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THE PROVIDER



Vol. 41 - No. 9

The Newspaper of the Providers' Council

Momentum building for Providers' Council's *SpeakUp4Equity* virtual event Oct. 27-30

Headliners include Martin, Baker, Pressley, Sudders and more. Receive group discounts when your team registers at www.providers.org

Momentum is building for the upcoming Providers' Council's 45th Annual Convention & Expo, *SpeakUp4Equity*, to be held virtually from Oct. 27 to Oct. 30.

Typically the largest gathering of its type in the Northeast, this year's virtual event will feature Dr. Atyia Martin, CEO and Founder of All Aces, Inc., as a keynote. Dr. Atyia Martin is a Distinguished Senior Fellow at Northeastern University's Global Resilience Institute. She has over 19 years of experience in resilience, applied learning, social and organizational equity, emergency management, public health and intelligence.

Dr. Martin will appear on Thursday, Oct. 29, during the morning session. Dr. Martin is a Distinguished Senior Fellow at Northeastern University's Global Resilience Institute. She has over 19 years of experience in resilience, applied learning, social and organizational equity, emergency management, public health and intelligence.

The COVID-19 pandemic is expected to have a profound impact on food insecurity across the nation. In Massachusetts alone, an estimated 15 percent of the state's residents will be considered food insecure by the end of 2020, according to Feeding America, the nation's largest hunger-relief organization.

More than 54 million Americans may find themselves staring at sparse or empty plates before 2020 is over – nearly a 46 percent increase than before the pandemic.

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State Representative Russell E. Holmes (second from left) dropped off donations at the Boston donation center of More than Words last month and greeted More Than Words Youth Leaders Yonis (far left), Raquaun and Kenny (far right).

Seeking troublemakers
EDITORIAL:
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October 2020

GOTV is vital in advance of Nov. 3 ballot

Due in large part to the COVID-19 pandemic, Massachusetts residents will have more ways than ever this fall to cast a ballot in the Nov. 3 general election.

Residents are able to vote by mail by requesting a mail-in ballot from the Secretary of the Commonwealth's office, take part in early voting in-person from Oct. 17 through Oct. 30 or cast their ballot in person on Tuesday, November 3.

The deadline to register to vote in the general election is also later than ever before, on Oct. 24, 10 days before the election.

The Providers' Council has been heavily involved with voter registration efforts, encouraging members to register to vote and make a plan to cast their ballot in November.

In September, the Council urged members to appoint CareVote Captains to be the point person for encouraging non-partisan voter engagement at their organization.

GOTV, see page 7

MTW making a difference

across Massachusetts, advocates say

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PROVIDERS' NEWS AND NOTES

Square One CEO Joan Kagan to retire at year's end

Joan Kagan, president and CEO of Springfield-based **Square One**, will retire Dec. 31 after leading the organization since 2003.

She will continue to serve as an advisor to the organization to support the leadership team during transition. A search committee has been established to identify her successor.

During Kagan's tenure, Square One expanded its service offerings from childcare to a full range of family-support services, building on her 45-year career as a family social worker. The agency, which traces its roots back to 1883, offers parent education, support and training programs, home visitation and personalized case management. "When you think about the non-profit community in western Massachusetts, the name Joan Kagan immediately comes to mind," said Peter Testori, chair of Square One's board of directors. "For decades, Joan has been a champion for the well-being and education of our region's children. Her passion and commitment have positively impacted the lives of thousands of children and families."

New interim executive director at Fairwinds

Michael Kellerman has been named interim executive director of **Fairwinds-Nantucket's Counseling Center**, replacing Tessandra de Alberdi who served in the post for a decade.

Prior to joining Fairwinds, Kellerman served as executive vice president



at Gemma Services and director of strategic partnerships at the Pew Charitable Trusts in Washington, DC. Kellerman holds a Master of Public Affairs from the University of Texas at Austin, and a bachelor's degree from The New School University in New York.

Yates becomes interim president and chief executive of Hope House

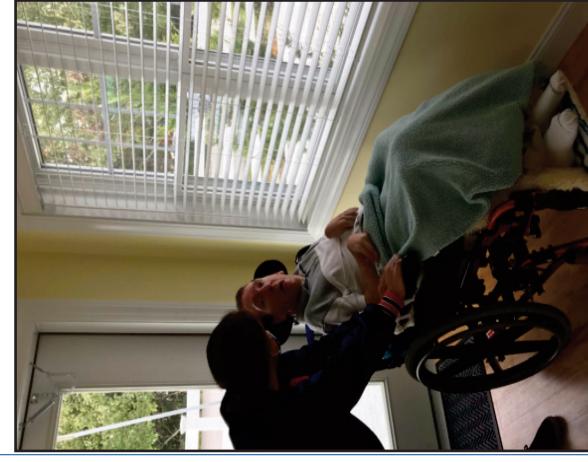
Paul Yates has assumed the role of Interim President and Chief Executive Officer at **Hope House Addiction Services**. Yates is an 18-year staff member and served most recently vice president of operations.

"Paul is a proven leader with a firm commitment to our mission and has the experience, skills, integrity and vision to lead us into the next chapter. We are excited that Paul will assume this important role ensuring a seamless transition to our future," the agency's Board of Directors said in a statement. Eileen Maguire will serve as the chief operating officer at Hope House, managing clinical services. Hope House is the oldest, and among the largest, residential treatment programs in Massachusetts for adults with substance use disorder.

Council welcomes new members 18 Degrees and Bay State Community Services

The Council is pleased to welcome two new members! Formerly Berkshire Children & Families, Inc., new member **18 Degrees** operates out of

Lifeworks residence in Westwood opens



Left: A staff member helps an individual enter Lifeworks' new residential program in Westwood in September. Right: The ranch-style house, which opened earlier this year, is staffed by nurses 24/7 and is designed to support five individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities that have complex medical needs. Lifeworks built the house through a collaboration with DDS, MassHealth, the Town of Westwood, and The Green Company, a Newton-based real estate firm that donated the land.

West Springfield, serving communities throughout Western Massachusetts. President & CEO Colleen Holmes leads the organization. Its mission is to promote the well-being of children and youth, and the strength of families, to build better communities in western Massachusetts. Learn more about them at www.18degreesma.org.

We are also pleased to welcome **Bay State Community Services** as a Council member. The south shore organization was formed in 1991 as a merger of five long-standing community agencies (Survival Inc., South Shore Council on Alcoholism, Mayflower Mental Health Association, Center for Community Counseling and Education, and Billings Human Services.) BSCS also operates three Community Centers south of Boston. President & CEO Daurice Cox leads the organization. Its mission is to support the unique needs of human service providers.

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PROVIDER PROFILES

CENTRO

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About the Agency

CENTRO was founded in 1977 as Centro Las Americas by a group of volunteers from Puerto Rico.

Its original mission was to serve, empower and advocate for Puerto Ricans in the Greater Worcester area.

In the years that followed, CENTRO's mission and the community it serves evolved. It was quickly realized that all Latinos, immigrants and minorities in the area could benefit from the services offered by CENTRO. In response to the changing needs of our target population, a rebrand was needed. Centro Las Americas transformed into CENTRO Inc. and has evolved into a tri-national, fully integrated, health and human services delivery system.

CENTRO is the largest minority-led, community-based, multiservice, multicultural, multilingual, non-profit organization in central Massachusetts. It serves more than 3,500 individuals and families in over 51 cities and towns in Massachusetts and provided over 24,000 incidents of client contact services in FY '19.

Today, more than 40 percent of the clients we serve are non-Latinos. The three operating divisions of CENTRO are CENTRO Family Services, our legacy LTSS programming to support individuals and families; OneHealth, our expanding health care division; and our wholly-owned subsidiary, the New Americans Community Development Corporation, founded by CENTRO's CEO Juan A. Gomez.



A CENTRO staff member prepares packages of food provisions and stocks inventory to support the Worcester community and beyond.

Mission is to help central Mass. residents



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Through community support services, CENTRO offers assistance with permanent resident renewals, the citizenship process, case management services, as well as help with EBT, WIC, SNAP and MassHealth Applications. This division is also responsible for our Emergency Food Pantry Services, providing our community with emergency provisions in collaboration with the Worcester County Food Bank.

While currently inactive due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the community support division is also responsible for our Latino Elder Program. This offers seniors the opportunity to participate in health awareness programs, case management services, and recreational activities.

Our Family Support Centers are funded by the Department of Developmental Services. This program serves children and adults with developmental disabilities by providing assistance navigating available community resources, transitional coordination between schools, employment, respite programs, and shared living programs. Our Intensive Family Stabilization program provides culturally sensitive, intensive intervention by utilizing a team approach led by a master's-level clinician

and a BA/BS-level or equivalent case worker.

CENTRO's Health Programs include Shared Living, Behavioral Health, Adult Foster Care and Group Adult Foster Care. Shared Living is a model of care that allows adults with disabilities to choose to receive the support they need by joining a companion and becoming part of their home life. Our behavioral health services offer in-home therapy with a licensed clinician, therapeutic training & support, and Therapeutic Mentoring for children. The services are geared towards giving families the tools they need to address stressors encountered in daily life and to navigate behavioral issues. Our adult and group adult foster care program provides assistance to adults, 16 years and older, who because of illness, weakness, disability, or advanced age, cannot live safely at home alone.

In addition to these major divisions of CENTRO, there is also the Institute of Latino Arts & Culture, which is responsible for preserving and sharing Latino culture with the greater Worcester community.

SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

CCI staff rises to challenges

In hard times, Coastal Connections activity and individual support to engage in the community and enhance skills. Then in March, 2020, COVID-19 came and CCI was closed for what we thought would be three weeks. As weeks turned into months, we were faced with the harsh reality of laying off nearly 65 percent of our workforce. This was simply devastating. The remaining staff were simply superb, pivoting services to remote in a seamless manner.

On August 3, CCI reopened its day program with its 15 remaining staff members. Positivity and joy once again reigned. CCI salutes the integrity and resilience of this group of staff who have had to redefine their work amidst a pandemic and removal of so many colleagues and friends.

In spite of the challenges, when asked for a few words to describe the staff, the individuals we serve readily shared the following: "energetic, awesome, very friendly, very considerate, fantastic and fun." Their positive words, together with the loyalty of this staff, indeed make a difference in the lives of all people who connect with CCI now, and in the future.



CCI staff September 2020

Miranda: Committed to helping

Paola Miranda joined the **City Mission** team in 2017 and serves as its director of homelessness prevention.

She oversees all homelessness prevention programs including A Lift Up, Emergency Needs Network, A Path to Employment and the Public Voice Project. She supervises the case managers and other program support staff, meets with A Lift Up participants and accompanies them to housing court; works with landlords on issues around eviction; and keeps the department informed on housing related policies at the local, state and federal level.

"I have worked in the human service field for many years and I can unequivocally say that Paola is one of the finest staff persons I have worked with. She is competent, committed, and caring. She goes beyond the call of duty in service to our program participants," said Rev. June R. Cooper, City Mission's executive director.

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, Miranda jumped into action. She immediately designed and implemented a user-friendly system on the City Mission website in three languages so that people in need of basic necessities, such as cleaning products

SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

Miranda: Committed to helping

Paola Miranda joined the **City Mission** team in 2017 and serves as its director of homelessness prevention. She created a new section about COVID-19 with information and resources and quickly reached out to partner organizations to work together to help as many people as possible. "I have always been committed to challenging the status quo and creating positive change in people's lives. Homelessness prevention is the epitome of social justice, and it has given me the chance to strengthen my advocacy skills and learn effective strategies to impact our communities and systems at different levels," Miranda said.

In 2020, she graduated from the Executive Nonprofit Management and Leadership Program at Boston University School of Law as well as a Master's in Criminal Justice from Salem State University. She has been working in the nonprofit field for over ten years.

One of Miranda's greatest passions is learning new languages. While her native language is Spanish, she also speaks English, Italian, and Portuguese. She is a Latina from South America and has the ability to create meaningful relationships with people from different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds.

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EDITORIAL



Michael Weekes
President / Publisher

Need some troublemakers

As I watched the first presidential debate, misnamed as a debate, between Joe Biden and Donald Trump, it remained clear that this nation has candidates with two divergent perspectives of America's future from the presidential office.

Hopefully, on or before Nov. 3, you have voted for the best choice for you, your family and your community. As stated in last month's editorial, this will be "a most consequential election" and shame on you if you don't exercise the right.

Because high voter turnout is what we want from our primary readership audience—the Massachusetts human services sector—our CareVote campaign seeks to encourage our sector's clients, staff, volunteers and family members to be registered by October 24, and use what the late U.S. Rep. John Lewis called the "most powerful nonviolent tool we have"—your vote.

We need you to show up and turn out. Yes, turnout from all the "good" troublemakers. And that is not an oxymoron.

We lost Rep. Lewis last July, but he left us a rich legacy, infusing our humanity with respect, tolerance and justice for all in this nation. Part of the legacy was for us to embrace "good trouble." He famously exclaimed: "Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble."

Yes, he was indeed a troublemaker. At least that is how the state trooper viewed him as he fractured Lewis' skull during a 1965 protest at the Edmund Pettus bridge in Selma, Alabama referred to as "Bloody Sunday." It was a horrific event that magnified America's struggle with its original sin—racism.

But this sensationally graphic rejection of equality and justice witnessed throughout the world and with

follow up "troublemaking" actions by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. did prompt an attentive President Lyndon B. Johnson to take action and push through the Voting Rights Act of 1965 that was signed into law in August of that year.

And here we are 55 years later and voting suppression, subversion and hostile tactics remain alive in our society. We need troublemakers to insist that every American must vote, and their vote must be counted.

We, figuratively, stand on the shoulders of the good troublemakers like Dr. King, Fannie Lou Hamer, Rep. Lewis, and in earlier pursuits of women gaining the right to vote and equality, Susan B. Anthony and Sojourner Truth. And as a nation, we stand as more diverse than ever.

According to a Pew Research Center report, in all 50 states, the share of non-Hispanic White eligible voters declined between 2000 and 2018, with 10 states experiencing double-digit drops in the share of White eligible voters.

Similar research confirms the growing percentage of Hispanic, Black and Asian voters too. Further, nearly one-in-ten eligible voters are in the Gen Z (18-23 aged) cohort, and this bodes well for the future.

Regardless of your race, age or gender, be ready for "good trouble" and let's get America back on course with its true democracy. Maya Angelou—poet, author and playwright—referenced a Dr. King quote that "all progress is precarious" when sharing her thoughts on voting in 2012. "So don't sit on the sidelines," Angelou wrote. "Don't hesitate. Don't have any regrets. Vote."

If you need information on voting in Massachusetts, visit carevote.org or call 800.462.VOTE.

Join us to SpeakUp4Equity

The Council has embarked on a focused course of discovery and query to help us and our sector understand and heal from the pervasive and entrenched systemic racism in our society.

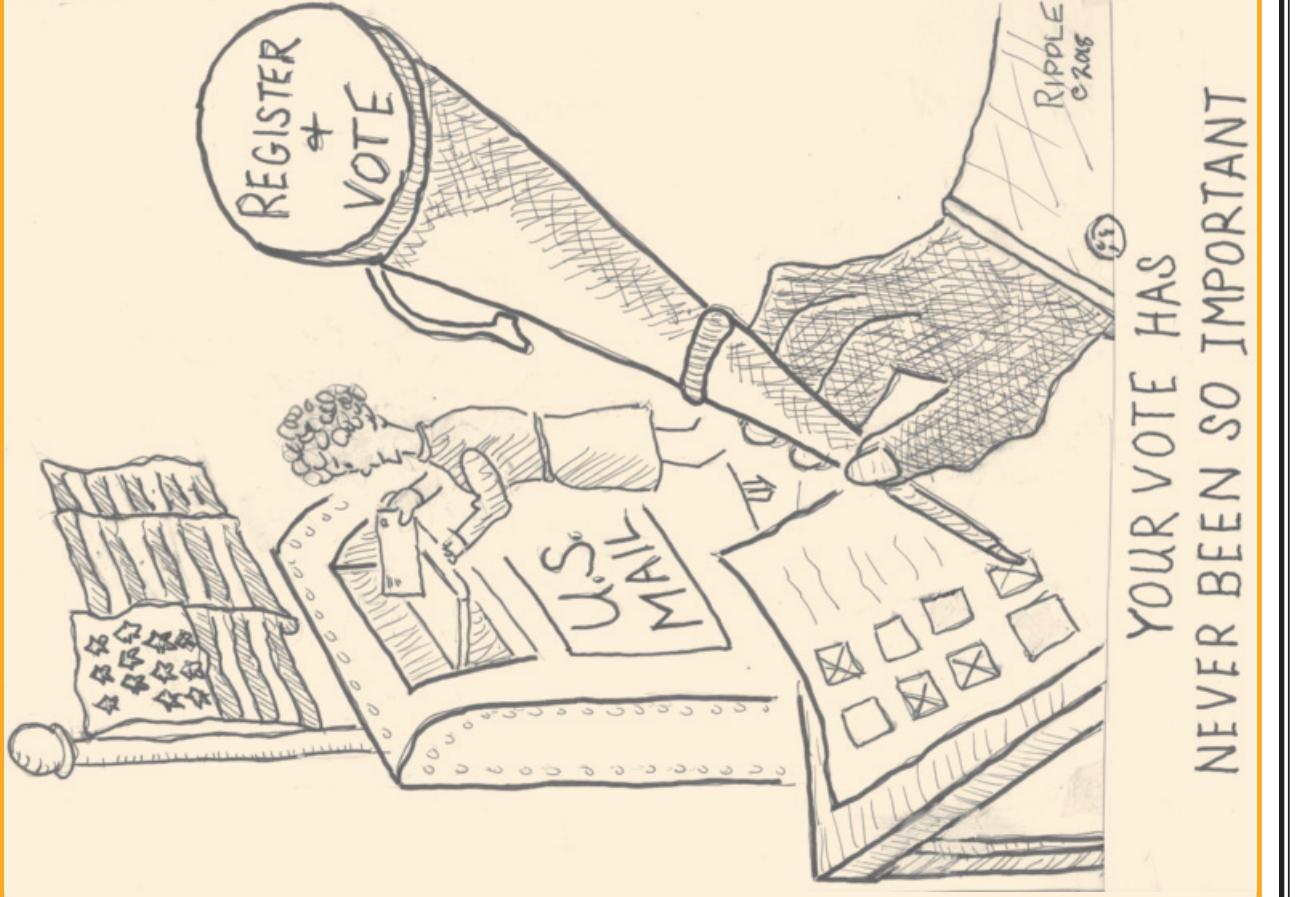
It permeates our social and economic structures, corroding the very ideals that are the framework of America's democracy—freedom, justice, equality and respect for all. Those who we support in our programs and efforts, often pushed to the margins of society, are too often disrespected or ignored. And far too often, they and the people that support them are people of color that seek equity.

It is racial equity that holds promise and it is in that spirit that our Race, Diversity and Inclusion Committee encouraged the theme of SpeakUp4Equity for our 45th Annual Convention & Expo. And while we are on this national journey for a "more perfect union" and we now better rec-

ognize that Black Lives Matter, join us. The Council constructed a definition, after reviewing and borrowing from many others, for racial equity that may be imperfect and may evolve. It helps us to discuss, listen, learn, educate and take action.

A partial definition of racial equity we are using to guide our work is, the "condition where one's race identity has no influence on how one fares in society. Race equity is one part of racial justice and includes the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes, and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race. A proactive counteraction of social and race inequities inside and outside of an organization."

We ask you to join us in promoting anti-racism. Join us October 27-30, throughout the next year and into the future. We can—no strike that, **we must**—make a difference.



YOUR VOTE HAS
NEVER BEEN SO IMPORTANT

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VIEWPOINTS FROM THE STATE

Telehealth, families and youth

By Lisa Lambert

When COVID-19 cases began accelerating earlier this year and stay-at-home advisories were put into place, families had to make rapid adjustments in order to access care, including mental health care, for their children via telehealth.

While telehealth was not developed to be rapidly implemented during a pandemic, it became a lifeline, sometimes an imperfect one, for families, youth and young adults.

Families shared anecdotes of their experience with telehealth and what did or did not work for them with us. Using this information, Parent/Professional Advocacy League sent out two short surveys - one for parents, one for young people - in mid-May 2020. More than 200 families and 30 young people ages 13-30 responded, weighing in on the benefits and drawbacks of telehealth.

The majority of families (91 percent) used telehealth for the first time in the two months prior to taking the survey, or mid-March to mid-May 2020. Similar to the parent responses, 61 percent of the youth and young adults reported their first telehealth visit had been in the previous two months.

The top obstacle reported by families was that they had little help with the apps or platform they needed to download before they could access telehealth. Sixty-seven percent reported they had to download an app, and 1-in-5 said they had to download multiple apps for different providers, even within the same agency. Some got an email which offered limited help. As a result, nearly 20 percent reported that their child missed one or more visits because of problems with the needed app.

Youth found the technology easier but were more critical of providers for their lack of help. However, almost one-third of youth also said they missed one or more appointments because of difficulties with the required app, which was higher than parents reported.

Access to the internet was not a major problem as most families (76 percent) told us they had a strong internet signal and access to needed devices. Quite a few parents stated that while their own internet connectivity was fine, their provider's connection was not, leading to interruptions in tele-

health visits. Undoubtedly, there are towns in Massachusetts with spotty bandwidth and that equally affects all users: parents, youth and providers alike.

The majority of families (62 percent) and youth (59 percent) said that care through telehealth was at least somewhat more effective than face-to-face visits. One parent wrote: "I love telehealth overall and would like to increase its use and effectiveness."

However, others cited a strong preference for face-to-face visits. Very few parents (15 percent) thought telehealth was a good method for delivering care in a crisis, although twice the number of young people (30 percent) thought otherwise.

Perhaps some of the hesitation around telehealth lies in the drawbacks identified by families. Parents said the greatest drawback was that their child lost interest during telehealth visits, followed by worries that the provider couldn't see all of the child and missed clues such as a child jiggling their feet or showing other nonverbal cues. One wrote that her daughter found it difficult to share her feelings through a screen.

Youth and young adults rated losing interest or focus during a remote visit as a top drawback. Lack of privacy was also a significant concern for youth and was highlighted by many young people. When parents were asked about the top benefits of telehealth, almost three-quarters (72 percent) said it was not having to travel or get their child into the car or on transportation. One mother wrote, "I hope telehealth is here to stay."

Families, youth and providers have all plunged into using telehealth as a standard way to deliver care. Once they began using it, some families and youth were enthusiastic, while some had reservations. Many found it difficult to change their idea of what it meant to "see" the doctor or therapist. But nearly all were grateful that the care continued, almost without interruption.

Read the full report at www.ppal.net

Lisa Lambert is executive director of the Boston-based Parent/Professional Advocacy League

Nonprofits vital in promoting voting

By Brian Miller

With the election rapidly approaching, it's incumbent upon nonprofits to ensure the communities they serve are represented at the polls and in our public debates. That means making sure they are registered to vote, that they know how to use the new mail-in ballots, and that they cast their votes early or on Election Day. The unfortunate truth is that if nonprofits don't, chances are, no one will.

Campaigns won't do it. The goal of candidates and political campaigns is to win an election, not foster an inclusive and representative electorate. With a win-or-lose election in front of them, they will invariably focus on their limited resources on people with a history of voting.

As a result, those deemed as "unlikely" voters – often low-income communities, communities of color, and young adults – get a fraction of the contact others do. Not being contacted, they don't vote, and then the cycle repeats itself.

Nonprofits, on the other hand, are often governed by missions and values that lift up inclusiveness, seek to strengthen the communities they serve, and grow leaders. On top of that, when the community served by a nonprofit shows up and votes, that nonprofit will be better equipped to accomplish its core mission. Across the nation, nonprofits are stepping up and building nonpartisan voter engagement into their core programs and community outreach work.

As the *Engaging New Voters* report from Nonprofit VOTE documents, nonprofits reach marginalized communities otherwise left out of the political process. Those engaged by nonprofits were twice as likely to be low-income, young, and people of color. Equally important, when nonprofits do engage the communities they serve, they vote at significantly higher rates. In the 2018 election, they showed an 11-percent-point advantage over their counterparts.

The COVID pandemic we face has only heightened the urgency of this work. As DMVs were shuttered and voter registration field programs put on hold during the first few months of the pandemic, millions of voter registrations

were no longer being registered or updated. Nonprofits across the nation, including United Way, Feeding America, YMCA, Goodwill, and others, stepped up to help ensure this year's National Voter Registration Day was a huge success. It was, but there's still work to do.

So, what can nonprofits do?

First, make sure the communities you serve are registered to vote. Voters in Massachusetts have until October 24 to register to vote or update their registration. That can easily be done online for those with a current driver's license. Others can register using paper forms which can be downloaded or gotten from a nearby elections office.

Second, nonprofits can help their communities make use of the new mail-in ballots. The last day to request mail-in ballots in Massachusetts is October 28. We strongly encourage voters to cast that ballot at least a week before the election. Voters can use the state's online ballot tracking system to verify their ballot has arrived and been counted.

Third, nonprofits can provide voters with nonpartisan candidate guides and resources like Vote411.org. Just make sure whatever guides you use are truly nonpartisan, and that they provide fair and balanced information on all the candidates.

Finally, nonprofits can send reminders about early voting times and on Election Day itself. Those last-minute reminders can include the national election protection hotline number, 866.OUR.VOTE, which will help people with unexpected issues they may face at the polls.

As nonprofits, we are a vital part of the communities we serve and a key part of our nation's civic fabric. It's time to step up and play our role in building a healthy democracy for the benefit of all.

Before, during and after COVID: Hunger is a “we” problem

By Jodi Falk

Since 1992, Rachel's Table in Springfield, Mass. has been focused on reducing food waste and alleviating hunger.

Before COVID-19, over 200 volunteers delivered food that was still healthy but not saleable, due to being close to expiration, leftover in a farm field, or in any other way unwanted.

This healthy and edible food was delivered to 50 agencies serving the food insecure in Hampden, Hampshire and Franklin Counties. Western Massachusetts, and Hampden County in particular, has one of the highest food insecurity rates in the state, according to a Feeding America study in 2020.

Special food purchasing programs like shelf-stable milk, protein and Thanksgiving meals complement the donated food to provide greater variety and support better nutrition.

Enter COVID-19. Food, water, and shelter are essential, and those providing these services, such as grocery workers, food rescue programs and food banks, were deemed essential to continue operating while most of us were sheltering in place. During the early stages of the pandemic, the food

supply chain was broken, or at best unpredictable, and at the same time unemployment was skyrocketing. The pandemic has led to Feeding America projecting that 54 million Americans may become food insecure. Families and individuals that had never done so before began waiting in lines at food pantries. Now, 1-in-4 children are food insecure.

During this time, Rachel's Table needed to completely change operations. Our volunteers are predominantly over the age of 60, and we were not willing to risk the health and safety of our volunteers or others in the community. We expanded our outreach to additional local partners with the capacity to recover what food was still available to donate, and we reinforced our purchase programs by introducing the Healthy Community Emergency Food Fund to deliver healthy protein, produce and milk to an increased in the number of agencies.

In addition, we began feeding front-line healthcare workers as an effort to thank them for putting their own lives on the line. We sponsored a virtual 5K walk/run which allowed anyone in the world to get fit while fighting hunger. Our efforts included partnering with

New England Dairy to distribute farm-fresh milk, distributing supermarket gift cards to families to support food security as well enabling individuals and families a choice to purchase culturally and personally desired food.

Hunger was already growing before the pandemic, and now the increasing gap between abundance and need is being widely experienced by more people, including the working poor, single mothers and people of color disproportionately affected.

We can continue to "feed the need" but will the story, or system, change to make this inequity less large, or less harmful? Are we considering this a "we" problem, rather than an "us" vs "them"?

Rachel's Table has been finding ways to support the eradication rather than just the mere alleviation of hunger. Judy Ingis, one of the founders of Rachel's Table, often states that our main goal is to make ourselves redundant. What are we doing? No solution can rest on one set of shoulders. This indeed is a "we" problem and it will need a "we" solution.

We are partnering with the Coalition to End Hunger to advocate for policy changes to support greater food

security in our region. Fighting for causes like fair wages is also an important step to recognizing the effect that the growing income gap has on so many of us. In our gleaning program, where volunteers who are typically not food insecure pick unharvested crops for donation to agencies feeding the food insecure, we are also inviting the residential programs we serve to come out to glean – for themselves, or others. We don't have to continue a one-way assumption of who can "give back."

Our Teen Board, whose mission is to educate themselves and others about childhood food insecurity in our area, has begun working with other local teen leaders in communities of color who have created their own organic gardens in the urban areas in which they live, some of which are considered "food deserts." The oft-used quote of this pandemic is that "we are in this together." We are, although differently. However, together, we can find a way out of hunger. It is upon us all to find that way.

Jodi P. Falk, PhD, is director of Rachel's Table, the food rescue program of the Jewish Federation of Western Massachusetts.

A VIEW FROM THE HILL

A commentary from a legislator on human services

Supporting our first responders during COVID-19

By Rep. James Arciero

In this new era of COVID-19, the way we view the world and how we act in it has changed.

Things we always took for granted as Americans, and as residents of Massachusetts, have had to be re-evaluated, and the way we live our daily, family and social lives has been greatly altered.

As this new threat has spread in our state, we in the Massachusetts House of Representatives have prioritized the needs of the Commonwealth in this pandemic. As members of the Providers' Council, our state's largest human services provider association, I am sure that you, as front-line workers assisting those in need, have also been confronting the challenges that COVID-19 poses to the important work that you do.

As the Massachusetts Legislature and Governor Baker have shifted their focus and attention to dealing with the pandemic and its impact on our residents, an important piece of legislation has gained momentum that will assist first responders on the front-lines of this battle. House Bill 2261: An Act Relative to Disability or Death caused by Contagious Diseases; Prescription was filed by Rep. Denise Garlick of Needham, myself and more than 45 of our legislative colleagues.

Specifically, this legislation will create a protection for police, firefighters and emergency medical service personnel who contract COVID-19 and other contagious diseases during the performance of their official duty. The bill provides that any public safety official who contracts, has symptoms of, or who otherwise becomes affected with COVID-19 which results in hospitalization, quarantine, or self-quarantine measures, will be presumed to have contracted their medical condition or incapacity to work in the line of duty.

The provisions of this section shall also apply to any condition of Hepatitis A, B, or C, Tuberculosis, HIV, and any other contagious disease which is found by the Commissioner of the Department of Public Health to impact the services of these first responders. In essence, we will be classifying these medical conditions as a work-related injury.

Our police, fire and EMS workers have been at the forefront of the fight against COVID-19. While many residents of Massachusetts were able to stop working or to pursue their employment from home, these dedicated officials had no such option. Day in and day out, they continued to work,

Rep. James Arciero represents the communities of Chelmsford, Littleton and Westford in the Second Middlesex 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.

HUNGER: Food insecurity expected to worsen in coming winter months

At the same time, her robust volunteer corps of local seniors and workers from Trial Court programs were suddenly unable to work due to pandemic restrictions. Citizens Inn recruited new volunteers, gratefully accepted help from local first responders and — through a grant from the cities of Salem and Peabody — was able to hire ten unemployed restaurant workers with food safety experience.

Vance said he was keeping a close eye on the impending end of the state's moratorium on evictions and the weather turning cold. "People will be having to choose, do I heat or eat?" Elders already see their limited incomes stretched on prescription drugs, rent, utilities and other things, Vance said.

"My message to people is to check cooking class last month in with elders because these people are scared to go out. Things feel like they opened up, but for our seniors who are afraid to be out and shop, it really hasn't opened up and people may be going without," he said.

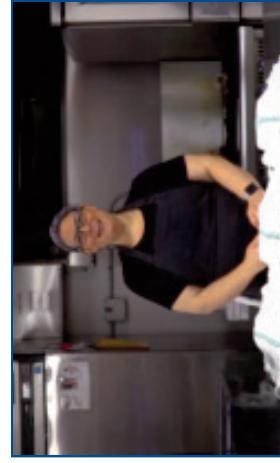
The Greater Boston Food Bank, which partners with a number of Council members, has distributed 40 million meals through this point in the year, a nearly 60 percent increase over the same time last year, "We are seeing over twice as many people are currently relying on our partner agency food pantries this summer than they did last summer," said Catherine Drennan, a spokeswoman for The Greater Boston Food Bank.

Many Council members around the state have created their own food relief programs, food pantries and meal service delivery to help alleviate COVID-related needs among clients and their families.

For example, Elder Services of the Merrimack Valley saw a 30 percent uptick in demand for meals among its population of vulnerable elders in the past six months, said its CEO Joan Hatem-Roy. For months, the agency has maintained a weekday delivery service that also encompasses a wellness check by staff.

Kate Benashski, program director of Peabody-based Citizen Inn's Haven from Hunger program, said she saw a sharp increase in need when the pandemic began, as more than 400 new families registered for services in March and April.

Read more in *Viewpoints on page 6: Hunger is a "we" problem before, during and after COVID-19 by Jodi Falk, Director of Rachel's Table. Rachel's Table is a program of the Jewish Federation of Western Massachusetts, a Providers' Council member.*



Haven from Hunger Assistant Program Director Brianne Jurs holding a virtual reality headset.

gram prerequisites during the pandemic to more quickly connect needy seniors to nutritious food. "You have to command the mayor for that," said Vance. "I think there are a lot of people who didn't need it before who are getting it now."

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Census will continue through Oct. 31

A federal judge has determined that the U.S. Census Bureau may continue its count for the 2020 Census until October 31, 2020.

The date was established in accordance with a timeline created after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.

However, the Trump administration issued guidance in late July, instructing the Bureau to finish the count on an expedited schedule.

Several lawsuits challenged the legality of this decision.

Massachusetts currently has over a 97 percent enumeration rate, although counting the remaining 3 percent of residents in time remained a priority at *Provider* press time for securing federal funding for hard-to-count communities and achieving accurate data that can guide state and federal policy decisions.

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CONVENTION: Council to offer more than 30 workshops to event attendees

Continued from Page 1

The annual Awards of Excellence and Peer Provider Awards will also be presented and dozens of exhibitors will be on hand at the convention's virtual exhibit hall to help organizations save time and money.

Attendees will be able to sign up for workshops and event programming through the Council's virtual platform, which will be available for iOS and Android devices. The app is available as a free download in each company's store, and users can find it by searching for "Providers' Council." Users will note the Council's trademark starburst is the app logo.

Diamond Sponsors USI Insurance Services and Citizens have returned for the virtual event, and People's United Bank has signed up as a Platinum Sponsor. Registration costs are \$90 for mem-

bers and \$160 for non-members; registration closes on Tues., Oct. 20. Groups of 10 or more people receive 10 percent off and groups of 20 or more receive 20 percent off.

Registrants do not need to indicate workshop preferences at this time, but Marylou Sudders each individual must have a unique email address to access our event platform. Once registrants use their email address to access the event platform, they will be able to register for workshops and add them to their daily schedule.

Register now to join us! Details of registration, workshops, speakers and more are posted on the Council's SpeakUp4Equity Convention & Expo page at www.providers.org and online at the event web platform. Once registered, all the information is available to view on the app.

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"We look forward to our community casting ballots to support caring communities on or before Nov. 3."

In addition to all of the congre-

sional and state races, there are two important questions on the ballot as well.

Question 1 concerns access to motor vehicle mechanical data, also known as "right to repair," and Question 2 is a proposal to implement a ranked choice voting system in Massachusetts.

Voters in Massachusetts set a

record in the state primary, casting more than 1.7 million ballots.

Nationally, more than 1.1 million ballots were cast by Sept. 29 in the Nov. 3 general election had already been cast by Sept. 29 in United States Elections Project.

With so much interest in voting, the Council plans to use its non-partisan

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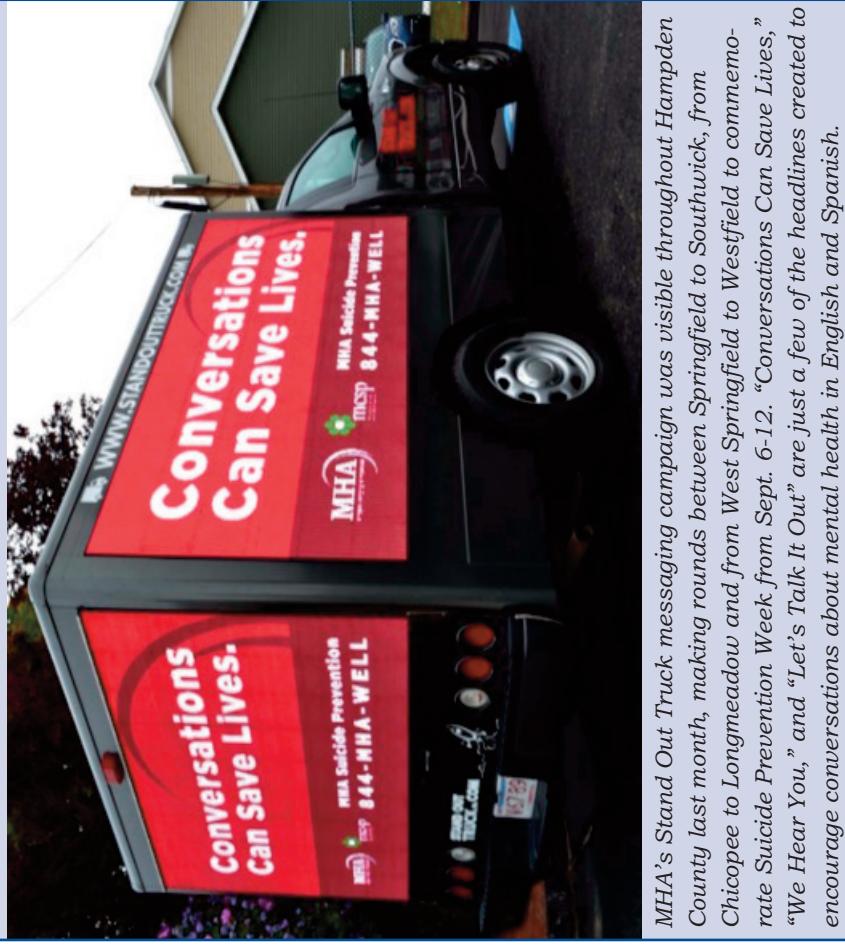
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MHA takes suicide-prevention messages to the streets



GOTV: Council seeks to "voterize" the human services sector

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In addition to all of the congre-

voter engagement initiative, CareVote, to ensure that human services workers, clients, families and staff have the information and reminders they need to access mail-in ballots and early voting. Organizations can assign CareVote Captains at their organizations by emailing ravi@providers.org.

Residents can check their voting status and/or register at the Secretary of the Commonwealth's website at www.sec.state.ma.us.

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What: **Unlocking Potential Through Organization Design** **When:** Thursday, October 8
When: 1 p.m.
Time: via Zoom
Where: Eric Curtis, Curtis Strategy
Trainer: *Free, members-only*
Cost:

What: **Managing Your Time, Talents and Productivity While Working From Home** **When:** Wednesday, October 14
When: 9 a.m.
Time: via Zoom
Where: Christine Singer, Your Personal Best
Trainer: *\$70 members, \$130 non-members*
Cost:

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Visit www.provider.org/events to learn more and register. Questions?
Contact Eliza Adams at 508.598.9700 or eadams@providers.org

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