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# THE PROVIDER

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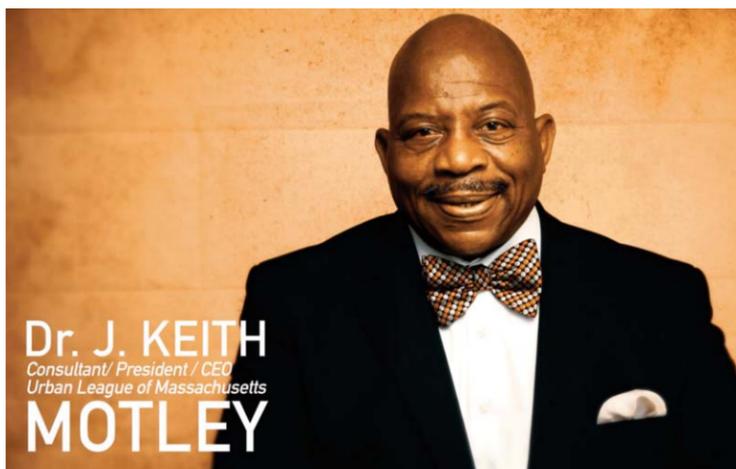
February 2022

## Members hold MLK Day celebrations

Celebrating the life and legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. holds great significance every year, but due to the resurgence of the fight for voting rights across the country, Imari Paris Jeffries, executive director of King Boston, noted that this year's Martin Luther King Jr. Day is a particularly meaningful one.

"We feel, particularly during this time when the right to vote is under attack, that this is an important time to raise up the legacy of Dr. and Mrs. King around ensuring that everyone's participation in our democracy occurs," Paris Jeffries said. "And this moment isn't only about doing something for others, it's also about a level of deep reflection for all of us."

On Martin Luther King Jr. Day, King Boston aired a 28-minute film on NBC Boston titled "Voices on King 2022: Reflections on Black Boston,"



Dr. J. KEITH  
Consultant/ President / CEO  
Urban League of Massachusetts  
MOTLEY

Dr. J. Keith Motley, consultant/President/CEO at Urban League of Massachusetts, was a speaker on King Boston's film "Voices on King 2022: Reflections on Black Boston" which aired on NBC Boston.

which paid homage to the elders and ancestors of the Boston civil rights movement, including those who are still around today. The film focused on how far the city of Boston and the region have come and how far they must go in combatting racism.

It was the fourth in a series of similar films produced by King Boston and was the second installment of "Voices on King."

Produced in partnership with Amazon and The Boston Foundation, the film included KING, see page 7

## Gov. unveils '23 budget; 257 Reserve at \$230m

Governor Charlie Baker presented his Fiscal Year 2023 budget proposal on Jan. 26, a \$48.5 billion spending plan that he said would create an array of tax breaks for families, low-income workers and seniors, and represents a "fiscally-responsible, balanced budget that makes important investments in our economy, schools and communities."

The proposal includes a record \$230 million for Chapter 257 Reserve and notes that the Executive Office of Health and Human Services will submit a report to the legislature no later than March 30, 2023 detailing the implementation of initiatives that increase the hourly wages and compensation of direct care human services workers.

The Providers' Council thanked the Governor for al-

locating a record amount in Chapter 257 funding, with the investment coming shortly after he signed off on the American Rescue Plan Act spending plan that included \$16.5 million for a loan repayment program and \$13.5 million for a grant program for human services organizations to support the retention and recruitment of human services workers. The Council, working with its colleagues, will continue to strengthen positive relationships with the administration and Legislature to maintain positive momentum.

"After several years of working directly with the Baker administration and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to increase critically low wages for com- BUDGET, see page 7

## SCOTUS nixes OSHA vaccine mandate for large employers

The Supreme Court of the United States last month blocked the Biden administration from enforcing its COVID-19 vaccine mandate for businesses with 100 or more employees.

The court concluded that the administration overstepped its authority by seeking to impose the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) vaccine-or-test rule for large employers. It did, however, allow the administration to immediately proceed

with a vaccine mandate for certain health care workers.

The vaccine-or-test mandate, announced by the Biden administration last year and the subject of numerous court challenges since, would have required companies with 100 or more employees to ensure their workforce was fully vaccinated against COVID-19 or have unvaccinated workers produce weekly negative test results. Organizations that failed to comply could have MANDATE, see page 8

## Delta Dental plan gets two-year rate hold

For the fourth renewal in a row, the Providers' Council, in partnership with USI Insurance Services, recently negotiated a two-year rate hold for Delta Dental participants with **no rate increase**. The rates will be in effect through March 31, 2024.

Along with the rate hold, the Council and USI secured other important enhancements to the Delta Dental program, including an increased calendar

year maximum on all plans with no increase to rates and access to RIGHT START 4 KIDS, a benefit that provides 100% coverage and no deductible for covered services - preventive, basic, and major - for children up to 12 years old.

More than half of Council members use this exclusive member benefit. To find out more and learn what you could save, contact bill@providers.org.

## Remembering MLKFS' Ronn Johnson



Ronn D. Johnson, president and CEO of Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services and a Providers' Council board member, passed away on Saturday, January 15 - on what would have been King's 93rd birthday. Henry Thomas, president and CEO of the Urban League of Springfield told the Springfield Republican: "He had a lifetime of contributions and of moving the needle for equity and for the community as a whole." Providers' Council President/CEO Michael Weekes noted of Johnson: "He exemplified Dr. King when he talked about 'What are you doing for others?'" Read more from Weekes on Johnson's life in his editorial (Page 4). In lieu of flowers, Johnson's family has asked for people to consider a donation to the MLK Jr. Family Services Food Pantry in Springfield.



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## Cape Abilities announces McElholm as new president & CEO

Cape Abilities, a nonprofit that serves adults with disabilities on Cape Cod, announced in January that it appointed Kim McElholm as the organization's new President and CEO.

McElholm had been serving as Interim President and CEO since September. With more than 20 years of experience with human services agencies, and a key member of the Cape Abilities leadership team for over six years, McElholm is poised to take on the role.



Kim McElholm

"It is clear that Kim is the best choice for this position," said Marion Broidrick, chairperson of the Cape Abilities Board of Directors. "She has been an invaluable member of the Cape Abilities team for many years, and has led with compassion, enthusiasm, and a person-centered vision. The Board is confident in her leadership, and we are excited for the organization's next chapter."

Prior to serving as Interim President and CEO, McElholm was Cape Abilities' Senior Vice President of Finance and Operations, jointly overseeing the implementation of the nonprofit's strategic vision.

## Citizens Inn leader Jackson to step down in June

Citizens Inn announced in January that Corey Jackson, who has led organization for the past 9 years, will resign in June.



Corey Jackson

Jackson's involvement with the organization began at 6 years old,

when his neighbor, Mary Jane Lee, founded Citizens Inn and his late father, Bill Jackson, served as an early board member. He served as a volunteer and board member with Citizens Inn for a number of years and was appointed to Executive Director in 2013.

Citizens Inn saw tremendous growth under Jackson's leadership, merging with Haven from Hunger in 2017, to serve over 5,500 unique individuals experiencing food insecurity and homelessness per year. Jackson will be transitioning to serve as a partner with Sarah J Consulting, a successful nonprofit consultancy firm founded by his wife, Sarah.

## IHR leader Finkelstein receives Lifetime Achievement Award

Dr. Norma Finkelstein, executive director of the Institute for Health and Recovery, was awarded the inaugural Perinatal-Neonatal Quality Improvement Network (PNQIN) Lifetime Achievement Award in November.



Norma Finkelstein

The award was presented at the PNQIN Perinatal Opioid Project Fall 2021 Summit, where Finkelstein was honored for her "unwavering commitment to improving the equitable health and well-being of mothers, infants, and families in Massachusetts."

Finkelstein's recognition follows her 50-year career in substance use prevention and treatment, with an emphasis on women, children and families. Throughout her career, Dr. Finkelstein has reshaped substance use programs by advocating for gender-specific and family-centered treatment. Her expertise in designing and managing services, as well as in policy planning and research, has resulted in over 50 professional publications and curricula.

## Thrive names Murphy as new VP of Quality Assurance

Thrive Support & Advocacy, a nonprofit empowering youth and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, announced in December that it appointed Ellen Murphy as vice president of Quality Assurance.



Ellen Murphy

Murphy has nearly two decades of leadership in the human services sector. In her new role, she ensures that the agency is meeting strict internal and regulatory quality standards and is establishing agency-wide performance improvement strategies to monitor the success and satisfaction of individuals served by Thrive. Additionally, she oversees data collection and management, accreditation and licensing, employee wellness initiatives and serves as compliance officer.

## Open Sky appoints Johnston as new VP of Integrated Care

Open Sky Community Services announced in January that Ryan Johnston had been appointed vice president of Integrated Care. Open Sky offers a wide range of services for adults, adolescents, and children with mental health challenges, developmental and intellectual disabilities, substance use disorders, brain injury, homelessness and other complex challenges throughout Central Massachusetts.



Ryan Johnston

Johnston previously worked for Alternatives, one of the agency's predecessor organizations and later for Open Sky.

## House of Possibilities launches HOPE Unlimited at Public Market

A nonprofit disability service provider with locations in Boston and Easton, House of Possibilities announced in November the launch of HOPE Unlimited, a social enterprise operating out of the Boston Public Market providing retail workforce development and inclusive employment for individuals with disabilities.

The Boston Public Market is an indoor, year-round marketplace featuring New England artisans and food producers housed under one roof. HOPE Unlimited operates two spaces within the market; a 48-square-foot American Stonecraft retail space that creates food slabs, cooking stones, coasters, trivets, bowls and custom engraving, and a 98-square-foot retail shop that sells items produced by artists and craftspeople with disabilities from across the country.

Both retail spaces provide critical on-the-job skill training, skill development, real-world experience and, for some HOPE members, their first job and first paycheck.

## Mainstay receives \$10,000 grant from MacDonald fund

Mainstay Supportive Housing and Homecare, a Newton-based nonprofit that provides supportive housing across Massachusetts, announced in January that it recently received a \$10,000 gift from the Robert & Martha MacDonald Giving Fund.

Mainstay owns and operates ten supportive housing programs in Massachusetts and provides supportive services at seven additional programs owned by partner organizations around the greater Boston area. They are currently working to develop their eleventh supportive housing program, which will serve unhoused LGBTQ+ young adults.

## Exclusive Endorsed Vendor



## GREAT NEWS!

USI is pleased to announce that, for the fourth year in a row, we have negotiated a **a two-year rate hold for Delta Dental participants, this time with *no rate increase!***

and

- **Increased Benefit Maximums**
- **Right Start for Kids Benefit**

The Delta Dental program is one of the Council's most popular programs. Interested Council members can receive a **free, no-obligation analysis** of their potential savings through the Delta Dental program.



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# PROVIDER PROFILES

## FALL RIVER DEACONESS HOME

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### About the Agency

Founded in 1893, the Fall River Deaconess Home offers under-privileged women a safe and nurturing environment. Since it first opened, the Deaconess Home has instilled the value of community to young women and has provided education, recreation, vocational training and a place to call home. Medical, psycho-social and psychiatric services were added in 1941, and in the 1960s Deaconess opened its first site for Group Home services. Today, the Deaconess Home is a vibrant, dynamic agency that provides cutting edge, comprehensive treatment services to youth and families in need and remains true to its founding principles. Our transparent behavior support system is designed to maintain the safety of the resident and employees, reduce the need for crisis intervention and strengthen the residents' interpersonal and daily living skills.

Our mission is to empower youth and families within their communities to develop social, emotional and academic skills to engage fully and freely in life. For almost 130 years, the Fall River Deaconess Home has utilized the philosophy and practice of structure, consistency and safety to support youth and families. The majority of the Deaconess Home's revenue comes from state funding sources.

### Providing essential services for 100+ years



Program participants at Fall River Deaconess Home read during time in an outdoor classroom.

The services that Fall River Deaconess Home provides primarily fall under two branches: **Residential Treatment Services and Support and Stabilization Services.** Residential Treatment Services provide individualized therapeutic interventions and a range of related offerings.

These offerings include: educational support and advocacy from Certified Special Education Teachers; after-school homework time and tutorial services; case coordination with public school personnel, including teachers and adjustment counselors; advocacy on behalf of youth and families in order to meet educational needs; vocational services; and transitional-aged youth curriculum.

They also include Preparing Adolescents for Young Adulthood (PAYA); assisting with volunteer and employment opportunities within the community; clinical assessments, safety planning and case management services; individual and family counseling; specialized clinical groups; comprehensive health and nutrition services; on-site nursing clinic and care; psychiatric evaluation and medication administration; nutritional education; teaching life skills such as preparing a healthy menu, shopping, cooking, budgeting and personal care routines; therapeutic and engaging program activity schedule; individualized behavior support plans; and sensory integration and de-escalation techniques.

**Support and Stabilization Services** are designed for youth in the community and their families to improve family functioning, increase

child and family safety and well-being, reduce the need for department intervention and the separation of children from their families and ease the transition to reunification following out-of-home placement.

Specifically, the support and stabilization services include: facilitation of psycho-educational and therapeutic client groups; assist parents/caregivers in navigating medical systems to include health insurance enrollment, referrals, medical appointments and transportation; assisting parents/caregivers with program assistance in areas of housing, financial aid, food supplement, child care, legal aid, immigration services, social security, DDS, DMH, substance abuse and outpatient treatment services; and assisting parents/caregivers in navigating educational systems to include virtual learning, school registration and school meetings.

They also include participating in educational assessments and individual educational plans; tutoring; case coordination with school personnel to include teachers and adjustment counselors regarding behavioral/mental health needs and academic performance; assisting with planning for post-secondary education; daily check-ins to provide academic, social and behavior support; providing youth and families with employment and job readiness training utilizing PAYA curriculum; providing youth with incentive based volunteer stipends; sibling support; immigration, housing and transportation support; and respite care.

### Executive Leadership

Maureen Philbin is the Executive Director of the Fall River Deaconess Home and is an energetic and visionary leader with more than twenty-five years of experience. She has built a stellar reputation managing nonprofit organizations in the fields of child welfare, advocacy, education, behavioral health and systems of care administration. She leads with purpose, passion and motivation.



Maureen Philbin

Her proactive approach to leadership is shown through her ability to engage with staff, Board of Managers and community partners.

Prior to leading the Deaconess Team, Philbin served as the Chief Operating Officer of Day One in Providence, RI and the Senior Vice President of Network Services for Child & Family Services of Newport County. Along with her extensive professional experience, Philbin is an alumna and adjunct faculty member of Salve Regina University in Newport, RI.

## SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

### Roberts goes above and beyond

Since 1878, **Nurtury**, New England's first early education and care agency, has been transforming child care to include high-quality educational programming and family support resources. Through our center-based programs and family child care system, we have touched generations of children and their families.

Going above and beyond is what **Barbara Roberts** does. A member of the Nurtury community for 26 years, Roberts has done it all. A year after starting as a temporary substitute in 1995, Roberts was offered the position of full-time teacher's assistant. She worked her way up the ladder, becoming a teacher, lead teacher and now serves as an Assistant Program Director at the Nurtury Learning Lab (she also earned her Associates Degree along the way). Roberts brings her energetic personality and her passion for her work to the program every day.

Managing program operations is no easy task, but Roberts is dedicated and committed to ensure that the staff, children and families that we serve stay safe and healthy. And her busy day

does not stop there. Due to COVID-19 and a reduced administrative team, Roberts makes sure that classrooms have staff coverage and that families are communicated to in a timely manner, all while making sure that day-to-day operations are running smoothly. And she does all this with a smile on her face.

"Everything I do is to make sure staff and children in the program stay safe," Roberts said. "I love what I do. These kids are our future and I want to be part of their journey."

Working weekends in response to COVID cases and opening the program on Sundays so that staff can get tested before starting the work week demonstrates her dedication, strong work ethic and initiative to reach the best possible results in any situation she faces.

"At Nurtury Early Education, we are privileged to have many co-workers who go above and beyond to support our mission, and Barbara is a shining example of that," said CEO Laura Perille.

Nurtury salutes Roberts as an advocate for all children and families.



Roberts loves her job, noting "these kids are our future."

### McAuliffe inspires smiles daily

**Nora McAuliffe** has been working for **United Arc** for over 10 years as a direct support professional and is an integral part of the lives of the individuals who receive services from the organization.

On a daily basis, McAuliffe supports individuals with medication dispensing, training, wellness education, meal preparation and shopping. She transports them to doctor appointments, therapy, the bank and to see family. McAuliffe takes environmental issues seriously and has an active eye to ensure the living environments of United Arc's consumers are safe and meet their needs. They enjoy their outings and community involvement activities with McAuliffe, who is dependable, reliable and consistently works even when not scheduled and needed.

Each one of McAuliffe's supervisors smile whenever they hear her name. She is a firm believer in accountability and strives to make sure the team is always communicating to navigate indi-

vidual needs and concerns. Even through the challenges of the past two years, McAuliffe's devotion to those she supports never wavered, and she leads

the agency's charge to continue supporting consumers throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

McAuliffe's peers frequently seek her out for advice or help in navigating issues that arise with the people who receive services. She was also the point person for developing a vegetable and flower garden near the office, engaging staff and individuals in the beautiful and tasty project.

The people she serves love her; one put it best, saying, "She gives me a hard time about diet and exercise. You can't pull a fast one on Nora. She cares, and we know it."

McAuliffe on the other hand, minimizes her daily impact on program participants. "If everyone did their part, the world would be a better place," she said.



People she serves say McAuliffe "cares, and we know it."

# EDITORIAL



**Michael Weekes**  
President / Publisher

## His was a life well lived

Many have opined on the meaning of a *life well lived* – from Angelou and Emerson to King, Oprah and Socrates. But the quintessential characteristic is one's selfless service to make a positive difference in the lives of others, without prioritizing the acquisition of material fortune or fame.

From my perspective, few have more aptly exemplified the esteemed status of a life well lived than Ronn Johnson, who passed away following a sudden battle with a COVID-related illness. Ironically, the passing of this long-time leader of greater Springfield's Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services occurred on the exact date of what would have been Dr. King's 93rd birthday – Jan. 15. It is a day that will be memorialized with a dual distinction in this community.

For many of us that knew Ronn and his work, we remain traumatized by the magnitude of this loss. Ronn had dedicated his entire professional life in the service of others and he did so with grace, perseverance, intelligence and an enduring sense of purpose – intentional and focused. I recall my conversations with Ronn, who would say, "Michael, if each of us did a little, we could make a huge difference." He was a life champion of answering Dr. King's "most persistent and urgent" question: "What are you doing for others?" In essence, his life's work luminates the fundamental foundation of a response.

Ronn was professionally involved with the Dunbar Community Center, the Center for Human Development and community engagement at Mass-Mutual, and culminated a successful career of community empowerment at Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services (MLKFS). He was their president and CEO, but more importantly, he was a voice of advocacy and a force for change in Springfield that transcended the walls of the gym and offices at MLKFS.

There, children and young adults who may have initially just sought recreation found themselves being tutored after school, learning life skills in their counseling program, bringing in a parental figure to get a blood pressure check, accessing food and nutrition services, connecting with a state and city agency for supports and becoming familiarized with college and career opportunities.

Ronn and I held memberships in the Beta Sigma Boulé chapter of the Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity – the oldest black Greek-letter organization, founded in 1904. This organization sought professional men of African descent who are committed to social action and education initiatives in their local community.

Ronn was instrumental at the organization – not only becoming a chief sponsor of their MLK Historically

Black College and University tour, bringing busloads of youth to visit HBCU throughout the mid-Atlantic and south, but also by encouraging members to support sending more busloads of youth to an HBCU Fair held annually in New York City.

Born and raised in Springfield, Ronn encouraged youth to pursue their dreams wherever and however it took them. These young folks often returned from these college visits with acceptance letters and scholarships. Possibilities became opportunities. Isn't that what we want for all children? To borrow the often-recited phrase, "a mind is a terrible thing to waste."

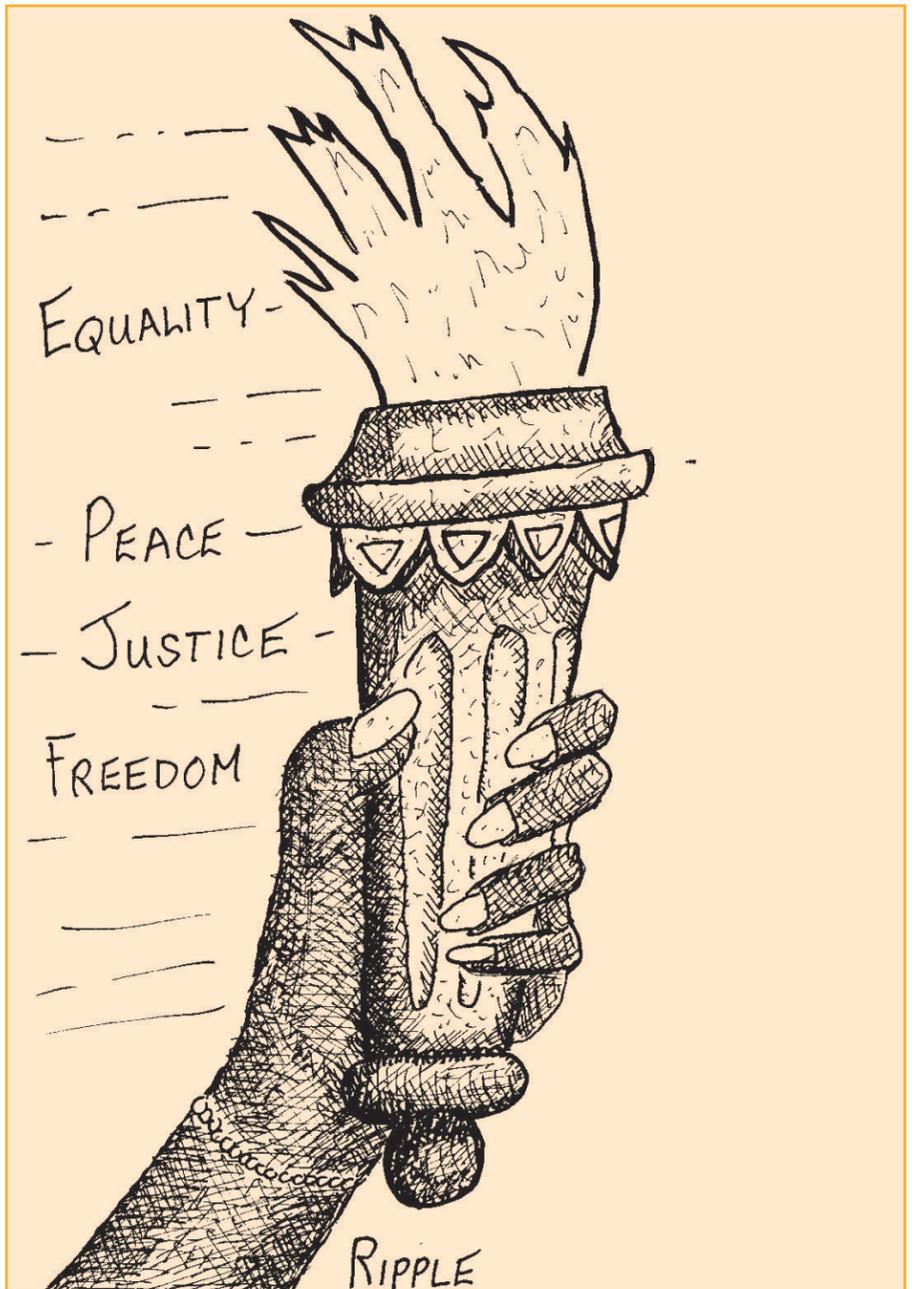
But not everything was a positive experience for Ronn. Last January, police arrested a man from Maine – a Bulgarian citizen who police noted had Nazi and white supremacist paraphernalia and contacts – who allegedly traveled from Pittsfield on at least three separate occasions to fire bomb the MLK Presbyterian Church and slash the tires of cars parked nearby. The MLKFS campus is adjacent to the church, where hundreds of children convened weekly, and Ronn was stunned by this brazen act of hate.

"I think that a church burning, aside from someone losing their home, has got to be one of the worst possible things that could happen," he said. But like Dr. King, whose home was firebombed 65 years earlier in Alabama, racism would not deter him from serving the community.

Perhaps the most significant challenge he faced was on a personal level. He and his wife's second child was born with a rare condition called Osteogenesis Imperfecta. Fortunately, the Johnson's were blessed with a network of supporters to help raise funds for their medical needs. They knew, however, that many families did not have the same supports, so they founded the Brianna Fund for Children with Physical Disabilities.

That fund began raising hundreds of thousands of dollars, helping numerous families by allowing children to maximize their abilities, rather than be overly confined by disabilities. Sometimes it meant chair lifts, house ramps or adapted vehicles – whatever was needed. While I can go on and on about this community-minded leader who received numerous community awards, I leave you to think about Dr. King's question and what we can do to make a difference. You don't have to run a nonprofit agency. You can volunteer at a food pantry like the one Ronn operated. It delivered five tons of food on a one-day-per-week arrangement because many of the families were food insecure and lived in "food deserts."

I hope we can be inspired by this *life well lived* and do as Ronn encouraged us to do: our little part too.



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Council is deeply appreciative to our longtime cartoonist Michael Ripple, who drew his last new cartoon for us last year. As we explore how to use this space in the future, we are honored to share some of Michael's "greatest hits," including this one.

**Want to highlight your organization or an employee with a Provider Profile or Salute?  
Want to write a Viewpoint or Op-Ed?**

**Contact Stefan at [sgeller@providers.org](mailto:sgeller@providers.org)**



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## Vocational rehabilitation meets virtual reality at Viability

By Colleen Holmes

The “cool kids” of all ages talk about Virtual Reality (VR) as casually as if it’s a PB&J. Some of those cool kids are students involved in a pilot program my agency is leading, called Project VR<sup>2</sup>, where students are doing a lot more than talking about VR.

Viability’s Project VR<sup>2</sup> is where Vocational Rehabilitation meets Virtual Reality. The pilot is developing uses for VR technology to overcome barriers and make job training and employment more accessible and successful for individuals with disabilities or other disadvantages.

Landing a job can be daunting. We’ve all been through it. You must fit inside the box in an application or resume for strangers to judge. If you’re lucky, you get an interview, which can feel like standing in front of a jury demanding proof. You have to be honest but market yourself, act comfortable but not cocky, be relatable but not overly familiar. On top of it all, you have to recall your work history (that mix of the humdrum, spikes of pain and occasional glory) and edit what you say on the fly.

When your history has holes in it, it gets even trickier. Just ask anyone re-entering the workforce due to recovery or disability, or because they took time off for childcare, parenting, eldercare or medical care of a loved one. Ask anyone looking to move up the ladder or break into a new field. Ask anyone who hasn’t had the opportunity to experience much success.

For individuals with a disability or disadvantage, the chances of being condescended to, overlooked, excluded, made fun of or faulted for circumstances not of their making may well exceed the chances they have had to realize their possibilities and contribute their talents and abilities.

For the individuals we serve at Viability, getting an interview, landing a job and succeeding at it is not just a challenge, it’s a big old bear with claws. Those claws have names: lack of skill, navigating unfamiliar environments, the exposure of public failure, one-size-fits all approaches for skill-building, lack of self-awareness, travel limitations and not knowing where or how to even start. Viability has been successfully tackling that bear for 48 years. With Project VR<sup>2</sup>, led by our Program Director Kristin Rotas and Chief Operating Officer Sue Cauley, we are building to a whole new level.

Viability has begun working with students and schools to safely develop game-changing tools, curriculum and diversity in scenarios and avatars for using Virtual Reality for work preparation, job training and employment access and success.

This has been made possible thanks to funding received from the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission and collaborations with Link to VR, Bodyswaps and Cleanbox.

“We were honored to take part in such a fantastic project,” said Edward Zemba, CEO of Link To VR, a Boston-based spatial computing company.

Bodyswaps provides the VR platform at the center of the experience. With Cleanbox, we were able to ensure the sanitation of the VR equipment, a must to launching the pilot during the pandemic.

Project VR<sup>2</sup> is in its early stages, but what we are learning, seeing and doing is promising. As two participants said, “I feel safe learning when I am in the pretend place,” and, “the avatars are not judging me.”

Progress to date includes the development of customized interview simulations for the people we serve, and an avatar that uses a wheelchair; the VR re-creation of the actual work floor of one of our manufacturing employer partners; production of the curriculum for students to guide accomplishment of learning objectives; and positive results on test runs (77% of students reported an increase in awareness of ways to improve, 72% reported an increase in understanding and 73% said they would recommend Project VR<sup>2</sup> to a peer).

“My goal was to improve my social skills so I could pass an interview and this helped me a lot,” one student participant said.

With reports like this one, we know we are on the right track.

Viability’s vision is to create a community of program participants and staff who make inclusion possible for people with disabilities and others. Employers also need technology tools to access and include a diverse workforce, and we’re determined to grow those options, shrink obstacles and advance equity. Project VR<sup>2</sup> is a real-life leap forward in that direction. Plus, it makes us feel like one of the cool kids!

*Colleen Holmes is the president and CEO of Viability.*

## Doc Wayne teams up with ESPN, The Village to show power of sport

By David Cohen

People are facing compounding mental health challenges; on top of pandemic hardships, they’re contending with ongoing racial inequity, political tension and economic insecurity. Regrettably, youth are being impacted unlike anything we’ve ever witnessed before. So much so, the U.S. Surgeon General issued a rare public advisory on youth mental health in December, with a warning and call to action to address what he labeled an emerging crisis.

Despite this, there are reasons to be optimistic. Last year brought remarkable change to the topic of mental health – it’s now being discussed and prioritized like never before. For their part in that, we thank the elite athletes and celebrities like Naomi Osaka, Kevin Love, Simone Biles, Selena Gomez and Prince Harry, who came forward about their mental health struggles and impressed upon people that we are all human and it’s okay to not be okay. Their courage and honesty is helping to diminish the stigma that has long been associated with mental health, making young people feel more encouraged and empowered to seek help.

And many states, including Massachusetts, are implementing game-changing legislation that makes mental health care more accessible and cost-effective. Some are establishing panels to help resolve barriers to care for children with complex behavioral health needs who find themselves in an emergency room, and some are allocating funds to support mental health professionals.

Further, akin to the many medical companies and institutions from around the world that have come together to address the pandemic, human services organizations, too, are collaborating increasingly to achieve better outcomes for their constituents, often with support from the business community. Doc Wayne is doing just that with a number of partner organizations whose missions and/or services greatly align.

Last fall, Doc Wayne teamed up with Connecticut-based ESPN Corporate Citizenship and The Village, which provides a full range of behavioral health, early and childhood youth development, substance use treatment and support services for children, families and adults in the Greater Hartford region. ESPN, a long-time supporter and partner of The Village, suggested that leveraging Doc Wayne’s sport-infused therapies within their children’s programs would bring additional advancements for these youth and their families, and ESPN was

happy to support the collaboration.

Doc Wayne’s programs take place in a gym or on a field, versus a clinical setting, and clinicians, known as “coaches,” engage with youth between the ages of five and 18 years old. The approach fosters openness and trust, and enables the development of new life skills and learning teamwork, with the benefits of physical activity. Doc Wayne’s coaches are training The Village clinicians through its Champions Network program, an external training curriculum with remote and live sessions that include a range of trauma-informed, sport-based therapies, as well as professional credentialing.

Some trainings have been focused on Doc Wayne’s Rookie Pride program, designed to address the unique needs of youth between the ages of five to eight years old. It’s part of the overarching Creating Champions curriculum that layers clinical and social-emotional learning goals onto an easy to grasp framework that resembles a tournament-style sports bracket, and uses youth friendly, sport-based language to ensure youth and families can connect to the material.

All three of these organizations are passionate believers in the power of sport and its ability to teach, heal and build confidence and teamwork, along with its physical benefits and how it supports social justice, change and acceptance. Nelson Mandela summarized it perfectly at the inaugural Laureus World Sports Awards in 2000; “Sport has the power to change the world. It has the power to inspire. It has the power to unite people in a way that little else does. It speaks to youth in a language they understand.”

Doc Wayne’s mission is to provide access to brighter futures for youth around the world and strengthen the field of mental health by using revolutionary sport-based therapy and clinical-based initiatives. We are deeply gratified that since the launch of the Champions Network training program in July of 2020, our team has trained people and organizations in 25 countries, including in conflict zones, impacting nearly 68,000 youth. With a light finally shining on how vital mental health is to wellbeing, we are optimistic that more opportunity and change will continue to come about, and we enthusiastically plan to be a part of that.

*David Cohen is the CEO of Doc Wayne Youth Services.*

## Peer leaders share lessons learned on Teen Dating Violence Awareness

Focusing on the prevention of dating violence, Casa Myrna’s Peer Leader Program teaches young people to educate others about healthy relationships and what to do if they or someone they know may be in an unsafe relationship. In honor of February being Teen Dating Violence Awareness Month, we asked some of our Peer Leaders – Lucy (16), Sarah (15), and Leandro (15) – to reflect on lessons they have learned.

### What are the biggest lessons you have learned about teen dating violence (TDV)?

**Lucy:** Anyone can face TDV. Your teammate, friend, peer, or co-worker and you should always be vigilant of the signs of dating violence and know how to help people in need. Teen dating violence should be taken just as seriously as adult dating violence. Teen’s lives can be ruined by

abusive relationships, and at Casa Myrna, we strive to help start conversations that will end dating violence.

**Sarah:** I’ve learned a lot about TDV, such as the different types of abuse, the way they’re carried out, the influence and impact that it can have on a person’s life and the reasons for why the victim doesn’t leave the abusive relationship. I have noticed that in a lot of abusive teen relationships, the abuse is often psychological. For example, the abuser might say that they will kill themselves if their partner breaks up with them, or they might blackmail their partners with intimate photos. Learning that only one of the partners is the abuser was also very eye-opening and shocking to me; there’s a big misconception that in an abusive relationship, both partners can be abusive towards each other, but in reality there will always be one partner that has power

over the other.

**Leandro:** I think the biggest lesson I’ve learned is that teens can experience dating violence just like adults. It is just as important to show teens what dating violence is so they can learn healthy habits early on.

### What is your part in the prevention of teen dating violence?

**Lucy:** At Casa Myrna, we learn how to start meaningful conversations about TDV in our community.

**Sarah:** I’ve started taking a very big part in the prevention of TDV because I’ve begun to understand and internalize what abuse actually is. I used to be very unenlightened about abuse and believed it could only be manifested through physical contact, like hitting your significant other. Unfortunately, that is not true at all and learning a lot more about it has put me in a better posi-

tion to help myself and others around me.

**Leandro:** My part in preventing TDV is learning about healthy relationships and introducing people to Casa Myrna. I also will be trying to make sure that close friends are not in unhealthy relationships.

### What do you think is the best way to prevent young people from getting into unhealthy relationships?

**Lucy:** If teens were to have conversations amongst themselves about dating violence and unhealthy relationships, they would drastically change the statistics. Having just one person you can rely on to help you escape an abusive relationship and find the support you need is everything.

**Sarah:** By educating them on what exactly an unhealthy relationship is and providing a sense of support in case they do find themselves in that sit-

uation. By support, I mean providing different branches and people they can reach out to for help and guidance. But most of all, I think education is the key to reducing the amount of unhealthy teenage relationships. This is because a lot of teenagers are actually in unhealthy relationships right now but don’t realize it, because they have no knowledge about what they are and the ways to identify if they are in one.

**Leandro:** Teaching young people about unhealthy relationships is most likely the best way to prevent it. This way they know what to look for and avoid, like red flags in relationships, but also good things and green flags.

*Casa Myrna is a Boston-based nonprofit delivering solutions to end domestic and dating violence. For more information, contact Mey Espinoza at [yespinoza@casamyrna.org](mailto:yespinoza@casamyrna.org).*

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## A VIEW FROM THE HILL

*A commentary from a  
legislator on human services*



### Bill creates student loan repay plan for human service workers

**By Sen. Eric P. Lesser and  
Rep. Jeffrey N. Roy**

Over 180,000 human service workers across the Commonwealth provided critical services during the pandemic and cared for the state's most vulnerable residents. During a moment of crisis, they staffed inpatient and outpatient mental health and substance abuse facilities, childcare centers, vocational rehabilitation centers, individual and family services and emergency food and housing services.

In an industry where success is measured by the quality of services delivered to our most vulnerable residents, our human service workers are unsung heroes for our economy and our society, and deserve to be celebrated.

They did what was needed of them during a moment of crisis to keep critical services available for our children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, mental illness and substance use disorders. They responded by putting others first. And these dedicated professionals helped and continue to help everyone in a moment of crisis to keep our loved ones safe in strenuous times.

We celebrate and acknowledge that service by helping these human service workers across Massachusetts pay down their educational debt. And we provide grants for health service agencies to support the retention and recruitment of human service workers and home health workers.

In partnership with our colleagues in the House and Senate, we worked to include legislation that we've been fighting for with the Providers' Council for six years in our American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) spending bill, signed by the Governor in December. The provision sets aside \$30 million for student loan repayment assistance and a grant program to support the retention and recruitment of human service workers and home health workers.

These programs will allow human service workers to continue working in a profession that they give so much of themselves to. And it will help human service providers attract and retain skilled employees.

Despite having similar levels of educational attainment as workers in other industries, human service workers are more likely to live 150 percent below the poverty level. In 2018, the Donahue Institute at the University of Massachusetts Amherst studied the human services sector and noted that median wages were

\$27,376, compared with \$40,557 for all Massachusetts workers – a difference of 48 percent.

On top of that, many human service workers have college and graduate degrees and are often saddled with student loan debt. Moreover, when students take on loans it may not be financially sustainable for them to even enter the human services field. That's because in Massachusetts, roughly 855,000 residents owe \$33 billion in student loans (107% growth from 2007-2017) and nearly 95,000 residents in Massachusetts are delinquent on student loan payments.

To respond to this workforce crisis and address the need for quality care, helping these critical workers pay down their educational debt will ensure that the human services sector has a future. And that's exactly what the program established in the ARPA bill does. It allocates \$16,500,000 for a loan repayment assistance program and \$13,500,000 for recruitment and retention grants.

A nine-member board will establish the eligibility requirements, assistance levels and work commitments which will be detailed in a report required by April 15, 2022.

This is a massive win for our human service workers, employers and the people they serve. Ultimately, their work results in higher-quality care and reduces costs in our health-care system.

Investing in our human service workforce supports the assistance they give to a wide range of people in need of care. Simply put, it responds to a financial and moral responsibility and helps answer the question, "who will care for our most vulnerable?"

*Sen. Lesser represents the First Hampden and Hampshire District, and Rep. Roy represents the Tenth Norfolk District. They are the sponsors of An Act relative to a loan repayment program for human service workers (H266, S120) and have sponsored similar bills for the last several legislative sessions.*



Sen. Eric Lesser



Rep. Jeffrey Roy

*The opinions expressed in A View from the Hill and Viewpoints from Across the State are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Providers' Council or its members.*



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# KING: Springfield MLK Day event remembers life of MLKFS' Johnson

Continued from Page 1

thoughts and reflections from leaders including Dart Adams, Segun Idowu, Rep. Liz Miranda, Jose Masso, Catherine Morris, Robert Lewis Jr. and Dr. J. Keith Motley. According to Duncan Remage-Healey, director of advancement and external affairs, King Boston intends to continue this tradition with NBC Boston for years to come.

But King Boston was hardly the only Council member to commemorate Dr. King and his continuing influence last month.

Quite fittingly, Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services (MLKFS) once again collaborated with Springfield College to host the city's virtual MLK Day performance, which brought together local youth and community leaders, as well as prominent political figures, to celebrate Dr. King's life, often through music and poetry.

Among the speakers at the event were Gov. Charlie Baker, Sen. Ed Markey, state Sens. Adam Gomez and Eric Lesser, and Springfield Mayor Domenic Sarno. Performances were made by the Springfield Community Chorus, the MLK Day String Quartet and students from Springfield Public Schools and the MLK Charter School of Excellence.

"When I think about how we can celebrate Dr. King and the holiday, I always go back to the idea of service; it really should be a day where we're thinking about serving our fellow human beings," said MLKFS Board Chair Dr. Calvin Hill. "It really is about remembering who he was as an individual and at the same time asking and committing ourselves to thinking about what we can do to be better."

Hill added that the sudden death of Ronn Johnson, MLKFS's president and CEO, made them consider calling off

the event, but Johnson's family encouraged them to carry on and they managed to include a tribute to him in the program.

Johnson died two days before the holiday – on what would have been King's 93rd birthday – after battling a COVID-related illness.

"We were able to have some imagery of Ron and talk about his role as someone that was the keeper of the trade, so it really did help to solidify the event from the standpoint of celebrating the legacy of Dr. King while at the same time recognizing someone that really uplifted King's mission within the community," Hill said. "By not doing it, we would have done Ronn a disservice."

And at Riverside Community Care, officials commemorated both MLK Day and Black History Month at the end of January with a virtual webinar titled, "Remembering the Children of the Movement," which primarily celebrated all the younger people who were a part of the civil rights movement and the contributions that they made to the cause.

Among those honored were Paula Young Shelton, a teacher, author and daughter of civil rights activist Andrew Young, and civil rights activist Nell Stokes, both of whom participated in a panel during the event. The webinar also featured musical performances from Ruben Studdard of American Idol and the Boston Children's Chorus.

"All too often we celebrate and it's just someone standing up and reading lines from the 'I Have a Dream' speech, but Dr. King had so much more influence and impact than that, and so many more people connected to him and the movement as well, and we should celebrate and highlight that," said Vice President of Diversity & Inclusion Angela Crutchfield.

# BUDGET: Proposal has tax breaks

Continued from Page 1

munity-based human services workers, we're pleased to see Gov. Baker make such a significant effort to help address the issue through his final budget proposal by including a record amount of funding in the Chapter 257 Reserve," said Providers' Council President and CEO Michael Weekes.

Among other highlights in the budget proposal were a 9.8% increase to Emergency Aid to Elderly Disabled & Children, a 6.9% increase to Department of Children and Families congregate care services and a 6.4% increase to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services. The proposal also includes a \$749 million deposit to the state's Stabilization – or "Rainy Day" – Fund, which the Governor said will bring the balance to an all-time high of \$6.64 billion by the end of FY '23.

"This proposal will help working families keep more of their hard earned money to pay for needs like child care and housing. It will also eliminate the income tax for hundreds of thousands of low income taxpayers," said Gov. Baker. "The cost of just about everything is going up and these tax breaks would help offset some of those costs for families."

In his budget message, Gov. Baker touted a balanced budget proposal that protects core services for the state's most vulnerable residents and makes significant investments to promote growth and opportunity.

Other line items of interest include: EEC line item 3000-3060 – DCF and DTA Related Child Care – dropped from \$359.1 million to \$325.5 million or 9.4 percent – as the funding was decreased to meet projected need.

MRC line item 4120-2000 – Vocational Rehabilitation for People with Disabilities – increased from \$18.7 million to \$23.3 million or more than 24 percent – as funding was transferred from DMH line item 5046-0000.

DYS line item 4200-0200 – Residential Services for Detained Population –

dropped from \$29.5 million to \$28.9 million or 2 percent.

DTA line item 4401-1000 – Employment Services Program – dropped from \$17.8 million to \$15.6 million – a decrease of 12.3 percent. There was also no specific funding earmarked for Competitive Integrated Employment Services (CIES) nor a funding floor for that program.

DPH saw several line items changed, including Family Health Services (4512-0103) and Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Prevention and Treatment (4513-1130). Funding for both line items was moved to other DPH line items, and it appears as if funding in both line items increased over FY '22 GAA.

DCF line item 4800-0041 – Congregate Care Services – increased from \$315 million to \$337 million, an increase of nearly 7 percent.

DMH line item 5042-5000 – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services – increased from \$105.1 million to \$111.8 million, more than 6 percent, due to an increase in projected need.

DDS saw cuts of 8 percent to Transportation Services (5911-2000) and 9 percent to Community Day and Work Programs (5920-2025) which totaled about \$25 million. Community Residential Services (5920-2000), however, increased from \$1.409 billion to \$1.442 billion – an increase of \$33 million. Additionally, Respite Family Supports (5920-3000) increased from \$84.9 million to \$90.6 million – about 6.8 percent.

DHCD saw a large increase in HomeBASE (7004-0108), which increased from \$25.8 million to \$56.9 million to meet projected need.

Elder Affairs saw large increases. Home Care Services (9110-1630) went up 8 percent, Protective Services (9110-1636) went up 9 percent and Elder Home Care Case Management (9110-1633) saw an increase of 12 percent.

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS • WINTER 2022

- What:** **Racial Equity and Organizational Change**  
**When:** Thursdays, February 3, 10 and 17  
**Time:** 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.  
**Presenters:** Barbara Holland, Advocates  
 Comma Williams, Comma Williams Enterprises  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** \$140 for members; \$200 for non-members
- What:** **Got Conflict? Deal with Conflict Effectively: Tools for Your Toolbox**  
**When:** Wednesday, February 9  
**Time:** 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.  
**Presenters:** Gail Packer, Executive Director, Community Dispute Settlement Center, Inc.  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** Members \$70; Non-members \$130
- What:** **Re-Organizing Your Time and Attention to COVID-Era Work Priorities**  
**When:** Wednesday, February 16  
**Time:** 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.  
**Presenters:** Christine Singer, M.Ed., President, Your Personal Best: Workshops for Success  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** \$70 for members; \$130 for non-members

*Pre-registration for these events is required unless otherwise noted.*

*Please visit [providers.org/events](https://providers.org/events) to learn more and register for the event you wish to attend.*

Questions? Call 508.598.9800 or email Mesa Merritt at [mmerritt@providers.org](mailto:mmerritt@providers.org).

## MANDATE: SCOTUS blocks OSHA vaccine mandate for large employers

*Continued from Page 1*

faced penalties of nearly \$14,000 per violation.

OSHA would have also required businesses to provide paid time off for employees to get vaccines and sick leave to recover from side effects that prevented them from working. Overall, the requirements would have applied to over 84 million workers across the country.

President Joe Biden said he was “disappointed that the Supreme Court has chosen to block common-sense life-saving requirements for employees at large businesses that were grounded squarely in both science and the law.”

Biden first ordered sweeping federal vaccine requirements late last year. The court’s announcement came amid a global spike of cases from the highly contagious omicron variant.

The vaccine-or-test mandate was quickly met with legal challenges by several states following its announcement, with the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans issuing an injunction to block its enforcement. How-

ever, the Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati lifted that injunction in December, allowing the rule to go into effect. Opponents of the mandate then sought emergency relief from that order from the Supreme Court.

In its rejection of the mandate, the Supreme Court argued that OSHA is only empowered to set workplace safety standards and does not have the authority to regulate broad public health measures.

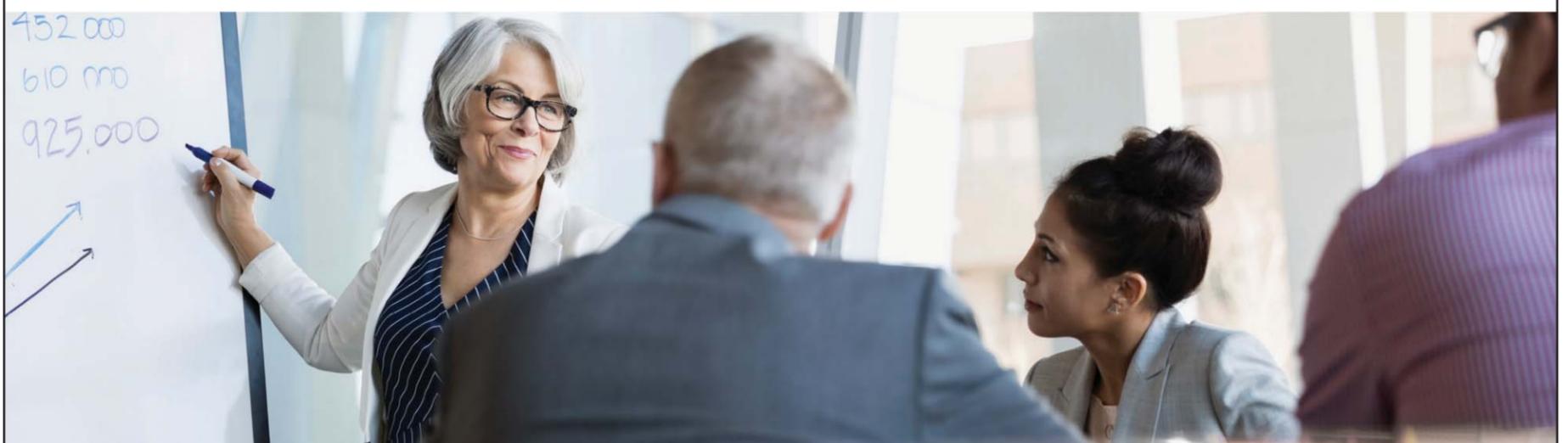
As a result of the ruling, large private sector employers are no longer required to have their workforce either get vaccinated or test weekly, though they must still follow state and local laws regarding vaccination and testing policies.

Health care facilities that wish to continue receiving federal Medicare and Medicaid funding must ensure their employees, volunteers, contractors and other workers receive the vaccine, unless exempt due to recognized medical conditions, religious beliefs or practices. The mandate does not cover staff who telework full-time.

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