy hearing. At Representative Steven Ultrino's office, I was unable to speak directly with the Representative, however Claudia Chung (head of staff) was able to talk with me for a few minutes. She was very nice and offered to pass along my information and my storybook to the senator.

I also was able to ask her several questions about how things worked in her office in relation to the education committee. For example, I learned that bills are prioritized first if they are refiled or new bills, starting with refiled ones, in chronological order. This bodes well for the Healthy Youth

Act since it has been refiled many times.

She also explained to me that Representative Ultrino has more weight when it comes to deciding which bills are done first since he is the chair of the Education Committee. Claudia also gave me some good advice on how to make my bill a priority for the Senator. This year Representative Ultrino's office has put out a goal to focus on bills that hit their three focus points: diversity, early childhood/PreK and special education. Claudia suggested that if the Healthy Youth Act coalition was going to come and present on this bill (something often done to teach Senator's about the bill) that they should frame the bill to fit into one of these categories. This would then make the bill a higher priority for the Education Committee.

This information from Claudia was very helpful and I plan to let the coalition know about it. I also told Claudia I would share her email information with the coalition so that she would be notified directly if an information session at the State House was planned.

Overall, I feel this meeting with extremely helpful in learning more about the Education Committee's processes and in making a connection with Claudia so that Ultrino will be more likely to have this bill on his radar as a priority.

■ Next Steps

On February 16th, 2023, the Healthy Youth Act was sent to the Education Committee in the Massachusetts legislature. Currently, the bill is now waiting for its hearing to be scheduled. To help get this scheduled quickly, it is important that the Healthy Youth Act Coalition encourage the members of the house and senate to make this bill a priority and give it a speedy hearing. I plan to continue to reach out and advocate for a speedy hearing for the Healthy Youth Act as well.

Once the bill receives its hearing date, it is important for the Healthy Youth Act Coalition to find constituents who are willing to give testimony supporting this bill at the hearing. I plan to speak at the hearing myself once I receive the hearing date. This will help to show support and advocate for the bill's passage.

Once the bill passes, there are two up-front implementation changes. This first is going to be the retraining of teachers on the new curriculum and inclusive point of view. Once teachers have been retrained with the new curriculum things should run smoothly within the classroom. The second is the actual material/new curriculum creation. Schools will have to decide whether to develop their own curriculum that aligns with the framework in the bill or may elect to use one that already exists. For

example, Planned Parenthood has an excellent curriculum available.

I personally don't see any substantial problems with the bill itself. However, I do think that sex education should not be optional in schools and although I think the Healthy Youth Act is the first step in that direction, I would like to see continued advocacy and support for sex education to be mandated. I also hope to continue to work with the coalition on the Healthy Youth Act and advocate for other bills involving sex education.

Overall, I have really enjoyed my work throughout the semester on the Healthy Youth Act and am excited to continue following, supporting, and advocating for the bill as it moves through the Massachusetts legislature.

■ Update

As of June 26, 2023: The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on February 16, 2023.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

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

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

Organization or Coalition support:

Mass NOW Healthy Youth Coalition: massnow.org

Ensuring Educational Opportunity for Incarcerated Youth

Lucca Raabe '23

Margot Schocket-Greene '23



Margot Schocket-Greene (left) and Lucca Raabe

Massachusetts fails to educate the population of young people who arguably need education the most. The lack of educational provision harms the lives of young people within juvenile justice facilities, by denying them the fundamental human right that is education. Moreover, not educating incarcerated young people prevents economic possible growth and fails to effectively reduce rates of re-offense. An Act to ensure educational rights are upheld for incarcerated youth works to hold institutions accountable for providing equitable education to all young people, and closes the gap that many students face when they miss years of crucial education while serving time in juvenile detention facilities.

■ The Bill

H.515/S.1542: An Act to ensure educational rights are upheld for incarcerated youth

■ Elevator Speech

Hello, my name is Lucca Raabe. I'm a senior at Brandeis University studying math, sociology, and social justice and social policy. And my name is Margot Schocket-Greene. I'm also a senior at Brandeis University studying politics; women's, gender and sexuality studies; legal studies; and social justice and social policy.

As young people and college students, we recognize the importance of a quality education. Massachusetts currently has the best public education in the United States, yet we are failing a large group of young people. Incarcerated students aged 18-22, who are prosecuted as adults, currently do not have access to the fundamental human right that is a quality education.

These students lose access to education as soon as they step foot into the adult system, something that would be prevented if they were in the juvenile system instead, or not incarcerated at all. We know that the education of 18-22 year olds has great potential to lower recidivism rates, thus, the education of this specific population could not be more crucial.

An Act to Ensure Educational Rights are Upheld for Incarcerated Youth/ Emerging Adults is the first step to not only ensuring all students have access to education, but reducing crime in the long run. Education has been shown to be the most effective way to reduce recidivism rates, which are highest for people in age 18-26. These are the very individuals who are currently deprived of educational access, and yet they present the greatest potential for positive change after incarceration.

H.515/S.1542 mandates the Department of Correction (DOC) provide incarcerated young people access to six hours of education a day and credit towards a high school diploma, vocational training, and even a college degree. The DOC must also evaluate students for special education accommodations, and work with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) to ensure new and pre-existing IEP's and 504's are implemented.

You have the opportunity to demonstrate our state's commitment to high quality education for all individuals, regardless of incarceration status, by

passing this act. Please urge your coworkers and colleagues to advocate for this bill, spread awareness about the importance of this issue, and call for a speedy hearing where this act is approved.

■ Op-Eds

Lucca Raabe

Access to Education is the Bare Minimum

Right now, everyone is talking about what we are teaching our young people. From Florida's ban on Critical Race Theory in K-12 education, to talks of widespread student loan debt forgiveness, to banning books like it's Nazi Germany, education news media is giving us all whiplash.

While everyone is concerned about what we are teaching our kids, no one is arguing if they should be taught. And yet, Massachusetts activists and legislators tout the state's top ranking in the country for quality public education as they quietly write legislation to hide the fact that there are some people in our state who are not being taught at all.

An Act to ensure educational rights are upheld for incarcerated youth (S.1542/H.515) guarantees access to education for incarcerated young people aged 18-22 who do not have access to education when they are processed in the adult system. Surely, any legislation is better than none, and guaranteeing everyone has access to education is essential.

Education is the leading factor to reducing recidivism rates, and young incarcerated people currently have the highest rates of re-offense. Legislation which ensures young people have educational programming is critical to reducing recidivism. Moreover, education is a fundamental human right to which all individuals should have access. At the same time, we need to ice our necks, pop a few Advil, and direct legislative attention to questions of educational content and quality as well.

Neither someone's incarceration status nor their age should prevent them from receiving a quality education. And, existing law agrees: there are plenty of 17-years-and-364-days-year-olds in the juvenile justice system who are guaranteed education up until their 22nd birthday. In this light, the new bill has garnered general legislative support.

THE VOICES OF THOSE AFFECTED

"Continued education has impacted me immensely. Though I have always believed in my potential, and having to go through a healing process, I was able to solidify my confidence. Obtaining the Degree, I saw/see that as a way to show people that I can be successful in my choices going forward, and hopefully convince others to put trust in my capabilities."

Steven Correia

Incarcerated Person at MCI-Norfolk
Received a BA from Boston University
Advocate for Education and Reform

Professor Rosalind Kabhrel (JD)

Legal Studies Professor & Co-founder of the Brandeis Educational Justice Initiative

"What makes the work I do so rewarding is that you will often encounter someone who is incarcerated as an adult...and they're like, 'I didn't know education could be like this'... This bill will build more allies and help provide more and more structured curricula [to incarcerated people]"

How Can You Help?


Call your representative and tell them to vote **YES** on S.1542/H.515

Get educated on the issue! Visit cfjj.org to learn more about the initiative to provide free, quality education to all



AN ACT TO ENSURE EDUCATIONAL RIGHTS ARE UPHELD FOR INCARCERATED YOUTH

S.1542 / H.515



FOR MORE INFORMATION:
LUCCA RAABE
AND
MARGOT SCHOCKET-GREENE

EVERYONE DESERVES A QUALITY EDUCATION

WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW TO HELP

The Problem

- Students on the cusp of adulthood (18-22 years old) lose access to their right to education when they are incarcerated in the adult system.
- Incarceration facilities fail disabled students by not developing and upholding individual educational plans
- The Department of Corrections lacks accountability and oversight in the provision of educational services

As a result, students are:

- Unprepared to continue education outside of the system
- Ill equipped to find jobs and stability upon release
- More likely to reoffend

The Solution

To address the problem, this bill:

- Requires students to be enrolled in educational programming for 6 hours a day
- Ensures data sharing between of DOC and education specialists (DESE) to create and fund educational programming
- Identifies disabled youth who need special education and provides necessary accommodations
- Increases access to education which has been shown to lower recidivism rates

And why shouldn't it? The bill does a lot of good things. Most notably, it:

- allows incarcerated people to get credit at Massachusetts public universities;
- ensures that any coursework students completed while in prison counts towards a degree or certificate after release;
- requires that the Department of Correction (DOC) assess students for IEPs and implement new and existing plans to better meet the needs of disabled students; and
- mandates the DOC provide 6 hours of classroom learning a day, 12 months a year.

But mostly, it highlights that these things are surprisingly not already written into Massachusetts law.

The bill gives the DOC, the main opponents of the legislation, the power to “establish and maintain standards for all teaching positions” and “make and promulgate rules and regulations governing [educational] programs” (Massachusetts S.1542/H.515, 2023). While the bill does say the DOC should consult education specialists, it says nothing more regarding the quality of education they must provide. There is no way to know if the DOC actually does consult education specialists, and the bill outlines no repercussions if it doesn't. Most notably, it does not require the DOC to assess the educational needs of its population and build programming from there.

For a bill that touts accountability in its title, it seems to be all bark and no bite. This bill is only one step in the right direction, but it is still a crucial step. This bill ensures educational access, the leading factor to reducing rates of re-offense, for the very demographic of individuals with the highest rates of recidivism. In doing so, it asks us to reimagine our criminal justice system as rehabilitative rather than punitive and opens the door to future structural change.

The legislative process is long and arduous. It guarantees that change will happen slowly. While this incrementalism should bother us, it is not justification enough to oppose this legislation. In fact, it should motivate support. The legislative process fosters negotiation and compromise, meaning this bill will likely do less than it does already. The bare minimum our representatives in office can do, is support this bill.

At the same time, legislation like this is not enough. So, what do we do?

Think back to the time your friend dragged you to a terrible improv show and say “yes, AND” to this bill. Call your representatives and senators and tell them to vote yes

on S.1542/H.515. Ask them to vote yes, and to do more. Ask them to radically reassess what education can look like for incarcerated young people. Ask them to create quality standards for curriculum and teaching centering the voices of those who receive it. And then write those standards into legislation.

Most importantly, continue thinking critically about what those in office are claiming to do. Don't let them compromise the most important parts of the change they want to make amidst the back and forth of partisan debate. Turn your head, strain your neck, and read the fine print. Hold them accountable, while not creating additional unproductive pushback. Access to education is essential, but ensuring access to quality education is most important.

Margot Schocket-Greene

Where Incarcerated Starts... and Education Ends

Blowing out the candles on your 18th birthday, do you remember that feeling of overwhelming intelligence? Unparalleled knowledge that surpassed the need for education? No? Neither do I. And neither do the incarcerated 18-22 year olds who have been robbed of their fundamental right to education.

Tried as adults, this demographic is barred from learning, as if their loss of freedom was not enough. During the pandemic, many youth felt the effects of virtual learning and how being cut off from their social networks impaired their ability to access quality education. News reports have shown the dire consequences for incarcerated students, who already have been barred from their support systems and educational sanctuaries, as the pandemic progressed and left them behind.

An opportunity is before us: to ignore the obvious crisis of prison education or to act now and change the lives of hundreds of students.

Normal teenagers are concerned about their grades, their 18th birthday parties in the coming spring, and the convoluted nature of high school hierarchies. Incarcerated students have been stripped of these rights: the right to a normal social life, the right to important coming-of-age activities, and the fundamental right to education.

Our prison system cracks the brutal whip of punishment without performing its duty of rehabilitation. If you've been convicted one day before your 18th birthday, you'd have access to the lackluster, but still existent, educational programs in the juvenile justice system. However, after you blow out those candles you're at risk to be tried as an adult and land yourself in a prison system that

brings your educational experience to a screeching halt.

We've heard it all before: "if you've done something bad enough to end up in the adult system... you deserve to be there with the consequences."

You're wrong.

Brains don't magically mature overnight; any 18-year-old's mind is still growing and developing, which won't be assisted by stopping their education. Even looking past the fact that 18-year-olds are treated differently than their 17-year-old peers, no matter the severity of the crime, rehabilitation must still be our goal. We owe it to our society and the people sitting in correctional facilities to make the fundamental right of education a priority. Education is proven to be the most effective way to keep young adults out of the prison system. Not to mention the positive impacts it can have on the economy and success reentering society.

Introducing the solution: An Act to ensure educational rights are upheld for incarcerated youth. This bill, currently fighting its way through the Massachusetts legislature, needs your help to succeed. This act would mandate that correctional facilities provide the necessary education for their students, ripped out of their comfort and learning settings, and receive the programming they deserve and need.

It will ensure that disabled students, often overlooked and written off as having behavior issues, would finally get the testing and educational plans to help them efficiently learn, even in a prison.

You don't have to agree with prison reform to see that it is undeniably vital to the fabric of our society to do everything in our power to reform those who have wound up in the incarceration system, and we already know the path that will lead us there. Anything short of providing full services to our youth is a disgrace to the pride of Massachusetts' education system and insults any chance correctional institutions have of becoming legitimate houses of rehabilitation.

I ask that you remember what was or is most important to you as a young student. Was it the freedom of living on your own after school? Graduating and making your parents proud? Make this a possibility for the future generations in our state. You hold the power to change the incarceration system for the better and increase the chances that students who enter it will come out on the other end. Acting on this power means students may have a chance at those once in a lifetime experiences as they return to education.

Look up your legislators and call them, remember for a second that this is a privilege that incarcerated students do not have, and urge them to pass this bill. Not tomorrow, not

next week, but now. Today.

Your voice matters in the legislative process, lives are in our hands and it's up to us to do the right thing, to make the change that matters.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Lindsay Sabadosa,

My name is Margot Schocket-Greene, I am a constituent of your district. In fact, I grew up on Vernon Street! I attended Northampton Public Schools for many years, and have been a proud supporter as you've sponsored and cosponsored bills advocating for educational rights of underrepresented folks for years. I am confident that our shared values of education and freedom will push you toward impactful action on this issue.

An Act to ensure educational rights are upheld for incarcerated youth (H.515), is no different. While Massachusetts has the highest-ranked public education system in the United States, we are currently failing those who need access to this fundamental human right the most: incarcerated youth aged 18-22 prosecuted in the adult system. This specific age range of students loses access to education as soon as they step foot into the adult system, something that would be prevented if they were in the juvenile system instead, or not incarcerated at all.

We know that 18-22 year olds make up a large part of the population that has the greatest opportunity to lower recidivism rates, and education is the most effective way to equip them to do so. Thus, the education of this specific population could not be more crucial.

H.515 is the first step to better meet the needs of incarcerated young people and ensure they receive a quality education, regardless of incarceration status. Most poignantly, this bill mandates the DOC (1) ensure youth receive 6 hours a day of classroom learning, and (2) evaluate disabled youth for IEPs and 504s and work with DESE to implement new and pre-existing plans, two rights which are not currently guaranteed for these students.

Some constituents have concerns that the DOC will resist this legislative change as it is not accompanied by a larger budget. The DOC has continued to receive increased funding despite a decrease in incarceration rates.

Others claim education is not what incarcerated emerging adults want. However, education has been proven to lower recidivism rates which will reduce crime and reoffense in the long term, both remedying potential budget concerns and better rehabilitating young offenders and protecting our society.

We ask that you call upon your fellow legislators, representatives, and senators to co-sponsor H.515/S.1542 and ask for a speedy hearing. You have the opportunity to change the lives of young people and re-imagine the purpose of incarceration as rehabilitation.

Thank you for being part of this crucial step toward demonstrating our state's ongoing commitment to providing quality education for all.

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Margot Schocket-Greene

On meeting with Sophia Leggio, Legislative Aide for Representative Garlick

Lucca and I scheduled this meeting ahead of time to meet with a legislative aide in the office of Rep. Garlick. We delivered the elevator speech as planned to the aide, Sophia Leggio, which went well, and she had very few questions for us.

However, while we were talking, Rep. Garlick came over to the table we were sitting at and introduced herself. We then delivered the elevator speech again to Rep. Garlick, after which she had several questions about the portions of the bill that deal with getting accommodations for students with disabilities in houses of correction.

We had previously researched her and knew that disability was a topic that she had previously shown interest in, so we were prepared to take this angle with her office. However, she wanted to know specific data and numbers on the students who are incarcerated and have been identified as disabled. Unfortunately, that data is simply unavailable in the adult prison system, so we tried to steer the conversation toward the positive impact the bill would have.

Ultimately, we ended up telling her that we would be sure to send over any additional data that we come up with to her office on the statistics of disability in incarcerated students. She seemed enthusiastic about the bill; however, it was a stressful meeting which could have gone better if we had access to those numbers beforehand. If we had better prepared to talk with the representative herself, we might not have been so nervous during our conversation with her, however, Lucca and I still managed to present the bill well and have a productive conversation with Rep. Garlick and Ms. Leggio.

Lucca Raabe

On meeting with Tom Bacon, Legislative Aide for Representative Mary Keefe

In the middle of March, I met with Josh, Sana, and Tom to discuss the ongoing state of the legislation at the beginning of the process. Tom Bacon is the legislative aide to Representative Mary Keefe, the sponsor of this bill.

Margot and I had previously met with Tom during our first visit to the State House to discuss the bill and get more information about the legislation. It was so interesting to meet with both Tom and the CFJJ [Citizens for Juvenile Justice] team.

During the meeting, I was mostly an observer, albeit a very active listener as Sana had asked Tom if it would be alright if Margot and I joined their already scheduled meeting. It was great to have a pre-established connection with both parties in the virtual space and share with CFJJ that my advocacy efforts had connected me with legislators in their network of collaborators. I was extremely thankful to be invited to attend this meeting, as it provided so much insight into the relationships between policy makers and political advocates.

...In the meeting, we also discussed potential individuals who could testify during hearings, and I offered connections to Brandeis community members who could potentially share their stories in hearings. I also asked Tom for insight into different approaches for legislative meetings to frame the bill according to the legislators' personal interests, particularly regarding Denise Garlick. While he didn't have too much advice, he recommended focusing on the disability throughline in the legislation and following our meeting with Denise Garlick I shared her interests with Tom to assist him and other legislators in their similar advocacy.

I ultimately learned so much about the relationship between government and non-profit organizations and learned what it is like to be a part of both which is extremely important to me as I consider a future career in policy.

■ Next Steps

Throughout the process of advocating for this bill, we have been in constant communication with Citizens for Juvenile Justice (CFJJ) regarding the ways in which we can be helpful to them. As a result we have talked amongst ourselves and with CFJJ about the drawbacks and potential issues with this act. Primarily how this bill acts as an accountability measure, but does little to guarantee the Department of Correction (DOC) implements educational programming.

In fact, the legislation places the most important

decisions surrounding finances and the creation and adherence to educational standards in the hands of the DOC, likely the largest opponent to the bill's passage. While leaving most decisions up to the DOC's discretion may win over some opponents of the bill, there are already documented issues with a lack of DOC oversight in a variety of dimensions.

This bill is an accountability measure, but only holds the DOC accountable insofar as it is required to data share with the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) and individual houses of correction as students are identified for needing IEPs. The DOC historically fails to publish annual reports with relevant data regarding programming and prison populations. At the same time, beyond requiring the DOC report data, the bill does not provide external oversight of the DOC in its implementation of educational programming.

Beyond the bill's failure to implement effective accountability measures, it does little to address the quality of education incarcerated students will receive. Once more operating on the presumption of good intent on behalf of the DOC, the most glaring shortcoming of this legislation is that the bill does not require the DOC center the needs of incarcerated students in any way, nor outline an external mechanism for ensuring educational programming meets a quality standard. In fact, it enables the DOC to set its own educational standards as it sees fit and mandates it meets these standards, which, as the largest potential opponent to this legislation, is highly counterintuitive.

In this way, as we pursue next steps in advocating for this legislation, we would hope to push CFJJ to be more intentional about ensuring not only that students receive education, but that they receive quality education.

While we have advocated for this bill and how the spending-neutral nature of it places responsibility on the DOC to reallocate its budget, we see this as a huge flaw in the probability of the success of this act. Without directives for how this funding should be reallocated and specific instruction of the hiring of qualified teachers, there is a large possibility that incarcerated students will not receive the education we wish.

Through voicing the above concerns to CFJJ and Thomas Bacon, a legislative aide to Representative Mary Keefe, the sponsor of this bill, we were prompted to rewrite this legislation ourselves, or add to it, in meaningful ways that would realistically ensure the right to education for all, and force the DOC to take action and operate under oversight from outside agencies.

One next step we would take is to draft a new bill to

address our critiques of the existing legislation, and present our draft to CFJJ, Thomas Bacon, and the lawyers who originally wrote this legislation.

If we were to continue to advocate for this bill, we would first speak to incarcerated young people to better understand the realities of incarcerated youth. We would collect feedback from those whom the bill impacts directly, and ask for insight into what they and their peers would find helpful and see as important components of potential future educational programs.

We would also more intentionally center their narratives throughout ongoing advocacy efforts to uplift their needs and humanize their experiences. We would then research ways to improve this bill to embody drastic structural reform despite being met with a legislative system designed to create only incremental change.

This would involve adding provisions about oversight, how funds should be allocated by the DOC, additional clauses on the specific programming that should be implemented as informed by individuals' lived experiences and research, and finally a mechanism for ensuring quality educational standards are set and continuously met.

This could potentially mean the legislation requires the DOC to work with educational professionals to guarantee quality instruction, as well as survey incarcerated young people to continuously adjust educational programming depending on the needs of its participants.

■ Update

As of June 26, 2023: The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security on February 16, 2023.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.1542: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S1542

H.515: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H515

Organization or Coalition support:

Citizens for Juvenile Justice: cfjj.org

In-State Tuition for Undocumented Students

Liliana Perez Diaz '23

Tracy Lisbey '23



Tracy Lisbey (left) and Liliana Perez Diaz

The Massachusetts Tuition Equity Act, An Act providing access to higher education for high school graduates in the Commonwealth, will help thousands of undocumented students have access to more affordable tuition and thus increase enrollment for public higher education institutions. The bill would grant students access to in-state tuition rates and fees if they fulfill the eligibility requirements which are based on in-state high school attendance and graduation. Although undocumented immigrant students will no longer be paying out-of-state tuition, the added enrollment would increase school revenues and help combat the declining enrollment rates. Not only does school revenue increase, but the Massachusetts economy also benefits through higher tax contributions and a more skilled workforce that can earn higher incomes. Therefore, the Tuition Equity Act has the potential to positively impact the lives of thousands of students, regardless of immigration status, and also to help fuel the Massachusetts state economy.

■ The Bill

H.1281/S.817: An Act providing access to higher education for high school graduates in the Commonwealth

■ Elevator Speech

“60% of bachelor’s degrees across the nation are awarded by public institutions ... on an annual basis. Median earnings for bachelor degree holders are 84% higher than those whose highest degree is a high school diploma.” Evidently, society’s potential to thrive is maximized when coming of age generations are prepared to the best of their abilities. Currently not all students are provided with equal state-funded support to continue their education past high school.

To solve this issue, the Tuition Equity Act grants all students, who have graduated from a Massachusetts high school and have lived in the state for at least three years, access to in-state tuition rates regardless of immigration status. [Value = Fairness + Future Preparation].

Allowing any resident, regardless of immigration status, to pay in-state tuition versus out-of-state tuition will allow any student that wants the opportunity to access what’s required to have better jobs, pay more taxes, and overall decrease their need for long term government assistance.

Will the joint committees hold a hearing by the end of the month?

Tuition Equity Act

H.1281 & S.871

Problem:

- Massachusetts high school graduates are required to pay out-of-state tuition at MA public universities solely because of their immigration status
- The cost of attendance at public MA colleges ranges from \$6,886 - \$16,205 per year, making college less attainable for these students
- These students, who have lived in MA for at least 3 years, get little too no aid

Solution: The Tuition Equity Act

- Grants *ALL* students access to in-state tuition rates and fees, regardless of immigration status
- Students who graduated from MA high schools and lived in the state for at least 3 years, regardless of immigration status, access discounted tuition
- Added enrollment increases school revenues and counteracts declining enrollment rates

Call to Action:

We ask for a speedy hearing for H.1281 & S.817.

For more information contact: Tracy Lisbey
Liliana Perez Diaz

Tuition Equity Act

H.1281 & S.871

MA has fallen behind in keeping
all of its students educated

IMPACTED STUDENTS



Immigrant Jose Montes attends an event on immigration reform in downtown Los Angeles on February 17, 2015. (AP/Nick Ut)



A group of undocumented youth and supporters from the New York State Youth Leadership Council on the steps of the State Education building in Albany on Tuesday, April 17, 2012. (John Carl D'Annibale / Times Union)

ANGELES

"I definitely think this bill is worth pushing. Being undocumented, college was already such a difficult process, and having to worry about the financial aspect was added stress I didn't need. I was too afraid to apply to public institutions because I knew they wouldn't help me financially due to my status."

PEREZ

"This bill would have changed my experience when applying to college. It would have encouraged me to think about higher education as a real opportunity for myself. It's hard when you have to attend college, constantly worried about if you'll be able to afford the following semester."

Op-Eds

Liliana Perez Diaz

Massachusetts Debt Production

We've all heard about the increasingly unaffordable prices of college, especially in recent years. In the span of just one year, the 2022 student loan forgiveness program is being questioned and is in danger of being overturned. The incredibly high demand of this program correlates with the cost of attending college and paying off loans becoming increasingly difficult. Many are questioning if this program is addressing the root issue of growing tuition fees that are increasing the inaccessibility of college for students across the country.

What many don't know is that this short term solution is not a solution for all students. To be eligible you need to have taken out federal loans which require financial aid eligibility, which excludes high performing students with immigration statuses. The program not only doesn't target increasing college costs and inaccessibility, but the educational system across many states deliberately limits all students from

continuing their education.

Today, Massachusetts students that have attended a state high school for three years or longer, are being billed as out-of-state residents to attend college. Now, imagine it's your senior year in high school, as you and your friends begin to receive your college acceptances you begin to notice your financial aid letters vary tremendously. You've been listed as an out-of-state resident, making your attendance at a public Massachusetts college cost around \$6,000 more than a student recognized as an in-state resident.

Your earliest memories are in Massachusetts, you will be a Massachusetts high school graduate, you hold a local job and pay state taxes. However, you are not allowed access to any federal tuition assistance that you've contributed to through paying state taxes, because of your immigration status. This higher tuition cost along with the 2-3% yearly tuition increase, leaves you feeling unexpectedly hopeless about continuing your education after high school. After you've worked so hard for this moment you cannot see how you will afford to pay this without any help.

An equitable approach to the accessibility of education for all students, regardless of immigration status, is vital to

avoid the deliberate marginalization of these students. Over 1,000 Massachusetts high school graduates suffer from inaccessible college costs on a yearly basis.

These are students who are commonly high performers up until the college application process. Many of these students have helped the Massachusetts public education system thrive. Although Massachusetts is recognized for its academia, it has continued to marginalize immigrant students through its education system. This not only harms their future success, but it harms the economic success of the state.

If all Massachusetts students who have attended a Massachusetts high school for three years or longer could be recognized as in-state residents then the state would benefit as a whole. Increasing tuition equity across the state will help aid the current significantly low enrollment rates at universities. By filling all of the seats in a classroom, public Massachusetts colleges are maximizing their capacity and financial gains. Tuition equity in Massachusetts will help maintain the state's academic recognition and allow it to join the 23 other states that have already addressed tuition discrepancies.

Since there is limited affordability to attend college the nation has incurred increased debt to fund student tuition. How much debt do we think Massachusetts students are accumulating on their own compared to states like New York, Illinois, or California that have increased their accessibility to public state colleges?

Students who choose to still attend college, even after being wrongly categorized as out-of-state residents, automatically experience limited social mobility since they'll need to pay off significant loans without the assistance of a student loan forgiveness program. Many of these students choose not to take such a great financial risk and cannot find ways to afford their education, so they are forced to give up their potential by not attending higher education.

Help reduce Massachusetts' potential debt and increase the number of educated students, regardless of immigration status by calling your local representative and asking them to vote favorably for bills H.1281 and S.871.

Tracy Lisbey

Undocumented Students Deserve a Chance

Every year when Spring rolls around, high school hallways are filled with students eagerly discussing which colleges they will be attending in the Fall. You hear seniors squeal and jump up and down as they think about this new chapter in their lives filled with nothing but opportunity. As some would say: the world is their oyster. However, many students

in Massachusetts do not get to experience this euphoric feeling due to the prohibitive costs of attending college.

Undocumented students in particular face the realization that because of their status, they have to pay the extreme costs of out-of-state tuition. This is a significant financial barrier causing many undocumented students to opt out of attending college. You would think that in the United States, the land of opportunity, tuition equity would be available – but that's not the case in every state. And that is unfortunately not the case in Massachusetts.

There is so much uncertainty that plagues undocumented individuals lives, tuition equity should be the least of their concerns. That is why the Massachusetts Tuition Equity Act is so important.

Many states across the country, 23 states and D.C. to be exact, grant undocumented students access to in-state tuition rates at their public colleges and universities. These rates are reserved for students who have lived in the state for at least 3 years and have graduated from a state high school. These undocumented students are able to graduate and face the same in-state tuition rates as their fellow peers. They get a fighting chance to experience the excitement and thrill of going to college.

It's clear that these states understand tuition is costly and affordable education should be accessible for all of their residents, regardless of immigration status. Yet, Massachusetts lags behind which is quite frankly embarrassing.

Federal law grants free K-12 education to all students, regardless of immigration status, but it does not guarantee undocumented students access to tuition equity. Massachusetts pours thousands of dollars into undocumented students just to give up on them once they graduate high school. Their true potentials are not realized because Massachusetts has not been able to pass a tuition equity bill.

These undocumented students, all odds stacked against them, are left without access to federal aid and are forced to pay the extreme out-of-state tuition rates. How is that fair?

Undocumented students are unable to legally work and are often left with no choice but to work under the table, low-skilled, and low-paying jobs. They struggle to make ends meet and barely have money to pay rent let alone out-of-state tuition rates. They deserve a fighting chance at accessing more affordable higher education– a chance to pursue a degree and better their lives.

On average, the difference between a high school and college graduate's wages is \$1 million dollars over their lifetime. Those who obtain a college education are also less

likely to experience poverty, unemployment, and are less likely to be on Medicaid and federal housing assistance compared to those with a high school degree. It's clear that earning a college degree has many benefits not only for the individual but also for the economy.

These undocumented students are not asking for free handouts, discounted tuition is not the same as free tuition. They just want access to the same rates their peers are receiving.

There is no reason why Massachusetts should deny its residents, regardless of immigration status, access to tuition equity. All Massachusetts residents deserve the chance to experience that euphoric feeling of attending college with their peers. This is why it's important that you call your state representative today and inform them of the importance of the Tuition Equity Act.

Help give all Massachusetts residents a chance to further their education because education is a right, not a privilege.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Mr. Stanley,

We hope all is well! We are Tracy Lisbey and Liliana Perez Diaz, Massachusetts residents currently attending Brandeis University and are passionate about social justice. All Massachusetts residents, regardless of immigration status, deserve the right to affordable education that allows them to increase their social mobility and become better contributors to society, including the Massachusetts economy. The Massachusetts Tuition Equity Act supports this initiative and we want to share with you the benefits of voting in favor of S.817 and H.1281 for Massachusetts public college/universities.

Waltham is a town with a large immigrant population that includes many students with immigration status, which marginalizes them from entering higher education due to out-of-state tuition costs. According to the U.S Census, between 2017 and 2021, 92.6% of people ages 25 and older in Waltham obtained a high school diploma or higher, while only 55.5% obtained a bachelor's degree or higher.

As students we understand first hand how difficult it can be to afford the pursuit of higher education as tuition costs exponentially increase. This has significantly decreased the number of students applying, enrolling, and currently attending colleges/universities across the state.

According to the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, across the nation 60% of bachelor's degrees are awarded by public institutions and on an annual basis,

median earnings for bachelor degree holders are 84% higher than those whose highest degree is a high school diploma. Evidently, society's potential to thrive is maximized when coming of age generations are prepared to the best of their abilities.

However, Massachusetts has fallen significantly behind and is currently one of seven states with restrictive access to higher education for all students. The state's S.871 and H.1281 bill proposes in-state tuition for all Massachusetts residents regardless of immigration status.

Although many believe the bill will be unfeasible for the state to implement, college applications and enrollments are at an all time low. The Tuition Equity Act can significantly address this gap, by increasing the number of students who can access higher education in the state. The number of educated people in Massachusetts will be maximized and state public universities will enjoy higher revenue as these students increase enrollment rates.

We thus urge you to vote favorably for bills S.871 and H.1281 to help the access to higher education for over 1,000 Massachusetts residents on a yearly basis.

Sincerely,

Tracy Lisbey and Liliana Perez Diaz
Advocates for Social Policy Change

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Liliana Perez Diaz

On meeting with Representative Sean Garballey

Tracy and I met with house representative Sean Garballey on April 4th at the State House. We reached out to him as advocates for policy change to speak about the importance of his support for the bill.

Throughout our meeting with him we began by explaining the issues with the current educational conditions of undocumented students with immigrant statuses in the state of Massachusetts....Rep. Garballey instantly agreed with us. He added insightful detail to the conversation about the long battles that have taken place to get the bills to pass.

As we began expanding on the solutions that the bills would provide, Rep Garballey informed us that he is a co-sponsor for the bill looking for ways in which the bill would get passed because he understood the effect it would have on students in the commonwealth. We learned how impactful the long term support can be, since the Rep. obtained a lot of information about the level of effect this bill would have.

Being that Rep Garballey made his support clear to us, we were able to successfully request a video of him speaking about his support of the bill and urging others to support it as well. Since this was [our] first meeting in the State House we would have liked the meeting to have been more conversational. We felt nervous going into the conversation which made us stick heavily to a scripted version of the points we wanted to make during our advocacy meeting. It felt difficult to transition from our agreements with the representative back to our call to action, since the representative had already made it clear that he would vote favorably.

In the future it would be best to [adjust]...the information we are advocating but also prepare multiple calls to action for those who are at different stages of support towards the bill. However, we still left the conversation feeling confident that the information we were providing the representative could help him continue to push for support.

Tracy Lisbey

On meeting with Victoria Mori from the Office of Senator Bruce Tarr

We met with Senator Bruce Tarr's staffers, Victoria Mori and a male staffer, at his office in the State House. We noticed that many Democrats were in favor of the Tuition Equity Act and felt that it was important to speak to a Republican.

This was by far the most important conversation I had. After voicing our elevator pitch, the male staffer made it clear that he believed this bill was important and he wanted to learn more...I emphasized that this bill is personally very important to me because I understand the financial barriers that students face when trying to access higher education.

My approach was trying to connect more emotionally which was not an approach I had taken before. He then expressed that he was a Canadian immigrant and was brought to the US at an early age. We were able to connect and have a deeper conversation about the bill and what it means for undocumented students and our own personal experiences.

Victoria was worried about the financial implications of this bill and I was able to explain to her that much of the costs were countered by the added enrollment. I also emphasized that while I understand the financial implications are important, tuition equity is more important and all Massachusetts residents, regardless of immigration status, deserve the right to in-state tuition rates because education is a right, not a privilege. She then agreed that "everyone deserves the right to an education." The male staffer agreed to relay our message to Senator Tarr and

would try to convince Senator Tarr to vote favorable for this bill.

Looking back, I was nervous going into the meeting because I knew there would be some push back. Victoria did push back but I was fully prepared for that and was able to swiftly answer her concerns. I learned that I can handle those tough conversations where it seems like someone doesn't agree with you.

I also learned that it's okay to get personal and that my story is important when advocating for this bill. It was my first time getting personal in my advocacy efforts and it went very well and made me feel like I made a real connection with the male staffer. Overall, it was a great conversation and it was a great connection to have since the male staffer said he would make it a priority to get Senator Tarr to look at the bill.

■ Next Steps

Moving forward, it's important to start having conversations with both public institutions but also private higher education institutions. Although the Tuition Equity Act aims to increase accessibility to public institutions in Massachusetts, private higher education institutions have access to larger financial resources as well as private funds versus only having state funded resources.

This difference in funding could allow private universities to more quickly implement appointed experts to help spread resources amongst their undocumented immigrant population to help them better understand the different aspects of their education and its feasibility. By creating this point, not only will private institutions better support this part of their student body but they will be ahead in establishing the resources to help implement this bill and could serve as a good example for public institutions to then implement the bill.

Many private higher education institutions, such as Brandeis, already host many immigrant students with various needs and could benefit from this point even without the passing of the Tuition Equity Act. However, by investing in the creation of this service they would begin to have a vital conversation about the difference it can make to actively support undocumented immigrant students through their education and help set the tone for other higher education institutions to access Massachusetts.

It is also important to continue to push legislators to support this bill. Through our work at the State House, we realized how influential we can be as advocates. By bringing up the Tuition Equity Act to legislators and their staffers, we showed them that people care about this bill and are relying

on their vote and support.

We also saw the importance of being genuine and personal when connecting with legislators. This showed them how the bill impacts real people and sparked empathy within them. It can be easy to detach from a bill but when people are voicing their own personal stories, the impact is much greater. Therefore, it is essential that other people voice their opinions and push legislators to support this bill.

A great way to do this is by starting on college campuses such as Brandeis. College students are eager to make a difference in the world and are great advocates. Whether it's by sending an email/calling their state legislator, sharing their opinions on social media and tagging legislators, or walking into the State House in order to advocate – these are all essential next steps that anyone can take.

■ Update

As of August 10, 2023: The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Higher Education on February 16, 2023. On August 10, 2023 Governor Maura Healey signed a state budget that included tuition equity.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.817: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/S817

H.1281: malegislature.gov/Bills/193/H1281

Organization or Coalition support:

Student Clinic for Immigrant Justice:
scijimmigration.org