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# THE PROVIDER

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## Council to host LG forum at AMBM



The Providers' Council plans to host a forum for candidates for Lieutenant Governor following its 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Membership and Business Meeting at the Beechwood Hotel in Worcester on Monday, May 2. From left to right: business leader and educator Bret Bero, Salem Mayor Kim Driscoll, State Rep. Tamí Gouveia, State Senator Adam Hinds and State Senator Eric Lesser.

After more than two years of only holding virtual events, the Providers' Council plans to resume in-person meetings at its 47<sup>th</sup> Annual Membership and Business Meeting on Monday, May 2 in Worcester.

The annual event to review the association's finances, discuss committee achievements and elect directors and officers to the Council's board will precede a human services forum featuring candidates for the Commonwealth's second high-

est office.

The Council is inviting candidates running for Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor to participate in a human services forum and discuss their vision for the Commonwealth with attendees from the community-based human services sector. The forum, which will include lunch, is open exclusively to Providers' Council members.

"We're very much looking forward to welcoming the candidates for Lieutenant Governor to meet with our

membership and discuss how we can work together to strengthen human services for the hundreds of thousands of residents who receive critical supports from this essential sector," said Providers' Council President/CEO Michael Weekes.

The Council is inviting all candidates who have declared for the race and who are actively seeking the office by raising funds and/or maintaining cash on hand. Official invita-

FORUM, see page 7

## Fair pay, loan repayment bills get favorable report

Legislation on the Providers' Council's Pro-Workforce Legislative Agenda moved forward in February, as the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities gave favorable reports to the association's Fair Pay for Comparable Work and Student Loan Repayment bills.

Four bills covering the Council's two priorities moved forward on Joint Rule 10 day on Feb. 2 – the date by which committees must act on legislation that was referred to them at the outset of the legislative session. Committees can choose to report a bill favorably, sending it to another committee; extend action on the bill, giving them a little extra time; or place the bill in a study, effectively ending its

progress for the legislative session.

The Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities reported out the Council's bills favorably, sending the Council's two Fair Pay bills – Senate 105 and House 237 – and two Student Loan Repayment bills – Senate 120 and House 266 – to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means.

"We at the Council are incredibly grateful to Chairman Michael Finn, Chairman Adam Gomez and all the members of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities for their support of our legislation," said President and CEO Michael Weekes. "This brings us even closer to addressing the root

BILLS, see page 6

## Mentoring initiative sees 10 years of success building future leaders

The Providers' Council's inter-agency mentoring program, The Leadership Initiative (TLI) is celebrating a major milestone in 2022: its 10-year anniversary.

Created as a way to cultivate the future leaders of the human services sector through supportive mentoring partnerships, the Council offers this program to all member agencies and has had over 70 participants in the program since its inception.

Mentees are employees with supervisory responsibilities that would like to grow in their roles, and they are matched with mentors at the senior management level from other agencies. This model creates a collaborative environment among members that allows for the sharing of resources, ideas and knowledge about the sector.

Katie Robery was an assistant director of operations at BAMS when she became a mentee in 2018, and through her collaboration with mentor Rob Gervais, vice president of operations at Justice Resource Institute, she learned a multitude of skills that enabled her to

rise to a director of operations position.

"With Rob, I learned about different financial aspects that weren't part of my role at the time: contracting, budgeting, larger-scale administrative work and how to manage lots of demands at once. He always supported and pushed me to learn more," Robery said. "I don't think that I would be in the position that I'm in now if I hadn't researched and gone through with the different programming at the Providers' Council. It gave me confidence and a skill set that allowed me to reach for things in my career that I might not have had otherwise."

To begin their mentoring journey, applicants are matched based on the mentee's professional development goals and the skill areas they would like to improve in. The mentoring pairs meet, at a minimum, on a monthly basis for one hour over the course of a year.

Rebekah Roulter, deputy director at Doc Wayne Youth Services, was a

TLI, see page 7

### The Leadership Initiative

Giving back to move forward

## TCF to produce orientation video



Ashley Sproul, peer specialist at Advocates, films her part for The Caring Force orientation video. Also taking part in the video filming were Banila Feika, residential counselor at Vinfen; Lydia Todd, chair of TCF and executive director of NFI Massachusetts; and Michael Weekes, president/CEO of the Providers' Council.

Banila Feika's decision to become a direct care worker was rather straightforward; he was inspired by the compassion his mother showed others working as a caregiver and wanted to follow in her footsteps.

And after working for six years as a residential counselor at Vinfen, Feika has become even more aware of how

vital the human services sector truly is.

But because human services workers are not receiving fair wages and must often work multiple jobs to get by, he and other direct care workers are calling on their peers via a new orientation video to join The Caring Force (TCF) and advocate for more

TCF, see page 7



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## Cambridge Family & Children's Service rebrands to Bridges Homeward

Officials from the agency formerly known as **Cambridge Family & Children's Service** in February noted the organization would rebrand as **Bridges Homeward**. The agency's staff, mission and services remain the same, and the public can visit the organization's new website at [www.bridgeshomeward.org](http://www.bridgeshomeward.org).



This is the first time the agency has changed its name since it became Cambridge Family & Children's Service in 1973.

"In 2022, after the challenges we have weathered and will continue to face, we are stepping into a new era: one where our public persona fully reflects the innovation of our staff, the progressive values of our agency and the amazing perspectives of children, teens and families throughout Greater Boston and beyond," said Executive Director Bob Gittens.

## FamilyAid names Richards first Vice President of Programs

**FamilyAid** announced in January that Carla Richards had been appointed its first Vice President of Programs. She will lead the agency's deepening services to more than 3,000 homeless children and parents, and direct innovations to its anti-poverty programming.



Carla Richards

"Carla is a tenacious leader with years of experience advocating for those in need," said FamilyAid President Larry Seamans. "We welcome her passion and expertise as we focus on expanding our two generational work

to meet the needs of an increasing number of homeless children and parents."

Richards most recently served as Director of Planning at Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), one of Boston's largest human service organizations, where she oversaw strategic planning, community needs assessments and program development efforts for residents experiencing poverty.

## YMCA of Greater Boston welcomes Gilbert as new CHRO

The **YMCA of Greater Boston** announced in late February that Robin M. Gilbert would join the organization as its new Chief Human Resources Officer.

With more than 20 years of HR experience, Gilbert will act as a strategic business partner and trusted advisor to the CEO, board of directors and executive leadership, in addition to driving organizational efforts.



Robin M. Gilbert

"Robin's leadership and history of success with shaping business strategy and organizational design and development will be key for our organization moving forward," said President & CEO James Morton.

## Judy Gould named to Mainstay's Board of Directors

**Mainstay Supportive Housing and Homecare**, the Newton-based nonprofit organization, announced in January that Judy Gould had been elected to its Board of Directors.

Gould is a retired healthcare executive with 37 years of public health leadership experience. She was employed by the Northeast Alabama Regional Medical Center for 17 years and held a series of senior management positions at the hospital, culminating with her appointment as acting CEO in 2008.

## Cummings surprises IINE with \$200K



The Cummings Foundation and its Executive Director Joyce Vyriotes (right) presented the **International Institute of New England** with a \$200,000 donation – double the organization's request – when IINE President and CEO Jeffrey Thielman visited the foundation. The funding will go toward IINE's Afghan Evacuee Support Initiative. "I am overwhelmed and so thankful for this generosity," Thielman said. "The people we are serving have come to the United States for a new beginning. Although they have suffered enormous trauma, they are resilient, and this support will help them start over and launch their futures."

## Several Council members among nonprofits to receive Life Science Cares Boston grants

Life Science Cares Boston, a Cambridge-based nonprofit that leverages the life science industry to eliminate the impact of poverty, announced in February that it granted \$1.5 million to 28 nonprofits working to fight poverty across Greater Boston.

The organization said more than 25% of the funding was directed to BIPOC-led organizations, six of which are led by women. Council members among the grantees were **Children's Services of Roxbury**, **CASPAR**, **FamilyAid** and **Victory Programs**.

## Northeast Arc receives \$100K from Yawkey Foundation

**Northeast Arc** announced last month that it received a \$100,000 grant from the Yawkey Foundation to support its Center for Linking Lives.

The Center for Linking Lives represents the transformation of 26,000 square feet of retail space into a community gathering spot where individuals with disabilities can live inclusively alongside their peers. The Center also features *parcels*, a unique store selling products made by, or created at businesses owned by people with disabilities or autism.



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# PROVIDER PROFILES

## IMMIGRANTS' ASSISTANCE CENTER, INC. (IAC)

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### About the Agency

Established in 1971 in New Bedford, the Immigrants' Assistance Center (IAC) was created to help immigrants on the path to citizenship overcome language, cultural and economic barriers, as well as integrate into the American way of life while maintaining their ethnic identity and pride.

Client work at the IAC was always challenging, yet consistent, until the 2016 Presidential election caused a crisis in the immigrant community, creating extreme fear, anxiety and uncertainty for immigrants. The IAC's capabilities were tested significantly; however the IAC's Emergency Family Preparedness and Know Your Rights sessions provided advice, assurances, a calm voice and critical legal information to clients.

During the pandemic, IAC's in-person services shifted to virtual. IAC staff made proactive wellness calls to elderly clients who had language and technology barriers and who were very confused by the pandemic. Additionally, "protected visits" to clients' homes occurred as a way of making sure they were safe and had food. IAC clients, many of whom are essential workers, put their own lives on the line to hold onto their jobs, while other clients lost jobs and needed help from IAC to access benefits.

Its budget grew to \$863,500 over the past five years, due to capacity building funding from the Carney Family Charitable Foundation, state funding for COVID education, testing and vaccine outreach and a 30% increase in the number of grants.

### Immigrants are backbone of US economy



Through its **Immigration and Citizenship Program (ICP)**, the Immigrants' Assistance Center helps new Americans successfully complete the Naturalization Process.

The immigrant community fully represents the principles on which this country is built. They are, and have always been, the backbone of the American economy, as 43% of Fortune 500 companies were founded by first- or second-generation immigrants. The Immigrants' Assistance Center's goal is to continue this reality by facilitating the immigrant community's success as citizens of this country and to continue their role as contributing members of the American economy.

Programs include:

- **Basic Services:** IAC helps the immigrant community with basic needs like food, shelter and clothing. IAC provides direct and indirect services in collaboration with existing public and private agencies that assist IAC clients in satisfying these needs.
- **The Immigrant Youth Program (IYP):** Run in collaboration with New Bedford Public Schools, the IYP helps immigrant youth with the myriad challenges they face when in this country, often alone and without adult advocacy.
- **Workforce Readiness Program (WRP):** Being developed in collaboration with Bristol Community College, WRP will enable



clients to secure skilled, gainful employment and become contributing members of the local, state and American economy.

- **Immigration and Citizenship Program (ICP):** ICP provides the full spectrum of services that are needed to successfully complete the Naturalization Process.
- **Education Program (EP):** EP includes English for Speakers of Other Languages, Citizenship, Civics and Literacy Classes.
- **Elder Program:** Assist elder clients with health care coordination, elder day care, Medicaid issues and other challenges that arise for these often-vulnerable clients.
- **Business and Community Education Program:** Designated by the U. S. Department of Justice as an authorized immigration representative, IAC helps business and community organizations stay current and compliant on complex and rapidly-changing immigration policy.
- **Pandemic-specific Vaccine Outreach Program:** Designed and implemented to educate the immigrant community about the coronavirus, while bringing vaccine clinics to neighborhoods, employers and churches.

### Executive Leadership

Helena DaSilva Hughes immigrated to the United States with her family from Madeira, Portugal at the age of 10. She is bilingual/bicultural in Portuguese with strong knowledge of Spanish. She possesses in-depth knowledge of immigration laws and policies.



Helena DaSilva Hughes

Working for the IAC for 36 years, Hughes was promoted to executive director in 1996. She developed and implemented numerous programs based on the needs of the immigrant community.

Hughes uses her vast experience to represent the voices and interests of the immigrant community, leveraging her deep legal and policy knowledge. In 2021, IAC's board promoted Hughes to the position of president.

Hughes serves on the board of or is a trustee at Massachusetts Immigrants and Refugees Advocacy, the Department of Public Health, the COVID-19 Health Equity Advisory Group, Coastline Elderly Services, New Bedford Economic Council, the AG's Advisory Council on New Americans, and SouthCoast Health.

She is a co-founder of Our Sisters School, an all-girls middle school for low-income girls. Hughes has a bachelor's degree in business administration with a minor in law. She is a graduate of UMass Dartmouth Leadership Southcoast.

# SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

## Key Program honors Salvatore

Dominic Salvatore came to the Berkshire Region of **The Key Program** on Nov. 29, 2000 and, after a long and successful career where he was the Night Shift Manager at the Key Howard House Program in Pittsfield, he retired in February.

Howard House is a stately, old house on top of a hill. It has been a great part of The Key Program for 42 years and Salvatore took care of the third shift for half that time. It has served many residents and it is now a shared space with latency-aged boys and girls in a combined Intensive Treatment Residence and Emergency Residence.

Salvatore not only worked through these transitions but helped manage them as well, and was the anchor on the third shift. He trained most of our new overnight staff and was intent on making them successful. Salvatore required them to be AWAKE and ALERT and to always be license-ready and prepared for any emergencies on the overnight shift. He met well over 150 youth during his tenure, whom he kept safe and happy as they slept and greeted in the morning with a strong, positive demeanor and a healthy breakfast.

When asked for his secret, Salvatore said, "I was always learning from or adjusting to the children and the new pro-

gram structures over the years. I enjoyed watching the great staff work their magic and I realized the longer I was here, the easier it was for me to establish

good relationships with the children. I watched countless children and staff grow over the years and if you keep a positive and open mind, rely on common sense and follow the structure of the program, you will be successful and learn from everyone around you."

Salvatore had wonderful stories to tell about his interactions with the children over the years. During a recent retirement breakfast, he shared several, but one of the most touching stories happened last spring, when one of the adolescent girls went to him and said, "Dom, even though I don't like you, can you help me register and sign up for the softball team at Taconic High School?" Salvatore promised her that if she agreed to go to practices and cooperate with the coach, he would help her. Several weeks later, the same girl came to him and said, "Dom, even though I don't like you, I was wondering if you would want to come to my softball championship game this week?" The staff and children of The Key Program want to express our admiration and appreciation for Salvatore and wish him a happy and healthy retirement.



After 42 years, Salvatore says goodbye to The Key Program.

## Arrubla-Castro helps survivors

Immigrant survivors of domestic violence endure additional hardships when seeking safety and security. Sonia Arrubla-Castro, the Latinx Counselor Advocate and Immigration Specialist at **Safe Passage**, works to decrease barriers faced by her clients and provide pathways to healing in the wake of relationship abuse.

Arrubla-Castro, an immigrant herself, came to the United States from Columbia almost 30 years ago and has used that unique experience to develop enhanced immigration support for Safe Passage clients over the last five years. Every day, Arrubla-Castro uses her compassion, creativity and ability to form meaningful relationships to connect survivors to life-saving resources and support.

"I have witnessed Sonia work with patience and empathy to support survivors who are traumatized, isolated, terrified and unaware of their rights or options," said Community Program Director Catherine Hodes. "Sonia's initiative and passion have helped Safe Passage develop a cohesive immigration response that includes the nuts and bolts of obtaining legal documentation, planning for safety and developing hope for the future."

Arrubla-Castro is a tireless advocate for immigrant survivors. She has gone above and beyond, obtaining the training necessary to support her clients through the application process for visas and other pathways to safety through the department of justice.

Arrubla-Castro's contributions to Safe Passage go beyond her incredible counseling and advocacy skills. In addition to her day-to-day duties of providing emotional support and case management for her clients, she also participates in internal committees and task forces to promote diversity, inclusion and belonging at the organization. Safe Passage's staff, clients and community have benefitted from Arrubla-Castro's leadership as a part of the union bargaining committee, the racial justice task force and the BIPOC affinity group.

Arrubla-Castro said that one of her motivations is to be a part of the change that our society needs to eliminate violence, discrimination, bias and racism. "It's like the Safe Passage mission," she said. "My work is the part that I can do - working one on one, step by step, to support systemic change and make a difference in the lives of my clients."



At Safe Passage, Arrubla-Castro provides pathways to healing.

# EDITORIAL



**Michael Weekes**  
President / Publisher

## Two long years, but not yet goodbye

Recently, I took a Lyft for the first time in two years. I've avoided the service lately – primarily due to there being less of a need, but also out of an abundance of caution. Both the driver, Anthony, and I were masked, the windows were slightly opened and we both volunteered that we had been vaccinated and boosted. When I asked how he's fared in the past two years, he said that he has suffered financially, but is very optimistic that the tide has turned.

With the numbers declining and the seven-day positivity rate around 2.2%, there is reason for optimism. Gov. Charlie Baker even ended the school mask mandate on Feb. 28 with the comment, "It's time to give our kids a sense of normalcy and lift the mask mandate on a statewide basis for schools." Our Department of Public Health revised their guidance as well, so that people who are fully vaccinated are not required to wear masks in most public places, aside from public buses, trains, ferries, hospitals, etc. As with so many other drivers, passengers, school officials and human services staff, Anthony longed for "normalcy," hoping that mask wearing is not the new normal.

As of the day that I am writing this, Massachusetts has recorded 1.67 million confirmed or probable COVID-19 cases – a number equal to one-in-four state residents. Chances are you or someone you know experienced the disease. It has contributed to the loss of over 23,157 Massachusetts lives – many of them are older residents and a disproportionate number of them are people of color, which is yet another ugly side of COVID-19 and our health care system. In a University of Massachusetts Amherst poll conducted last year on 800 residents, nearly twice as many people of color (26%) had family or close friends die compared to their white neighbors (15%).

The pandemic has stretched on for *too long* and yet we still can't say goodbye to it. Reflecting on the demonstrable decline in infection rates in the U.S. – as state and local governments begin to ease mandates for vaccinations, mask wearing and other measures – Dr. Anthony Fauci voiced a strong message of caution: **"You may be done with COVID, but COVID is not done with the United States – nor is it done with the world. We've got to do what it takes to get it to be done."** Perhaps he is, unfortunately, correct.

While it may remain longer or – the unthinkable – spike again, it's a challenge that we've seen our human services sector face, as it has demonstrated its resiliency to this threat. The workers in this community-based sector have filled more than 180,000 jobs around the Commonwealth and provided safety to hun-

dreds of thousands of clients and staff; they will be there and ready to provide essential services. They will be in residential programs, day services settings, outpatient services, emergency shelters, therapeutic environments, counseling programs, foster homes for children and adults and many other settings. However, they will be a somewhat depleted workforce, low in number, tired of the long shifts, but understanding their essentiality. Let's keep honoring these heroes and heroines.

This pandemic, which may be morphing into an endemic, has exacerbated a worsening workforce crisis; our sector is losing staff members to less risky work environments that offer far more competitive salaries to recruit and retain staff. In pre-COVID times, our median wage was \$27,736 compared to the median wage in all other industries of \$40,557. Notwithstanding, the human service sector has valiantly fought to keep programs open and provide quality services to the public. It has not been easy or, in some cases, possible. Even with an amazing essential workforce, the sector doesn't have enough staff to provide optimal services, meaning clients and program participants are not receiving all that they should be. With vacancy rates reaching 30 to 40% or more, the sector's options are few. Let's be candid – providers need higher rates to support more competitive compensation and benefits.

Our sector appreciates the considerable efforts that the Baker Administration and Legislature have made in investing more funding into the system. Today, the administration is proposing at least another \$230 million in the Chapter 257 Reserve for FY '23. It is helpful, but let's look at the numbers; as inflation has climbed to 7.5%, the \$230 million proposed reserve may bring some direct worker median wages to \$16.79 an hour. However, providers reported that they need at least \$17.53 an hour to just stay even with their actual expenses. And I think that number is insufficient and they will require much more to hire an adequate workforce. Lyft advertises that their Boston drivers earn up to \$33 an hour.

We must do better for our state's "other first responders" who – with higher education credentials and specialized training – provide mental health care, homelessness and emergency services, child protection and other essential services, including for those with disabilities. Our providers will formulate a request for a more adequate budget solution. As Dr. Fauci said, "We've got to do what it takes to get it done." Fortunately, the state now has the financial resources to realize our values of fairness and caring. Let's get it done. It has been too long.



*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, highlighting our amazing human services professionals.*

**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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## ‘The Time is Right for Social Work’ is March theme for NASW

By Rebekah Gewirtz

Massachusetts is home to 27,000 of the nation’s almost 720,000 social workers, who are committed to enhancing human well-being by working to make our communities more just and equitable places to live, work and thrive.

This call to service has never been more important as we have navigated our way through a pandemic that has exacerbated so many of our social ills and exposed the cracks in the systems and services intended to be a balm for those ills.

You can find social workers in every pocket of our Commonwealth working to empower people with the skills, knowledge, resources and encouragement to overcome some of life’s most pressing challenges. Simultaneously, you can find social workers working upstream to address the root causes of the problems that clients and communities experience.

**This duality and ability to provide direct intervention while working to prevent the need for intervention is unique to and engrained within the social work profession.** Social workers are taught to meet people where they are while also working with them within the context of their environment.

Social workers bring this training and lens to every practice setting imaginable, whether it be in hospitals, community health centers, nursing homes, veterans centers, schools, child welfare settings, jails and prisons, nonprofits or government agencies.

We are proud of this legacy and even prouder to lift up and advocate with social workers in Massachusetts who so deeply embody this work. These are social workers like Erin McAleer, the president & CEO of Project Bread, a nonprofit committed to eradicating hunger, and Carla Monteiro, a former candidate for Boston City Council who ran on the understanding that social work practice is well-suited to inform policy decisions and that a social worker is needed to close the gaps in city services.

McAleer, Monteiro and the thou-

sands of other social workers in Massachusetts work every day to make our state a better place. This is especially true now as social workers are on the frontlines of our compounding crises of access to mental health services, racism, economic inequality, climate change and so much more.

And this is precisely why the theme for Social Work Month this March is “The Time is Right for Social Work.” Social workers continue to lead the way in helping society through our toughest challenges. While social workers are uniquely able to meet these challenges, the demands on the profession are unmanageably high. This strain puts social workers at a great risk for burnout. **We need agencies to commit to hiring more social workers to lighten the load and to paying social workers higher and more equitable salaries.** We also need agencies to join us in the fight for policy change that can alleviate the demands on social workers on the federal and state levels.

Consider contacting your lawmakers and urging them to support the Improving Access to Mental Health Act and the Social Work Reinvestment Act, legislation that would support the profession on a national scale. On the state level, we need you alongside us as we advocate for the Mental Health ABC Act. 2.0, which would have mental health care be treated like physical health care, forgive social workers’ loans and aid anti-poverty efforts like the Lift Our Kids campaign and the SNAP Gap campaign -- efforts that would lighten the burden of things social workers must do to help clients and communities meet their most basic needs.

Together, we must thank social workers for carrying the weight of the world, while advocating for ways to lighten the load. If ever there was a time for social work, it is now.

*Rebekah Gewirtz is the executive director of the Massachusetts Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.*

## Nonprofits are getting out the vote for an inclusive democracy

By Brian Miller

In 2021, the Urban Institute conducted a nationwide survey of nonprofits to better understand how the pandemic affected factors like nonprofit finance and staffing. Buried in that survey was a largely unrelated question that has provided us at Nonprofit VOTE, and others who care about fostering an inclusive democracy, new insights into the role nonprofits are playing in promoting greater participation in our elections, especially among historically underrepresented communities.

A deep dive into the data, unpublished until this month, shows that one out of five nonprofits do nonpartisan voter engagement, including voter registration and get-out-the-vote work. However, engagement levels go up significantly for nonprofits serving communities of color. Among nonprofits that primarily serve Black or Hispanic communities, roughly one-third do voter engagement (35% and 34% respectively). Among nonprofits led by people of color, engagement levels climb even further. About two-fifths (39%) of nonprofits with majority people of color boards do voter engagement, while half of nonprofits with Black or Hispanic CEOs do voter engagement work (48% and 50% respectively).

These findings and more are part of a new report from Nonprofit VOTE entitled, “America’s Nonprofits Get Out the Vote,” available at [www.NonprofitVOTE.org/Americasnonprofits-GOTV/](http://www.NonprofitVOTE.org/Americasnonprofits-GOTV/). These findings are testament to the key role that nonprofits — including food pantries, health centers, family service agencies and more — are playing in challenging historic gaps in voter participation along the lines of race and income, which distort both our democracy and the policy debates that flow from it. And the scale of these gaps cannot be understated, with the Brennan Center reporting that 71% of white voters cast ballots in 2020, significantly higher than the share of Black, Hispanic and Asian-American voters who cast ballots (63%, 54% and 60% respectively) nationally.

We know from our work with nonprofits across the country that helping the communities they serve secure a seat at the table is a key motivating factor for their voter engagement work. The Urban Institute data, including the

strong link between the demographic makeup of the community a nonprofit serves and its likelihood of doing voter engagement, reinforces this long held understanding of what motivates a nonprofit to step up in the civic space.

In stepping up, some nonprofits are no doubt weighing in on current fights around restrictive voting policies being advanced around the country, as well as positive reforms moving forward here in Massachusetts. But it must be stated that good elections laws alone, though important, won’t close voting gaps along race and income lines, as they are driven largely by other factors, like who is and is not contacted about elections. To close these gaps, we need both good policy as well as the social ecosystems to engage voters where they are, one-by-one where necessary, to pull them back from the brink of political alienation and into the democratic process.

That’s why nonprofits, including human service providers, are so critical to this work. By and large, they have trust, long-term relations and deep roots in the very same communities that have been historically underrepresented in our democracy. And thankfully for democracy the timing of these revelations couldn’t be better, with the Urban Institute’s data showing nonprofits serving underrepresented communities are en masse recognizing the unique role they can play and are stepping up to help solve this critical challenge.

The survey does not get into the details of how voter engagement is integrated into the nonprofits work, but we know from experience it can take many forms. Some nonprofits conduct voter registration year-round as part of client intake. Others focus on short drives in the lead up to the election — often in the waiting room of the nonprofit itself— or use their communications to send out election reminders and information on voting early, by mail or in person. All of this work is part of the civic ecosystem that sustains our collective democracy and highlights the critical role nonprofits across the nation have to play in its stewardship.

*Brian Miller is the executive director of Nonprofit VOTE.*

## Pandemic has huge impact on behavioral health – and it’s not all bad

By Marsha Medalie

We all know that the COVID-19 pandemic has taken a huge toll on the mental health of our population nationwide, and Massachusetts is no exception. Studies have shown alarming but predictable elevated rates of behavioral health problems. Since the beginning of the pandemic, more than one-third of adults reported symptoms of anxiety and/or depression, 56% of young adults reported signs of anxiety and/or depression, 25% of young adults began or increased substance use and 26% of young adults had thoughts of suicide, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation and the U.S. Census Bureau. The stress, isolation, disruption and losses caused by the pandemic have had a tremendous effect – especially on young people and marginalized communities already impacted by economic and healthcare disparities. The

additional impact of the social unrest and political and cultural divides our country has been experiencing for the last several years has added to the stress, especially for people of color. Providers across Massachusetts have done our best to meet the need, but keeping up has proven extremely difficult.

Access to behavioral health services has been a national crisis for many years. Even in Massachusetts, where we have more clinicians per capita and a richer behavioral health public benefit than many states, there have been long waiting lists for outpatient therapy, medication management and, as has often been in the news, inpatient psychiatric beds for children and adults. The problem has been here for many years, but the pandemic both exacerbated and exposed it.

Long-term underfunding of community behavioral healthcare, such as outpatient mental health and addiction services, has negatively impacted providers’ ability to attract and retain clinicians and

other staff, as well as their ability to cover operating costs of opening and maintaining licensed clinics and other programs. Community behavioral health services are essential if we are to help people with the most significant and complex mental health and substance use challenges. Fortunately, the Baker administration and the Massachusetts legislature have identified the crisis in access and are committed to addressing the problem through innovative legislation and programming like Community Behavioral Health Centers.

But while the pandemic has unquestionably made the crisis in access far worse than it has been, it has also brought some silver linings. For one thing, providers learned telebehavioral healthcare quickly and well, accelerating our knowledge and abilities probably by many years. This has meant greater access to care, especially for people hampered by transportation issues, work schedules, childcare responsibilities and a general reluctance to show up at an office.

At Riverside Community Care, our five Outpatient Centers made the transition to telehealth within days of the nationwide shutdown, and performed 10,000 more appointments in 2020 (the first year of the pandemic) than the previous year – the vast majority over telehealth. Additionally, we’ve found that telehealth is working; in a Riverside survey of people served by our outpatient programs, 92% of the 684 respondents reported that their needs were being met via telehealth.

Also, many more people today are talking openly about their mental health challenges, lessening the stigma so that it is now more likely that individuals will acknowledge that they are struggling and seek help. As stigma lessens, people are also beginning to demand that behavioral health services be as available as physical health services, and as news articles abound about the national mental health crisis, it is pushing some businesses, insurers and public and private payors to reassess

their benefits packages and rates. Employers who in the past shortsightedly shunned the idea of generous mental health benefits are re-evaluating, and many are beginning to recognize that employees are now expecting the workplace to help support mental well-being for themselves and their families.

Riverside’s MindWise Innovations – our division that provides behavioral health consultation, screenings and trainings with corporations, schools and universities across the country and the globe – has seen a significant increase in employers’ interest in learning how to encourage a healthier and thus more productive and engaged workforce.

The adage that crisis is opportunity may be happening in the behavioral healthcare field, spurring change and a new urgency to improve access. I certainly hope so.

*Marsha Medalie is the Chief Executive Officer of Riverside Community Care.*

# BILLS: Council legislation goes to Ways & Means; State House reopens

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causes of our sector's workforce crisis."

The Council's Fair Pay for Comparable Work bill would eliminate the pay disparity between community-based human services workers and state employees who do similar work, which has progressively worsened to the point that recruiting and retaining high-quality workers is now a colossal challenge for providers.

In November, when Weekes, state legislators and executives from several member organizations testified in favor of the Fair Pay bill during a hearing with the Joint Committee, Weekes explained that the state has reported paying an average weekly wage of \$1,274 to state employees in the individual and family services area, while the community-based human services sector has reported paying average wages of just \$548.

"This is a pay gap of more than 130 percent, which is an insurmountable challenge to our workforce crisis," he said.

Pathlight Executive Director Ruth Banta also said that four of Pathlight's nurses had left to work at state-operated homes in the previous 18 months, primarily because her organization is funded by the state at a rate of \$31 per hour for a nurse, but the state pays its own nurses between \$34 and \$57 an hour.

"We just really want the level playing field for wages," Banta said in November. "We know we've got the difference in benefits and all these other things, but to have such wage discrepancies for the very similar work just really puts us at a disadvantage with the state, who are our primary

purchaser — They're our regulators and our competitors."

As for the Council's loan repayment legislation, it would create a program to help human services workers pay back their student loans, which would be in addition to the \$16.5 million loan repayment program the Council already secured in the American Rescue Plan Act spending plan.

By advancing these bills, the Council is closer to eliminating the pay disparity and creating loan repayment opportunities, thereby strengthening the community-based human services workforce that fills more than 180,000 jobs and serves one-in-ten residents of the Commonwealth.

## State House Reopening

Aside from bills moving forward, another major development from Beacon Hill was that in late February the State House reopened to the public for the first time since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, making it the last state capitol building in the country to reopen after shuttering in March of 2020.

Senate President Karen Spilka and House Speaker Ronald Mariano said in a joint statement that to enter the State House members of the public must wear masks and show proof of COVID-19 vaccination or a negative test taken no more than one day prior to entry.

"With public health data constantly evolving, we will review these requirements on a weekly basis," Mariano and Spilka said on Feb. 14 when first announcing the reopening, according to the *State House News Service*.

## A VIEW FROM THE HILL

A commentary from a legislator on human services



# House-passed VOTES Act would expand voter access

Rep. Natalie M. Blais

In July 2020, the Massachusetts Legislature passed legislation to implement an early vote-by-mail system, expand early voting periods and make in-person voting safer and more efficient. This work was necessary and driven by a commitment to fair and free elections during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Breaking down barriers for voters resulted in record turnout in the Nov. 3 general election. In total, over 3.6 million ballots were cast, breaking the previous turnout record in 2016 by nearly 300,000 votes. According to data from the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office, roughly 41 percent of Massachusetts voters opted to cast ballots by mail and 23 percent chose to vote early in-person.

At a time when other states are tightening restrictions to make it harder for voters to cast ballots, Massachusetts is building on its commitment to expand voter access. Last month, the House passed the VOTES Act (H.4359). In a victory for democracy, legislators voted 124 to 34 to extend the reforms implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic and adopt new measures to ensure voting is accessible and secure for every resident of our commonwealth.

The bill strengthens provisions already in place for Massachusetts residents, including pre-registration for teenagers, automatic voter registration, online voter registration and early voting.

The House-passed version of the VOTES Act also makes permanent mail-in voting for all voters and early in-person voting on weekdays and weekends, expands automatic voter registration, allows for the continued use of ballot drop boxes and increases digital access for online ballot requests.

Additionally, the bill reduces the voter registration deadline from 20 to 10 days before an election, giving eligible voters more time to register. This is a particularly important provision for new voters and residents who have recently moved. Coupled with early voting, this provision will allow residents to register to vote and vote on the same day for a block of time leading up to the election.

An amendment, sponsored by Representative Liz Miranda (D-Boston), to ensure that incarcerated individuals are informed of their voting rights passed with overwhelming support. As a result, correctional facilities will be required to provide information on the right to vote for eligible incarcerated individuals. In addition, voter registration and vote-by-mail assistance must be provided.

The legislation protects the rights of people with disabilities as well, by requiring accessibility accommodations based on disability and language needs.

The House-passed VOTES Act requires the Secretary of the Commonwealth to analyze the policy and fiscal impacts to the commonwealth and to each city and town related to the implementation of Same Day Voter Registration.

Recognizing the unique needs of our rural communities, the VOTES Act includes provisions for towns across the state that continue to use paper ballots and ballot boxes.

The Senate passed similar legislation and a conference committee has been appointed to negotiate a final bill for consideration by both chambers.

During this time of transition, our town clerks have continued their efforts to ensure our elections are safe and accessible for everyone in our communities. They have been steadfast partners, providing feedback to legislators to improve systems and make government work better for the citizens we serve.

Protecting and expanding voter rights are of paramount importance to our democracy. Buoyed by the millions of Massachusetts residents who took advantage of expanded voting opportunities in the 2020 election, the legislature has once again taken decisive action to break down barriers to the ballot box and expand voter access.

For more information, you can visit the Secretary of the Commonwealth website at [www.sec.state.ma.us](http://www.sec.state.ma.us). You can also call 1-800-462-VOTE or email [elections@sec.state.ma.us](mailto:elections@sec.state.ma.us) with questions or concerns.

In the meantime, please mark your calendar for these important dates:

### STATE PRIMARY:

Aug. 17 - Voter Registration Deadline  
Aug. 30 - Vote by Mail Application Deadline  
Sept. 6 - State Primary

### STATE GENERAL ELECTION:

Oct. 19 - Voter Registration Deadline  
Nov. 2 - Vote by Mail Application Deadline  
Nov. 8 - State General Election

Rep. Blais represents the First Franklin District.

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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## TLI: Mentoring initiative helps many

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mentee with TLI in 2014 and was paired with Justice Resource Institute President and CEO Andy Pond.

Roulier said that Pond was “exceptionally skilled” at asking questions rather than providing a direct answer, which assisted her in practicing decision-making and reflection in a safe environment.

“The Leadership Initiative gave me a safe space to not only ask questions but, more importantly, talk about real-life scenarios I was encountering in the nonprofit workplace every day,” she said. “My mentor supported and challenged me in my thinking, which resulted in better decision-making, more confidence in my leadership and a deeper understanding of the careful balancing act of nonprofit leadership in a complex world.”

Over the years, TLI mentees have represented a wide range of roles from within the sector, including clinical directors, residential coordinators, therapeutic counselors, operations managers and recruiting specialists. Likewise, TLI mentors bring a vast pool of wisdom and leadership experience through executive roles within their agency.

This year, the Council is recruiting

mentors and mentees for the 2022 TLI cohort. In addition to monthly mentoring sessions, pairs will receive a regular newsletter with resources to support their growth and leadership journey, as well as access to cohort-wide events.

Both Robery and Roulier strongly recommended their colleagues enroll with TLI, saying that they still stay in touch with their mentors and that the program inspired them to become mentors to others as well.

“Education is important and a privilege, and the Providers’ Council provides that privilege to people who might not otherwise have it,” Robery said. “I’ve really tried to impress on people that I’ve mentored or folks that I supervise that they need to take advantage of the program, because it really does round you out, give you a lot of experience and get you ready for that next level so you can kind of go into it with more confidence.”

“Why wouldn’t you utilize this mentorship program?” Roulier added. “A mentor’s only purpose is to support you, and if you’re looking to grow professionally, it’s a win-win.”

Those interested in joining the program can learn more by visiting [bit.ly/TLI\\_Program](http://bit.ly/TLI_Program) or by reaching out to Mesa Merritt at [mesa@providers.org](mailto:mesa@providers.org).

## FORUM: LG event planned for May

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tions have been sent to business leader and educator Bret Bero, Salem Mayor Kim Driscoll, State Representative Tami L. Gouveia, State Senator Adam Hinds and State Senator Eric Lesser. All declared candidates for Lieutenant Governor are Democrats.

Craig Sandler, the managing partner of State House News Service, has agreed to moderate the forum. The moderator will direct all questions to the candidates or introduce questions from members of the audience; the candidates will not be permitted to question each other.

While the Council expects to have extremely limited in-person capacity due to social distancing guidelines and

to ensure safety protocols are followed, the organization plans to record the forum for distribution with its membership and the broader human services community.

“If members of the human services community are not ready to attend an in-person event, we will record the forum to ensure they’re able to hear what candidates seeking to represent them have to say about the community-based human services sector,” Weekes added.

Before the afternoon forum, the Council will elect directors and officers to fill vacancies on its board of directors at its Annual Membership and Business Meeting. Council members will be asked in March to fill out the proxy form.

## TCF: Caring Force orientation video encourages membership in initiative

Continued from Page 1

state funding.

“Joining The Caring Force has shown me the power of strength in numbers when communicating with lawmakers. Together we submit testimony at hearings, hold annual rallies, and organize campaigns to bring more attention to the human services sector and the needs of the thousands of people receiving services,” Feika said in the TCF’s orientation video. “If you are not a member of The Caring Force, I strongly encourage you to join.”

The initial idea for the orientation video came from a meeting with TCF Captains in November 2021, who felt it would carry more weight to have direct care workers explain why others should join The Caring Force rather than just executives do it on orientation day. The Providers’ Council loved the idea and began working a video production team to make it a reality.

The video begins with Providers’ Council President and CEO Michael Weekes explaining the origin of The Caring Force and TCF Chair Lydia Todd speaking about some of its major achievements, including successfully advocating for \$30 million dollars of the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) spending bill to go toward a student loan repayment program and a recruitment and retention grant program, specifically for human services.

“This sector truly supports our “Common Wealth” in Massachusetts – our state’s residents. And no one has a more important role in our state’s over-

all health, safety and development than you,” Weekes said in the video.

“Our advocacy over the years has shown me how powerful we can be when we come together to effect change,” added Todd, executive director of NFI Massachusetts.

Two TCF rising stars featured in the video were Feika and Ashley Sproul, a peer specialist at Advocates, who each talked about their experiences with TCF and why others should join as well.

“I was first introduced to The Caring Force while receiving services at Advocates. The staff who worked with me joined The Caring Force to share their experiences of being overburdened and underpaid and the real need for supportive legislation. Now as a member of the workforce and The Caring Force, I’ve witnessed how sharing my experiences at an annual Caring Force Rally led to more funding for the sector and greater dialogue with legislators,” Sproul said. “When wages reflect the dedication and commitment human services workers put in every day, I feel that greatly improves the services that are provided across the board.”

The filming of the orientation video took place in late January in the Council’s office and will be released in the coming weeks.

The Caring Force, a coalition of human services supporters who care about creating a more effective and unified human services sector for all, was created by the Providers’ Council in 2011. Today, it has more than 30,000 members across the Commonwealth.



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CALENDAR OF EVENTS • WINTER/SPRING 2022

What: Emerging Leaders: Stay and Grow in Human Services

When: Tuesday, March 8

Time: 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Presenters: Jim Ognibene, M.Ed, Visioneer Consulting

Where: Online via Zoom

Cost: \$70 for members; \$130 for non-members

What: Free, Members-Only Webinar: Cybersecurity Primer for Nonprofits

When: Thursday, March 31

Time: 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Presenters: Brian Giganti, Partner, Citrin Cooperman Advisors LLC; Dr. Suzanne Miller, Partner, Citrin Cooperman Advisors LLC; Kevin Ricci, Principal, Citrin Cooperman Advisors LLC

Where: Online via Zoom

Cost: Free for Providers' Council members

SAVE THE DATE — MEMBERS ONLY EVENT

What: Providers' Council Annual Membership & Business Meeting and Lieutenant Governor Forum

When: Monday, May 2

Time: AMBM in morning; Forum beginning around noon

Where: Beechwood Hotel, 363 Plantation St., Worcester

Cost: TBD

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

Please visit 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.

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