

Advocacy for Policy Change

Brandeis Students Work to Reform
Massachusetts Law

Spring 2022



INTERNATIONAL CENTER FOR
ETHICS, JUSTICE AND PUBLIC LIFE
Brandeis University

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



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

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

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

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Table of Contents

■ Introduction	2
Melissa Stimell	
■ A Message from Jay Kaufman '68, MA '73	4
■ Required Project Components	5
■ Providing a Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness	6
Allie Mundis '22 and Oliver Qiu '22	
■ Increasing Access to Menstrual Products in Prisons, Homeless Shelters, and Public Schools	11
Lydia Begag '22 and Reena Zuckerman '23	
■ Providing Health Coverage for Children with Disabilities	17
Emmett Polevoy '22 and Roe Keshet '22	
■ Providing a Gender Neutral Designation on State Documents and Identifications	23
Benjamin H. Vardi '22 and Maxim E. LeBlanc '22	
■ Expungement of Juvenile and Young Adult Records	29
Gali Davar '22 and Joy Lan '22	
■ Promoting Comprehensive, Inclusive, and Medically Accurate Sexual Health Education	34
Eleanor Lavin '22, Marissa Torelli '22, and Shayna Zeitlin '22	
■ Protecting the Civil Rights and Safety of All Massachusetts Residents	40
James Barno '22 and Rahul Arockiaraj '22	
■ Coordinating Suicide Prevention Services, Behavioral Health Crisis Care, and Emergency Services Through 988 Implementation	46
Rebecca Regwan '22 and Brett Silk '22	
■ Authorizing Driver's Licenses for Undocumented Immigrants	51
Rose-Lee Jean-Baptiste '22 and Gazelle Umbay '22	
■ Preventing Overdose Deaths and Increasing Access to Treatment	56
Natasha Chaiyarat '22, Devan Chen '22, and Vanessa Palomares '22	
■ Reducing Plastic Bag Use	62
Rachael Brito '22, Tyler Carruth '23, and Teresa Shi '23	
■ Providing Free Meals in Massachusetts Schools	68
Jada Harrison '22 and Cedrick Frank '22	

Introduction

Melissa Stimell



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

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

Now in its 13th year, “Advocacy for Policy Change” is dedicated to the creation of citizen advocates: individuals prepared and motivated to create a just society through legislative advocacy. In 2022, we anointed 27 citizen advocates for such issues as gender justice, overdose prevention, healthcare equity, juvenile justice, immigrant rights, and women’s healthcare.

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

These students persevered through the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the Massachusetts State House was the last in the nation to re-open to visitors, students continued to engage with legislative leaders. For the first time since 2018, their final “Present and Defend” took place in-person at Brandeis while including several participants via Zoom.

Once again, I must thank several people whose support over the past 13 years has been invaluable. This course would not exist without the ongoing support of Professor Emeritus Richard Gaskins, my mentor and the former director of the Legal Studies Program. He and Daniel Terris, now Director Emeritus of the International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life, took the kernel of a unique idea and made it a reality. Ethics Center Board member and former Massachusetts State Representative Jay Kaufman ’68, MA ’73 helped me to create a course worthy of Brandeis University. An expanding list of exceptional teaching assistants made the course a reality: Kaitie Chakoian, David Duhalde, Andrew Hart, Misti Jeffers, Roz Kabrhel, Benjamin Kreider, Christian Lopez, Charlotte Powley, Melissa Ross, Doug Smith and Cynthia Tschampl.

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

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

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

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

Melissa Stimell

Academic Director, ENACT: The Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation

Director, International Center for Ethics, Justice and Public Life

Professor of the Practice in Legal Studies

Chair, Social Justice and Social Policy Program

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



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

As the United States faces challenges that are vast in scale and deep in impact – including the global pandemic, racial injustice, climate change and political polarization – some question our democracy’s capacity to meet the moment. How can we best address these and other pressing issues? What is the role of policy-makers? What is the role of advocates? What role 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 arena, they dig into difficult “real world” problems and meaningfully interact with the state’s change agents and would-be (or should-be) change agents. They grapple with competing policy ideas and engage with lawmakers and advocates alike.

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

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

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

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

Required Project Components

The reports in this volume are excerpted from the material required of each student team in “Advocacy for Policy Change” (Legal Studies 161b) in Spring 2022. The assignments were designed to develop and demonstrate the students’ understanding of the issues and the advocacy process.

Storybook

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

Research Report

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

Elevator Speech

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

Letter to the Legislator

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

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

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

Campaign Journal

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

Op-Ed

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

Advocacy Video

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

Next Steps

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

Final Oral Presentation: “Present and Defend”

Bringing everything together, on April 26, 2022, students gave brief oral presentations of their legislative advocacy projects and responded to questions from audience members.

Providing a Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness

Members of the Project:

Allie Mundis '22

Oliver Qiu '22

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

■ The Bill

S.142/H.264: An Act providing a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness

■ Elevator Speech

We are students at Brandeis University and Massachusetts voters, who fundamentally believe that people experiencing homelessness deserve the right to survive and should be entitled to the same basic rights and opportunities as people with stable housing.

In our state, people experiencing homelessness face unnecessary discrimination and harassment on the basis of their housing status. As Massachusetts voters, we feel that it is unfair that homeless people are being discriminated against in public spaces, voting booths, workplaces, and hospitals because they cannot afford Boston rent. On any given day in Massachusetts, there are 18,000 people who are homeless, including over 800 veterans and 500 unaccompanied young adults.

The Bill of Rights for people experiencing homeless would decriminalize homelessness and protect the rights of people experiencing homelessness. We ask that you vote favorably for the Bill of Rights in the Ways and Means Committee to move the bill out of the committee. We would love to see you support this bill that protects the basic rights of homeless people as citizens of our democracy.



Allie Mundis and Oliver Qiu

■ Op-Eds

Allie Mundis

It's Time for a Homeless Bill of Rights in Massachusetts

News headlines have surged over the last year with images and descriptions of “Mass and Cass,” the tent cities lining Mass Ave and Melnea Cass Boulevard in Boston. These encampments made headlines; the tent cities turned heads. Everyone was so shocked at how we could let something like this happen. Yet homelessness is not a new phenomenon in our state, and it persists in every neighborhood in both visible and hidden ways. Misconceptions surrounding homelessness perpetuate the idea that homeless people look, act, and dress a certain way, and almost all these stereotypes are negative. As a result, people experiencing homelessness face discrimination, harassment, and exclusion from society. People experiencing homelessness deserve the same basic rights and dignity as those with stable housing.

Current legislation in Massachusetts criminalizes people based on their lack of permanent housing, which leads to the arrests and harassment of people for human acts like sleeping in vehicles or eating in public parks. Ordinances in Massachusetts are actively anti-homeless and exclude homeless individuals from the basic rights that we enjoy every day. No one should be arrested for basic acts of survival. Imagine not only lacking a safe place to sleep each night, but not having the guaranteed right to access public spaces, voting booths, jobs, and hospitals solely because of your housing status. In 2020, 1 in 8 people arrested in Boston were homeless. Anti-homelessness laws contribute to a greater number of arrests and involvement with the criminal justice system for individuals experiencing homelessness.

“An Act providing a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness” (S.142 and H.264), seeks to protect the rights of homeless people in Massachusetts. This bill is a crucial starting point for improving the lives of people experiencing homelessness by reaffirming the right to move freely in public spaces, hold private property, vote, and seek employment in the absence of a permanent housing address. This legislation seeks to protect the rights of people who for too long have been unprotected under Massachusetts law.

Failing to address homelessness is unnecessarily costing our state millions of dollars since people experiencing homelessness often have few choices but to utilize emergency social services. Preventing the unnecessary and unjust incarceration of people experiencing homelessness by upholding and protecting their rights will save our state’s resources. This legislation is a fiscally neutral intervention that has the potential to greatly reduce the high costs associated with homelessness.

The bill may spark some opposition from business

owners and city officials who are concerned about the presence of homeless people in public parks, but it is crucial to recognize that homelessness will not simply disappear if we continue to neglect the needs and rights of people experiencing homelessness. It is essential that we decriminalize homelessness and actively advocate for structural fixes to ensure housing security for all.

We need a bill of rights to protect the immediate needs and livelihoods of people experiencing homelessness in our state. I ask for your help in passing this crucial Bill of Rights. Call, email, or meet with your local legislators and urge them to vote for this bill to move it out of the Senate Ways and Means Committee and Joint Committee on Health Care Financing. Within the landscape of the Boston housing crisis, the Bill of Rights will open doors for people experiencing homelessness and prevent unnecessary and unlawful discrimination. Other states in the US have successfully passed similar bills of rights and defended the rights of people experiencing homelessness. Massachusetts has a legacy of protecting and upholding the rights of its people; now is the time to continue to uphold this legacy through the passage of this Bill of Rights for people experiencing homelessness.

Oliver Qiu

As of 2022, the average rent for an apartment in Boston is over \$3,600 per month. If you live in Boston or the surrounding areas, you are probably not happy with your rent. But how often do you think about the unhoused people who cannot afford the rent of a stable home? In Massachusetts, there are 18,000 homeless individuals on any given day, including over 800 veterans and 500 unaccompanied young adults. The issue of homelessness is a significant systemic issue, which the homeless bill of rights could provide a solution to.

Homeless people face the daily struggle of finding a place to sleep and food to eat. In addition to not having a warm bed to sleep in during the long New England winter, unhoused individuals also suffer from constant harassment and discrimination from our society. People experiencing homelessness are 11 times more likely to be arrested than a housed individual despite not being more likely to commit a crime. In Boston, homeless individuals make up 1/8 of the total arrests, many of whom were arrested for the sole reason of being homeless. People experiencing homelessness also face discrimination in workplaces, hospitals, voting booths and public parks on the basis of their housing status. Why should we criminalize people for not being able to afford Boston rent?

The homeless bill of rights takes the first step in decriminalizing homelessness. The bill would protect homeless people’s right of equal access and privacy in public spaces including public parks. It would also protect homeless

people from discrimination when seeking employment, healthcare, and political representation. The bill would prevent homeless people from being kicked out of a public park or denied employment on the basis of their housing status.

As residents of Massachusetts, we would love to see our fellow citizens being treated fairly and humanely. We are advocating for the homeless bill of rights which would provide homeless people with fair and humane treatment in society. The bill has been reported favorably by both the Massachusetts Senate and House of Representatives. However, it is currently stuck in the Senate Ways and Means Committee along with thousands of other bills.

With support and encouragement from the public, politicians may be incentivized to learn more about the bill and move it upwards in their priority lists of bills to be passed. Everyone's effort in supporting the homeless bill of rights is important. As an individual, you may support the bill by giving a quick phone call or writing a short email to your local representative. Another easy way of showing support is by spreading awareness with the people around you on the issue of homelessness and the homeless bill of rights. By reading this article, you have already taken the first step in creating change for the homeless people in Massachusetts. Hopefully, you will take a few more.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Cynthia Stone Creem,

Our names are Allie Mundis and Oliver Qiu and we are both undergraduate students at Brandeis University and voters in Massachusetts. Allie grew up in Brookline and spent time volunteering at the Brookline Food Pantry, where she witnessed the lack of basic services and opportunities for people experiencing poverty and homelessness. Homelessness affects every district and corner of our state, including Brookline, in both visible and hidden ways. We applaud your efforts to improve the landscape of affordable housing in Brookline.

We believe that people experiencing homelessness deserve the same basic rights as people with stable housing. Housing status should not be the basis of discrimination and harassment, especially considering the lack of affordable housing in our state. Current legislation in Massachusetts criminalizes people based on their lack of permanent housing, which leads to the arrest and harassment of people for acts of survival like sleeping in vehicles or eating in public parks.

"An Act providing a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness" (S.142/H/264) is a crucial starting point for improving the rights of people experiencing homelessness by re-affirming the right to free movement in public spaces, privacy of property, and voting and employment in the

absence of a permanent housing address. Although the bill has been met with opposition from some business owners and city officials who are concerned about the presence of homeless people in public parks, it is important to realize that homelessness will not disappear by neglecting the needs of people experiencing homelessness. Although this bill is not a structural fix for the lack of affordable housing, decriminalizing acts of survival in public spaces, through the Bill of Rights, will protect people experiencing homelessness from unnecessary harassment and costly involvement in the criminal justice and welfare system.

Will you advocate for this bill with your colleagues in the Senate Ways and Means Committee to get the bill out of Committee? With your help in advocating for this bill, we can provide equal rights for people experiencing homelessness and make Brookline the inclusive and democratic town it strives to be.

Thank you,
Allie and Oliver

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Allie Mundis

On meeting with Evie, a legislative staffer for Senator Mike Barrett

During the meeting, [we were] asked more questions than we were used to. It was a relief to have a partner who could help answer the questions. I felt like we did a good job of answering the questions and it also showed me some gaps in my own understanding of the bill. Up until now, the bill has felt very straightforward and most of the senators that we have met with have grasped it quickly, which likely isn't the case with a lot of the other bills.

I made a comment about how similar bills of rights have been passed in other states. She followed up by asking me which states it has passed in and how effective the legislation has been. Although it was nerve wracking, I'm glad Evie asked us difficult questions so I could realize what I do know and what I should do additional research on before our final "Present and Defend" [in the class].

Overall, this meeting went well and I'm glad Senator Barrett's office gave us the opportunity to educate them on homelessness legislation. Evie was a good listener and told us that she would pass along her notes to Senator Barrett. This meeting was a good opportunity to [demonstrate] ... my own knowledge related to the bill.

■ Storybook

A Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness (S.142/H.264)

Lead sponsors: Representative Smitty Pignatelli, Representative Frank Moran, and Senator Becca Rausch



1 in 8 people who were arrested in Boston were homeless

Homelessness in Massachusetts

18,000 people in Massachusetts experience homelessness on any given day, including 500 unaccompanied young adults, and over 800 veterans.

Discrimination Facing People Experiencing Homelessness

Anti-homeless legislation in MA criminalizes people experiencing homelessness based on their housing status, and fails to protect them from visibly living in public spaces.



73% of cities have ordinances that prohibit acts like sleeping, eating, or sitting in public spaces.

The Bill of Rights...

Recognizes that people experiencing homelessness should have the right to:

- equal access to public spaces
- privacy of property and confidentiality of records
- access routine and emergency medical care
- vote in the absence of a permanent address
- employment in the absence of a permanent address

Overall, it amends Massachusetts' anti-discrimination laws to include housing status.

Hear the Stories



Sue Marsh, former Director of the MA Coalition for the Homeless

"The housing market in Boston is a big and slippery ladder. Once you lose your grip, it's easy to slide down to the bottom and it's hard to climb up the slope. I once met a single mother who had to buy two pairs of new sneakers for her son who shot up six inches and grew out of his old shoes in less than a year. The money to buy two pairs of new shoes put immense pressure on her monthly income. She eventually lost her home because she could no longer afford rent and make ends meet."



Renee Nakkab, Student

"In Waltham Commons, the police routinely come and kick homeless people off the lawn, even when they're not doing anything of harm to the community. They're sleeping on a bench, or eating, or playing sudoku when they get harassed by the police. This harassment is a public act, it's embarrassing and makes them feel less than. By doing this, the police are enforcing the idea that they're outsiders."



Senator Rebecca Rausch

"Everyone deserves dignity and respect, regardless of housing status, especially during a global pandemic... The Bill of Rights is a harm reductive approach to help people exit homelessness."

Call to Action

- Find out who your local legislators are: www.wheredovotema.com
- Call your legislators to support and vote favorably for the Bill of Rights!

Oliver Qiu

On meeting with Senator Paul Feeney

I emailed Senator Feeney as a college student and resident of Waltham concerned about the homelessness issue and wishing to advocate for the homeless bill of rights. During the meeting, Allie and I listed statistics relevant to the homelessness issue and presented the ways in which our bill would help create a solution.

In our previous research, we discovered that Senator Feeney had supported legislation helping veterans. I listed the number of veterans who are homeless in our state, which received a heavy nod from the senator. We conveyed to him that the bill is currently in the committee he is a member of, and we would be grateful if he could help move the bill out of the committee favorably. Senator Feeney was supportive of the bill and stated he would help to push it forward. He acknowledged the homelessness issue in our state and thanked us for our advocacy work.

I considered the listing of the homeless veteran statistics to be especially helpful as Senator Feeney responded positively

and started showing support for our bill afterwards. I learned that connecting our bill to issues that the person is interested in is effective and will continue to do so.

■ Next Steps

Throughout the course of this class, we have made significant efforts to advocate for our bill and we feel confident that Massachusetts will join the wave of states that have passed homeless bills of rights into law. In our advocacy efforts, we haven't been met with significant controversy or disagreement from legislators or their staffers about the bill. The only hesitation we have met has been about the bill getting prioritized over other necessary bills such as bills dealing with COVID-19, climate change, and other pressing concerns.

Our biggest advocacy efforts have been helping the bill get out of the committees it is currently in, especially since bills can get stuck in the Senate Ways and Means Committee. Throughout the last few months, we have met with several legislators in both the Senate Ways and Means Committee and the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing. We chose legislators who have advocated for housing policies

in the past. We plan on continuing to reach out and speak with legislators who have yet to respond to our requests, including senators in the Ways and Means Committee as well as representatives in the Joint Health Care Financing Committee.

Next steps could be to meet with legislators in both committees who may be less familiar with housing policy in our state so we can educate them about the importance of a homeless bill of rights. In the next few weeks, we plan to continue monitoring the bill and advocating for it to be voted favorably out of these committees by calling and emailing legislators, as well as spreading the word for other Massachusetts voters to do the same. We especially want to reach the chairs and vice chairs of the committee directly, whom we haven't yet met with.

Our previous meetings with legislators have given us momentum to continue this work in educating representatives about our bill and why it's crucial. We plan to send out our video and storybook to the sponsors of the bill, as well as to other legislators we have met with in order to remind them of their commitment to the bill. In meeting with legislators whose represented districts may not have a large visible homeless population, we will remind them of the nature of homelessness being present in every corner of the state regardless of its visibility.

We also hope to continue our alliance with the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless. We were able to attend their Legislative Action Day which gave us a great background on their housing policy priorities. In addition to the homeless Bill of Rights, their policy priorities include promoting affordable housing through increasing funding for RAFT (Residential Assistance for Families in Transition) and emergency housing vouchers.

As we were advocating for the Bill of Rights, it became clear that the homeless bill of rights legislation would not solve the issue of affordable housing in our state. Rather, it is a starting point that would decriminalize homelessness and lay the foundation for ensuring that people experiencing homelessness are entitled to basic rights. In addition to advocating for the Bill of Rights, our next steps include also educating ourselves on and advocating for other affordable housing policies that the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless works on.

Now that we are part of the Coalition and receive their newsletters and meeting information, we feel prepared to continue advocating for the Bill of Rights as well as other housing policies including policies that control the increase in rent price, building of more affordable housing units, and extension of eviction deadlines, all of which would reduce the threat of homelessness in our state.

As students, we are aware of the role that education plays in creating change, especially for legislators who may not have time to research the specifics of every bill in committee. We have grown to be experts on the bill and feel comfortable in this role. Through this process, we have witnessed how the legislative process plays out and the ways in which policy change occurs. We have greatly valued the opportunity to advocate for our bill by meeting with legislators and attending coalition meetings.

We are grateful to have joined the ENACT network of students who are equally passionate about playing an active role in advocating for causes important to them.

■ Update

As of January 31st, 2022: The bill was reported favorably by the Senate and currently sits in the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. As of February 14th, 2022, the House reported favorably on this bill and it sits in the Committee on Health Care Financing.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.142: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S142>

H.264: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H264>

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless:
mahomeless.org

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

Members of the Project:

Lydia Begag '22

Reena Zuckerman '23



Reena Zuckerman and Lydia Begag

S.2730/H.2354, commonly known as the I AM Bill, is the most equitable and promising solution to alleviating a lack of access surrounding menstrual products in Massachusetts. Currently, in schools, homeless shelters, and prisons throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, there is no or little free access to menstrual products. According to the Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition, one in seven children in the state cannot afford access to menstrual products. As the pandemic has taken a massive economic toll on communities where housing and financial support is not guaranteed, “period poverty” has grown as well. The I AM Bill would require uniformity and more equitable access across different facilities. At its heart, the I AM Bill addresses an intersection of issues, involving healthcare and equity.

■ The Bill

S.2730/H.2354: An Act to increase access to disposable menstrual products (the “I AM Bill”)

■ Elevator Speech

Our names are Reena Zuckerman and Lydia Begag, and we are Massachusetts natives, voters, and Brandeis University students. There is no doubt in our minds that you know and love someone who menstruates, and you feel that they deserve equity and inclusion in every aspect of their lives. What if they did not have the products that they use regularly – would this truly ensure equity and inclusion for them? Can we imagine if our communities had no equal access to other basic health-care products, like toilet paper or cold medicine?

Currently, there is a shortage of menstrual products in our communities. The pandemic has taken a massive toll on communities where housing and financial support is not guaranteed. Period poverty has grown as well. The places that are disproportionately affected by the lack of access are homeless shelters, public schools, and prisons.

The most equitable solution to ending period poverty in Massachusetts is passing the I AM Bill (S.2730/H.2354). This bill would give community members in schools, prisons, and homeless shelters free access to menstrual products. Eighty nine percent of school nurses in Massachusetts say their school had no policy of providing menstrual products to students. These statistics are worse in homeless shelters and prisons. It is a small ask to make period products accessible so that these communities can thrive.

Representative, we know you agree that equity and inclusion are fundamental to the Commonwealth’s prosperity. This bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Public Health. We ask for your help by speaking with your colleagues in the committee to move it out to the House floor. Let’s extend these values together to include menstruators in the fight to end period poverty. Someone you know and love just might thank you.

■ Op-Eds

Lydia Begag

Chances are you've heard of Gloria Steinem's famous essay *If Men Could Menstruate*. If you haven't, fear not! It is exactly what it sounds like: a sarcastic imagination of what our society would be if cis-gendered men got periods. Steinem imagines that if men menstruated, sanitary supplies would be federally funded and free. It's satire, but part of me wonders. How quickly and eagerly would our menstrual products be funded if the people making most of the political decisions had periods too?

My first period was a painfully awkward experience at age 11. I was sitting at the dinner table, eating my mac and cheese, when I felt it come on. After a few days of bleeding, I ran out of the stash of menstrual products my mom kept under the bathroom sink. At the store, I didn't realize they were so expensive. I thought to myself, *Do we all really have to pay this much for a pack of Always Ultra Thin pads every month? They cost five times as much as a gallon of milk! Why do I have to bleed and my brother doesn't?!*

Ten years after my first period, I still consider the possibility of free menstrual products funded by our government. For people who have to decide between their Always pads or buying groceries for their children, compromising decisions to their health are always being made. MA shelters report menstrual products being among the least donated items. One in seven children in the state lives in poverty and can't afford to buy period products. In prisons across the commonwealth, access to period products is not guaranteed. These communities face a reality more dire than just an awkward period story. Period poverty is a persisting issue that must end now.

Our legislators in the State House have a promising solution to this issue: the I AM Bill (S.2730/H.2354). If passed, the bill would require public schools, homeless shelters, and prisons all across the state to provide free menstrual products, equalizing access for their communities. Whether you are a county jail inmate or a middle schooler getting their period for the first time at school, you would have access to a pad or tampon. If you are economically stressed, you would no longer have to choose between food, a roof over your head, education, or access to menstrual products.

For non-menstruators who think our government paying for menstrual products is unnecessary in the grand scheme of public policy, I ask you to reconsider. Imagine our society with no toilet paper in our restrooms. How comfortable would you be living your day-to-day life? Naturally, it would diminish your sense of dignity, distract you from your normal functions, and worsen your physical health, giving you a skin rash or infection. Period products function as a piece of our

healthcare, just like toilet paper and other sanitary products. So, when you ask us how much our period products cost under this policy, remember that we never ask you how much your toilet paper costs. Menstruators deserve free access to products that promote their physical well-being.

This bill has already passed the State Senate and is currently pending action in the House Ways and Means Committee. It is essential that this bill leaves committee favorably to get to the House for an open vote. Please call or email your state representative to ask them to speak with their committee colleagues to get this bill out of committee urgently.

If you are a menstruator, you have a right to share your stories with them. If you are not a menstruator, you have a duty to support your menstruating peers' health and dignity. Period poverty impacts everyone – from the struggling single mother at the homeless shelter who just escaped domestic abuse to the non-binary student who is too distracted to focus in class. If you are a non-menstruator reading this, consider reaching out to your representative as a way to support all your loved ones with periods. Trust me, they'll thank you for it – and if they don't, at least Gloria Steinem will.

Reena Zuckerman

The Importance of Menstrual Product Access

Imagine a group of eighth-graders, wearing their white graduation dresses, hanging out before the ceremony begins. The school building has opened back up for the ceremony, but as it is nice outside, the group of friends is hanging out on the soccer field. One of the students feels something in her underwear, she walks into the building, goes into the bathroom, and realizes she has gotten her period for the first time. She exits the stall hoping that the bathroom has pads or tampons that she can take, especially so that no one else can find out that she has her period. When she realizes there are no menstrual products in the bathroom, she tries two other bathrooms in the school, and even checks with the school nurse. There are no pads to be found. She goes back to the bathroom and tries as best she can to create a pad out of some toilet paper, praying that there won't be a red splotch on her white graduation dress....

I am grateful to have always had access to menstrual products at my home, and also in the nurse's office of my private high school when I needed them. This is not the case for every kid in the commonwealth, and that needs to change! There is a bill currently working its way through the state legislature titled the I AM bill, which would require free period products to be offered in all public schools, homeless shelters, and prisons.

According to a survey conducted by MassNOW in 2019, over half of school nurses surveyed noticed that their students

had to miss class to obtain menstrual products. According to the Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition, one in seven children in the commonwealth are affected by period poverty. This is an inconvenience on a whole other level. I can remember a time early on in my period journey when I had to use toilet paper in place of a pad, but after that, I started carrying around pads in my backpack all of the time. I am lucky that my family could afford whatever products the menstruators in my family needed. I never had to miss a day of school because of a lack of access, as should be the case for every student in the Commonwealth. The I AM bill will quell these existential inconsistencies in Massachusetts residents' lives.

When speaking with the President of PAD@Brandeis University, the period equity advocacy group on campus, one thing stood out to me. There are only three bathrooms on the entire campus that have free period products in them. One of them is within an office suite in Mandel, one is in the SCC, and she did not know where the third was. All three of these bathrooms are for female-identifying members of our community. If this university, which has an endowment of \$1,074 million as of June 2019, and an even larger budget, thinks it is too much of an inconvenience to increase access to free menstrual products, it is unthinkable that we expect public schools, homeless shelters and prisons to provide access on their own.

For me, menstruating was a painful inconvenience. For others, it required missing school or choosing between their own health and other necessary expenses such as food or electricity. The commonwealth will continue to be at a disadvantage as long as thousands of students miss multiple school days each month because they do not have access to needed period products. While the I AM bill passed the Senate unanimously, it is currently stalled in the House Ways and Means Committee. Please call or email the representatives on the committee to make sure the bill gets a vote in the full House.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative John J. Lawn Jr.,

Our names are Reena Zuckerman and Lydia Begag. We are Brandeis University undergraduates, lifelong Massachusetts residents and voters of Somerville and Hudson. We are writing to you to ask for your support for the I AM Bill, S.2730/H.2354. In this commonwealth, we believe in equity and we believe in the dignity of all people. However, we are currently falling short. Passing the I AM bill will get us even closer to those important values. As menstruators ourselves, we believe that every person who menstruates in the commonwealth should have equitable access to essential products. The I AM Bill is the first major step in making this

a reality, by guaranteeing that every public school, homeless shelter, and prison will have free products available.

As the Chair of the Joint Committee on Healthcare Financing, your support could be influential in getting this bill onto the House floor and passed. While the bill currently resides in the House Ways and Means Committee, your knowledge and expertise in healthcare financing is extremely important. One of the biggest issues that opponents of this bill have is that the current text of the bill does not state how these products would be paid for. However, we have seen pilot programs in schools across the Commonwealth and their associated costs. According to your colleague, Representative Livingstone, it would cost about \$2,000 upfront for each school to add dispensers and then would cost an additional \$2,000 per year. That is a drop in the bucket for schools, considering that these institutions have funding for other necessities such as toilet paper and Advil in the nurses' office. Similarly, prisons already provide some necessities, and adding menstrual products will ensure a more equitable distribution with little money added to the state budget. As the chair of a committee that pertains to healthcare financing, your support would be instrumental in easing any opposition.

Another reason that we are reaching out to you is because of your strong commitment to public advocacy. Your membership on the Board of the Watertown Boys and Girls Club is a phenomenal example of this. At the heart of this bill is the issue of equity. Thousands of students across the Commonwealth, including those at the Watertown Boys and Girls Club, are affected by period poverty. This can take multiple forms, including students having to miss school for up to a week each month because they do not have access to necessary menstrual products. Passing this bill will be beneficial to the students of Massachusetts, and to the state as a whole, as dismantling unequal barriers to education helps all communities.

The I AM Bill will propel this state to the forefront of menstrual equity in this country, making a much-needed change for those most vulnerable in the commonwealth. We ask that as the Chair of the Joint Committee on Healthcare Financing, you advocate in support of this bill to your committee colleagues to get the I AM Bill on the House floor for a vote. Your assistance will go a long way to making sure the I AM bill then makes it to Governor Baker's desk. This bill will work to create a more equitable commonwealth for all, as well as giving thousands of people the dignity that they deserve. Thank you for your time.

Best,

Reena Zuckerman and Lydia Begag

■ Storybook

I AM Bill - S.2730/H.2354

What Are the Facts?



Approximately 1 out of 7 children in MA is living in poverty and struggles to pay for menstrual products.

Over half of MA school nurses reported seeing students miss class to get menstrual products.



25% of homeless shelters in the Commonwealth do not provide any menstrual products.

The I AM Bill will...

- provide free, disposable menstrual products in *prisons, homeless shelters, and public schools*
- allow menstruators to *live comfortably and with dignity* while on their periods
- turn an *invisible, stigmatized* issue into a public policy issue *worthy of attention*

Speak to your representatives to get this bill out of the House Ways and Means Committee!

I AM Bill - S.2730/H.2354

Menstruation affects us at all levels, social, political, and physical. Here are some stories:

Sasha Goodfriend

Director of the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization of Women (NOW)

"This is about making an invisible stigmatized issue a public policy issue. I want the government and our tax dollars to pay for essential items."

Charlotte Powley

PhD, MPH, M.Ed, author of "Menstrual Hygiene Management in Public Schools"

"Growing up I suffered from really bad periods, and having to miss class and feeling really embarrassed and ashamed about it. The reminders of my own experiences, and then those experiences [of my menstruating students] definitely put [menstrual equity] on my radar."

Madison Leifer

President of PAD@Brandeis University

"Everyone who gets a period should be able to go about their lives without their periods holding them back."

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Lydia Begag

On meeting with a legislative aide for Representative Carmine Gentile

On our first lobbying day, Reena and I met with Ravi Simon '19, a legislative aide for Rep. Gentile, a Brandeis alum and former student of this class. We wanted to approach this meeting with certain strategies: one, to appeal to him as informed Brandeis students with a knowledge of the representative's advocacy efforts for women, and two, to educate him about the budget concerns behind this bill. We wanted to go in these directions because we knew it would be important to employ personal connections, but also to present ourselves as educated on the bill and to firmly support it as the best state-level solution to ending period poverty.

Ravi seemed supportive, but was also wary of doing anything to [bother] the House Ways and Means Committee, because as he said they need to be careful with how they

approach them on costly items. While I had known that this was the sentiment many representatives had towards the House Ways and Means Committee during the budget-finalization process, it was still an opportunity to push back and continue to advocate for why this bill was important. Instead of saying, "That makes complete sense, we'll wait for an answer," I decided to persuade him a bit more into thinking about how we never ask for the costs of toilet paper or other essential items to our hygiene and health-care. Why do we find it so important to continue to debate the costs of period products, then? He was receptive to this and even agreed that there was a double standard.

Overall, I thought the meeting went pretty well. It was...a good opportunity to provide information about the bill and argue for why it urgently needs to be passed. We fostered a great connection with him (he gave us his number in case we had any more questions) and ended up sending him the storybook and a fact sheet from Mass NOW, one of the leading coalitions supporting the bill, to pass along to Rep. Gentile.

Reena Zuckerman

On meeting with Representative Hannah Kane

We set up this meeting for multiple reasons. The most important reason is that Representative Kane is the ranking minority member on the original house committee the I AM bill was in. She is also the lead Republican backer of the bill on the house side.

Representative Kane spoke about the advocacy work she was doing as a member of the executive committee of the Women's Caucus, describing the meetings that she had on this bill with powerful members of the house including with the House Ways and Means Committee chair as well as the Speaker of the House. She emphasized that of the more than 6,000 bills filed in a session, the Women's Caucus is only advocating for four bills, of which the I AM bill is one, and that in and of itself shows the importance of this bill to the caucus.

All in all, I found the meeting with Representative Kane to have been the most useful, as I learned more about how the State House works as well as gained a guarantee that she will provide more information as she is updated with the process.

■ Next Steps

The bill is currently in the Massachusetts House Ways and Means Committee, where it resides pending further action. Throughout our advocacy for this bill, we have witnessed it pass through the senate on a unanimous vote and progress further throughout session towards bi-chamber success. However, if this bill is to pass through the house as successfully as it did the senate, there are several key points to future advocacy for the I AM Bill must consider. Below, we outline several next steps for the I AM Bill: potential implementation aspects and issues that can arise, as well as how to address them; potential lobbying issues; future advocacy collaborations for Mass NOW and MME to further their lobbying impact; and finally, recommendations for expanding the scope of the bill once it is passed.

The I AM bill does not detail how the free menstrual products will be financed, along with a lack of detail on other crucial implementation concerns. These concerns include the issue of equal and consistent implementation of products as well as the issue of education. While providing products is a great first step, if menstruators are not educated on how the products work, or about menstruation itself, this bill will not be able to help a great number of people who would benefit from it. Another possible implementation issue would be the consistent and equitable supply of products in public schools, prisons, and homeless shelters. Each community within those three categories will have to figure out how much product they need per year and to make sure there is an adequate supply. The bill does not state how each of these places should

supply the period products, just that they have to supply them. While it should not be a problem - just as these places supply an adequate amount of toilet paper, they can also supply an adequate amount of menstrual products - it is still a possible implementation issue.

Lobbying efforts for the I AM Bill from its supporter coalitions (such as Mass NOW and MME) have been largely successful. However, we see a potential avenue for improvement. When Sasha Goodfriend, Director of the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Organization for Women (NOW), came to speak at the Heller School, she mentioned how period poverty conversations can be dominated largely by student populations, particularly those in college. While student lobbying is effective and inspires legislators to take action, it can also diminish the realities of homeless shelters and prisons (both of which comprise a vastly higher number of underprivileged people than universities). This is noteworthy to consider for future lobbying steps: how can both coalitions and future students of the LGLS 161B course focus their lobbying efforts on including homeless shelters and prisons more? Legislators may find it appealing to hear student voices in their constituencies speak about how they have been impacted by period poverty, but we should not forget that this issue needs a platform for individuals who are desperately in need of period products every day. Future lobbying efforts, in order to avoid becoming exclusive from other social groups and movements, can maintain a sense of intersectionality with future advocacy collaborations and campaigns.

There are two possibilities for new advocacy collaborations that might help advance the passing of the I AM bill. The first is working with the Healthy Youth Coalition, which is trying to pass a more accurate sexual education curriculum in the commonwealth. Due to the overlap in our topics, it could be beneficial to team up with them to advance both bills. The second advocacy collaboration possibility is reaching out to coalitions and organizations working with the incarcerated population in the state. If passed, this bill would directly affect menstruators in Massachusetts state prisons, and so working in tandem with those advocating for this community would make sense.

Finally, we end with recommendations for the I AM Bill's advocacy continuing even after this initial bill is passed. When passed, this bill will make it a statewide mandate to provide free menstrual products in public schools, homeless shelters, and prisons/correctional facilities. Why stop there? The I AM Bill will serve as an impressive foundation for future advocates to lobby for expanding this access beyond just three main arenas. Public universities, public restrooms (in restaurants, cafes, and shopping malls, to name a few places), religious institutions and even hospitals can all be encouraged via future legislation to provide free period products to their

community members. We recommend that advocating to pass the I AM Bill is only the first step: beyond this one piece of legislation, menstrual equity advocates can prioritize next steps in their future lobbying efforts.

■ Update

As of March 3rd, 2022: The bill was passed unanimously by the Massachusetts State Senate. On March 7th, 2022, the bill was read in the House chamber and then referred to the committee on House Ways and Means, where it currently resides.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

S.2730: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S2730>

H.2354: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H2354>

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Menstrual Equity Coalition:

mmecoalition.com/about

Massachusetts National Organization for Women

(NOW): massnow.org/

Providing Health Coverage for Children with Disabilities

Members of the Project:

Emmett Polevoy '22

Roe Keshet '22



Emmett Polevoy and Roe Keshet

Bill S.763, also known as the “Cover All Kids Bill,” seeks to address the issue of healthcare in undocumented communities. While access to affordable, high quality healthcare is important to support a healthy population, there are many undocumented people who do not have access to public health programs due to their immigration and legal status. This bill specifically addresses undocumented children with disabilities in an attempt to provide healthcare to the vulnerable populations that need it. This bill proposes that these public health programs be broadened to include individuals who might not have qualified for them previously.

■ The Bill

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

■ Elevator Speech

We are Roe Keshet and Emmett Polevoy, and we are seniors at Brandeis University. Currently, we are both Waltham residents, and Roe is a Middlesex County resident and Massachusetts voter. We are both incredibly passionate about the issues of health equity.

Everyone deserves to get the access to the healthcare that they need in order to live healthy and happy lives. However, undocumented children and young adults go without these services every day. Without these services, children with disabilities often have to stay in hospitals, or stay at home instead of being able to go to school. They do not have access to vital tools such as wheelchairs, hearing aids, and eyeglasses. Over 30,000 children and young adults are ineligible for comprehensive healthcare because of their immigration status. 1,650 of them are children with disabilities. We are here to ask you to pass bill S.763, Cover All Kids, which will ensure that undocumented children and young adults with disabilities are able to qualify for MassHealth coverage and other health services.

By helping us pass bill S.763, you will fill the healthcare gap that currently exists for children and young adults with disabilities and improve the lives of thousands of children who desperately need your help. Not only will we be helping the children in our community, but we will also be helping our healthcare system. The health concerns of these youth do not need to reach a level resulting in serious consequences and requiring long-term hospital stays, and we can work to ensure they do not.

Please help us advocate for this bill by speaking to your colleagues in the Senate Committee for Ways and Means, who can help advance bill S.763 to the Senate chamber floor for a vote.

■ Op-Eds

Emmett Polevoy

Taking care of others is important, we all know that. From the golden rule in kindergarten, to the primary assumptions in some economic schemas, taking care of those who cannot care for themselves is among the most important of human instincts. During this pandemic, there is a population that has managed to fall through the cracks: that of undocumented disabled children.

In the state of Massachusetts, over 30,000 undocumented children need healthcare. 1,600 of those 30,000 are undocumented disabled children – an incredibly vulnerable population that needs appropriate and consistent care. Unfortunately, they aren't getting that care, or receiving the mobility devices, preventative maintenance, and mental health care that they so desperately need. In this COVID-19 pandemic, it is also critical to have ready access to healthcare. How we as a society can sit back and let the youngest and most fragile of our communities go without care is a shock and a travesty. These are people, children even, who need healthcare to live their lives, and they are going without.

As one disabled child – now a disabled adult – mentioned, “I grew up too fast. I got older, and now I have to suffer for it.” This person is speaking on the issue of getting healthcare as a child in an undocumented family; frequently, they needed to squash down the health issues that they had, never mind the mental health issues that living as the child of undocumented immigrants could cause. They felt as though they “were walking on eggshells” in regard to getting sick. A child should never have to feel that way, especially not when they aren't feeling well or are getting sick due to something outside of their control.

There is a solution proposed, though. The Cover All Kids bill is currently in the Senate, and it would be instrumental in leveling the playing field for disabled and undocumented children. This bill proposes that undocumented disabled children and young adults up to the age of 20 would be granted healthcare, something that they currently do not have. Giving these children access to care that would improve their lives is critical – they deserve to be happy and healthy in their lives, and they need to be able to grow up knowing that they do not have to choose between getting access to care and eating.

By granting these vulnerable populations access to appropriate, relevant care, these children will be able to live happy, healthy lives. It is so important to remember that these are children, kids who need our help, and this is one of the best ways that we can give them the resources they need to grow up and be productive members of our community. By helping these children, they will, once they grow up, give

back to the community that assisted them, helping us rise up together. There is nothing that makes us more human than to take care of others.

This bill is critical to the community in question – it gives undocumented disabled children access to the MassHealth program. This means that these children who have previously been unable to access appropriate, compassionate care will be able to obtain crucial medical interventions that they need in order to improve their quality of life, including treatments for chronic conditions and access to mobility devices. These children should not suffer needlessly for something as out of their control as their immigration status.

That there are over 1,000 children in this state affected by this bill is telling. Here is a population in need of assistance and, now that there is a bill introduced that will help them, it is stuck in the Senate Ways and Means Committee, unable to progress. With over 30,000 children ineligible for healthcare, many of whom are disabled, one would think that there would be a pressing need to deal with this problem before it grows. It is our job as a community to ensure that these children are given the care they need.

There is something that the ordinary person can do, though. Contact your state senator to speak with the Senate Ways and Means Committee to move this bill along. Only together can we help the children left behind, those who need our support. Don't hesitate – contact your senators as soon as possible so that we can speed up this bill's passage. The longer we wait, the longer children go without the critical care they need.

Roe Keshet

A Day in the Life of A Parent of an Undocumented Child with Disabilities

The time is 7:00 AM and it's time to wake your child up for school. Like every day, you feel the pit in your stomach fill with guilt. This is certainly not what you imagined the American Dream would look like.

Your child should be enjoying life like a kid does, playing around with their friends, getting their hair messy in the mud. Instead, your child has been forced to live their life in isolation from their peers and their community.

You wake your child with a kiss on the forehead, picking them up and carrying them to the bathroom to get ready. You then carry your child back to their room and spend a lengthy amount of time helping them get dressed. After this process is finally over, you finally carry them to the kitchen and sit them down at the table to eat breakfast before their tutor arrives. You remember how in your home country, these are tasks they were able to do by themselves with the help of a wheelchair. You would give anything to not have had to leave that wheelchair behind when you escaped to the United

States. You've heard stories of families being separated and deported, and you're terrified of losing the people you love most by getting help. You know that you're powerless to help your child gain their independence back and thrive again, and you have no idea where to go next.

This is just an example of what life can look like for an undocumented family with a child with disabilities. The experience of living in a disabled body should be appreciated as a full and worthy experience. As part of that appreciation, we all have to realize that each disability carries with it unique needs, which make the individual no less than any able-bodied person but may require specific treatments and tools like wheelchairs in order to allow the person to perform vital day-to-day tasks.

People often associate wheelchairs with confinement, think of them negatively as a tool that restricts people. But the reality is that a wheelchair is a powerful and wonderful tool for independence. For freedom. But it is also expensive, and often not covered by the very limited type of insurance available for undocumented immigrants. Without important mobility aids like wheelchairs, many disabled people have to depend on others for almost every day-to-day task. The same applies to other disability assistive devices, like hearing aids or glasses. These are tools that are often taken for granted, but the reality is that they are inaccessible for many undocumented children with disabilities in our country who only qualify for programs like MassHealth Limited, which is much more narrow and does not cover many such tools or other vital treatments.

On top of these existing boundaries, many families also avoid getting care for their children out of fear of separation and deportation. These often are families that fled their home and have nowhere else to go. They are terrified that what happened to 16-year-old Carlos Gregorio Hernandez Vasquez, who horrifically died of the flu in 2019 in his cell at a detention center, will happen to their children.

There are 30,000 children present in the state who are ineligible for healthcare because of their immigration status, 1,650 of whom are children with disabilities. 1,650 children who have to worry about whether they will be able to get up every day and live their lives. These children are innocent and completely dependent on adults, and they need our help.

But the good news is that we have recognized the problem, and we have a real solution for the state of Massachusetts: The Cover All Kids Bill, or S.763 in the Senate. Cover All Kids mandates that all children with disabilities be eligible for the available health insurance options, like MassHealth, regardless of their immigration status.

Be a part of this change by advocating to your local representatives about advancing bill S.763 forward. The time for action is now, especially since the coronavirus poses a particular threat to individuals with disabilities who

already have difficult medical conditions and may also be immunocompromised. Let's work together to make sure no family in our state has to feel this helpless again.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

There are over 30,000 children and young adults who are ineligible for comprehensive healthcare because of their immigration status. 1,650 are disabled. Their immigration status, the fact that they are undocumented, bars them from coverage by MassHealth and other subsidized healthcare programs. They do not have access to particularly imperative healthcare treatments, mobility aids, and other services that improve their quality of life.

We can make a real difference by passing bill S.763. The Cover All Kids bill not only extends healthcare coverage to disabled children who are undocumented, but also undocumented disabled youths between the ages of 19 and 20. This bill makes the healthcare provided by MassHealth available to this population, one that is frequently ignored by legislation, and would thus not only raise their quality of life but also the longevity and the ability of this vulnerable population to better serve their communities.

Some may say that children and young adults are resilient, that their health concerns do not often get to the level of serious consequences and long term hospital stays. However, this is simply not true. In order to stop an illness before it becomes serious, one must have access to treatment. A lack of preventative care for children and young adults leads to more severe and long-lasting health consequences, which may overburden the healthcare system in the long run.

We ask that you please speak to the chair of the Senate Committee for Ways and Means in order to help advance bill S.763, Cover All Kids, to make this much-needed change. These children are relying on you.

Thank you,

Roe and Emmett

■ Storybook



COVER ALL KIDS

VOTE FOR BILL S.763 TO PROTECT OUR CHILDREN

Bill S.763 takes an important step towards ensuring that all children have access to state-run healthcare by expanding MassHealth's CommonHealth plan to undocumented children and young adults with disabilities.

There are more than 300,000 kids and young adults in MA, including 1,650 with disabilities, who are ineligible for comprehensive MassHealth coverage because of their immigration status

We are letting these kids down.



MA is a leader when it comes to healthcare, but we are still severely lacking when it comes to covering undocumented immigrants.

Lack of proper health insurance translates to an inability to receive vital life-saving services, such as:

- Mobility aids, such as wheelchairs
- Hearing aids
- Eyeglasses
- Home and Community Based Services
- Adequate Mental Health Services and much more!

"I GREW UP TOO FAST"

- I.M. AN UNDOCUMENTED DISABLED CHILD

"There was no information on what procedures would look like, or what the costs involved would be"

”

The system is impossible to navigate -- my family has never gone into a medical appointment knowing how much it would cost us

”

SUZANNE CURRY

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH POLICY DIRECTOR AT HEALTHCARE FOR ALL

Psychological Health

"This is about not having the adequate amount of mental health services that they would have if they were eligible for MassHealth, and these are populations that probably experienced a lot of trauma, and also other issues to when you're new to a country and acclimating."

Physical Health

"We have an example of a child with Down Syndrome who was diagnosed with Leukemia. She could have gotten a lot of the services she needed at home from a nurse, but unfortunately, those services aren't covered. So she had to be in the hospital for about a month and her mother had to take time off work to be in the hospital with her for that month."

”

This is an issue of eyeglasses and hearing aids, being able to see and hear. It's something that's very important as well for being able to participate in school and the community.

”

FOR MORE INFORMATION
LET'S CONNECT

Connect with bill sponsors

Senator Sal DiDomenico
Sal.DiDomenico@masenate.gov
(617) 722-1650

Rep. Dave Rogers
Dave.Rogers@mahouse.gov
(617) 722-2263

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Roe Keshet

On meeting with Suzanne Curry, Director of Behavioral Health Policy at Healthcare for All

There were two main parts to this meeting: during the first part I informed Ms. Curry about our advocacy work and about the bill we were working on specifically and why my partner and I believe it is important to pass said bill. Once the informational portion of the meeting was concluded, I proceeded to ask Ms. Curry about her work with Healthcare for All, their focus on S.63 more specifically, and how their work at Healthcare for All relates to the experiences of undocumented children with disabilities, in order to be able to use the information for the storybook.

This was a good way to plan the meeting because it allowed me to practice speaking about my bill and advocacy work while also learning more about the practical implications of the bill in real life. As such, I was able to both educate and be educated during this meeting. Overall, the meeting was very productive and I felt like both Ms. Curry and I were able to learn from each other and communicate our experiences and goals very clearly. And even more importantly, I felt like I was able to communicate my message about the bill and its importance very clearly and with an understanding of the context that I was in.

Emmett Polevoy

On attending a Brandeis Disabled Students' Network panel event:

The Disabled Students' Network held a panel of speakers that spoke on both physical and mental disabilities in the context of public health. It was eye opening to see people in my community speak out about their experiences with the healthcare system, especially in the context of being disabled. As a disabled person myself, it helped me better understand some of the problems facing my community, as I was not as familiar with them previous to this meeting.

During the Q&A section, I asked about various governmental methods to better support the community, and whether or not there were other bills in addition to bill S.763 that focused on healthcare for people with disabilities. When asked about bill S.763, I explained the purpose of the bill, whom it affected, and where it currently was in the Senate.

The intersection between Covid-19 and disability was one that was thoroughly touched on during the seminar. Namely, we discussed how people can access the extant care available to them in order to better treat themselves and improve their quality of life, and how the healthcare system has a tendency to prioritize younger individuals over older individuals. This

favoring can lead to people who need care not getting it, and it is crucial to keep that in mind as we advocate for bill S.763. It is important that everyone, regardless of age and immigration status, has access to healthcare.

On meeting with Senator Cynthia Stone Creem:

Senator Creem's office is interested in issues related to healthcare and immigration, and this bill happened to be right up her alley. As Senator Creem's office had not known about the bill beforehand, we were more than willing to share more information on this bill for her. This would help educate the senator on what this bill does and why she should support it... Senator Creem's office seemed amenable to the cause, and we furthered the conversation by asking how best to get the bill moving from the Senate Ways and Means Committee.

We [also] learned that the best way to get bill S.763 out of the Senate Ways and Means Committee is to write to said committee. It is crucial that those who represent us hear from their constituents and the people who live in the areas that they represent. It resonated with me that much of what we have been doing [in this course] has been helping to get these voices out and to spread awareness for this bill.

■ Next Steps

The next step that we see for this bill is to continue lobbying for it in the State Senate. There is much work that needs to be completed, and a fair bit of advocacy that one would need to ensure that more people know about this bill. Of the senators we spoke with, not one knew about this bill before we brought it up to them. By increasing the number of senators and representatives aware of this bill, we can help speed the process of getting it passed along, as the more awareness there is of it, the better the chances are of it getting passed.

Spreading this knowledge to the public is another way that we can continue to advocate for this bill. Those who have representatives in the State Senate can be informed on the fact that this bill exists, and thus contact their representatives to help expedite the process of passing it into law. The more people who are aware of this bill, and the benefits that it would have for our society, the faster it can be passed and the faster we can reap the rewards that come with taking care of vulnerable populations in the community.

It is so crucial that we – through word of mouth, information campaigns, and other methods of spreading the word of where this bill is in the Senate and House – show people that there is room for change in the way that undocumented immigrants are treated in society, especially children who did not get a choice in whether or not they arrived to another country. They are not the decision makers, after all, and they did not get a say in how they arrived in the United States.

One can also consider the House in advocacy work. This advocacy project focused only on the Senate side of things, so there is room for another group to work on the House angle, as it is not as far along there as it is in the Senate. Bill S.763 does have a great deal of potential, and if it can be supported on both the House side and the Senate side, then it would be that much easier to pass it. After all, bills need to be passed in both the Senate and the House to be codified into law.

This is a promising bill, however. Many people close to the bill believe that it will pass in the Senate and will be reported on favorably by the House. This is because the bill, though not well known, has a great deal of support in both the House and the Senate, as it aims to help a vulnerable population who will become productive members of their community.

Through these methods, we can further this bill in its journey throughout the Massachusetts state legislature. By spreading knowledge of the bill through word of mouth, information campaigns, working with coalitions, and

publishing op-eds about bill S.763, we will be able to take the next steps to better help this bill.

■ Update

As of November 17th, 2021: The bill is currently in the Committee on Health Care Financing, and Workforce Development, where version S.763 of the bill accompanied former version S.762.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

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

Organization or Coalition support:

Healthcare for All (HCFA) — Advocates for Health, hcfama.org

Providing a Gender Neutral Designation on State Documents and Identifications

Members of the Project

Maxim E. LeBlanc '22

Benjamin H. Vardi '22



Maxim E. LeBlanc and Benjamin H. Vardi

Currently Massachusetts identification operates within a gender binary: male or female. The inherent problem with this policy is that it actively excludes and negates any diverse gender. Bill H.3126, or the “Gender X Bill,” acts to change the precedent of identity by adding a third box, marked “X”, on all state identification forms. The bill lowers the barriers to accessing affirming I.D.s by eliminating the need to “prove” one’s gender with medical records or notes from a counselor. Instead, beginning at age 18, one can decide how to identify oneself within our government by checking a box and swearing under oath not to utilize one’s newly inclusive I.D. for fraudulent purposes. This change would be enacted through partnerships between the Department of Health and the Secretary of Finance. Both roles would be responsible for first identifying which state forms require gender identity and subsequently amending them to add the ‘X’ designation.

■ The Bill

H.3126: An Act providing for a gender neutral designation on state documents and identifications

■ Elevator Speech

Our democracy was founded on the principle of representation and equality – principles we know you believe in. Allowing for a gender X option so that government identification documents acknowledge everyone would serve to strengthen our democracy by including those our system has marginalized in the past.

As nonbinary students and citizens ourselves, we believe that a democracy that is not representative of its citizens is hypocritical and does not encourage the youth of today. Gender-queer people are existing in a government that doesn’t even acknowledge their existence. Forcing citizens to show identification that does not align with their gender identity discourages queer voters from engaging in the political process.

Allowing for this gender X option on state-issued identification documents would create a space where all members of our society would be included, and all Americans can feel engaged in their government. When casting your vote, remember to do so in favor of a communal, stronger, and more representative democracy.

■ Op-Eds

Maxim LeBlanc

Opinions of a Ghost

American democracy was founded on the principles of representation and equality – principles that kindergartners sing every morning in our pledge of allegiance. However, the state of Massachusetts currently recognizes identity through an exclusive gender binary: male or female. The problem with this is that the state doesn't recognize me, my friends, intersex individuals, or my gender-diverse community.

This civil disconnect isn't an isolated issue. Nearly 670 anti-LGBTQ bills have been proposed by state legislators around the US since 2018, 238 of which have been proposed in 2022 with six months still left on the buzzer. Most notable is the "Don't Say Gay" bill recently signed into law by Florida's governor Ron DeSantis. The bill outlaws discussion surrounding LGBTQ+ topics in public schools, nullifying the identities of an entire community, and alongside them, the kindergarten principles of our democracy.

The Massachusetts bill proposed to solve these issues, H.3126, An Act providing for a gender-neutral designation on state documents and identifications, has sat on the house floor for over two years. It's easy to dismiss the significance of bill H.3126, saying that anti-LGBT incidents are isolated. Surely homophobia isn't as prominent an issue in our blue state? How could it be when we have the second largest queer population in America?

While it is easier on the collective liberal conscience to believe this, and I wish I had the privilege to agree, my existence itself is a living counterargument to this idealistic claim.

See, despite the fact that I can't identify as nonbinary within the confines of our democracy, the public never hesitates to remind me of my identity. Strangers' stares turn grocery store aisles into a freakshow circus – and over what, my thrifted skirt? It's been said that it's hard to exist in a world that doesn't want you in it. Yet today it feels as if my own democracy, my country, my state, would rather I don't exist at all.

Every piece of legislation isn't political but instead deeply personal. How does it feel when your identity is up for debate inside a statehouse where you don't have a seat, you may ask? Pro tip: not good! In fact, I feel invisible. The glaring 'M' on my driver's license represents a shell of who I once was; yet what choice do I have except to live by it? And so my own existence is political activism. Though Massachusetts refuses to represent me for who I am, I can be my own representative.

And that's exactly what I've done. Queer people have long existed on the margins, but the recent reactions from fearful

legislators show how far we've come. We're voting, creating, organizing, and building a stronger representative democracy, and they're still scared. Every year 78,000 trans individuals are accused of voter fraud due to non-affirming identification. The hypocrisy of a democracy that isn't representative of its constituents isn't merely a problem of ideals – it's causing real life consequences.

48% of LGBTQ+ youth growing up in this state consider suicide. A third of LGBTQ+ adults aged 50 to 75 living in Massachusetts have been diagnosed with depression. Yet they turn out in droves to protest these legal limitations. Students across Florida risk expulsion for attending class as their authentic selves, so they don't attend class. Instead, they walk out in protest. We're not fighting for rights, we're fighting for representation, for the basic ability of a false promise already ensured to us in our Declaration of Independence. Times are changing, and it's time for our democracy to change with them.

It's time Massachusetts moved forward with policies such as bill H.3126 and acted like the political leader it is. Changing the basis of identification from binary sex to gender creates a democracy reflective of its population. For too long our government has served to marginalize queer voices; now is the time to lift them up. Whether it's stepping into a voting booth or signing a release for bungee jumping, being able to show an I.D. that actually serves to identify you is in and of itself an affirming experience. The fact that one can't already is criminal. I enter a voting booth committing perjury.

We have to stop criminalizing queer bodies and embrace them for the people they are. I'm tired of fighting for my government to see me. I am tired of not being seen. The silence in legislative action is deafening. The sooner we begin to care about queer citizens, the sooner we can begin to care for them. There are blatant problems that exist for LGBTQ+ people of all ages. Recognizing us is the first step to resolving them, and there is no time to waste.

Benjamin Vardi

The Not-So American Dream

Jonathan Van Ness launched their hair care line in 2021, a few years after their debut on the show *Queer Eye*. From this show, books, their haircare line, podcasts, and TV appearances, they have built a five million dollar net worth for themselves within the past few years, built mostly on being an LGBTQ+ role model and their story.

Jonathan Van Ness lived the American dream, of working hard and reaching success through perseverance. However, if Jonathan Van Ness were to apply to get a license in the State of Massachusetts, they would be denied the right to put their correct identity on that license, a nonbinary gender identity. That same identity that they were able to build into

a successful business would not be recognized in the eyes of the American government, which shares stories like theirs as examples of “the greatest country on Earth”.

As of 2015 there were around 29,000 transgender individuals within the State of Massachusetts, and that is likely a significant underestimate. Stigma, discrimination, and fear of acceptance are all players in the unfortunate reluctance for these people to “come out of the closet.” The number was significant in 2015 and is on the rise as the stigma continues to change, and acceptance is more widespread.

These citizens go through the same education system, eat the same food, consume the same media, and get inspired by the same principles of the American dream as anyone else raised in this country. Why after all of this would we deny transgender and nonbinary people the right to be a part of the great American system? To take part in the American dream?

Throughout our education system, we are taught and told all about this American dream. The experiences of people like Andrew Carnegie, the Vanderbilts, the Rockefellers, and those involved in the Gold Rush are instilled in us at a young age. They come from America, where you can do or be anything if you work hard and are motivated.

But, when thinking about it, how can you be anything, or build anything, if you can't be *you* on a simple identification card? That in itself is a contradiction. An identification card, which allows you to make something of yourself, and for you to take part in this American dream, should represent *you*, not the person the world wants you to be. Especially not in America, this supposedly “great” country.

Society can be a brutal place for people who identify as either nonbinary or transgender. When I was 16 years old and I checked off “M” on my driver’s license, I wasn’t as excited as the other kids. Something felt off, and I didn’t even know why at the time. Now I know why, because getting a driver’s license is a coming-of-age experience, where kids take a big step towards adulthood, a step towards independence and this American dream. However, this was not a coming-of-age experience for me. The boy named Ben who was turning 16 and was taking a step towards being independent did not match the person inside. How do we expect children to want to take part in all the benefits and privileges of being an American citizen when we don’t allow them to do so as *themselves*?

America, the place where anyone can be anything if they put their mind to it. Whether it is a haircare line, a podcast, a clothing line, a stockbroker’s profession, or anything in between, we as Americans believe that if we put our mind to it, we can achieve it.

That is why I am asking you, yes *you*, the reader of

this op-ed, to call your representative and vote in favor of the “Gender X Bill.”

This bill would allow those obtaining a Massachusetts-issued identification card the right to identify themselves as M, F, or X, the latter for those who don’t identify as male or female. The opposers of this bill will deny these identities exist, but we are here. All of us. Male, female, non-binary, transgender, and many more, and we want to set ourselves and future generations of Americans up for success. We want to set them up to be successful as themselves, so that down the line we create the land of opportunity we hold so dear as Americans.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representatives Michael Barrett and John Lawn, Hello! I hope our letter finds you well. Max (my partner) and I (Ben) are both seniors at Brandeis University who identify as non-binary. We are currently residents of Waltham and are working together to advocate for Bill H.3126, An Act providing for a gender-neutral designation on state documents and identifications.

Our democracy was founded on the principles of representation and equality; allowing for a gender X option on state identification forms strengthens our democracy by including those who have been marginalized in the past. As stated above, this bill implements the “Gender X” option on driver’s licenses in the state.

In summary, this would allow for individuals who apply for a driver’s license, or any other form of state identification, to be able to put down their correct gender identity instead of conforming to a set gender binary. The passage of this bill would set an amazing precedent for other states and other levels of government, and it is a step in the right direction by allowing people who don’t fit into either binary gender to feel comfortable and validated in their identity.

This legislation already exists in both our home states, Maryland and Maine, and as graduating seniors entering the “real world,” it is a piece of legislation we would love to see enacted for the queer people of Waltham and beyond today.

The counterarguments opposing this bill tend to stem from a homophobic and transphobic position. For example, Representative Jim Lyons raised concerns regarding increased workload for law enforcement and the cost of new license printing, but since when have we put prices on human rights? Further, this isn’t rights, it’s representation. Building systems of identification that are authentically representative eases the workload of our bureaucracy, and more importantly, empowers the lived experiences of thousands of constituents within



H.3126: THE GENDER 'X' BILL

"This Isn't Rights, It's Recognition"

- MA Constituent

How H.3126, a Gender 'X' option on Massachusetts identification, would not only validate identities, but reinforce the strength of our modern democracy.



“Who doesn't want to have a successful life? But that means engaging with our society and our institutions. If we take away those aspirations from a young person, what's left? This takes the whole idea of citizenship to a different level ... the government needs to provide for us in terms of representation and safety.”

- QUEER BRANDEIS FACULTY MEMEBER

THE PROBLEM

CURRENTLY, THERE ARE ONLY TWO OPTIONS ON IDENTIFICATION FORMS IN MASSACHUSETTS

- There were about 30,000 transgender individuals in 2015 with an increasing rate over time
- Having 'M' or 'F' as the only options for identification misrepresents a large, marginalized community



THE SOLUTION THE GENDER 'X' BILL

- Allows for those who do not identify with either gender to have governmental recognition
- Increases political participation in younger citizens, and is a true representation of society



JUANICA BUCHANAN, MSW, LICSW
(SHE/THEY)
LGBTQIA+ SPECIALIST
COMMUNITY THERAPIST

“The fact that you can opt out of a binary system is in and of itself empowering. It doesn't hurt anyone - to allow an option for everyone.”



78,000

Trans individuals are falsely accused of voter fraud annually

Massachusetts. There are no valid arguments opposing this bill, because to oppose it is to oppose our existence. One simple box would create a space where all members of Massachusetts society would be able to participate in our democracy as themselves.

With this in mind, we are hoping to count on your vote in favor of bill H.3126, the “Gender X Bill,” and vote in favor to sustain the American democracy we all know and love.

Benjamin Vardi and Maxim LeBlanc

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Maxim LeBlanc

On meeting with an anonymous member of the Brandeis Gender and Sexuality Center (GSC)

Our meeting with the GSC was our first meeting outside the political arena. The interview served as an entry for our storybook and went incredibly well. We were able to establish a close tie to our interviewee through multiple shared identities. Swearing to anonymity permitted for a very off-the-cuff discussion regarding a very complex issue. This resulted in a long and casual discussion regarding the bill and its effects.

Sharing our individual viewpoints meant we bounced ideas off each other, learned from our individual viewpoints, and expanded our perception of the bill and possible arguments to ensure its passage. We were able to glean a better understanding of the bill’s impact by hearing the expert opinion of someone who has worked [extensively] with queer communities....

This expertise was incredibly helpful in visualizing and explaining the moral impact of the legislation. Though Ben and I have a personal connection to the topic through our own nonbinary identity, tapping into the sentiment of a larger gender-diverse community functioned to help us develop our strategy moving forward.

Benjamin Vardi

On meeting with Representative Christine Barber

Our meeting with Representative Barber was one of the most successful meetings of our advocacy. When Max and I joined the meeting, we began by discussing our personal connections to the bill. In all of our advocacy efforts, this has been the most effective method to engage people and have [them] listen to us. Max and I discussed the importance of the bill not just to us personally, but also to the future generations of children in Massachusetts.

As a representative of a pretty progressive area in the

state, she was in support of our bill, and was very engaged in the conversation. Our meeting with Representative Barber was most successful in my eyes because we had a really successful outcome. She was generous enough to offer to send our letter to the chair....

What this meeting taught me was the importance of advocacy; without this meeting, we would not have been able to pass along the letter to the chair of the House Ways and Means Committee, which will hopefully bring attention to the bill.

■ Next Steps

Throughout this process we have learned a lot. We learned about the complicated process of passing legislation, as well as the seemingly endless hurdles that legislators must pass through in order to accomplish anything. It was a complex journey, but one we did not leave the same way in which we began.

Bill H.3126 is currently on the floor of the House Ways and Means Committee. As noted above, the bill passed 36 to 1 on the Senate floor and has been in the House for the past two years. Since the moment we were handed the legislation, we wondered “Why isn’t this already enacted?”

Our legislative journey began with that question and ended with a plethora of answers. There are 6,000 bills in a legislature filled with individual motives and goals. Our work quickly became learning how we could partner our legislative priority with that of others. While we encountered little opposition, our main goal was in raising active and audible support, not only in the times we lobbied, but in all instances in which the bill was discussed.

Moving forward, our main priority remains consistent. Our methods are new, but our aims are the same. We would attempt to create a shared passion with key stakeholders in other gender-rights bills through creating a “vehicle” for change. When meeting with Representative Elguardo, she elaborated on this idea of vehicles for us, which would group together bills that share a similar motive, and this “vehicle” would allow for the more bills to be pushed to the forefront of the floor. The centerpiece of the vehicle would bond paired legislation through the topic of gender justice.

We noted increased coordination and willingness to extend favors/acts of support among representatives who were feminists or already involved in gender justice. We feel that through partnering our bill with others, such as the “I AM” bill, we can create the buzz necessary to deem our policy a widespread legislative priority.

When thinking about substantive problems with the bill, the first that came to mind for us was that this bill is a stepping stone into gender justice. What we would like to see in the future perhaps is a bill that would not require parental consent under the age of 18 but would offer this as an option

for all applying for a license at the age of 16. However, we have learned through our legislative journey that in politics and advocacy, it is about taking small, practical steps to effect change, rather than pushing for huge, unattainable leaps.

This experience has allowed us to learn a lot. Though we have studied the legislative process in detail through our other courses, this acted as a real-world capstone to our education. We were able to learn the challenges and opportunities that exist within our current government, and the potential for change that exists. As Health: Science, Society, and Policy (HSSP) students with a focus on policy, we were able to understand the battlefield in which our future work will take place.

On a more personal note, this process also entailed several moments in which we were walking a line between our lived experiences and learned expertise. In the beginning we feared leaning too heavily on one of these knowledge bases over the other. Now we understand how to walk this line with confidence, not only moving forward, but doing so with stylish intent. Lobbying for a bill so personal and close to home has forced us to grow as both students and people. This growth cannot be understated for our future work regarding the legislation.

■ Update

As of December 27th, 2021: The bill was reported favorably by committee and referred to the House Ways and Means Committee, where it currently resides.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

H.3126: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H3126

Organization or Coalition support:

Massachusetts Transgender Political Coalition:

masstpc.org

Massachusetts Gay Legal Advocates
and Defenders: glad.org

Expungement of Juvenile and Young Adult Records

Members of the Project:

Gali Davar '22

Joy Lan '22



Gali Davar and Joy Lan

In Massachusetts, it is difficult for people with criminal records to expunge (clear) their records. It is particularly important that expungement is accessible to those with records for youthful offenses committed before the age of 21 because the brain is still developing until then, and recent research indicates that youthful offenses do not predict future criminal activity. S.980/H.1531, An Act relative the expungement of juvenile and young adult records, would address this problem. The bill would automate the expungement process, rather than the current system in which individuals with records have to file for expungement themselves. It would also remove many of the current limitations on expungement. It would allow more offense types to be eligible, and it would remove the limit on the number of offenses that qualify – the current limit is two, including arrests that did not result in convictions. The bill would improve quality of life for people with records for youthful offenses by making it easier for them to access education, employment, and housing, with no risk to public safety.

■ The Bill

S.980/H.1531: An Act relative to expungement of juvenile and young adult records

■ Elevator Speech

Hello, we are Gali Davar and Joy Lan. We are Waltham residents and Brandeis students who are passionate about juvenile justice. We're here to talk to you today about H.1531/S.980: An Act relative to the expungement of juvenile and young adult records.

We all want to take good care of our youth and help them become successful adults. Under the current laws, one mistake a person makes in their youth can hold them back from accessing education, jobs, and more for the rest of their life. This is because their records follow them around, leading to stigma and exclusion wherever they go, so that a mistake made years ago becomes a permanent punishment.

The bill would improve access to expungement, the permanent censure of a person's record, for youthful offenders. The bill would automate expungement for offenders up to age 21 and lift many restrictions on eligibility for having a criminal record cleared. Improving access to expungement helps young people get back on track because it leads to lower rates of recidivism and better employment outcomes.

Everyone deserves a second chance, and mistakes from a person's youth shouldn't follow them around as a permanent punishment. Support the expungement bill to help young people get back on track and leave the past behind.

■ Op-Eds

Gali Davar

Let Them Move On: Why We Need Automated Expungement for Youthful Offenses

Think about every stupid thing you did as a teenager. It's probably a long list, right? For most of us, these mistakes only follow us around as late-night twinges of embarrassment. We've all done things we regret in our youth, but we grow out of it. We know that they don't really reflect who we are. But for some, these youthful mistakes follow them around in a much bigger way. Some people wind up with permanent records for the simple mistakes of a teenager that can prevent them from accessing critical opportunities in life, such as a good education and gainful employment. This is because Massachusetts lacks a commonsense expungement law for youthful offenses. Luckily, there is a bill before the state legislature now that would rectify this problem: H.1531/S.980, the expungement bill.

Expungement, or the permanent erasure of a person's juvenile or criminal record, is especially important for youthful offenses because of the nature of our adolescent years. Skipping school, underage drinking, getting into a fight at school: all of these actions can result in a permanent record. Sure, these are not examples of ideal, perfect behavior, but none of us are ideal, perfect people.

It's just not right that these kinds of mistakes, so common in our turbulent adolescent years, should follow someone around for the rest of their life. Even an arrest that does not result in a conviction can stay on someone's record permanently. Who among us wants to be judged by the actions of our 15-year-old self in a job interview or loan application? It is illogical and unfair, but it is the reality for people in Massachusetts with a record for youthful offenses.

Advances in scientific research make it even more clear that we need expungement for juvenile and young adult offenses. We now know that human brains are not finished developing until the age of 21 to 25. This finding helps to explain why teens and young adults engage in more risky behavior than adults.

The poor choices young people sometimes make is just a matter of normal development and says nothing about their character. Given this understanding of human brain development, it's no surprise that juvenile and young adult records hold no predictive value for future criminal behavior after four years. Young people grow out of their reckless behavior as their brains finish developing. If keeping records of juvenile and young adult offenses does not predict future behavior, and instead holds people with records back from making better choices and accessing good opportunities, why do we still do it?

There is no good reason to hold on to these records, but there are plenty of reasons to increase access to expungement. Under the current laws, due to unnecessary restrictions almost no one is eligible for expungement. Even those who are eligible rarely access expungement because they have to file themselves. Meanwhile, these records are visible to employers, college admissions offices, landlords, and more. Many of these decision makers discount someone if they have a record. So people who are rehabilitated and want to get back on track in life instead have doors slammed in their face and a teenage mistake becomes a permanent punishment. That's not right.

The expungement bill would improve public safety too. If someone cannot access good jobs, housing, or education due to their record, they may feel trapped and forced back into a life of crime. Common sense expungement laws, conversely, have been shown to lower recidivism rates, helping people stay away from crime and contribute positively to society. So, the expungement bill is good for everyone, not just the people whose records would be expunged. No wonder over 20 states have already passed similar reforms to expungement.

The expungement bill would make two key changes. First, it would make almost all offenses eligible for expungement except those that resulted in bodily harm. Second, the bill would automate expungement for youthful offenses, so a person's record would be automatically cleared when they turn 21 or three years after their last offense. These are common sense, tried and tested reforms that make it easier for youthful offenders to become successful adults.

Everyone deserves a chance to leave the past behind and start fresh, especially for teenage mistakes. Please contact your representatives and urge them to support H.1531/S.980, the expungement bill, because you support people in moving on and making better choices in life. Let those teenage mistakes stay where they belong: in our cringe-worthy trips down memory lane.

Joy Lan

A Permanent Record = A Permanent Punishment – It's Time to Pass Massachusetts' Automatic Expungement Bill

It's that time of year again: young adults are choosing their paths for the next few years of their life. High school seniors are picking a college to attend, college students are looking for summer jobs, and college graduates are pursuing a graduate degree or accepting full-time positions.

For some, this dream of attending a good university or accepting a good job remains only a dream. These are the individuals who still hold criminal records for mistakes they made in their youth, mistakes that many of us make as teenagers and young adults, but few get punished so severely for.

Because of Massachusetts' lack of an automatic expungement system, many of these individuals are forced to deal with their record for a lifetime. This can prevent them from accessing the same opportunities as everyone else. Childish mistakes made in one's youth have become permanent barriers to jobs, housing, education, and more.

Some may wonder, "But these are people with records for a reason. How can we let these criminals roam our streets, our schools, our apartments, and our jobs???" Most people – including you and me – have likely made mistakes as a teenager; that does not make someone a dangerous or lifetime criminal. And of course, serious crimes that resulted in serious bodily injury or death, or a sex-based crime, should not qualify for expungement. However, the current expungement laws in Massachusetts have too many restrictions, many of which are unreasonable and do more harm than good.

For example, currently, those who have more than two arrests on their record do not qualify for expungement, even if the arrests never led to a conviction. Individuals also currently have to go through the complicated legal process of figuring out how to get their records expunged themselves, which may include depleting already scarce resources of time, money, and energy. Since a young person's record also holds no predictive value after four years, holding a record for longer has absolutely no benefit. Imagine if getting in trouble when you were 16 prevented you from getting the job you want, receiving a college education, and living in the housing of your choice for the rest of your life. Doesn't that sound absurd?

Instead of permanently labeling these individuals as criminals because of mistakes in their youth, Massachusetts needs to do more to allow these young adults to become educated and productive members of society.

Bill H.1531/S.980, An Act relative to the expungement of juvenile and young adult records, would rectify this injustice. At least [20 other states](#), including California, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania, have recognized the need for some sort of automatic record clearing process, and have seen benefits such as [reduced recidivism](#) and [fiscal benefits](#) due to having more educated members of society, more workers in the workforce, more taxpayers, and reductions in government assistance that previously had to be provided to those who struggled to find a job due to their record.

If the expungement bill is passed in Massachusetts, youthful individuals up to the age of 21 who qualify would receive automatic expungement. Qualifications include young adults with records from their youth not involving serious bodily harm or death or sex offenses. Individuals will no longer be unjustly punished for a lifetime for a mistake they made in their youth. They can now become educated and productive members of our society rather than remaining a

burden on government resources.

It's time for Massachusetts to keep up with other states throughout the United States and recognize the need for automatic expungement. Contact your representative today and tell them to vote yes on bill H.1531/S.980, An Act relative to the expungement of juvenile and young adult records.

You can find your representative at malegislature.gov/search/findmylegislator.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Michael J. Barrett:

Hello, we are Gali Davar and Joy Lan, Waltham residents and Brandeis students who are passionate about juvenile justice. As a parent and champion of education and family issues, I know that investing in our youth is important to you. That is why you should vote yes on S.980: An Act relative to the expungement of juvenile and young adult records.

Under the current expungement laws, it is nearly impossible for young people to clear their records and get a fresh start. There are too many restrictions on eligibility, and young people have to go through the complicated process to apply for expungement themselves. Young people with records face barriers in accessing jobs, housing, and education. They are permanently punished and held back in life for small mistakes made in their youth.

The expungement bill would improve access to expungement so our youth can have a fresh start. The bill would automate expungement for youthful offenders up to age 21 and lift unnecessary restrictions. The expungement bill would help youthful offenders get on the road to success with their records no longer holding them back from accessing jobs, education, and housing.

There are concerns that this bill would be harmful to public safety. However, it will improve public safety, because in states where there are automatic expungement laws, youthful offenders have lower rates of recidivism.

Another concern about this bill is the public expense. But after the initial costs of setting up the new system, the state would see net financial gains, as more young people access higher education and gainful employment.

As the Assistant Majority Leader, I ask you to use your position of distinction to help the expungement bill pass. I urge you to speak with your colleagues on the Joint Committee on the Judiciary and encourage them to vote favorably on bill S.980. Vote yes on the expungement bill so young people can get the fresh start they deserve.

Best regards,

Gali Davar and Joy Lan

Gali Davar

On meeting with Noah Secondo, Policy Director for Senator Eric Lesser

The purpose of the meeting [with Noah Secondo] was to learn more about the bill's status in the Committee on the Judiciary and encourage Senator Lesser to support the bill. Senator Lesser is the Vice Chair on the Committee on the Judiciary, so it was great that we succeeded in securing a meeting with his office ahead of the vote out of the Committee on the Judiciary.

We discussed with Noah why we care about the expungement bill and why we think it is important. [Noah] agreed that the expungement bill is important and said he would bring it to Senator Lesser's attention amidst the many bills before the Committee on the Judiciary and make sure he knows about it. Noah was amenable to the idea to begin with so we [brought the bill] to the top of the pile, so to speak.

On meeting with Patrick Prendergast, Chief of Staff for Representative Michael Day

The purpose of the meeting was to talk to Patrick about the bill, learn more about its current standing and internal politics of the joint Committee on the Judiciary, and encourage Representative Day to support the bill. We were quite nervous going into the meeting because it was the first one and we didn't know what to expect...but Patrick stopped us and told us he already knows about the expungement bill. He seemed to support the bill personally...but discussed the many challenges of this bill – the volume of important bills before the Committee on the Judiciary, a lack of data on the scope of the problem in Massachusetts, and ideological opposition to the bill.

He spoke with us for forty minutes.... It ended up being extremely informative to us and I am grateful for the time he

Storybook

December 2021

Expungement Bill

H1531/S980: An Act Relative to the Expungement of Juvenile and Young Adult Records

What is Expungement?

- The complete erasure of a criminal or juvenile record

Problem

- MA's current law is outdated.
- Records are not cleared automatically.
- Too many restrictions to expungement.

After 4 years

the predictive value of a youth's record for reoffending is lost.



Solution

- Automatic expungement gives young people the fresh start they deserve.
- A fresh start means jobs, housing, and education.



Automatic expungement increases:

- Education
- Public safety
- GDP



Automatic expungement decreases:

- Recidivism

Hear the Stories

Expert Testimony on the Need for the Expungement Bill to Pass

"Young people engage in behavior that can be criminally charged but is actually [developmentally] normal teenage behavior. We should help them learn from that behavior, not criminalize it."

-Sana Fadel, Deputy Director at Citizens for Juvenile Justice



"Juvenile expungement is good public safety policy. States that make it easier to expunge juvenile records see subsequent reductions in recidivism and improved employment outcomes."

- Senator Cynthia Creem, public hearing, December 2021



"We're almost never able to help people expunge juvenile records because almost nobody is eligible under the current statute."

-Jacob Hayward, Greater Boston Legal Services, public hearing, December 2021



"As a juvenile justice practitioner and attorney, I can readily identify former clients deserving of a clean slate."

- Audrey Murillo, Massachusetts Bar Association, public hearing, December 2021



Call your legislators and ask them to vote yes the expungement bill (H1531/S980)!
Find your legislators at: <https://malegislature.gov/search/findmylegislator>

took to discuss it with us. The most useful thing was hearing about the internal politics and situation of the committee from an insider, something important to our bill that is impossible to learn through researching online. Something that worked really well in this meeting is that I was able to lean on my existing knowledge of juvenile justice issues in Massachusetts to respond to his counter arguments.

Joy Lan

On hosting an informational booth at a Waltham Group tabling event

As this meeting was on the Brandeis campus, it was a good opportunity to spread the word about the expungement bill, gather support for it, and encourage Brandeis community members to voice their support for it by contacting either their own representative (if they are a Massachusetts voter), or contacting Waltham's Senator Michael Barrett.

We had a template ready on our laptops for people to fill in their name and a personal connection if they chose to before emailing the letter out. We also had copies of our storybook ready with a link included to help people find their representative.

This was extremely helpful to us as a lot of people passed by the event in a rush to get to another event, meeting, or something else. The storybook made it so that we could get the word out and gather support from busy Brandeis community members who support the bill but may not have the time and energy to voice that support on their own.

It made me realize that advocacy doesn't always have to be a long meeting set up in advance. Sometimes, it can simply be convincing a community member who shares your values to give you a few minutes of their time to listen and learn about the bill, and eventually support it.

■ Next Steps

There are several next steps we could take to help get the expungement bill over the finish line. The bill was recently voted favorably out of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary and is now before the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. The bill might face pushback over financial issues because we do not have data on the scope of the problem in Massachusetts, so we cannot make precise estimates about

how much the bill will cost to implement. We could continue to advocate for the bill to members of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means, emphasizing the examples from other states and financial return on investment over time as recipients of expungement get better jobs.

We could also send some of our advocacy materials made in this class to the Expunge Massachusetts Coalition, including our storybook, video, and letter to legislator template. At this phase, we believe that advocates should focus financial arguments on data from other states – return on investment in employment and wages outcomes for recipients of expungement – and be prepared to answer questions about why we don't have better data on the issue in Massachusetts.

Lastly, as we shift our focus from members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means, it would be useful to find out what Senator Michael J. Rodrigues – the chair of that committee – believes to be necessary to report this bill out favorably. It would also be beneficial to provide him with data on the current fiscal benefits found for expungement from studies done in California and Michigan. Another storybook-style pamphlet focused on financial benefits would be useful here.

■ Update

As of April 19th, 2022: The Senate accompanied H.1531 (which the House concurred on April 14th, 2022) with a new draft of the bill: S.2837.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

H.1531: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H1531

S.980: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S980

Organization or Coalition support:

Citizens for Juvenile Justice: cfjj.org

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

Promoting Comprehensive, Inclusive, and Medically Accurate Sexual Health Education

Members of the Project:
Eleanor Lavin '22
Marissa Torelli '22
Shayna Zeitlin '22



Eleanor Lavin, Shayna Zeitlin, and Marissa Torelli

An Act relative to healthy youth, more commonly known as “the Healthy Youth Act” (S.2541/H.673), intends to reform sexual education curricula in Massachusetts in order to make them more comprehensive, medically accurate, age-appropriate, and inclusive of the racial, ethnic, or sexual identities and orientations of all students. Under current Massachusetts law, schools are not required to teach sex education if they do not want to. Through the Healthy Youth Act, the standards will be raised for schools that do choose to teach sex education in order for the curricula to be more realistic and representative of the world today. An important piece of this bill is that parents and guardians will not only have the right to view the curricula 30 days prior to the material being taught in a classroom, but also the ability to “opt-out” their student from the sex education curricula entirely if they would like, which appeases worried parents. Ultimately, this bill emphasizes how students need the tools of healthy romantic and sexual practices to protect themselves from sexually transmitted infections and domestic violence, especially if they identify as a LGBTQ+ youth.

■ The Bill

S.2541/H.673: An Act relative to healthy youth

■ Elevator Speech

Hi, our names are Marissa, Eleanor, and Shayna, and we are seniors at Brandeis University who are passionate about offering comprehensive, equitable sexual education for all students in Massachusetts.

We know that you also believe that every student deserves accurate and comprehensive education. Shouldn't this mindset also extend to sex education? The current sex education curriculum was developed in 1999 and has not been updated since, nor has it been properly modified to fit the current needs of youth.

The Healthy Youth Act, H.673/S.318, creates comprehensive sex education by providing age-appropriate, equitable access to valuable information on healthy relationship practices regardless of a student's identity, in addition to information on prevention of sexual and relationship violence, STI prevention methods, and contraceptive options. Comprehensive and inclusive sex education in schools would lay the groundwork for students to practice healthy behavior when engaging in sexual and romantic relationships for the rest of their lives.

Please speak with your colleagues in the House Committee on Ways and Means to move this bill to the House floor and encourage its passage so that the education system helps to produce a population of young adults who are educated in healthy sexual and relationship practices.

■ Op-Eds

Eleanor Lavin

We Have the Solution to this Epidemic

On March 13, 2020, President Trump declared COVID-19 a national emergency. Preventative measures were instituted to ensure that the spread of COVID would be contained. Mask mandates were instituted, and businesses were put on lockdown.

We have another epidemic on our hands and this one has been festering for a long time. Sexually transmitted infection (STI) rates have been rapidly increasing, and there is a palpable lack of knowledge surrounding our own health and sexual/romantic well-being, and yet, unlike their response to COVID-19, our leaders have failed us to enact change to protect us.

For 11 years, the Healthy Youth Act (HYA), a solution designed to improve the health and well-being of the Commonwealth, has been held in the state legislature unable to get any footing on the House floor. For 11 years our leaders have neglected the safety of our children and have shirked the importance of their education. For 11 years, they have fallen prey to the trope that teenagers know it all. In fact, they don't – they haven't been taught.

The current Massachusetts sex education curriculum was developed in 1999. Think about where you were in 1999. For most of 1999, I was not even born yet. You might have been a recent college graduate, or a new parent. In 1999, President Clinton's impeachment trial started. In 1999, the Twin Towers still stood. In 1999, gay marriage was not legalized in Massachusetts, let alone on the federal level. Simply put, 1999 was a lifetime ago. And yet our education standards have not changed for sex education since then.

Many people will attribute the lack of updated sex ed curriculum to its "taboo" nature, but most likely you reading this right now, are a byproduct of sex, or engage in sex yourself. Although you might want to live in blissful ignorance that your children or the general population of teenagers are not sexually active, you would be disappointed to find out this is not true. [In fact](#), more than 60% of Massachusetts high school students will have sex by graduation, even though only around 50% are taught how to use a condom. As a result, Massachusetts students aged 15 to 24 only represent a quarter of the sexually active population, but they represent half of gonorrhea cases and more than two-thirds of chlamydia cases.

It is clear that something needs to change. [The HYA](#) is the perfect solution to this epidemic. It promises to provide comprehensive, medically accurate, age-appropriate, and inclusive sex education to all Massachusetts public schools

that elect to teach sex education. Studies have shown that teens that receive proper sex education are more likely to use birth control and STI prevention methods.

Parents, students, or schools who do not want this education can easily opt out of this program with zero academic consequences. It places the choice in the individual's hands. There is no mandate for all schools and all students to learn sex education. Rather, this bill would provide schools the curriculum and structure to teach sex education in a way that is inclusive, comprehensive, and medically accurate.

If you are now wondering how schools would have the money or resources to incorporate such a program, the answer will further persuade you to support the HYA. There are already multiple programs that are currently being used in some Massachusetts schools that offer free sex education curriculum. Therefore, not only does the HYA not cost any money, but it will save Massachusetts money in the long run. Massachusetts currently spends millions of dollars on welfare due to STIs and unplanned pregnancies. Imagine from a purely fiscal standpoint if these rates drastically dropped. Millions of dollars could be invested in new infrastructure and technology and more education to better our society.

The Healthy Youth Act (HYA) is the solution to a long-standing problem – a silent epidemic which has plagued our youth for far too long. We have had the solution for 11 years and instead of acting on it, we have failed immensely. We have fallen into the "know it all" trope of a teenager instead of recognizing that they only know what we choose to teach them. We must now choose to teach them how to be healthy and safe.

[Please contact your representatives](#) and urge them to ensure that the HYA will pass the House Ways and Means Committee and be brought to a vote on the floor this session.

Shayna Zeitlin

Setting a New Standard for our Youth through Proper Education

Twenty two. That is how many women have sued [Deshaun Watson](#) for sexual misconduct during massage sessions. \$230 million. That is how much money the Cleveland Browns offered Watson in a five year, fully guaranteed contract. This is the most *guaranteed* money in NFL history.

Is this a person we want to idolize and reward? At what point should a gifted person be penalized for unacceptable behavior? We cannot allow sexual misconduct to be ignored. By putting Watson on a pedestal, despite his real transgressions, we are signaling to a younger generation that it is acceptable to mistreat women, especially when you have power.

Instead of promoting this message, we must teach our

children and their children proper sexual education that is comprehensive and teaches healthy, inclusive practices.

The Healthy Youth Act (S.2541/H.673) is a bill that aims to reform sexual education curriculum in Massachusetts. The goal is to create a more comprehensive, medically accurate, age-appropriate, course that is inclusive of all students regardless of their racial, ethnic, or sexual identities and orientations. With an updated curriculum, schools will help prevent negative sexual outcomes before they occur and will empower students to engage in healthy relationship practices.

According to a CDC report released in 2020, in Massachusetts [6%](#) of total teens and [17.6%](#) of teens identifying as gay, lesbian, and bisexual reported that they experienced sexual dating violence. Physical dating violence was reportedly experienced by [6.9%](#) overall and [17.7%](#) for teens identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. A survey of 12-18 year-olds on harassment, found that [48%](#) of those that had been dating experienced dating related stalking or harassment. Among youth, there seems to be a lack of a clear definition of key phrases like “consent” and “sexual harassment,” further perpetuated by icons like Watson. Granted there has been some backlash against Watson, but that does not change his status, or compensation. Thus, he is still getting away with his wrongdoings demonstrating the lack of consequences for sexual/physical misconduct.

Many opponents of the Healthy Youth Act strongly believe that discussions of sex should stay out of schools, spoken about in the home only and at the sole discretion of the parents/guardians. However, we have seen for way too long the impact of binary, outdated sexual education (or lack of education).

It is time to get our youth on the same page about what is healthy and appropriate. Comprehensive, inclusive education gives students the knowledge on how to engage in healthy practices, lowering teen birth rates and youth STI rates, as proven in various studies. Teaching about healthy relationships, consent, and boundaries will hopefully also decrease dating violence and sexual violence.

Watson may be a great quarterback, but what he does off the field has an impact on our youth. We need to teach healthy, safe, and inclusive sexual education to help our youth actually understand how to engage in safe and healthy sexual practices or not engage in sex at all.

To make this plan a reality, please reach out to your local legislators, and show your interest in the education of our children to promote the progress of this bill. This bill has been in the legislative process for over 11 years. It is time we give students the education and resources they deserve.

You can find your legislator’s information here: malegislature.gov/search/findmylegislator.

Find more information about the Healthy Youth Act and how to get involved here:

massequality.org/legislative-agenda/healthy-youth-act/.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Lawn,

We hope this finds you well. Our names are Marissa Torelli, Eleanor Lavin, and Shayna Zeitlin, and we are seniors at Brandeis University passionate about offering age-appropriate, equitable sexual education for all students in Massachusetts.

As young women in college, we have seen first-hand that lack of proper sexual education can foster unsafe sexual practices resulting in negative outcomes on the student population. In viewing your prior voting record, it is clear that you understand the importance of prioritizing education reforms. Additionally, with your endorsement from Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts, it is apparent that you are committed to bettering the well-being of your constituents. Your past record has shown your dedication to the safety and well-being of youth, in addition to the promotion of reproductive rights and health.

We thank you for advocating for the health and safety of the next generation and fighting for equality in education. While we recognize that you are very busy, we ask you to devote time and energy toward an opportunity to provide proper sexual education to Massachusetts public school students.

The current, outdated sexual education curriculum does not properly equip students to engage in healthy relationship practices. By the time Massachusetts students graduate from high school, 60% are sexually active. Massachusetts residents aged 15 to 24 only represent a quarter of those who are sexually active, but they represent half of gonorrhea cases and more than two-thirds of chlamydia cases. In Massachusetts, sexually transmitted infections (STI) rates have increased by over 32% since 2015, and young people are disproportionately affected by this rise.

Additionally, LGBTQ youth are further marginalized due to the disproportionate impact STIs and sexual assault have on this population. Furthermore, there seems to be a lack of a clear definition of key phrases like “consent” and “sexual harassment” among youth.

The Healthy Youth Act focuses on a plan for comprehensive sex education through STI prevention methods, birth control, and equitable access to valuable information on healthy relationship practices and consent regardless of their sexual orientation and gender identity. Comprehensive and inclusive sex education in schools would

provide the groundwork for students of all backgrounds to practice healthy behavior once they begin to engage in sexual and romantic relationships.

Based on school websites, we know that your son received comprehensive sexual education that will help shape his future success. Don't all students deserve to receive the same quality of education that your son did? Massachusetts voters agree that 92% of students should receive sex education in high school and 89% believe that they should cover how students can stay healthy if they become sexually active.

However, the small group of opponents to the Healthy Youth Act strongly believe that discussions of sex should stay outside of schools, be spoken about in the home only and at the sole discretion of the parents/guardians. Adversaries have claimed that teaching such "explicit" information in schools will lead to a slippery slope where students will then become more inclined to behave dangerously.

In actuality, sexual education equips students with the knowledge necessary to engage in healthy practices, thus lowering teen birth rates and youth STI rates, as proven in various studies. Additionally, the Healthy Youth Act ensures that parents and guardians will have the right to view the curriculum 30 days prior to the material being taught in a classroom and will have the ability to "opt-out" their student from the sex education curriculum entirely if they would like.

We implore you to uphold the wishes of the Commonwealth and speak with the Chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means to ensure that the Healthy Youth Act finally passes the House, after being passed in the Senate on numerous occasions. With the passage of this bill, legislators can guarantee that the state education system is producing a population of young adults who are educated in healthy sexual practices resulting in a statewide decrease in STI rates, unplanned pregnancies, and sexual and relationship violence.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Marissa Torelli

Eleanor Lavin

Shayna Zeitlin

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Eleanor Lavin

On meeting with Representative Natalie Higgins

It was truly an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to speak to Representative Higgins, a cosponsor of the bill. She was so incredibly engaging, compassionate, eager to hear from her constituents, responsive, informed and was willing to talk to us to make progress on this bill. Since Rep Higgins was already so informed on the bill, much of our conversation did not surround informative measures but instead I took a personal tone. As a college student where many students are discovering their sexuality and sexual practices, having poor sex education can be extremely detrimental to the success of everyone on campus...and one of the first steps to halting these negative behaviors is through education.

Rep. Higgins was incredibly receptive to my statement and repeated multiple times that she appreciated how open we all were and how hearing from her constituents and/or college students is her favorite part of the job. She then shared her own story of how being queer herself has impacted her own journey and her own beliefs on the importance of the HYA.

Not only does Rep. Higgins support the HYA, but she thinks it is only the first step to mandating better sex education for all students. Ultimately, meeting with Rep. Higgins gave our group so much confidence about the work we have been doing on this bill.

Rep. Higgins loved our passion and our advocacy for this bill and seemed so proud that we were working to pass it. She taught us that reaching out to legislators and encouraging other friends to do the same is really key to advocacy. The more messages that legislators receive the more likely they are to genuinely take note of this want of change for the commonwealth. It was a great reminder that legislators really do listen to the needs of their constituents and will change their legislative agendas accordingly.

Shayna Zeitlin

On meeting with a legislative aide to Representative Jack Lewis' office

Ms. Miller was very receptive [to our advocacy] as she did not know much about the bill. However, she was confident that Rep Lewis knew a lot about the bill. Regardless, we asked her if she could reiterate the information we gave her and also the urgency with which we presented the bill. She assured us that she would pass on the information and talk to Rep. Lewis in the hopes of moving the bill forward.

With meetings like this, we hope to increase awareness

of the bill as well as promote its movement to and through the House floor. From this meeting, I learned the importance and ability of legislative aides. Ms. Miller was very helpful and praised us for our outreach, reassuring us that what we are doing actually makes a difference.

I also learned that although people may agree that there is a problem that needs to be fixed, there is not a simple way to move a bill like this forward when there are so many other more pressing bills. I learned that any advocacy is good and to continue to push through and talk to as many people as possible.

On meeting with a legal aide in Representative Andre Vargas' office

Rep. Vargas is a cosponsor on the HYA, so he is already supportive of the bill and wants to see its promotion. We asked [the legal aide] if she would speak to the representative to share our advocacy work, and she said that she will let him know that it is a priority of many people and she thanked us for our work. She warned us however that the session is coming to an end, and she is unsure if it will be brought to a

vote. Thus, she encouraged us to continue our efforts to add it to the radar of representatives.

I think going forward, continuing this effort to reach out to reps who support the bill, but also ones who aren't yet so public about their views, [will be important], even if it is in the form of a letter. I learned not to be afraid of talking to the opposition.

Next Steps

The Healthy Youth Act is currently stuck in the House Committee on Ways and Means once again. This committee has proven to be the most troublesome stage for our bill and where our bill has died several times before. In order for our bill to come to a vote on the House floor, it must pass this committee.

Since this bill has no funding allocated to it, we believe that there are two reasons as to why this bill has not left this committee yet: in comparison to the COVID related bills on the docket right now, this bill might not seem as important or there is a financial implementation concern.


Storybook

The Healthy Youth Act


S.2541/H.673: "AN ACT RELATIVE TO HEALTHY YOUTH"

THE PROBLEM:
Current sex education curricula abides by an outdated, heteronormative standard that does not teach inclusive, healthy, sexual practices to all students.

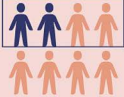
STI cases have continued to rise, and despite the majority of high school students engaging in sexual activity, many students lack the education on preventative measures required for safe sex.



52%
Only 52% of Massachusetts high school students learn how to use a condom



81%
81% of LGBTQ+ youth do not learn about LGBTQ+ inclusive topics in sex ed classes

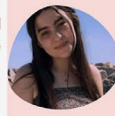


Massachusetts students aged 15 to 24 only represent a quarter of the sexually active population, but they represent 50% of gonorrhea cases

THE SOLUTION:
Passing this bill will reform sexual education curricula in Massachusetts in order to make it more comprehensive, medically accurate, age-appropriate, and inclusive of all students regardless of their racial, ethnic, or sexual identities and orientations.


GABBY KATZ Former Student of Northampton High School & Current Sophomore at Brandeis University

"My sex education wasn't adequate...for a while I didn't feel comfortable talking about STIs, what types of birth control were available to me, and other things like that because we didn't cover them in class. I had to learn from my friends about sex education which is definitely not the most accurate way of learning about sex. We learned from our experiences; it's like trial and error. Except, an error could ruin my life."





Co-Chair of Communications Committee for Healthy Youth Act Coalition **STAZI OWEN**

"This bill speaks to me very deeply on a personal level. [If I had a] safe space...where my identity was talked about and welcomed and made me feel like I mattered, [my mental and physical health would've improved]. Comprehensive and inclusive sex education ties in so many issues of access, inclusion [and] social justice that we are [all] experiencing right now. [I've heard] experiences of violence, sexual assault, bullying, people feeling like they had no idea what STIs were and then they contracted them and were feeling remorseful that nobody talked to them about these important things when they were younger. [You] hear these stories and it makes you take a step back and realize that we need to be talking about these things more."



Contact your Legislators about the Healthy Youth Act!

<https://malegislature.gov/Legislators>

In regard to the implementation of the Healthy Youth Act, for schools that do not teach sex education, finances could become an issue. These potential costs could come from either hiring a full-time teacher to actually teach these materials to the students or adding to the workload of an existing teacher, but still paying them more for their extra duties. Most, if not all, school teachers are already busy enough, so adding on the extra duties of sexual education could be burdensome to some school districts and simply not feasible. However, since there are a plethora of reliable and free sex education materials out there, the concern of expenses is lessened since sex education materials are very accessible today.

Although we would love to share this perspective with the leaders and chairs of the House Committee on Ways and Means, that has proven to be nearly impossible. With several failed email attempts, we recognize that we cannot give up on this front. The Chairs of the House Committee on Ways and Means are still the primary targets for our advocacy efforts as they are truly the only ones who have the ability to move this bill along the legislative agenda.

Our biggest lobbying roadblock has been getting in contact with the Chairs, but moving forward we hope to slowly get in contact with every member of the House Committee on Ways and Means to let them know that negative fiscal implications of the Healthy Youth Act are scant and there is no reason for this bill not to pass during the current legislative session.

When speaking with Representative Natalie Higgins, she was incredibly optimistic about the passage of the Healthy Youth Act before the end of the current legislative session. Since she is in constant contact with the bill's lead sponsor, Representative James O'Day, she was able to provide insight and information from O'Day himself. They both believe that since there is a large amount of ongoing support for this bill from both constituents and individuals within the State Legislature, they are ready to unleash their plans for

constituent-led advocacy soon. Although what Representative O'Day had planned was described to us in general terms by Representative Higgins, we trust that they have something special in store for their advocacy. We see a great amount of potential for future advocacy collaborations with both Representative O'Day and Representative Higgins as they are by far the two representatives most passionate about this bill.

Finally, moving forward, we hope to have continued collaboration with members of the Healthy Youth Act Coalition. Anastasia "Stazi" Owen, who is the current Co-Chair of the Communications Committee for the Healthy Youth Act Coalition, recently shared with us that she will be contacting our group soon regarding upcoming initiatives the Coalition is planning and how we can be involved in that. We shared our media advocacy videos with Stazi, and we hope these videos can be used, in collaboration with the Coalition's efforts and support, to spread more awareness for the Healthy Youth Act.

■ Update

As of September 27th, 2021: H.673/S.2541 was read and referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means, where it currently resides.

For More Information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

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

S.2541: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S2541

Organization or Coalition support:

Healthy Youth Act Coalition: healthyyouthact.org

Protecting the Civil Rights and Safety of All Massachusetts Residents

Members of the Project:

Rahul Arockiaraj '22

James Barno '22



Rahul Arockiaraj and James Barno

An Act to protect the civil rights and safety of all Massachusetts residents (S.1579/ H.2418), more commonly known as the “Safe Communities Act,” is a bill aimed at protecting due process rights of Massachusetts residents. This bill’s purpose is to keep communities and residents safe by preventing local police from questioning people about their immigration status without their informed consent. This would ensure that anyone in need of assistance from first responders is free to call and without fear or repercussions by encountering law enforcement. It also would prevent valued community members that may not be citizens, some of whom have been residents of the Commonwealth for many years, from being detained or deported for simply calling first responders when they have done nothing wrong.

■ The Bill

S.1579/H.2418: An Act to protect the civil rights and safety of all Massachusetts residents

■ Elevator Speech

Our names are James Barno and Rahul Arockiaraj, and we are students at Brandeis University. As children of immigrants, equity and safety have been the foundation to establishing a sense of community in our environments. However, out of fear of deportation or detainment by ICE, members of our commonwealth have become hesitant to contact local authorities, receive crucial medical services, and even report crimes such as domestic abuse.

When our residents are afraid to depend on those that are entrusted to make our state a safer place, the entirety of Massachusetts becomes significantly less secure. While all these issues already damage the integrity of our communal values, the COVID-19 pandemic raises the magnitude of these problems exponentially. Despite being more susceptible to comorbidities that result in more dangerous contacts with the virus, many immigrants are foregoing vaccination opportunities and treatment options, all out of fear of local cooperation with ICE. It is unacceptable to remain complicit when our own institutions that were meant to provide safety, instead compound the danger caused by the pandemic.

The Safe Communities Act rebuilds all of our residents’ relationships with local authorities by establishing a sense of trust, equity, and safety. By clearly instituting certain duties as federal responsibilities, our local authorities would be able to focus on their original responsibility: to protect and serve the community. Ensuring that all residents can call for help would make our entire commonwealth a safer place.

We strongly urge you to support the Safe Communities Act and hope you encourage your colleagues to vote it favorably out of the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security. Thank you.

■ Op-Eds

James Barno

Is it Really About Immigration?

On May 3rd, 2019, police responded to a call to an apartment complex in Stoughton, Massachusetts shortly before midnight. Inside the apartment, the responding officers found 43 year old Telma Bras, a Portuguese immigrant, violently stabbed to death. She had been murdered at home by her husband, a man with a history of abuse and violence, in front of her two children.

Bras' teenage daughter said that she was in the country illegally, looking for a path to a green card. She kept a low profile and kept her head down at work intentionally to not stir up questions about her immigration status. Like many others, she feared to call the police or any government official because of her immigration status. Her story is all too similar to a system of fear that Massachusetts forces their immigrant population to live in.

Every day, there is violence against vulnerable people like Telma Bras. Unlike their neighbors who are citizens, undocumented residents know that calling the police in Massachusetts will bring ICE into the picture and risk destroying their entire lives. They face a decision between enduring physical, emotional, and verbal abuse or calling the police, the latter of which may result in deportation. Unfortunately, because many of the abusers are not held accountable from their previous offenses, violent situations are enabled. In 2021, Massachusetts had the most domestic violence related deaths in five years, many of whom were immigrants.

Enough is enough. The problem is not with the immigrants. Massachusetts is the only state in the Northeast that deputizes local law enforcement as ICE agents. Massachusetts continues to allow coordination between federal agencies and state law enforcement, at the state's expense no less. Massachusetts is continuing to foster an environment of fear for all of its residents. Thousands of crimes go unreported each year in the state because of this system, making the entire community more dangerous. ICE is not going to change their practices, but Massachusetts can.

The Safe Communities Act would solve this problem and protect so many others like Telma Bras from a similar danger. It provides all Massachusetts residents, regardless of immigration status, the right to call authorities for any reason. The bill prevents law enforcement officers from questioning someone's immigration status, disentangles local law enforcement from acting as ICE officers, and informs residents of their due process rights. This bill would restore the public's trust in local law enforcement.

The need for this bill was highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which residents felt paralyzed to call for emergency services, even when their life and wellbeing was in danger. Experts agree that although 9-1-1 calls decreased over the pandemic, domestic violence rates did not, meaning that many victims could not get the help they needed. Our system in Massachusetts is failing too many residents.

California passed similar legislation a few years ago and has seen massive benefit from it. Crime rates are actually lower across the state, and especially in areas with high density of immigrants. Restoring trust in authorities creates a safer environment which benefits every Massachusetts resident, not only immigrants.

The bill is probably not as controversial as you might think. It does not make Massachusetts a sanctuary state like opponents claim. It also would end up saving the state money by not forcing law enforcement officers to work as ICE agents and by disengaging from costly court and bureaucratic federal issues.

It's also not a question of immigration, it is a question of public safety. A majority of police departments in the state already mandate the goals of the Safe Communities Act, the bill would just standardize best practices. Over 70 statewide organizations already support the bill. It's time to pass the Safe Communities Act and support victims like Telma Bras and so many others.

Please consider contacting your state legislators or police chiefs and ask them to support H.2418/S.1579, the Safe Communities Act. We need to show all Massachusetts residents that it is okay to call 9-1-1.

If you or someone you know is suffering from domestic violence, please contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-7233.

Rahul Arockiaraj

April 1st: Happy "Call Governor Baker" Day

As a kid my nickname at school was "The Michelin Man." To my surprise, it wasn't because of my friendly, kind-spirited nature, but rather my rotund appearance. Unless you counted my lunch box, I had no friends. However, one of the few people who were nice to me was Jamie. Jamie smelled like a Sharpie, had enough silly bandz on her wrist to conquer the world, and above all else was the love of my life.

So, when Max and Chris came up to me and told me that they would notify Jamie of my existence, if I did just one thing for them, I was all ears. We walked down the hall to the only public landline in the school, they dialed three numbers and told me to say: "Hi I'm the Michelin Man and I need a change in my tires." An hour later I was sitting in the principal's office, feeling a singular bead of sweat make its way from the

top of my forehead to the edge of my double chin, as I was anxiously waiting for my dad to join the meeting.

Two things I learned that day: 1) April 1st is not a fun day for fat kids in middle school and 2) 911 was not the number for Taco Bell.

When I was telling this story to one of my friends, I was pretty disappointed that I didn't receive the regular amount of pity chuckles I would usually get. However, I learned pretty soon why when she told me about her story. For the sake of her anonymity, we can call her Annie.

Annie grew up in Massachusetts with a single mother. She recalled numerous times in her childhood when her mother's abusive partner would physically assault her and subsequently trash their house. For most, calling 911 would be the immediate response, but for Annie things were different. "I felt so powerless because he would just threaten to tell the police my mom was undocumented if we decided to call."

Instead of giving a statement to a police officer, she would get a first aid kit to clean up her mother's wounds, vacuum broken glass off the carpet, and sit down silently on the couch feeling an overwhelming sense of hopelessness.

Many of the members of our commonwealth share similar stories to Annie. Due to fear of deportation or detainment from ICE, immigrants have become hesitant to contact local authorities, receive crucial medical services, and even report crimes such as domestic abuse. When our residents are afraid to depend on those that are entrusted to make our state a safer place, the entirety of our Commonwealth becomes significantly less secure. The ability to call 911 or visit a medical facility is a basic right NOT a privilege. We cannot be complacent while our own institutions, which were designed to enhance public safety, instead compound danger for all our community members.

The Safe Communities Act has instilled a sense of faith for many members of the commonwealth. The bill rebuilds the relationship between residents and local authorities by establishing a sense of trust, equity, and above all else safety. By clearly defining immigration as a federal issue and banning 287(g) agreements, local police can go back to their original duty: to protect and serve the community.

92% of deportations from Massachusetts state courts are based only on entry without inspection charges. This means that the majority of Massachusetts residents deported in 2021 were residents of the commonwealth for over 10 years. These people have been interwoven in our community as workers, employers, spouses, and parents. Furthermore, immigrants are undoubtedly integral to all facets of life in a community, especially to our economy. There are many large business owners who have come out in support of the bill, most notably Seana Gaherin of Dunn Gaherin's, and Larry O'Toole, CEO of Gentle Giant Movers, who stated: "how much I rely and

depend on [immigrants?] [My business would not be able to survive without them.](#)"

This year marks the fifth and likely last time this bill will appear on the House and Senate floor. Despite having enough momentum to achieve a basic majority, the threat of Governor Baker's looming veto has deterred state policymakers from taking further steps. The bill protects civil rights, not just for individuals, but for our entire community. We must act together and stand up for our fellow residents.

Not only should you call your local legislator and contact agencies such as [MIRA](#) and [Progressive Mass](#) to help surmount the issue atop the legislative podium, but I urge you to reach out to your local police chief to address your concerns and propose changes. It is quite literally now or never, and I hope on April 1st, the only calls you encourage your friends to make are to Governor Baker's office.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

In your second term as Senator, you passed legislation regarding domestic violence that set a precedent, not only for the state, but for the entire country to follow. Two decades later, we are writing to urge you to follow your affinity and continue to advocate for equity and trust by supporting the Safe Communities Act. We are incredibly grateful for your effort in vaulting this bill into the forefront of the Senate podium, and we understand that the health and safety of our state are of the utmost priority to you.

The other day, we spoke to a DACA student at Brandeis University, whose mother is undocumented and previously resided in Massachusetts. She recalls numerous times in her childhood when her mother's abusive partner would physically assault her and subsequently trash her house. For most, calling the police would be the immediate response, but for our fellow student, things were different.

She stated how helpless she felt when her mother's abuser would threaten to tell local authorities of her immigration status if she decided to notify anyone of what happened. Instead of giving a statement to a police officer, she would get a first aid kit to clean up her mother's wounds, vacuum broken glass off the carpet, and sit down silently on the couch feeling an overwhelming sense of hopelessness.

Passing the Safe Communities Act would help assure all community members that local authorities will not act as federal agents, but rather return to their original duty: protect and serve the community. The bill will rebuild the relationship between residents and local authorities by banning 287(g) agreements, protecting due process rights, limiting local communication with ICE, and barring officers from asking

questions regarding legal status. Survivors of domestic violence will not be treated differently due to their legal status and healthcare services will be available to all.

The opposition severely misinterprets a large portion of the bill. One of their main fears surrounds local authorities' potential inability to confer with federal agencies regarding criminal matters if the bill was passed. However, the Safe Communities Act only limits local cooperation regarding immigration issues. The fact is that the Safe Communities Act does not provide criminal immunity to immigrants. Instead, it limits state and local involvement in purely civil immigration matters, so that every community member feels safe turning to the police or to our state courts for protection.

Despite the blatant misinformation spread by the opposition, the Safe Communities Act restructures a sense of trust, equity, and safety surrounding local authorities. There is no doubt that after its implementation, the bill will make the commonwealth a safer and more equitable place for all community members, no matter their legal status.

Furthermore, as proud members of your constituency, we urge you to continue supporting the Safe Communities Act and hope you encourage your colleagues to vote the bill favorably out of the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security. Thank you for your time.

Your Constituents,

James Barno and Rahul Arockiaraj

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

James Barno

On meeting with Tom Baranowski, a legislative aide for Representative Christina Minicucci

I think this meeting was where [Rahul and I] had the most success truly advocating for the bill. We were perfectly in tandem with this meeting and I think Mr. Baranowski received it very well. We know that he at least mentioned it to Rep. Minicucci because she wrote us a kind email a few days after thanking us for our advocacy on the topic.

[Mr. Baranowski] affirmed that he understood what we were saying, and was a very active listener, which encouraged us and made us more confident. We made genuine connection with Mr. Baranowski, we've been in contact with him several times since and he actually passed along to us the advocacy plan "toolkit" that Rep. Minicucci got from MIRA. Once again, I think we were successful because we seemed genuinely interested and brought energy to the meeting.

Rahul Arockiaraj

On meeting with Ian Hatfield, legislative aide to Representative Jamie Belsito's office

Much like our meeting with [Mr. Baranowski]...this was much more of an education meeting rather than one of advocacy. Ian kept emphasizing Rep. Belsito's co-sponsorship, but also reinforced that he would take any/all of our information to present to her. After the meeting we sent Tom's toolkit as well as our own storybook, which were said to be incredibly informative.

During the meeting, James and I approached the topic with more confidence and energy, which really led us to succinctly explain the details of the bill. I think we did a great job of explaining how the bill solved the multitude of problems that are existent in a clear, succinct manner. Previously, we had gotten feedback that our explanation of the bill's solution was a bit unorganized, but I think we cleaned up our act here, due to our calm composure and added confidence...the lesson learned from this meeting is that sometimes education is also advocacy. Rep. Belsito is representing a district that has historically been incredibly Republican, and towards the end of the meeting, Ian agreed to find a way to bring up the Safe Communities Act during a town meeting, so that those who oppose the bill can potentially understand that it guarantees rights...a foundation for the political leanings of the Republican party.

■ Next Steps

The Safe Communities Act is currently in the Joint Committee on Public Safety. Its reporting date is May 4th, 2022 and it likely will be reported out favorably from that committee, which will send it to the House Ways and Means Committee. Previous versions of the bill have been reported out favorably from the Ways and Means Committee, which leads us and the co-sponsors and coalitions supporting the bill to think that this iteration of the bill also will.

The only real obstacle preventing the bill from being passed in this session is the overhanging veto from Gov. Baker and the fact that the bill currently does not have enough support for an override. A change in administration would almost certainly allow the Safe Communities Act to pass into law.

A large portion of the work left to do with this bill is to provide accurate messaging and information to legislators and members of the community. Opposition to the bill created an extensive misinformation campaign sparking fears that this bill would make Massachusetts a sanctuary state or something equivalent.

Everyone who has read the bill and understands its objective knows that these claims are simply false, however we've spoken to coalitions who argue that just planting the thought in people's heads is already very harmful. Much of our work this semester was simply trying to provide information to dispel these rumors, including in our storybook and in our "Present and Defend" project.

One such pivot that we would recommend for future messaging of the bill is a rebranding towards public safety. Throughout many of our advocacy meetings, as well as our present and defend, we found ourselves repeatedly saying "the bill is about public safety not immigration." This has been true since the bill's first steps in 2017 and holds today.

Hopefully, by emphasizing the bill's strides to promote and uphold public safety standards, political contention and rampant misinformation will subside. Additionally, by reinforcing that the Safe Communities Act follows its namesake and supports every single resident in our community, the bill will not be viewed solely under the guise of immigration, but also public safety.

Another priority in the months after passage should be to regain trust with the immigrant community. A massive problem with the current laws in Massachusetts is that undocumented residents aren't just afraid to call the police, they don't call any government organization that they need, including medical services. These problems were heightened during the COVID-19 pandemic which saw immigrant communities with higher sickness rates and lower vaccination rates from the disease. The only clear plan for regaining trust that we've seen is from coalitions, specifically MIRA. They have readily available information and spread it throughout immigrant communities trying to spread accurate information.

The bill has a very wide range of support, notably from medical organizations and immigrants rights organizations, however one area that requires more lobbying and activism is police unions. A majority of police chiefs and unions support this bill, including in Boston and Worcester, however, there are parts of the state that are resisting. This becomes more of a political question, which is something that it should not be.

■ Storybook

SAFE COMMUNITIES ACT

H 2418/ S1579

PROBLEM

Under the current law, residents of Massachusetts can be questioned by police for simply calling for help. Sick children are going without care, domestic violence is going unpenalized, and crimes are going unreported because our own community members fear the repercussions of calling the police. Massachusetts has created an atmosphere of terror, it's time to re-gain residents' trust.

SUPPORT



SOLUTION

The Safe Communities Act prevents law enforcement officers from questioning someone's immigration status when acting under the color of law. It also ensures that anyone in the commonwealth is free to call the police or access help they need and emphasizes that all Massachusetts residents are valued community members that all not be deported for simple immigration violations.

FACTS

91% of all deported Massachusetts residents in 2021 were solely from immigration violations, not actual crimes

Massachusetts is the only state in the Northeast that upholds 287g agreements, allowing local law enforcement to act as federal immigration officers

In California, where this bill is already law, crime and poverty have decreased in immigrant communities

This bill does NOT create sanctuary cities. It protects residents of the state

For Common Myths about the Bill.



DOMESTIC ABUSE IS UNCHECKED

THE MOST VULNERABLE GROUPS THAT ARE SUFFERING FROM THE CURRENT LAW ARE VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC ABUSE. MANY THINK THEY ARE UNABLE TO CALL FOR HELP FOR FEAR OF BEING DEPORTED. CONTACT YOUR LEGISLATORS AND ASK THEM TO SUPPORT THE SAFE COMMUNITIES ACT

JENNIFER MUROFF LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF MASSACHUSETTS

Immigration Legislation Specialist for the League of Women Voters. She says "All of them [victims of domestic abuse] have said they're too afraid to call the police, the abusers use immigration status as a sword saying 'you will be deported if you call the police.'"

JONATHAN COHN PROGRESSIVE MASS

Policy Director of Progressive Massachusetts. He says that the current law "increases power to people holding it in abusive domestic or work relationships." He adds that "this process benefits nobody, deportations do not make communities safer."

DOUGLAS SMITH TRII

Programs Director at The Right to Immigration Institute. He states that "People need to feel secure in going about their lives. A little traffic stop can get someone deported to a country they know nothing about."

IMMIGRATION IS A FEDERAL MATTER. MASSACHUSETTS IS UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO REQUIRE OR ALLOW ITS LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS TO QUESTION SOMEONE'S IMMIGRATION STATUS. JOIN THE MOVEMENT WITH OVER 70 STATEWIDE COALITIONS THAT HAVE ALREADY ENDORSED THE SAFE COMMUNITIES ACT AND DO WHAT YOU CAN TO PROVIDE SAFETY, SECURITY, AND EQUAL TREATMENT FOR ALL MASSACHUSETTS RESIDENTS.

The messaging that has been most effective is the fact that all crime would decrease if this bill were implemented.

The Safe Communities Act is in a unique spot where there is not much justifiable opposition and it likely will be passed given time. Highlighting the priorities of the bill and what it truly does to the public and legislators is the only foreseeable step to take. Every person that we've come into contact with has supported the bill after learning what it truly does and the fact that it would actually save the state money. Ultimately, rebranding the bill's message and a public awareness campaign may be the only steps still needed.

■ Update

As of June 28th, 2022: H.2418 was reported favorably by the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security and was referred to the House Ways and Means Committee, where it currently resides.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

H.2418: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H2418

S.1579: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S1579

Organization or Coalition support:

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

ACLU of Massachusetts:
aclum.org/en/legislation/safe-communities-act

Massachusetts Communities Action Network:
mcan.us

Coordinating Suicide Prevention Services, Behavioral Health Crisis Care, and Emergency Services Through 988 Implementation

Members of the Project:
Rebecca Regwan '22
Brett Silk '22



Rebecca Regwan and Brett Silk

Senate Bill 1274 and House Bill 2081 aim to provide citizens with an option other than calling 911 for mental health situations, in the form of a separate emergency number, 988, which will direct callers to people trained to handle any kind of mental health emergency. Whether it is a manic or depressive episode, a suicide attempt, or possibly even a domestic conflict that stems from mental health, there are a number of cases where a talking with a trained mental health professional would be a better solution than engaging a police officer. This bill is part of a national initiative to have the 988 hotline operate around the country by July 16th, 2022. There are a number of 988 call centers and resources throughout the country already. This bill would integrate those into one number that is able to function more effectively. The bill looks to address how 988 will work specifically in Massachusetts.

■ The Bill

S.1274/H.2081: An Act to better coordinate suicide prevention services, behavioral health crisis care, and emergency services through 988 implementation

■ Elevator Speech

Hello Senator,

During the pandemic, public health became a greater part of daily life, while driving many to become increasingly mentally run down. You have supported your constituents' health during the pandemic, and providing mental health services, as you would for any other health issue, is the next step in ensuring their health.

As mental health issues continue to plague more of the population and with suicide rates in Massachusetts on the rise, police feel less prepared to handle these situations effectively. Ineffective police actions during these crises are not only a waste of police resources, but lead to poor health outcomes for struggling citizens. Specifically, studies have shown that people who are struggling with mental illnesses were 16 times more likely to die during a police interaction.

By passing An Act to better coordinate suicide prevention services, behavioral health crisis care, and emergency services through 988 implementation in Massachusetts, all current mental health hotlines would be placed on one easy to access number. It would provide citizens someone to talk to, someone to respond, and somewhere to go, allowing trained psychiatric crisis responders to be dispatched to a crisis scene rather than 911, and allowing them to provide more appropriate health care services.

Your constituents are counting on you to bring mental health reform to the state and allow them to access proper mental health services during both acute psychiatric issues and smaller daily mental health issues.

We ask that you bring the Senate version of this bill, S.1274, to a vote and move it through the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Recovery, to allow the integration of mental health services in Massachusetts to occur as effectively as possible before the national July deadline.

■ Op-Eds

Brett Silk

A Call to Save a Life: 988 as an Alternative to 911

When Linda Gulman opened her candy shop, Indulge, on January 5th 2021, the last thing she expected that day was to be held up by a man with a knife, especially not a man who had come in and out of her store many times over her 30 years of working there. The Newton store-owner was shocked that the resident of the apartments above her store would do such a thing! She was frightened, and did the only thing she could think of, calling 911. When the police arrived, Michael Colon retreated to his upstairs apartment, and unfortunately, following a long and tense interaction with police, was shot and killed.

Newton residents, oddly enough given their political stances, acknowledge that this was not an unjust police shooting, as Colon proceeded to charge at officers with the knife after “less-than-lethal” force did not work, meaning that the officers did need to defend themselves. However, the issue here goes beyond this.

The problem that most had with this incident is the fact that Colon, a man suffering through a mental health crisis, should not have been interacting with the police AT ALL. There have been many incidents like this, when 911 was called to an incident that could be better handled by a mental health professional.

This is what the 988 national hotline, being implemented in July 2022, hopes to solve. Ultimately, given the July deadline for this hotline, it is critical that Massachusetts properly funds and implements these services in the state, to ensure that those struggling with a mental health incident do not have unnecessary and potentially dangerous run-ins with police who are just trying their best to do their job.

In order to see how the 988 hotline may practically be set up, the example of another state in setting up their own hotline’s launch can be instructive.

New York, our neighbors to the west, have already introduced a bill of their own designed to provide funds and support for the hotline. However, upon discussion with a professional who works at a crisis center in New York, it became clear that their implementation was not going as well as they would have hoped. As she claims, they have been assigned the task of being ready for the July deadline, but remain uninformed about the operating budget, and thus can not hire the proper number of people, and prepare the proper infrastructure to handle the amount of calls they are expected to receive.

This should not happen in Massachusetts, but given legislators’ lackluster care to H.2081/S.1274, unfortunately

this may be Massachusetts’ fate as well. What good is a call center that does not have the funds or people necessary to answer the calls?

To ensure that Massachusetts is ready to handle the volume of mental health and suicide calls that are expected, funding must be approved and distributed accordingly so that Massachusetts call centers can be built, staffed, and trained to handle whatever situations may be sent their way. If we fail to implement this bill, we can expect to see calls dropped and ignored, people left without help, and an ultimate overuse of 911 again.

How should Massachusetts residents have faith with a service that can’t even ensure its own success and survival? It is crazy to think that we are less than half a year away from the 988 number being implemented, and yet there has been minimal information about the number provided to everyday residents. Ultimately the care and attention to this bill, given its immediate nature, has been severely lacking.

While there are a number of bills in the House and the Senate, and not all can receive the utmost focus, a bill as critical and timely as this should be put at the forefront of representatives’ agendas, and the other 988 bills should be passed as soon as possible to ensure proper funding and preparation for the bill. Hopefully, through implementing and guaranteeing the 988 hotline’s success, the amount of unnecessary 911 calls can be prevented, and maybe, just maybe, can we avoid all of the unnecessary deaths and consequential discipline to law enforcement.

Rebecca Regwan

New Pandemic, New Problems: Bringing Mental Health Reform

President Biden’s remarks on March 30th that, “We’re now in a new moment in this pandemic. [Although] it does not mean that Covid-19 is over” are representative of how many people understand the new regulations. Although to some the relaxing of the Covid-19 regulations means a new freedom and return to the old normal, it is equally frustrating and mentally straining to those who understand that the pandemic is still very much happening in 2022.

This is not the “old normal” college students knew in 2019, this is a “new normal” that comes with its own mental hardships on top of students’ already demanding schedules.

As my university eased its pandemic regulations, cases rose with it and last week I contracted the disease for the first time. Although I was triple-vaccinated, Covid was specifically hard on my mental health as I had to come to terms with the fact that I had the disease I was paranoid of. While struggling in isolation, I had no idea who to call to ease my anxiety of having the disease, my school work and the potential long term effects. Through this I understood the uneasiness with lifting these regulations.

These are regular thoughts for thousands across the state of Massachusetts who don't know who to call to get help. They are living and suffering with mental illnesses, while Covid-19 is only exacerbating their issues.

They know who to call if they are physically ill: 911. First graders learn how to call 911 in an emergency. But who can they call if they have equally important crises with their mental health? Can 911 even properly respond to these mental health crises? Do police officers have any effective measures to help during these crises?

When the police are called to these crises one in 16 people suffering with mental illnesses end up fatally injured. A majority of police report feeling ill-equipped and ill-prepared to handle mental health crises. Thus, 911 and police may cause more harm than benefit for an individual struggling through a mental health crisis.

Suicide rates in the state have risen exponentially over the last five years, and the pandemic is only exacerbating it. Those people deserve to know they are cared for and can be assisted through a hotline.

Even when someone knows to call mental health crisis hotlines, the question becomes how to find the number. A quick google search, for someone with a mobile phone, provides you at least 11 different Massachusetts hotline numbers. The next question becomes which number to call. Which number is best for the situation? Which will you reach the quickest? All this questioning is wasting valuable time during a crisis, where the answer should be simple.

Even then a new issue arises, because the current mental health crisis hotlines are simply unresponsive, fragmented, and ineffective. In Massachusetts approximately 20% of calls to crisis hotlines were abandoned. That is young people struggling through the pandemic who did not find help. That is people struggling through suicidal thoughts who did not speak to someone that one fateful night. It is weeks of work lost. It is days lost in bed. It is life lost.

988 provides a solution to these big problems in our current system. It proposes ONE easy to remember number that provides citizens in crisis with someone to talk to, someone to respond, and somewhere to go. This means that there will be someone on the line who is a trained mental health professional to speak with, as well as professionals prepared to dispatch to provide assistance on the scene of a crisis. And finally, mental health facilities for citizens to go to acquire longer term care. This is a big step from the current system and provides citizens with real solutions and assistance during all mental health struggles.

Fifteen other states have already implemented the 988 hotline, with others to follow before the July 2022 deadline. These states have seen an increase in call volume, but only due to the large number of untreated cases prior to its

implementation, contrary to the belief that the hotline is merely causing more crises.

Students and citizens alike deserve to know that although times are hard during the pandemic, they are supported through the 988 hotline.

Contact your legislators today about passing Bill H.2081/S.1274 through the budget, committee, and State House to become law. This bill must become law quickly to provide an effective alternative to 911 for mental health struggles.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

We hope this finds you well. We, Rebecca Regwan and Brett Silk, are students at Brandeis University and residents of your district. Over the past two years, public health has become an even greater part of our daily life and the necessity of all health care services has grown. As a pioneer of new health services yourself, you understand why the state should have an interest in providing new mental health services to effectively curb the mental health epidemic and improve public health. During the pandemic many people continued to become increasingly run down and burned out, and at the same time, suicide rates in Massachusetts have surged.

As mental health problems continue to rise, frequently the only option to seek emergency help is to call 911 and have police respond. Police feel ill-prepared to handle these situations effectively, and ineffective police actions during these crises are not only a waste of police resources, they lead to poor health outcomes for citizens struggling through both acute psychiatric issues and smaller daily mental health issues. Specifically, studies found that people struggling with mental illnesses were 16 times more likely to die during a police interaction.

By passing the bill An Act to better coordinate suicide prevention services, behavioral health crisis care, and emergency services through 988 implementation in Massachusetts, all current mental health hotlines would be placed on one easy to access number. It would provide citizens someone to talk to, someone to respond, and somewhere to go, allowing citizens to reach the type of assistance needed for the severity of their issue.

This number would allow trained psychiatric crisis responders to be dispatched to a crisis scene rather than 911, to de-escalate and stabilize situations without the need for physical force.

Some are worried about how the funding will be collected to create the 988 system, especially because it is set to be partially funded by a small monthly fee to every mobile phone

user in the state. It is important to note that these systems will help the general public at a small cost, as mental health makes up an important part of public health. This fee is also set to be approximately 1\$ per month, which is a very small portion of a citizen's phone bill for the services it will be providing.

Others are worried that this new service will create more mental health related crises, and although it might seem as though that is true with the suspected increase in call volume, it is not the case. This increase is only due to the increased number of citizens that will be able to reach proper assistance during times of crisis rather than merely suffering, thus leading to better health outcomes.

We know that you have supported your residents during this pandemic, and this is the next step in protecting their health. Your constituents are counting on you to bring mental health reform to the state and allow them to access proper mental health services.

Please advocate to your colleagues to vote S1274 through the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery and reach the Senate floor as soon as possible,

especially considering the national July deadline. We hope that you will continue to support this bill and vote it favorably when you get the chance to.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Regwan, Brandeis University
Brett Silk, Brandeis University

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Rebecca Regwan

On meeting with Representative Tackey Chan

The meeting with Representative Chan was created because he is a Brandeis alum and we wanted to use this connection to allow us to get through to a representative more effectively. Rep. Chan works closely with many of his colleagues at the state house and we wanted to get those people to get our bill out of committee.

■ Excerpts from Storybook

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE 988 MENTAL HEALTH CRISIS HOTLINE: H2081/ S1274

Public health should be at the forefront of our state's agenda, and access to mental health assistance should be a right for all Massachusetts residents.

THE PROBLEM -

- Suicide Rates have increased to a rate of **9.1 deaths per 100,000 people** in Massachusetts over the past 5 years (American Health Foundation, 2019).
- People with mental illnesses are **16 TIMES MORE LIKELY TO DIE** during a police interaction (Carrol, 2022).
- The rate at which many Massachusetts residents sought mental health services stagnated (SAMHSA, 2019).

HOW DOES 988 SOLVE THIS PROBLEM? -

- Someone to Talk to: Creates **ONE UNIVERSAL NUMBER** to call for all mental health crises, combining 11 mental health crisis hotlines for ease of access to those suffering through crises.
- Someone to Respond: Trained psychological professionals and peers are prepared to de-escalate and stabilize situations, without the need for physical force.
- Somewhere to Go: Providing a mental health facility to go to, or community based facilities for care

OTHER STATES USING 988 -

- **15 STATES** have already implemented 988, leading to an increase in call volume and better served citizens .
- New York State implementation has brought assistance to those in need, with centralized call centers .

Stories from Mental Health Crises Workers

KATIE STOLL - LONG ISLAND CRISIS CENTER
DIRECTOR - NEW YORK, CURRENTLY
IMPLEMENTING 988

"We received a lot of calls over the COVID pandemic, people are just **EXHAUSTED** and don't have much more to give"

" **988 IS FOR EVERYTHING** "



RANYA BRAVERMAN GOLDSTEIN - PREVENTION ADVOCACY AND RESOURCE CENTER (PARC) STUDENT PEER ADVOCATE AT BRANDEIS UNIVERSITY-

"Hotlines are important for mental health because they provide **CONFIDENTIAL SUPPORT** during moments of crises."
"In crises text line, I provide individuals struggling with support and concrete steps on how to help them out of their difficult moment."

THERE'S STILL TIME. ACT NOW.

We urge citizens to call your Legislators and urge them to pass Bill S1274 and H2081 through and allow us, the residents of Massachusetts, easy access to health care.

We continued our advocacy by explaining our value for our bill, what the bill is setting out to do, and then what we are asking for him to do to push this bill to pass. He continued by asking us questions about the bill's implementation and how that would function, and expressing the need for better mental health care in the state. Specifically, he had many questions about how they would integrate the many existing systems into one. We tried our best to answer but mostly listened to the issues he was bringing up as they were very valid.

He had brought up the fact that he didn't necessarily believe this bill could pass and...the issues with its implementation.... I think it worked well to explain the details of the implementation to the best of our knowledge and some of the issues we believed there were in waiting to implement this bill. We did not shy away from explaining what we believed the issues would be.... [F]or the future of our advocacy for this bill, I believe that we can focus more on how this bill may function even with its roadblocks, as well as getting through to representatives' colleagues in the committee.

Brett Silk

On meeting with Brittany Webb, a staff attorney for Senator Cynthia Stone Creem's Office

Our brief yet informative meeting with Brittany Webb from Senator Creem's office gave us an opportunity to truly offer information to a senator to hopefully inspire and make a positive change for the course of our bill. As we began, she let us know that while she had not yet heard about this particular bill, there was a similar one that she had heard about, S.1552, which would offer similar, but not as full functioning support for mental health services.

More importantly, however, as we got into the discussion, she let us know that talking with the chairs of the committee that the bill is currently sitting on may be a beneficial course of action, as she felt we could pick their brains and possibly see exactly where it sits and what is going on. She also let us know that Senator Creem has been one to often support initiatives like this one, and...we do hope that this will fully allow us to help and provide support for this bill in the Senate.

■ **Next Steps**

As we look forward, given that this bill is still sitting in the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery, we hope to continue to reach out to and work with legislators to help the bill pass. It is noteworthy how there is currently language in the most recent governor's budget that would go to support mental health awareness and resources. This specifically states that it would create the 988 hotline and pave the way for its success.

Moreover, the prospect of going to future National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) events, and other similar events also creates the possibility of encouraging the passing of our bill, as well as awareness for both the bill itself and the 988 number that will be used. We would also focus on how other states have implemented 988 and what benefits they are displaying, so we could properly advocate supported by the evidence of those benefits.

Ultimately, one area that may need to be looked into is the posting of and attention to the 988 number, as many citizens will likely not know about the number in the near future. It may make sense for the official Massachusetts Instagram, as well as newspapers, to write and post about the number to ensure that the information is spread successfully.

■ **Update**

Bill S. 1274 was reported favorably by committee and was referred to the Health Care Financing Committee. On July 7th, 2022, the House version (H.2081) was also reported favorably and referred to the Health Care Financing Committee. In August 2022, the bill was codified into law.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

H.2081: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H2081

S.1274: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S1274

Organization or Coalition support:

National Alliance on Mental Illness, Massachusetts (NAMI): namimass.org

Authorizing Driver's Licenses for Undocumented Immigrants

Members of the Project

Rose-Lee Jean-Baptiste '22

Gazelle Umbay '22



Gazelle Umbay (shown on computer screen) and Rose-Lee Jean-Baptiste

At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was an increased need for families to drive to the hospital for medical emergencies, testing, and vaccinations. As more people demanded medical attention, more people needed access to driving on the roads, which caused accidents and hit-and-runs. A problem many undocumented immigrants face during this time is having to drive to the hospital without training on road safety, proper driving identification and insurance. Bill H.4470 would authorize undocumented immigrants to access to driver's licenses, to prevent unsafe driving situations. Enabling undocumented immigrants to go to driver's education classes and buy car insurance would reduce the number of hit-and-run cases we see in the state. This in turn would also protect undocumented immigrants from dealing with immigration services as they begin the process of getting a license.

■ The Bill

H.4470 (currently H.4805)/S.2289: An Act relative to work and family mobility during and subsequent to the COVID-19 emergency

■ Elevator Speech

Rose-Lee: Hi Senator. Our names are Rose-Lee Jean-Baptiste and Gazelle Umbay. We are both residents of Waltham, undergraduate students at Brandeis University, and are both children of immigrants. We are here to discuss Bill H.4470, An Act relative to work and family mobility during and subsequent to the COVID-19 emergency. This bill has been recently passed by the House and our hope is that it will pass through the Senate.

Gazelle: We believe that undocumented immigrants deserve equal opportunity to drive safely, the ability to drive to the hospital during COVID-19-related emergencies, and to learn basic knowledge of road safety. This is a public safety concern. COVID-19 has left undocumented immigrants with no legal way of transporting their family members to the hospital.

Rose-Lee: There has been an increased need to access healthcare facilities during the pandemic, but many undocumented immigrants lack access to a driver's license, preventing them from safely traveling to hospitals, grocery stores, etc.

Gazelle: About 78% of Commonwealth workers rely on cars to get to their jobs, go to the grocery store, and access other necessities. Additionally, there are about 16,000 essential workers in Massachusetts who are undocumented immigrants. Not passing this bill prevents 16,000 essential workers, who we all rely on during the pandemic, from safely getting to work. So what would be a solution? Removing the requirement of proof of U.S. citizenship or lawful presence to obtain a driver's license and safe driving education.

Rose-Lee: How do you feel about the safety of our community? Please vote in favor of allowing undocumented immigrants to drive safely and have safe access to travel to medical facilities.

■ Storybook

DRIVER'S LICENCES FOR

Undocumented Immigrants

H4470: An Act Relevant to Work and Family Mobility

Scan to
read the
bill!



THE PROBLEM

- COVID-19 related medical emergencies leave undocumented immigrants with no legal way to transport loved ones to the hospital
- essential workers are usually undocumented and rely on cars to get to and from work

HOW WOULD THIS BILL SOLVE THESE PROBLEMS?

- driver's licenses will allow people to legally buy cars with insurance for coverage during car accidents
- the impossible situation undocumented immigrants are put in will be alleviated with permission to obtain their licenses.
- they would be able to safely bring their loved ones to medical facilities for care

DO YOU BELIEVE THAT ALL PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO DRIVE SAFELY?

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

CALL OR EMAIL YOUR LOCAL LEGISLATOR AND TELL THEM TO VOTE IN FAVOR OF THIS BILL!

Hear Their Stories

"Getting to work during COVID was really difficult because I relied on public transportation."
-Undocumented Immigrant in MA

"Busses were becoming less reliable so there were times I could not go to work because I didn't have a way to get there."
-Undocumented Immigrant in MA

■ Op-Eds

Rose-Lee Jean-Baptiste

It's Monday morning and you wake up with a headache, sore throat, and body aches. As you get up to get your household ready for the day, you notice that everyone in your home, including the children, have similar symptoms. Everyone points you to the drive-up COVID-19 testing center 30 minutes away, but you have no driver's license, an unregistered and uninsured vehicle, and you are undocumented. Do you risk the trip and your residency in the United States for the sake of the safety of those around you, or do you stay home and risk the health and safety of your family?

December 2021 marked the beginning of another [rise in COVID-19 cases](#). More people continued to demand adequate and accessible healthcare for themselves and for their families, increased hospital visits and a decrease in resources available to help everyone who asked. Like many other people in the United States, undocumented immigrants also had a demand for access to healthcare facilities. More than five million undocumented immigrants are essential workers in the United States. That is about [4% of the country's population](#).

In the state of Massachusetts, about 16,500 of the [approximately 500,000](#) essential workers employed in the state (about 3.5%) are undocumented. To summarize, undocumented immigrants made up a small percentage of the essential workers working during the pandemic so of course they are put at a higher risk of contracting and spreading COVID to those around them due to the high volume of interactions and close contacts they frequently have. They should have easy access to getting to and from these health facilities without putting their lives at risk.

The current law in Massachusetts surrounding securing a learner's permit and driver's license require proof of citizenship or lawful presence, a Social Security number, and Massachusetts residency. Because of these requirements, undocumented immigrants are not able to get their licenses. Legislators have proposed a bill that presents the possibility for undocumented immigrants to get their driver's licenses without posing a risk to their life in the United States. The newest version of the legislation, ([Bill H.4470](#)), aims to allow driver's license access to all eligible Massachusetts residents, regardless of their immigration status. It is important that everyone, regardless of their legal status, has equal access to healthcare and equal access to resources that would make it easy for them to get to healthcare facilities when needed.

Despite being born in the United States, there have been times where I have struggled to get to the hospital due to not having reliable transportation or because I did not know

how to drive. I've spent countless hours on the bus suffering from high fevers, and sitting in classrooms because I wasn't allowed to leave to seek medical attention. The same things are happening to our undocumented children. What would you do if you were in their shoes?

Coming to you as a child of immigrants and as someone who has fallen victim to a lack of access to medical facilities, it is imperative that you, the reader, call your Massachusetts legislator and urge them to vote in favor of this bill. How would you feel if you couldn't bring your children to the hospital when they fell sick? Wouldn't you take them anyway? Let's make it easier for everyone.

Gazelle Umbay

Massachusetts Needs Driver's Licenses for All

Being a parent is difficult. You have to wake up early in the morning, get your kids ready for school, make them lunch, drop them off at school, and drive to work all before 9 am. Imagine getting a call from your child's school and they tell you that your child is experiencing COVID-19 symptoms. Now you have to leave work, drive to their school to pick them up, take them to your local CVS to buy a rapid COVID-19 test, drive back home, have them take the rapid test, and find out that they test positive. On top of all your professional duties and countless parental responsibilities, you now must drive your child to the hospital so they can receive the proper medical care to treat their illness.

Now imagine being a parent and bearing all those same responsibilities, but not being able to drive because, as an undocumented immigrant in Massachusetts, you are not eligible to apply for a standard driver's license. You are now put in a difficult situation where you either choose to not go to the hospital because you are legally not allowed to drive, potentially putting your child's life in danger, or you drive to the hospital with the fear that you could get pulled over by the police and get deported. Unfortunately, this is a reality for many residents of Massachusetts. Not having access to a driver's license makes their lives *much harder*.

There are around 110,000 undocumented people employed in Massachusetts as essential workers. These people form the backbone of this state, producing our food, looking after and taking care of our loved ones, and stocking our food in the supermarkets. That means around 110,000 people are either driving to work without a driver's license or relying on public transportation to get to their jobs. Many of those undocumented, essential workers also live in areas where public transportation is not accessible, making their journey much more tedious and difficult. While the city of Boston is super walkable with a great public transportation system, places in Western Massachusetts do not have those same luxuries.

What 16 other states have realized is that undocumented immigrants are people, just like everyone else in this country, who are deserving of the privilege to not only drive but to drive safely. People in those 16 states have the luxury of knowing that they will get to work safely because they have proper knowledge of road safety. They have the luxury of not having to wake up extra early in the morning to catch the train or bus to work. They have the luxury of bringing their children to the hospital for medical-related emergencies without the fear of deportation.

An Act relative to work and family mobility during and subsequent to the COVID-19 emergency (Bill S.2289/H.4470), ensures that everyone, regardless of immigrant status, can bring their child safely to the hospital without the risk of deportation. This bill would permit all eligible, undocumented immigrants to apply for a driver's license without having to show proof of citizenship or present a Social Security number at the DMV.

For those concerned, this bill does not grant citizenship to undocumented immigrants. It simply allows them to obtain a driver's license so that they are able to live their lives in comfort knowing they cannot get deported due to driving. This legislation would also give everyone in Massachusetts comfort knowing that all drivers have received proper knowledge of driving and road safety.

Hardworking undocumented immigrants live in fear of deportation, being separated from their families, and losing the life they have created here. No one should have to choose between bringing their child to the hospital with the risk of getting pulled over or staying at home with a sick child, because they are not legally permitted a driver's license. But this is their reality. Put yourself in their situation.

[Call or email your state senator](#) and tell them why passing this bill will not only improve the lives of hardworking residents who are deserving of a driver's license but will also ensure safer roads for everyone living in Massachusetts.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

Our names are Gazelle Umbay and Rose-Lee Jean-Baptiste, and we are residents of Waltham and undergraduate students at Brandeis University. We are also both children of immigrants and know friends and family who are undocumented immigrants and community members of the greater Boston area.

We are writing today in support of Bill H.4470, An Act relative to work and family mobility during and subsequent to the COVID-19 emergency. This legislation seeks to give access to a driver's license to undocumented immigrants in the state of Massachusetts so that they are able to drive to healthcare facilities for any COVID-19-related emergencies. During

the COVID-19 pandemic, it has been especially hard for undocumented immigrants to take their family and friends to the hospital to receive intended care, because they do not have access to a driver's license. We believe that safe driving on the road is a right and responsibility all drivers have to the community.

There are around 110,000 undocumented immigrants employed in the state of Massachusetts including about 16,000 undocumented workers who work at hospitals, supermarkets, and other essential jobs. Many of these people rely on their cars to get to work, as public transportation is not available or accessible. They also rely on their cars to travel to hospitals when there are COVID-19-related emergencies with friends and family members.

The job of senators and representatives of Massachusetts is to keep the communities within the state safe. Not passing this bill is failing in this duty. Especially during the pandemic, it has been more essential for people to be on the roads when they need medical care. Undocumented immigrants should have the right to drive, so they are able to receive the intended care for their medical needs.

By passing the Driver's License for Undocumented Immigrants Bill, we can begin to address these disparities, and ensure that all people, including undocumented immigrants, are able to safely drive during COVID-19-related emergencies, have the opportunity to drive safely without the fear of deportation, and have proper knowledge of the rules of the road.

In the United States, 18 other states have seen the benefit of passing similar bills granting access to driver's licenses for undocumented immigrants. Because this is a public safety issue, undocumented immigrants in those states are able to attend to COVID-19-related emergencies as well as drive on the roads with confidence.

We urge you to vote in favor of this bill so that undocumented immigrants are allowed to drive safely and have safe access to travel to medical facilities.

Thank you,
Gazelle Umbay
Rose-Lee Jean-Baptiste

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Rose-Lee Jean-Baptiste

On meeting with Emma Hunter, legislative aide to Senator Becca Rausch's office:

After meeting with Emma Hunter, Senator Rausch's legislative aide, she suggested that we narrow the way we decide to lobby to people who wouldn't support our bill. Before starting the meeting, we were struggling to decide the best way to advocate for the bill. We faced some conflict on whether we should simply choose a public safety-based argument, or an argument based on the rights that immigrants deserve. However, Emma told us to focus on the public safety argument as we move towards advocating to people who would not care for the rights of immigrants. She also explained how more people have been driving without a license and it would put the community at ease if they knew a large percentage of people went to driving school and have access to the right resources to be safe on the road. This meeting was very essential because it gave us the green light to shift our argument based on the groups we are lobbying to which...we were debating [if it was okay to do].

Gazelle Umbay

On attending the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Coalition (MIRA) State House Immigrants' Day virtual event:

The MIRA Coalition Immigrant's Day was held on March 29 from 10 am to 12 pm over Zoom. When I joined the meeting, I immediately felt surrounded by people who wanted to make a change for the immigrant community in Massachusetts, even if I was not physically with them. There were many speakers at this meeting, one of them being the mayor of Boston, Michelle Wu, who spoke about why immigrants are the backbone of our state, producing our food, taking care of our loved ones, and stocking our food in the supermarkets. She emphasized that we need to fight for immigrants' rights and talked about the Driver's License for Undocumented Immigrants bill.

It can be hard to find a community that you feel welcomed in, and MIRA did a really good job of being inclusive, encouraging, and informative. Before the Immigrant's Day meeting, I just assumed that they would talk about why passing immigrants' rights bills are crucial for our community, which they did, but I left the meeting feeling more of a sense of hope and comradery. I felt the most connected to the undocumented immigrant community because it created such a great emotional impact on me. Because of this, [in meetings]...I started with creating an emotional impact so that those who are reading and listening understand why the need for this bill is so urgent.

■ Next Steps

An Act relative to work and family mobility (H. 4470) is not a newly proposed bill. It has been around for the last decade, initially sponsored by State Representative Tricia Farley-Bouvier and State Senator Patricia Jehlen in 2014 but has failed to pass twice.

However, in February of 2022, this bill was passed in the House and it is looking like it will be presented in the Senate during this legislative session. This bill has racked up the support of many state legislators and coalitions. It is projected that the bill will be presented in the Senate within this next week with our hopes that it will get passed.

If this bill were to be passed within the next week or so, it would take about 90 days to become implemented as a law. The only way the bill could become law immediately would be if it contained an emergency preamble, which in this case it does not. In this case, this bill is in the Senate Committee on Ways and Means, and if the Senate chooses to vote in favor of the bill, it would be discussed among the House and edits will be made to favor both groups in the State Legislature.

Long term, if passed we see this bill being beneficial to those who need it and eventually we would see more safe driving, and more people being able to handle situations as they see fit when they come up because they will have access to the road and getting to and from their destinations.

While the likelihood of this bill not getting passed is low, the possibility is always there. If the Driver's License for Undocumented Immigrants bill does not get passed by the Senate in this legislative session, we believe that the fight for immigrants' rights is not over. Because this bill has been presented before and has increased its support each time it has been presented, it will eventually get passed. The reason this bill failed to pass in 2014 is that many legislators received angry and passionate messages from conservative constituents which swayed their decision. In our meeting with Senator Crighton, he mentioned to us that the need for this bill to pass only increases as the pandemic continues to worsen and more people need to be on the road to tend to any COVID-related emergencies.

While we cannot control the number of undocumented immigrants in the state, we can push for the need for driving accessibility for undocumented immigrants and for safer roads for all Massachusetts residents. Therefore, if this bill does not pass in the Senate in this session, the next time it does, they will continue to emphasize the need for driving so that people can go to the hospital for COVID-19-related emergencies. It may be harder to pass this bill if it does not get passed in this session because people are starting to care less about the pandemic, as more individuals are getting vaccinated and the effects of COVID-19 become less severe.

We believe that the most effective thing we can do to

lobby for this bill is to spread awareness to eliminate any misconceptions about the benefits immigrants will receive if the bill gets passed.

Also, continuing to message our state senators to pass this bill is so important because the session ends so soon and the likelihood of this bill getting passed is very high, according to the different state senators we spoke with and their staffers.

Lastly, keeping in contact with the legislators and coalitions that we have spoken to is very important so that we can continue to figure out effective ways in lobbying to get this bill passed.

It is our hope that this bill will be passed in the Senate and implemented in the state of Massachusetts. If passed, this would allow all people, regardless of documentation status, to obtain driver's licenses and navigate their everyday lives without an issue. Through lobbying, spreading awareness, and educating people on how this bill will have an impact, support can grow, and more people will continue to advocate for its passage. The eagerness to pass this bill comes from the increased need for everyone to drive so they are safely able to bring their family members to the hospital during any COVID emergencies and so that every driver in Massachusetts has undergone proper education of road safety. If other states were able to implement similar bills, it is our hope that Massachusetts can too.

This bill has the momentum to be a success here and with significant support from legislators and the people of the state, we can make sure that Massachusetts residents are safe and have the resources available to ensure their safety.

■ Update

As of June 10th, 2022: The House passed H.4805, overriding Governor Baker's veto on their initial vote to pass this bill. The Senate voted on June 9th to pass S.2289 on June 9th, 2022, and the bill was codified into law.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

H.4805: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H4805

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

Organization or Coalition support:

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

Preventing Overdose Deaths and Increasing Access to Treatment

Members of the Project

Natasha Chaiyarat '22

Devan Chen '22

Vanessa Palomares '22



Natasha Chaiyarat, Devan Chen, and Vanessa Palomares

In 2020, there were an estimated 100,000 deaths due to drug overdose in the United States. In Massachusetts alone, there were 2,106 opioid-related overdoses. Despite investments in substance misuse programs, treatment beds, and laws related to public health since 2015, Massachusetts has not seen a decline in opioid-related deaths. Bill S.1272/H.2088 intends to not only establish facilities where drug consumption can be supervised in order to prevent deaths, but also decrease the economic and social effects drug overdoses have in a community. Supervised consumption/injections sites do not attempt to promote drug usage, but rather prevent health risks associated with unsanitary and unsupervised drug usage. Supervised consumption facilities reduce instances of syringe sharing which is associated with HIV and Hepatitis C transmission. Additionally, licensed and professional personnel are able to encourage access to health care services related to substance abuse and testing for transmittable diseases.

■ The Bill

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

■ Elevator Speech

Natasha: Hello, our names are Natasha Chaiyarat, Devan Chen, and Vanessa Palomares and we study Health: Science, Society and Policy at Brandeis University.

Vanessa: In 2020, there were over 2,000 opioid-related overdoses in Massachusetts. Since 2015, there have been many efforts to tackle this public health crisis, such as investments in substance misuse programs, treatment beds, and public health laws. Despite these efforts, Massachusetts has not seen a decline in opioid-related deaths.

Devan: As residents of Massachusetts, we have seen the devastating impact of the opioid crisis in our local communities. Social stigmas surrounding drug abuse have alienated those who struggle with opioid addiction. These negative connotations have driven many people to prefer solitary drug use, which increases the likelihood of death by overdose and also poses numerous social and economic harms to the community.

Vanessa: Supervised consumption sites provide a transformative approach to the Massachusetts opioid epidemic. These facilities would ensure a safe environment for drug consumption under the supervision of medical practitioners. These sites do not attempt to promote drug usage, but rather deter health risks associated with unsanitary and unsupervised drug usage. Additionally, these sites are equipped with a vast knowledge of referrals for issues concerning rehabilitation, counseling, and substance abuse treatment and education.

Natasha: The fact of the matter is that those who struggle with opioid addiction will continue to harm themselves and the community if no new action is taken. Not only do supervised consumption sites reduce opioid-related burdens in the community, they also revolutionize societal attitudes towards those struggling with addiction. They remind us that addiction is not a choice and that those struggling with this issue are still members of our communities.

Devan: Will Senator Crighton encourage the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery to vote bill S.1272/H.2088 favorably out of the committee?

■ Op-Eds

Natasha Chaiyarat

A Transformative Approach to the Opioid Crisis

When will we see the end of the war on drugs? With extreme incarceration rates, rising medical expenses, and growing division among communities, it seems as if the opioid crisis is here to stay. This does not have to be the case. We need to reflect on current drug policy, attitudes towards those who struggle with opioid addiction, and re-strategize our approach to this persistent public health crisis. There is a solution and it is supervised consumption sites (SCS).

Each year, the U.S. spends approximately \$11 billion on drug overdose treatments, hospitalizations due to organ failure, and intensive care units. Since 2015, Massachusetts has increased funding for substance misuse programs, and treatment beds, and passed laws related to public health.

Yet, deaths from overdose continue to soar. In 2020, there were 2,106 opioid-related deaths in Massachusetts, which reignited the demand for a new and better solution. Current measures have proven ineffective in preventing deaths from overdose and the time has come for Massachusetts to adopt supervised consumption sites.

House Bill 2088 and Senate Bill 1272 would launch a 10-year pilot program establishing at least two supervised consumption sites in Massachusetts, regulated and licensed by the Department of Public Health.

Some say these sites encourage drug abuse at a different, specified location. Somerville native and City Council President Matthew McLaughlin responded to this increasingly popular critique, according to a [July 20 State House News article](#). He pointed out that “the problems that people fear with safe consumption sites exist right now with no supervision at all.” This must end now.

Supervised consumption sites are morally just, cost-effective, and most importantly, they work. There have been zero cases of deaths at these sites. Participants are able to visit these facilities of their own free-will without fear of judgment and incarceration. These sites frame the opioid crisis as a public health issue rather than a mere criminal offense.

Contrary to common critiques and misunderstandings, supervised consumption sites do not promote drug abuse, but rather provide the harm reduction tools necessary to protect users and encourage, not force, them to seek treatment. Through addiction treatment education, overdose medication, accessible healthcare advice, and more, supervised consumption sites prevent deaths caused by drug overdose.

A recent bipartisan congressional report estimated that overdose deaths cost the United States about \$1 trillion annually. Although the cost of SCS is still in the works, there

is no doubt that these facilities will improve the economy in the long run. The well-being of citizens is crucial to the economy and many states and countries have acknowledged this fact.

Massachusetts is not the only state that is considering supervised consumption sites. California, Colorado, Maryland, Rhode Island, and multiple cities have petitioned for the opening of supervised consumption sites since 2018. In 2021, New York opened two supervised consumption sites, in Washington Heights and East Harlem. [A local New York newspaper](#) reported that “as of Jan. 23, 2022, 114 drug overdoses were averted at the two sites,” and “officials report that 585 people have registered at the sites and have used the locations 4,974 times.”

Supervised consumption sites may seem scary to those who do not fully understand their purpose, but what’s scarier is having people who struggle with opioid addiction continue to harm themselves and the community. These sites provide a transformative approach and serve as the key to restoring public health and safety for all. They not only reduce opioid-related burdens in the community, they also revolutionize societal attitudes towards those who struggle with addiction, which will surely impact future legislative acts. If we desire an effective, sustainable, solution to the opioid epidemic, supervised consumption sites are the answer.

The passage of H.2088 and S.1272 will maximize safety for all members of the community. Massachusetts residents should call their state senator or representative and ask them to support supervised consumption sites. Your voice matters.

Devan Chan

Sackler Settlement Won’t Help the Dead – Massachusetts Needs Supervised Consumption Sites

Last month, members of the Sackler family were confronted with statements from over 20 people in a virtual court hearing about the devastation caused by their company, Purdue Pharma, and its product Oxycontin. The hearing was conducted in a federal bankruptcy court where the Sacklers have also recently reached a [\\$6 billion dollar settlement](#) agreement with US states for their role in the opioid crisis; Massachusetts is expected to receive approximately [\\$110 million through this settlement](#).

With this influx of funding, we have to turn our commonwealth’s opioid epidemic response towards harm reduction, specifically, supervised consumption sites (SCSs). But only one thing stands in the way: passing the legislation to legalize SCSs across the state.

Supervised consumption sites are facilities that serve to prevent overdose deaths by providing a space where those in active addiction can bring the drugs they have obtained

elsewhere and consume under supervision. Health care providers at these sites are trained to administer naloxone, an opioid blocker, in the event of an overdose. Most sites have additional proactive prevention practices including providing clients access to sterile injection equipment, guidance on safer consumption practices, and assisting those seeking treatment for substance use disorder. More recently, some have begun to offer [fentanyl test strips](#).

All in all, supervised consumption sites are closely regulated medical facilities and not state sponsored “drug dens.” Such mischaracterizations are made in bad faith by those morally opposed to addiction.

Despite opposition from those who would cling to false moral righteousness, the commonwealth is making incremental progress on the legislative front. Both the House and Senate have introduced legislation that would allow communities in Massachusetts to open supervised consumption sites if they so choose, but the bills have yet to hit the floors of either legislative body. Not surprising given the controversial nature of the proposed legislation. But we have to realize that SCSs are not new to the conversation on mitigating the effects of the opioid epidemic and have actually been operating successfully in Canada and other countries outside of North America. It’s policy in the US that has fallen behind.

Although the Department of Justice under the Trump Administration opposed SCSs in the US, going as far as to block Philadelphia from opening a site in 2019, the current political climate appears to be warming to the prospect of deploying supervised consumption sites. In February, the Justice Department stated that they are [evaluating and speaking with stakeholders](#) about developing appropriate guidelines for supervised consumption sites. This came after two SCSs were opened in New York City last year without action from the DOJ. Additionally, Massachusetts U.S. Attorney Rachel S. Rollins has in the past [voiced strong support for SCSs in the state](#).

In a time where 92% of the 2,100 confirmed opioid overdose deaths in the state involved the [presence of fentanyl](#), we can not afford to reject supervised consumption sites any longer. Massachusetts communities, such as Somerville where the devastation of the opioid crisis is acutely felt, have already drafted plans to establish SCSs. All they need is for the legislation to pass. Now that the Senate has concurred, it’s time to move both bills S.1272 and H.1088 favorably out of the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Abuse and Recovery and force legislators on Beacon Hill to vote on the bill.

Money from the Sackler settlement and several other high-profile opioid pharmaceutical settlements is expected to arrive in the commonwealth soon. Despite all efforts thus far, the opioid crisis in Massachusetts is not getting any better. How many more people must we lose before

we decide that letting people die of addiction is profoundly immoral? Supervised consumption sites save lives and it is a powerful step towards humanizing how we care for those with addiction.

But the legislation *has to pass now*. Contact your state representative and demand that they pass this legislation on supervised consumption sites in the commonwealth.

Vanessa Palomares

The Road To Recovery Has To Be Paved With Good Intentions

Albert Einstein supposedly said, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” Although he was referring to quantum theory, Einstein introduces the idea that human stubbornness promotes the idea that the same procedure will yield different results, despite the obvious. To the same extent, we cannot expect a governing system to invest in the rehabilitation, mental and behavioral health, and social well-being of vulnerable communities as they have in the last seven years, and expect different results.

Substance use has steadily decreased in the United States with the increase of counseling and treatment facilities. However in Massachusetts there has not been a significant decline in opioid related overdose deaths since [2016](#) through the use of these programs and agencies. However, the Baker-Polito Administration has allocated [\\$408 million](#) for substance misuse education, health emergency departments, and law enforcement for the year 2022. The administration believes these measures will finally aid the opioid crisis in Massachusetts, despite precedent.

Massachusetts experiences five opioid-related overdose deaths [per day](#), higher than the national rate, meaning these programs are not targeting the necessary populations. People with substance use disorders who consume illegal substances acknowledge that recovery is a possibility. However, the road to recovery is not straightforward, but rather filled with stops, turns, deviations, and roundabouts. Sometimes, these stops can be deadly, but if people are afforded the opportunity to live, they can continue their journey.

Supervised consumption sites (or safe consumption sites) intend to be that stop, a lifeline if you will. Supervised consumption sites (SCSs) are sterile facilities whose goal is harm reduction through methods that reduce the risks of disease transmission and prevent drug-related overdose deaths. SCSs ensure that people who consume drugs obtained prior to entering the site are monitored by professionals trained to stop overdoses, and therefore deaths. SCSs are not just a space for clean drug usage, they promote testing for HIV and Hepatitis C and resources related to substance abuse and rehabilitation.

This will only be possible if legislation permits it. Maybe

Talk to Your State House Representatives about passing MA Bill S.1272/H.2088 - *An Act to Prevent Overdose Deaths and Increasing Access to Treatment*

<https://malegislature.gov/Legislators/Leadership>

SUPERVISED CONSUMPTIONS SITES

In Massachusetts, deaths from the opioid overdose crisis has increased 3x over the last ten years. Under bill S.1272/H.2088, Massachusetts communities can choose to establish supervised consumption sites (SCSs), a harm reduction practice that works.

SAFE CONSUMPTION SAVES LIVES

now is the time to leave behind our insanity and think outside the box – think about a method that has proven to reduce deaths to *zero* when utilized.

Despite peoples’ best efforts, [the war on drugs](#) did not effectively target the root of drug use and distribution, but rather prompted the disproportionate presence of Black and brown people in the criminal justice system and concrete criminalization of illegal drug use. Our community morals and values tell us that opioid usage is illegal, and therefore immoral. As a result, usage should be punished and not acknowledged in our communities, making drug use taboo. A taboo that strains the medical system with more than [\\$1 trillion](#) dollars per year due to surgeries, treatment, and consultations. A legislative taboo that incarcerates people in exponential amounts per year based on single use rather than treatment. This condemnation of illegal drug use should not warrant the death of more than 2,000 lives per year since [2016](#).

If history has taught us anything, it is that two wrongs do

not make a right. Laws, amendments, and bills are enacted with the aim of a safer, healthier, livelier community. At the moment, they do not address the imminent danger to people who live with an addiction to an illegal substance. Our society has criminalized drug usage to an extent that socially isolates and abandons people if they are not able to afford treatment. This worsens their mental condition, and may cause them to further rely on an addictive substance, pushing them to the brink of death.

What if we could prevent the death of those who are struggling during the process of recovery from substance abuse? Well, bill S.1272, An Act relative to preventing overdose deaths and increasing access to treatment, seeks to do just that. At the moment it sits in the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Recovery.

If you want to see a change with concrete proof that it saves lives, I highly encourage you to contact [your Massachusetts legislator](#), tell them about supervised consumption sites, and ask that they tell their colleagues on

the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Recovery to favorably vote out bill S.1272.

This way, our community can come together and look beyond our morals of right and wrong, but rather life and death.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Michael J. Barrett,

My name is Natasha Chaiyarat and I am writing to you along with Devan Chen and Vanessa Palomares. We are students at Brandeis University and residents of Waltham who study public health and are passionate about health advocacy in local communities.

We first want to thank you for your service on the Public Safety and Homeland Security Joint Committee as well as your recent efforts on environmental committees. Your concern for community safety matches our strong interest in creating safer neighborhoods for Massachusetts residents. Our studies and experiences in Waltham have strengthened our concern for the well-being of the community, especially those affected by the death of loved ones lost to opioid overdoses. In order to prevent further loss of vulnerable community members, we ask that you support bill S.1272/H.2088.

Despite the effort of law enforcement, and policies that prevent drug usage and promote education and counseling, instances of substance use death have steadily increased since 2000. In 2020, there were more than 2,000 deaths due to opioid overdoses in Massachusetts. This number is expected to increase in the coming years given the effects that Covid-19 and the cascade of social issues impacted by the pandemic have had on a national level.

However, now is the time to invest in a solution that has proven to have zero deaths when properly administered. Supervised consumption sites (SCS) do not promote drug usage, but rather provide the harm reduction tools necessary to protect community members with substance use disorders and encourage them to seek treatment. Evidence proves that crime rates regarding disorderly conduct or drug usage do not increase in the communities in which SCSs are implemented.

Opioid overdoses cost federal and local governments and hospitals time and money associated with treatment and emergency surgeries due to organ failures. Data from active SCSs have shown that an estimated \$4.89 is saved per dollar that the community invests in the site. Medically trained staff, provision of clean needles, substance abuse counselors, and testing for transmissible disease provides communities with cleaner public spaces and diminishes costs associated with the treatment of overdoses.

We hope that you see the benefits in supervised consumption sites, as we have. We ask now that you support

this bill and encourage the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Recovery to favorably vote out bill S.1272/H.2088.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Natasha Chaiyarat, Devan Chen, & Vanessa Palomares

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Natasha Chaiyarat

On meeting with Representative Natalie Higgins:

Our...meeting with Representative Natalie Higgins was intimate and informative. Since Rep. Higgins is a member of the Joint Committee [on Mental Health, Substance Use, and Recovery], we stressed the importance of encouraging her colleagues to vote favorably on the bill. At the end of our presentation, she thanked us for our efforts and advised us to continue to advocate for this cause. She shared our enthusiasm for working on getting the bill out of committee and underscored the significance of providing communities in Massachusetts with the option to create supervised consumption sites.

One of the major takeaways from the meeting with Rep. Higgins was her emphasis on giving communities the choice to construct these facilities. She highlighted the necessity of having communities decide for themselves the measures that would improve public health and safety. We resonated with this message and applied it to subsequent meetings to accentuate our common value (community). I left this meeting with another facet of the issue, which is choice and coercion. Similar to how Rep. Higgins underscored the choice of community members, I continued to emphasize people's agency in deciding to visit these sites.

Devan Chen

On meeting with Senator John Keenan:

We pitched our elevator speech and then briefly spoke...about supervised consumption sites in general and their potential efficacy in Massachusetts.... Questions regarding whether the money would go to supervised consumption sites did come up. Senator Keenan was definitely interested in speaking with us and most of the conversation was centered around his advocacy efforts for the bill and in speaking to his colleagues that were against the concept of harm reduction. One of the things he mentioned was that...a colleague asked him what he was doing after, to which he responded that he had a meeting with us about supervised consumption sites and the colleague said that legislation like that is basically just giving up in the fight [against the opioid crisis].

Overall, in this meeting, I learned that a lot of the opposition against the bill came from legislators outside of the Joint Committee which makes sense because generally you would have to have some interest in substance use legislation if you were a member of the committee...I think of all the legislators that we met with, Senator Keenan seemed to champion the bill the most.

Vanessa Palomares

On meeting with a legislative aide and Chief of Staff for Representative Joanne Comerford's office

[At our third meeting], we were able to present our elevator speech with little to no issue as they were very welcoming. After we finished [the staff] let us know that Representative Comerford was a supporter of the bill, which made us very happy.

As a result, we used this meeting to also gather some of their strengths and weaknesses when speaking to the public regarding the issue. They mentioned that the moral dilemma and legality of consuming illegal drugs poses the greatest challenge during discussions. However, one of their points resonated with me and I continue to utilize it in my arguments. Specifically, how consumption sites are not a band-aid solution, but rather a lifeline for people dealing with addiction. They later advised us to communicate with coalitions, specifically SIFMANow, to gather more perspectives from people who are directly affected by this bill.

■ Next Steps

Supervised consumption sites (SCS) are a new and unfamiliar concept in the United States. Not many people are familiar with the purpose, structure, or implications of establishing supervised consumption sites, but we must acknowledge that they are a harm-reduction method with the intention of preventing deaths.

At the moment, S.1272/H.2088 is sitting in the Joint Committee on Mental Health, Substance Use and Recovery. We gathered very promising feedback and assurance from the legislative meetings we held with legislative representatives. However, we have to consider the meetings we did not hold, the legislators that never contacted us in return. For example, a representative who mentioned he was still “on the fence” with regard to supporting supervised consumption sites and their purpose. But, we can assume that there are others who also have reservations given the legal and social implications SCSs have in a community.

Thanks to the feedback from legislators and their personnel we have a greater understanding of who we should contact with regard to gaining more support for this bill. For example, coalitions like SIFMANow! are a great resource for

receiving insights as to how needle-exchange programs and rehabilitation are steppingstones to recovery.

The biggest problem with the bill is the legal implications it has on drug usage. Many legislators and citizens worry that supervised consumption sites are a gateway to legalizing the usage of illegal substances. The bill itself does not address these concerns, but it does recognize that the drugs being consumed on sites are indeed illegal. In the future, other legislators and law enforcement agents may express their concern in subjects regarding arrests, detainments and questioning of people who are traveling to and from SCSs.

People who (may) benefit from SCSs may also have questions regarding the confidentiality and security SCSs will provide against law enforcement. The bill may have to expand its intent for privacy protection in order to ensure that potential users are not reprimanded for visitations.

In both academic and personal conversations, we found that when SCSs are mentioned, we have needed to elaborate on their purpose and qualities in addressing the opioid-overdose crisis in Massachusetts.

Advocacy will play the greatest role in pushing bill S.1272 out of the joint committee it is currently in, and those in the future. People need to know about the benefit SCSs can have in a community and it is our role to make sure that happens. We are constantly sharing our opinions, and soon enough we can share our materials online and on campus for future and current students to advocate for this important, and life-saving, bill.

■ Update

As of July 25th, 2022: The Senate accompanied a study order for this bill (S.3051). On August 4th, 2022, this version was discharged to the Committee on Senate Rules, where it currently resides.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

H.2088: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H2088

S.1272: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S1272

Organization or Coalition support:

SIFMA Now!: <https://www.sifmanow.org/>

Reducing Plastic Bag Use

Members of the Project:

Rachael Brito '22

Tyler Carruth '23

Teresa Shi '23



Tyler Carruth, Teresa Shi and Rachael Brito

One of the largest sources of plastic pollution is the over two billion single-use plastic bags that Massachusetts residents receive from retailers every single year. Single-use plastic bags are the most likely form of plastic to be not discarded properly. While 147 cities and towns in Massachusetts have already enacted legislation banning the provision of plastic bags at the local level, their efforts alone are not enough. S.525/H.902 “An Act Relative to Plastic Bag Reduction” will ban single-use plastic bags statewide, will encourage the use of recyclable paper bags and reusable bags, and will impose fines on businesses that continue to use plastic bags. Furthermore, S.525/H.902 will create a stream of income for cities and towns by fining retailers that still use plastic bags, and charging consumers ten cents per paper bag. Half of these funds will go to cities and towns to be used for environmental projects.

■ The Bill

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

Elevator Speech

We are Tyler Carruth, Teresa Shi and Rachael Brito, students at Brandeis University, residents of Waltham, and some of us voters here in Massachusetts. We are advocating for S.525/H.902: An Act relative to plastic bag reduction, which will ban retailers from providing customers with plastic bags to carry out their goods and will encourage the use of reusable bags.

This issue is at the heart of environmental justice, to ensure a clean and healthy environment for every Massachusetts resident. We know that you are also concerned about caring for the health of the residents of Massachusetts. We, the youth of Massachusetts, care about our future and believe that neither we nor our environment should suffer.

This is absolutely vital to the wellbeing of our environment as Massachusetts alone uses over a billion plastic bags every year. These bags then break down into microplastics where they can infest the water we drink, the food we eat, the air we breathe, and even the rain that falls from the sky.

This bill will efficiently help turn off the faucet of plastic flowing into our society and provide funds to establish environmental education and clean-up programs to help moderate the current damage to our environment. One of the best ways you can help our environment is by voting yes on S.525/H.902 and encouraging your fellow senators and representatives to also vote yes on S.525/H.902.

■ Op-Eds

Tyler Carruth

Plastic is Everywhere! How Do We Stop It?

Spring is a wonderful time of the year! It brings warm weather, blooming flowers, leaves on trees, and time outside with friends and family after many months, especially during the COVID pandemic, inside under wool blankets. But, as we come out of our homes and into the beauty of nature, we will inevitably see the disgusting sight of single-use plastics sprinkled across the otherwise beautiful landscape. While this repulsive sight might inspire some of us to take our spring cleaning just a bit more seriously by taking part in an environmental clean up, this is, unfortunately, nowhere near enough to stop the avalanche of harmful single-use plastics flooding our environment and our lives. If spring means change, then Massachusetts needs to change its laws to reduce or ban single-use plastics.

Even taking the inspiring, altruistic, and hard work of the clean up crews into account, only between eight and ten percent of plastics are actually recycled every year. For reference, Massachusetts alone consumes over two BILLION single-use plastic bags every single year; roughly 70 to 80 percent of which end up as pollution in our landfills, rivers, creeks, forests, and even back yards, though it doesn't stop there. The single-use plastics that aren't recycled can take up to a thousand years to completely break down. During this thousand year time period, these plastics are breaking down into ever smaller pieces, spending most of this time as microplastics.

Microplastics, as defined by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), are “those [plastics] that are less than five millimeters in length.” These pose an especially serious risk as microplastics are being found absolutely everywhere. They are found in our soil, in our oceans, in our seafood, in our salt, in our beer, in our drinking water, in the rain that falls from the sky, in the air we breathe, deep in our lungs, and even in the blood that pumps through our veins.

In short, plastic is everywhere and, because of this fact, it is virtually impossible to completely remove from our environment.

While I understand that this is a lot to take in at once, and is a rather blunt analysis that does not initially inspire hope, it is not meant to say that there is nothing that we, as residents of Massachusetts, can do. In March of 2021, two bills were introduced in the Massachusetts State House specifically dealing with reducing the amount of plastic in our environment: An Act relative to plastic bag reduction (H.902/S.525) and An Act to reduce single-use plastics from the environment (H.869).

H.902 primarily focuses on reducing the two billion plastic bags that Massachusetts consumes every year by banning retail establishments from offering single-use plastic bags and by encouraging consumers to choose reusable bags through a \$0.10 fine on all recyclable paper bags purchased in place of a plastic bag.

H.869, while similar to H.902 in wanting to ban plastic bags and imposing a fine, is an omnibus bill that seeks to ban and reduce single-use plastic across multiple areas, including, but not limited to: banning polystyrene (styrofoam) containers, banning non-reusable plastic straws, and banning single-use plastic water bottles.

These measures may seem extreme to some, but if we truly want to stop the flow of plastic into our environment these bills are necessary first steps. Without these vital first steps, plastic pollution could one day rise to levels where it could be seriously harmful to wildlife and to our own health.

That's why we need to do everything in our power, as citizens and voters of Massachusetts, to convince our state legislators that these bills need to pass. Currently, both bills are in the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture which is chaired by Senator Rebecca L. Rausch, Senator James B. Eldridge (who sponsors H.902/S.525), and Representative Mindy Domb.

Not everyone can solve the big problems on their own, but you can reach out to your state legislators, as well as the people above, tell them how important cutting off the flow of plastic into our environment is, and demand that they vote favorably on H.902/S.525 and H.869 in both the Joint Committee and on the floor of the Massachusetts State House and State Senate.

Teresa Shi

A Healthy and Enjoyable Spring Outing

As spring is coming into the season, little animals are coming out, and so are the humans! What better way to spend time than coming together and traveling around. We are going to the grocery stores, restaurants, shopping malls, and tourist sites. All of them increase human pleasure and GDP, but also have another thing in common: the consumption of plastic bags, which is detrimental to our environment.

You might wonder how a convenient plastic bag produces any harm. But do you know how a plastic bag is produced, transported, or disposed of? The truth is, from making them to disposing of them, they increase carbon emissions and threaten our survival in every single step.

Surprisingly, many oil and gas companies turn toward the plastic industry as their final draw. To produce a plastic bag, oil and gas producers inject a high-pressure mixture of water, sand, and chemicals in shale reservoirs rich in ethane, methane, and other gases. The gases are then processed and

transported through the pipelines to cracker plants. Fracked gases transform to the thin layer of plastic that we often use in a single-use plastic bag.

In an ideal world, oil and gas companies obtain natural gas and send them to the cracker plants secretly and quietly. Consumers use plastic bags quietly and happily. No one has to worry about a thing. But this is not an ideal world. Methane escapes into the atmosphere in every part of the procedure, from extraction, processing, and distribution, to burning.

Methane's climate impact is considered to be 25 times more harmful than carbon dioxide, and it tends to linger in the atmosphere for a dozen years. On average, the leaked methane in the extraction stage is around 1.5 million tons per year, which equals 19 500-MW coal-fired power plants. The pipeline leaks an estimated 0.8% of the methane delivered to plastic facilities, which is another one million tons of methane per year. On top of that, the on site crackers release around 60 million tons of carbon dioxide and consume six million tons of methane themselves per year through power plants. Not to mention other environmental damage from leakages such as water contamination and reduced air quality.

The cycle of earth goes as a person or a monkey picks up an avocado fruit, makes an avocado toast, spits out the pit, the peels decompose into the soil, and the pit grows into another avocado tree. But the fate of plastic bags is more like a line than a circle – a pipeline toward climate change, taking fossil fuels from the ground, then burning them with more carbon emissions.

After we sort through the materials of recycling and composting, the treatment for the rest of the waste typically is either throwing it into landfills or incinerating it. However, neither of the two is a good solution, especially with the increasing amount of plastics. As the composition of municipal waste has usually been divided into paper, glass, metals, wood, food, plastics, etc, over the past 50 years the content of plastic waste has also risen with plastic making up 12.2% of 292.4 million tons of waste from the U.S. in 2018.

A plastic bag can go into an incinerator where it will generate charred residue: solid ash with a strain of black particulate smoke. Within the mysterious black smoke, there are nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxides, particulate matter, lead, mercury, and dioxins: all of the elements harmful to our bodies in a spring outing. On top of that, U.S. waste incinerators released 12 million tons of carbon dioxide in 2016, and half of the sources are from plastic.

Since plastics are not naturally biodegradable, they only break down into smaller and smaller fragments and become microplastic that we end up consuming in our bodies. One of the biggest endpoints of waste plastic in the ocean is around 15 million tons of plastic waste entering the ocean in 2018. Like Dr. Chelsea Rochman said, "Every fish in the Great Lakes

has plastic in it." Perhaps spring is not only a time to go out and use plastic bags, but we also get to consume the plastics back into our bodies through the air we breathe and the food we eat. Truly, a natural cycle.

Nevertheless, there is an efficient way to stop the faucet of plastic from flowing into our society. The bill S.525/H.902: An Act relative to plastic bag reduction will ban retailers from providing customers with plastic bags to carry out their goods and will encourage the use of reusable bags. It is especially important, since we residents in Massachusetts alone use over a billion plastic bags every year.

You can contact your state senators and representatives to ask them to vote yes on S.525/H.902. We deserve a beautiful spring outing without the worry of contaminating our future.

Rachael Brito

Ditch the Plastic Bags, Save the Planet

When you think about the South Pole, you likely envision frigid temperatures and vast, snow-covered landscapes. Recently, one of these strongly held beliefs about Antarctica was shattered. This past March, temperatures were 63 to 67 degrees Fahrenheit higher than the daily average in areas of Antarctica. To put things into perspective, the average daily temperature in Boston in March is between 46 and 31 degrees Fahrenheit. If we experienced a similar increase, the temperature would reach 90-100 degrees. Any Bostonian can attest that this would be mind-blowing and would raise a lot of concerns.

The rising temperatures in the Arctic represent an undeniable consequence of climate change. We need to rethink the way we live and relate to the environment around us before we experience more negative consequences. An easy way to do this is by living more sustainably and using less plastic in our daily lives. An Act relative to plastic bag reduction (S.525/H.902) is a bill currently being discussed at the State House in Massachusetts. This bill prohibits the sale of plastic bags at businesses across the state. The goal of the bill is to reduce the amount of plastic waste produced by consumers as well as decreasing the production of plastic bags (since there will be a lower demand for them). Recycling efforts are insufficient solutions to this problem because they only address the disposal of plastic bags and not the production process, which releases harmful toxins into the air.

I'm sure that all of us see an average of two to three plastic bags littering the street every time we go outside. Currently, Massachusetts residents use an average of two billion plastic bags a year, the majority of which are not properly disposed of. S.525/H.902 is a solution to this problem because it seeks to replace plastic bags with reusable bags in businesses across the state. Environmental

groups across Massachusetts agree that this bill sets the expectation that governments can and should take an active role in fighting climate change. An Act relative to plastic bag reduction is the first step of many that we need to undertake to ensure the health of our planet.

Similar legislation has been implemented in over 10 states nationwide and over 150 municipalities in Massachusetts. These bills have been successful in reducing plastic waste with little to no negative consequences for businesses and consumers. Massachusetts is running out of space at waste centers, and it is therefore imperative for us to rethink our habits as consumers and business owners.

News like the rise in temperature in Antarctica seems to spark a lot of fear in the public surrounding climate change and the harm we are causing to our planet. We often see a new wave of climate activism and protests immediately afterwards, but unfortunately these movements are typically short-lived. Climate change is such a large problem – one that many of us have grown up aware of – that we struggle for it to remain at the forefront of our minds. We are constantly bombarded with news about climate change and as a result, we are desensitized to the harsh reality of our dying planet. Or, if we are one of the proactive few that take on climate activism to the fullest extent, we quickly become burned out due to the magnitude of the problems we are trying to solve and the difficulty in enacting solutions.

As a result, I implore you to not ignore this most recent example of the dangers of climate change. The destruction of our planet is not inevitable. We still have time to change things for the betterment of the planet. As easy as it is to do, don't fall victim to the bystander effect – we are all citizens of this planet, and we all have a role to play.

Beyond the individual changes we can implement, we need to recognize the role of governments in combating climate change. Call your state representatives to pass S.525/H.902 and take an active stand against climate change today. Reducing plastic bag waste is a critical step in reinventing the way we approach issues related to sustainability. Plastic bag reduction bills have been proven to work and need to be implemented as soon as possible in Massachusetts.

Letter to the Legislator

Dear Senator Barrett,

Our names are Tyler Carruth, Rachael Brito, Teresa Shi and we are students at Brandeis University. We are writing to you as concerned residents of Waltham and Massachusetts voters. The dangers surrounding climate change have become more common as the years go by and they are projected to get worse. One of the most influential steps we can take is to reduce the amount of plastic we use because the production,

Storybook

2. Storybook:



An Act Relative to Plastic Bag Reduction

MA BILLS S.525 & H.902


THE PROBLEM

- The production and incineration of plastics release large amounts of greenhouse gases
- Micro-plastics in the ocean are disrupting natural food chains
- Plastic can take over 1000 years to decompose

Solution

The Bill

- S.525/H.902 WILL ESTABLISH A STATEWIDE BAN AGAINST THE SALE OF SINGLE USE PLASTIC BAGS BY RETAILERS IN MASSACHUSETTS



1. Bans the sale of plastic bags in MA
2. Encourages the use of reusable bags
3. Institutes a fine of at least \$0.10 per paper bag purchased by the consumer
 - a. \$0.05 of the fine on each paper bag sold will go back to the city/ town to be used on environmental education and clean up

Stories

Mary Fischer
Director of Sustainability at Brandeis University

"I think what's really important to understand is that MA has almost zero capacity for additional waste."

Plastic bags are routinely disposed of improperly and wind up overcrowding out landfills

Alex Vai
Volunteer Campaign Coordinator for Surfrider MA

"[Our solutions] cost stores less money. It makes sense from a climate change standpoint to reuse items... It wasn't until you spend all day picking up tiny pieces of trash to realize that you can't just throw money into trash collection"

Bill Rennie
Vice President of the Retailers Association of Massachusetts

"A uniform standard would be more beneficial for the industry and easier to understand for the consumer."

Currently, retailers and consumers need to navigate over 100 individual local bans on plastic bags

CONTACT YOUR STATE SENATORS AND REPRESENTATIVES AND ASK THEM TO VOTE YES AND ENCOURAGE THEIR COLLEAGUES TO VOTE YES ON S.525 OR H.902!

Legislature Contact Information:

Senator James Eldridge
(Bill Sponsor)
James.Eldridge@masenate.gov
(617) 722-1220

Senator Rebecca Rausch (Committee Chair)
Becca.Rausch@masenate.gov
(617) 722-1555



Want to Learn More?



Scan to Read the Complete Bill



incineration, and disposal of single-use plastic contribute heavily to climate change because they release greenhouse gasses.

As residents of Massachusetts, we deserve to live in a healthy environment and ignoring the dangers of plastic bags contributes to issues of environmental injustice. As young adults, we are deeply concerned about the future and health of the planet.

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection released a report outlining that the state has a limited capacity for additional waste. Environmental groups argue that focusing exclusively on recycling or other forms of plastic waste processing are insufficient solutions to this issue – we need to decrease plastic production and disrupt the supply chain.

Senator, we understand that you've been supportive of banning single-use plastic in the past, with H.869 An Act to reduce single-use plastics from the environment. We believe that S.525/H.902 is a vital part of the solution because it not only bans the sale of single-use plastic, but also introduces a \$0.10 remittance for each paper bag sold. Therefore this legislation encourages consumers to switch to reusable bags and decreases plastic bag production.

Opponents argue that bans are ineffective and costly to both consumers and business owners. In actuality, research shows that similar legislation has been successful in other states and nations. Furthermore, the Retail Association of Massachusetts, which is composed of over 4,000 business owners, supports this legislation because it would establish preemption across the state. Businesses are also able to retain \$0.05 for each bag they sell, which offsets their costs. In terms of the consumer, over 60% of residents in Massachusetts already experience some form of a bag ban in their respective municipality, and therefore this legislation will not introduce more costs to them.

We urge you to express support for this legislation as it fights for a favorable report from the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture. As the Senate Assistant Majority Leader, we hope you use your influence to encourage your colleagues and help push forward this important legislation.

Sincerely,

Tyler Carruth, Rachael Brito, Teresa Shi

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Tyler Carruth

On meeting with Immaculate Mchome, legislative aide and Environmental Policy Advisor for Senator James B. Eldridge's office

The purpose of this conversation was to gain initial insight into why Senator Eldridge was sponsoring S.525/H.902, the history of the bill in previous legislative sessions, what its path through the legislature might look like, any resistance his office encountered, identify who else we could talk to, and discover what else we could do to help this bill make it out of the Joint Committee on Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture.

Our meeting with Immaculate went very well, as she was able to inform us that the bill had been introduced in every session since 2011 and even managed to pass the Senate last session. She then went on to describe that her office was in the process of making the bill "more palatable"...she was also able to describe in great detail the likely path that our bill would take [through committee].

Finally, Immaculate was able to give insight into how advocates, like ourselves, could help out by writing testimony and informing other senators and representatives that cities in their districts may have already passed plastic bag bans. [The information] provided my team and me the foundational information we needed to get our project started and helped us craft a plan to reach out to other individuals. From this meeting we learned that we wanted to reach out to other members of the committee to gain their perspectives and learn more about what may be holding up the bill. Looking back on our meeting with Immaculate... the insight [she] provided was incredibly helpful as we were getting started.

Teresa Shi

On meeting with Alex T. Vai, Treasurer and Campaigns Coordinator of Surfrider Foundation Massachusetts

Surfrider is one of the biggest organizations within the environmental coalitions that is advocating for plastic reduction and a plastic ban. We thought the organization might provide us with some insights into the importance and strategies to advocate for the bill, especially at the beginning of the process.

During our meeting, we talked about what are the reasons and efforts that Surfrider has put into advocating for single plastic bag reduction. ...Alex argued that the exemption is too broad to apply and the preemption might replace the local advocacy effort. He argues that preemption has been historically used to stifle local actions, and because the bill

has a less strict language, it will serve as a step backward for many towns. This was a very informational and important meeting because it revealed again the specific content of the bill matters for each player in the advocacy process.

It took us by surprise that the environmental groups are more in favor of the Omnibus Bill rather than the Plastic Ban Bill. It made us change our direction on the bill to learn more not only on the plastic bag ban but also the Omnibus Bill and putting effort to advocate for both bills during the following meetings.

Because the Surfrider as an organization has a long history of working and advocating for the bills, we mostly try to learn from their existing knowledge [rather than direct lobbying]. We essentially came to the conclusion that we are in support of both bills, and any progress between the two will be a great step within the state's legislative process.

Rachael Brito

On meeting with Ravi Simon, legislative aide from Representative Carmine L. Gentile's office

We organized this meeting hoping to speak with Representative Gentile because he is a member of the ENRA Committee, which is currently studying our bill. Ravi was very helpful and shared that there are usually too many bills being studied for legislatures to be fully aware of the facts for each, therefore they trust the judgment of the chair and vote accordingly. He suggested we focus our advocacy efforts on scheduling meetings with committee staffers.

Ravi was confident in relaying to us that Representative Gentile was in full support of the bill and that he was a strong advocate for environmental legislation. As a result, we discussed the pros and cons of our legislation versus the omnibus plastic bill that was also in committee. We ended the call with Ravi putting us in contact with Senator Barrett's office. We learned how helpful meetings with aides could be and the role they play in advancing legislation.

■ Next Steps

For our next steps, since the bill is still stuck in the Joint Committee on the Environment, Natural Resources, and Agriculture in this legislative session, we are hoping to continue advocating for our bills to legislators on the Joint Committee, as well as to legislators on the House Committee on Ways and Means. As Senator Barrett's Chief of Staff suggested, talking with other legislators and finding creative ways to pass our bill within a larger omnibus bill might be a good idea since our bill has been in the committee for a considerable amount of time and is unlikely to receive enough attention in the remaining weeks of this legislative session.

Another thing our group can do after the class is to join the external coalitions and organizations' meetings such as

Surfrider and collaborate with other community members. As we learned, Surfrider hosts monthly meetings for volunteers to come together and push this bill, as well as other important environmental legislation, forward.

We also hope to bring to these coalitions what we are best at in terms of our own skills. Teresa brings journalism and documentation skills, Tyler lends political knowledge and understanding of the legislative process, and Rachael adds determination and her strong will in organizing. It would be helpful for us to work with the coalitions instead of advocating independently in support of this cause.

Through our discussions with environment groups in Massachusetts we learned about some negative aspects of the bill that we hope to be able to change. One of their biggest complaints is the vague language used in part of the bill, which creates loopholes for business owners. Additionally, there are some exceptions put in place for small business owners that allow them to continue to use plastic bags. Lastly, they dislike the preemption clause because it prevents local governments from enacting stronger legislation. Surfrider in particular mentioned that there are some towns that currently have more restrictive, and therefore better, bills in place regulating plastic bag bans. These more effective bans will have to be replaced by the regulations described in S.525/H.902 if it were to pass.

■ Update

As of June 9th, 2022: The Senate accompanied a new draft of the bill, S.2895. The House also accompanied a new version of the House draft on June 2nd, 2022, H.4826. Both bill versions were reported favorably by committee and referred to each chamber's Committee on Ways and Means.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

Bill H.4826: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H4826>

Bill S.2895: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/S2895>

Organization or Coalition support:

Surfrider Foundation Massachusetts chapter:
massachusetts.surfrider.org

Environmental League of Massachusetts:
environmentalleague.org

Sierra Club Massachusetts chapter:
sierraclub.org/massachusetts

Providing Free Meals in Massachusetts Schools

Members of the Project

Cedrick Frank '22

Jada Harrison '22



Jada Harrison and Cedrick Frank

In our current battle with COVID-19 in Massachusetts, there is a food insecurity endemic: 23.6% of households with children were food insecure in May 2020. This issue affects Black and Latinx families disproportionately with 1 in 3 and 1 in 4 families, respectively. S.314/H.714 would solve the problem with the implementation of a universal school meal plan. After this bill is implemented, students in both high and low income districts would no longer have to pay for meals at school. Parents and guardians would no longer have to worry about providing their children with money or food for lunch each day. This bill would use a combination of federal reimbursement and state funding to provide all students with free breakfast and lunch.

■ The Bill

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

■ Elevator Speech

Hello, my name is Jada Harrison, and this is my colleague Cedrick Frank. As residents of Waltham, Massachusetts and students studying public health at Brandeis University we have recognized the increase in food insecurity that has happened throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Today we would like to talk about the Universal School Meals Act that would give students regardless of their income access to healthy meals that would give them all equal opportunity to thrive and grow in the school system.

I want you to think back to when you were in school. Have you ever really realized that the only thing students and families are required to pay for is food? Students get free desks, restrooms, chairs, paper and free books and textbooks, but food is not free. Some schools may even pay for transportation, sports and extracurricular activities, but are not required to cover the cost of food. In Massachusetts 23.6% of students are food insecure and 27% of those students do not qualify for governmental assistance such as SNAP, food stamps, WIC or any other child nutritional program. This makes the students ineligible for free or reduced lunch. Additionally, a third of eligible students tend to simply opt out of lunch to avoid stigmatization practices by the other students and staff.

This bill would ensure that every school is providing free breakfast and lunch to its students. It would require that schools enroll into federal programs such as the Community Eligibility Provision program. This program would fully reimburse schools that have more than 40% of their students eligible for free or reduced meals. The State Department of Education would cover the remaining cost of the bill to limit the burden placed directly on school districts.

We urge you to vote this bill favorably out of the Joint Committee of Education and encourage your colleagues to do the same.

■ Op-Eds

Cedrick Frank

Let's Bury School Lunch Debt: Access to Universal School Meals

I can remember it as if it were yesterday. We had just left the gym, sweat still dripping from our faces, and my friend Alex and I were anxiously awaiting the best cuisine in the world... school lunch. First, I grabbed my strawberry milk, followed by Alex, then we grabbed our plates and went to type in our lunch numbers into the keypad by the head chef.

Having always received free and reduced lunch, I had never experienced what was about to happen next. The screen turned green for me, and the head chef said I was free to leave. When it was Alex's turn, it turned red, because he owed money for lunch. The head chef quickly snatched the plate from Alex and handed him a brown paper bag with a PB&J sandwich. He cried out of embarrassment. Not only that, but for the next few weeks he was bullied by our classmates.

I felt terrible for him because it was "Taco Tuesday" and he was a child being punished for being low-income and food-insecure, which affects one in every eight Massachusetts students. During lunchtime, a third of eligible students tend to opt out of lunch to avoid stigmatization by the students and staff. To avoid lunch discrimination, all students should receive free school lunch and breakfast meals.

Due to the obvious impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Massachusetts food insecurity crisis, 23 percent of Massachusetts students are food insecure, a significant increase from 10.1 percent in 2018. Due to discriminatory practices, a student goes a whole day without receiving food instead of receiving a sack lunch that distinguish those who pay and those who don't. Most schools don't hide it. When their peers are aware of this, they can tease and bully that student, which negatively impacts a student's learning experience, because depression can lead to poor grades. A student should never have to be concerned about whether they will be able to eat at school and focus on passing their assignments.

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government has identified an increase in food insecurity in the United States, particularly in Massachusetts youth. The federal government enacted the Families First Coronavirus Response Act (FFCRA) with the assistance of state governments. We are currently combating food insecurity; however, what will happen when the program expires in the fall of 2022? 27 percent of food insecure Massachusetts students are still ineligible for free or reduced-price school meals. This makes it even more complex and even more of a push to eradicate school lunch debt and provide equal access. This means that these children face food insecurity every day, but do not meet

the income eligibility requirements for a lower priced school meal.

I have a perfect permanent solution: implement free and universal school meals.

The bill would provide free breakfast and lunch to all children in the state of Massachusetts, regardless of their family's income. Waltham Food Service Director April Liles stated "My kids eat breakfast and lunch with me, just like the week of February vacation, and I'm sad that I can't feed them. On any given day, 80 percent of our children are eating lunch, and about 50 percent are eating breakfast." Also she noted, "The only thing people have to pay for in school is food, because they get free desks, free paper, free books, and a free place to be all day, and you know how often I don't have to pay for the bus or sports depending on the school district." This demonstrates the need for us as a society to destroy and bury lunch debt in order to relieve our students' families of the burden of providing school meals.

Currently, there is a bill circulating in the Massachusetts Joint Committee of Education, and they extended the reporting deadline until June 2022. To provide all students with equal access to school lunch and breakfast, call/email your local legislator and tell them to co-sponsor the Universal School Meals bill H.714/S.314 and to vote it out favorably. You can also visit projectbread.org and <https://malegislature.gov> for more information about the bill and how to support your Massachusetts food insecure students, who are just trying to receive a proper education.

Jada Harrison

To Be Free or Not to Be

Congress recently made the decision to not extend the federal universal school meals program that was implemented at a time when many things were uncertain during COVID. Families were worried about having the same job in a week, the same hours or income. This was a time when many people's sole focus was keeping their families safe. When we first went virtual, many families struggled to provide the same quality of meals for their children. Some sacrifices were made to come up with the money needed for breakfast and lunch every day. The federal government recognized the need for action and in this time of need, the federal government came through to provide meals, no matter their abilities or financial capabilities, to school-aged children.

I think deep down inside, even though we all hoped the federal government would extend the program, we knew it would eventually come to an end. And while this program has ended, the food insecurity levels in Massachusetts have continued to be elevated despite the decrease in COVID cases.

The Universal School Meals Act presented by Senator DiDomenico and Representative Vargas would restore this

WHY SUPPORT UNIVERSAL SCHOOL MEALS (S.314/H.714)

THE PROBLEM

23.6% of households with children in Massachusetts are food insecure.

In 1 in 3 Black households and 1 in 4 Latinx households with children are food insecure.

27% of children who are food insecure did not qualify for free or reduced-price meals through school meal programs.

An estimated 1/3 of eligible students skip lunch, rather than endure embarrassing and stigmatizing practices.

THE IMPACT

SCHOOL MEALS FOR ALL CAMPAIGN IS SO CRITICALLY IMPORTANT AS A WAY TO PROVIDE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY FOR PEOPLE TO BE ABLE TO GROW AND THRIVE.

— Rabbi Joseph Mezler

"MEAL DEBT IS AN ADULT PROBLEM, NOT A KID PROBLEM"


— DEB JEFFERS, FORMER SALEM SCHOOL NUTRITION DIRECTOR

Project Bread Coalition


THE SOLUTION

1. Board of education will require that all schools serving lunch through the National Child Nutrition Act serve breakfast and lunch free of charge for all attending students
2. Schools will maximize their federal funding by joining programs such as "Community Eligibility Provision"
3. State department of education will cover the remaining cost of school meals

"The only thing people have to pay for in school is food, like they get free desks and free paper and free books, and a free place to be all day and you know often we don't have to pay for the bus, or sports... But the only thing I have to pay for is food and it's just like such an essential, vital part of the school day, and in the majority of the other countries in the world, it's part of the school day."



Denezia Fahie, Alum of Worcester Public Schools



April Liles, RD, SNS
Food Service Director of Waltham Public School District.

"I remember being in 4th grade fundraising and collecting cereal box tops to payoff student lunch debts. In thinking back about the injustice of food insecurity in my district, I recognize the importance this bill will have for students in marginalized communities."

Call to Action & Extra Info

Call to Action

As Massachusetts residents we would urge you call your legislator and ask them to vote this bill, (S.314/H.714) favorably out of the Joint committee of education, and encourage their colleagues to do the same.



more information
S.314 Bill Text



Project bread website

program at the state level. It would use federal programs to get reimbursements for certain identified districts with the remaining cost being covered by the state government. With this bill, you would no longer have to wake up early on a Monday morning to make breakfast and lunch for your kids.

While many uncertainties continue to plague society with this pandemic, one thing we know for sure is that children without access to school meals are going hungry. One in eight children in Massachusetts is currently facing food insecurity. This is not an issue solely taken on by low-income individuals. Studies have found that there is an unseen need for school meals for children who don't qualify for low-income programs such as SNAP and Masshealth, but still are deemed to be food insecure. So even with the current system of free and reduced school meals, there are some children living without access. And school debts that accrue through these students are often unpaid and taken out of funding that schools could use for different areas. There has been a decrease in the level of food insecurity seen since the peak of the pandemic, but with the frequently changing unemployment rates, food insecurity rates are still higher than they were prior to COVID-19.

This has been a problem that has plagued Massachusetts for quite some time. The pandemic has lifted the veil on the impact of this problem, but do we honestly believe that, because COVID rates have been lowered, that schools will miraculously be able to find a replaceable program for the federally funded Universal School Meals Act on their own? The community that would be most affected by this is the children, children who can't vote and have little power over the decisions made at the state level.

Students and parents would line the streets waiting for meal distributions at pick-up points throughout the pandemic. No one was asked about their income level or financial abilities. In my talks with administrators from Brockton, food pantries came and worked with the school to provide meals for students who couldn't make it to the pickup points.

We don't expect parents to pay for books, teachers, or computers. But food is an obvious necessity, children need quality meals to thrive and learn throughout the day. The burden of responsibility is going to fall back on you, parents that may not always have the extra money to give their child a meal every day. For parents who live in food deserts, how will they find fresh and nutritious meals to send to school with their child?

This move by the federal government to provide universal meals was a great temporary solution to a long-standing problem. According to Project Bread, food insecurity rates in households with children remain at double what they were pre-pandemic. It's on us to advocate for the children currently in need, and those in the future that would benefit from the continuation of this program. So I implore you to reach out to

your state senator and representatives to make sure that they support bills S.314 and H.714 and vote in their favor when they reach the floor.

■ Letter to the Legislator

Dear Representative Lawn,

My name is Cedrick Frank. I am writing to you along with Jada Harrison, and we are currently seniors at Brandeis University. We are residents of Waltham, Massachusetts and as part of our studies, we are pursuing political advocacy for An Act relative to universal school meals, H.714. This bill ensures that each student receives two free meals when they come to school as part of our fight for quality education. My colleague and I are both deeply connected to this movement through our individual experiences with subsidized school meal programs.

My colleague and I were fortunate to have received free and reduced-price lunches while attending public schools. Because we come from low-income families and are first-generation college students, this has enabled us to become involved in advocating for this bill. Unfortunately, 23% of Massachusetts students are food insecure, which is a dramatic increase from pre-Covid at 10.1% in 2018. Also, 27% of students who are food insecure don't even qualify for free or reduced lunch. This means that they're missing the opportunity to have a voice in government to bring the change on the way school meals are funded and ensuring each student receives a meal while at school.

A third of students who receive free or reduced lunch tend to skip or opt out of receiving lunch to avoid discrimination and bullying from other students. A student goes a whole day without receiving food because of stigmatizing practices that distinguish those who pay and those who don't. Their fellow peers who know this can negatively impact a student's learning experience in the classroom.

Bill H.714, An Act relative to universal school meals, which makes breakfast and lunch available at no charge to each attending student in Massachusetts, is the solution to this problem. This will ensure that each and every student receives the same meals as their fellow peers, shielding low income students from lunch shaming and combat food insecurity in school. Also, Waltham families and a Waltham Food Service director says this helps the families and staff because groceries are becoming more expensive and this helps families feed the students, which helps save for bills and other household needs that are beneficial to the child's overall growth.

Also, this bill allows for diverse meal delivery, which is to ensure that each student receives two meals. For example, lunch can be served in the classroom and lunch room depending on

the school's preference. This bill can reduce lunch traffic in the cafeteria because students can receive their lunch faster, and to not give a different meal to a student who owes a lunch debt because it provides equal access for each student.

Our ask of you is simple. As you may know, An Act relative to universal school meals, H.714, is currently in the Joint Committee of Education, and the reporting date has been pushed back to June 1st. In order to ensure this bill passes, we are requesting that you write a letter in support of the An Act relative to universal school meals to Micheal J. Rodrigues, Chair of Senate Committee on Ways and Means, and House Chair Aaron Michlewitz.

Thank you,
Cedrick Frank
Jada Harrison

■ Excerpts from Campaign Journals

Cedrick Frank

On meeting with April Liles, RD, SNS, Food Service Director for Waltham Public Schools

The first meeting was with April Liles...who was a fantastic and informative interviewee. We talked about her role and explained what the Universal School Meals Bill was and got her point of view on it.

At the beginning of the discussion, she made a shocking statement: about 8,000 food service staff members were traveling to Washington, D.C. to fight for universal free school meals on a federal level. [This] was excellent to hear because it reinforced her position on the bill as a strong supporter. Getting her approval of the bill because she works directly with students and deals with the school food budget has a fundamental impact on students.

The reason for meeting with her was [due to] her insight and experience of working in the Waltham food service industry for over 7 years. She understands first-hand how this bill can impact students and families, by being a great relief system because a lot of families cannot afford to pay rent and buy groceries and adequately provide two school meals for one student let alone 3-4 children....

She was pretty receptive to our advocacy. She answered our questions thoroughly and insightfully because of her knowledge of working behind the scenes for many years. Also, from this meeting it gave me the courage to advocate for this bill to other legislators and allies of the bill.

Jada Harrison

On meeting with Aiden Church, legislative aide at Representative Alice Peisch's office

This was one of the meetings I really enjoyed. I felt that we had a good discussion and the legislative aide had a lot of knowledge of the bill. In other meetings I felt I had to do a lot of teaching, and while this is important to advocacy I wasn't getting the questions answered that I needed.

[Aiden] had background knowledge of why the bill was waiting on a vote. He told us that the people in the committee were waiting on the federal decision to come out. This was good to know because it related back to the previous meeting we had with the Nutrition Director at Waltham Public Schools. It also helped us to have a specific talking point in our advocacy. [W]e could bring up that [this] year's federal bill was no longer going to cover universal school meals and it was now up to the legislators in Massachusetts to make the decision. My partner and I thought that we could use this to give individuals a sense of urgency in passing the bill.

Next Steps

Our bill is currently in the Joint Committee on Education, and is scheduled to be voted on this summer. We feel as if the bill is expected to be passed into Massachusetts law, based on our advocacy from this semester. We really haven't seen any opposition to our bill, besides the fiscal amount, but if that is fixed the bill could successfully be based off of the committee and to the next step: the House Committee on Ways and Means.

In order to continue advocacy for this bill we would talk to the House Committee on Ways and Means about the budget and how much the bill would cost. With the cost estimate that we have we'd be able to advocate for the spending for this bill. Within our advocacy in the House Committee on Ways and Means we would emphasize the positive fiscal impacts of the bill, citing the lowered healthcare cost and overall better quality of life for students.

Project Bread has emphasized that this would be an impactful investment into the future lives of everyone growing up in Massachusetts. Further advocacy would include discussing the positive benefits to the children's lives in that they would see better education outcomes and lower rates of food insecurity within Massachusetts.

Once the bill gets out of the House Committee on Ways and Means we can focus on senators and representatives who were not cosponsors on the bill. We would do this by setting up a meeting similar to the ones we had in class to help educate and advocate for the Universal School Meals Act.

If we feel the bill would not make it through a vote after advocating to these individuals, we could turn to a budget adjustment instead. This would help us bypass the conservative party's ideology, in hopes of getting funding for the next year. This would be a temporary solution while we continue working on getting the bill passed by both the Senate and House.

■ Update

As of June 2nd, 2022: Both the House and the Senate extended the reporting date for this bill to July 31st, 2022, pending concurrence. This bill currently resides in the Joint Committee on Education.

For more information

View the bill (MA legislature website):

H.714: malegislature.gov/Bills/192/HD1161

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

Organization or Coalition support:

Project Bread: projectbread.org



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