

VIEW FROM THE HILL

*A commentary from the
Senate President*

Public health must include mental health

By Senate President Karen E. Spilka

With a global public health crisis and a country reeling from racial injustice, it's easy to talk about health and safety without seeing the full picture. Last year, I wrote of the overwhelming need for changes in attitude and policy regarding mental health.

Since then, events have further reinforced these ideas. Inadequate responses to isolation, anxiety and untreated mental illness due to the twin pandemics we face compound the toll on our lives and the wellbeing of the entire Commonwealth. Now more than ever, our work on public health must embrace all aspects of health - including mental and behavioral health.

This means that mental health efforts must be integrated with the safety measures we take to halt the virus' spread. We began these efforts last year, when the Massachusetts Senate dedicated over \$25 million in new funding to support expanded access to mental health services. These and other mental health supports protect physical health as well; the Department of Mental Health's Rental Subsidy Program, for example, funded at \$11 million, will help vulnerable people to remain in their homes during this crisis, thus limiting the spread of the virus.

With remote students less able to access counselors and support at school, the Senate passed legislation to increase mental health care access for children and committed an unprecedented \$94 million to services for

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*Senate President
Karen Spilka*

The Caring Force launched its "Essential Workers" campaign in December to thank human service workers and bring public awareness to the incredible efforts of dedicated caregivers who fill more than 180,000 jobs across Massachusetts.

The Caring Force, which has more than 28,000 members, is the grassroots advocacy initiative of the Providers' Council.

"More than ever, our numerous human service professional's heroic acts of courage and commitment should be commended by virtually every community in the Commonwealth," said Council President & CEO Michael Weekes. "There are lives in the balance. We need to make sure our essential staff are recognized as such by all."

As a first step, TCF will distribute eye-catching yard signs, hoping to reach a wide swath of Massachusetts communities with the message and provide a visual "shout out" to the industry's staff.

"Displaying the signs is a great way to fully engage your workforce, board and other stakeholders in thanking and recognizing human services workers across the Commonwealth while raising awareness of our sector," said Lydia Todd, executive director of NFI Massachusetts, and committee co-chair of The Caring Force.



TCF Co-chair Lydia Todd with one of the campaign's new yard signs

Next, TCF will create public service announcements that will provide information about the essential work done in the human services sector. The Council hopes its members will assist in identifying "Caring Force Ambassadors," staff, clients, family members, board members and even celebrities who may have a connection to the sector.

The ambassadors may also help provide testimony at the State House in support of the Council's legislative priorities: Fair Pay for Comparable Work and Student Loan Repayment legislation, scheduled to be filed this month.

An act relative to fair pay for comparable work will ensure human service workers doing the same work as state employees are receiving a similar rate of pay.

An act establishing an education loan repayment program for human services workers will give eligible human service workers up to \$150 month for up to four years while they are repaying a qualified education loan.

More information on the Essential Workers Campaign can be found on the Council's website at www.providers.org. Please reach out to Ravi Simon at rsimon@providers.org to discuss ideas for Caring Force Ambassadors, or if you would like to purchase lawn signs for your workers.

On Beacon Hill, budget delayed by COVID finalized; prep for FY '22 begins

While the end of the calendar year is normally very quiet on Beacon Hill, the completion of a state budget and the work of several legislative conference committees is keeping elected officials busy deep into December - and potentially early next year.

Legislators were racing against the clock during the December holiday season to complete several items, including the FY '21 state budget and a police reform bill, all while preparing for the session to finally conclude at midnight on January 5, 2021. The new legislative session will begin when the 192nd General Court is seated on January 6, 2021.

State budget

In early December, House and Senate lawmakers reached an agreement on a \$46.2 billion budget proposal to fund state government for FY '21. To balance the spending plan,

legislators tapped the stabilization, or rainy-day fund, for \$1.7 billion.

The Providers' Council had been advocating for a number of items in the budget debate, including:

Chapter 257 Rate Reserve: While the reserve account to fund Chapter 257 rates had been at \$160 million in the Governor's two budget proposals, the House proposal and the Senate proposal language in the line item was different in each version of the budget.

The Council and *The Collaborative* had advocated for the House version of the language, which the Governor preserved in the final version of the budget, requiring a comparison of the median salary for each classification of staff positions with the 75th percentile wage estimate for that position, as determined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics for Massachusetts in the

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Getting the word out on the streets

Human services workers are essential workers awareness campaign kicks off with yard signs, legislation to increase salaries and reduce student loans

A helping hand for the holidays...



Unable to help serve traditional holiday meals as in previous years, Morgan Memorial Goodwill volunteer and Boston Mayor Marty Walsh donned his apron and sent virtual holiday wishes to staff and the clients they serve.

MOVA grants \$2.8 million to 29 Massachusetts nonprofits

The Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance (MOVA) has announced \$2.8 million in emergency grant funding to provide housing stabilization services for victims of crime in response to challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Among the Council members receiving grants were **Casa Myrna, Centerboard, Jewish Family and Children Services, Key Program, Mothers for Justice and Equality, On The Rise, REACH Beyond Domestic Violence, Safe Passage, SMOG and Transition House.**

"Ensuring survivors of crime have a roof over their heads is critical to the health and safety of them and their families", said Liam Lowney, MOVA's executive director. "This pandemic has increased isolation and economic distress, forcing many victims impacted by violence to lose their homes. During these unprecedented times it is essential that we support the victim serving organizations with the funding they need to meet the evolving needs of their clients."

Tufts Health Plan Foundation grants \$340K to 22 nonprofits

The Tufts Health Plan Foundation granted \$340,000 to 22 Massachusetts nonprofits to support efforts aimed at helping local communities respond to the coronavirus pandemic.

The grants will support organiza-

tions working to address basic needs like food access, housing assistance, and other fundamental supports to help people stay safe and healthy. Among the Council members receiving the grants were **Advocates, Inc., Community Teamwork and Justice Resource Institute.**

"Nonprofit organizations continue to face significant challenges as they respond to current needs, prepare for colder weather and address changing conditions," said Tom Crowell, Tufts Health Plan president and CEO.

Barr announces \$4.15 million in new grantmaking centered on racial equity

The Barr Foundation has announced new and extended support for over 30 organizations to advance racial equity and support communities hit hardest by COVID-19 in Greater Boston and across Massachusetts.

Among those grants was a \$175,000 to the New Commonwealth Racial Equity and Social Justice Fund, founded by a coalition of Massachusetts Black and Brown executives for the sole purpose of leveraging our individual and collective power to work together with community organizations to make transformative societal changes by addressing systemic racism and racial inequity in Massachusetts.

Among the Council members receiving grants from the most recent Barr Foundation announcement were **City Life/Vida Urbana** and **MLK Jr. Family Services.**

Holiday tour at ATI wows local visitors



American Training Inc. transformed its Andover headquarters into a magical giant snow globe and invited local families to drive by and enjoy the holiday spirit. "The WOW! Magic of Christmas, Giant Snow Globe Drive-Thru" ran Dec. 18-19.

SPLILKA: Mental health parity is a priority for coming year

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children's mental health.

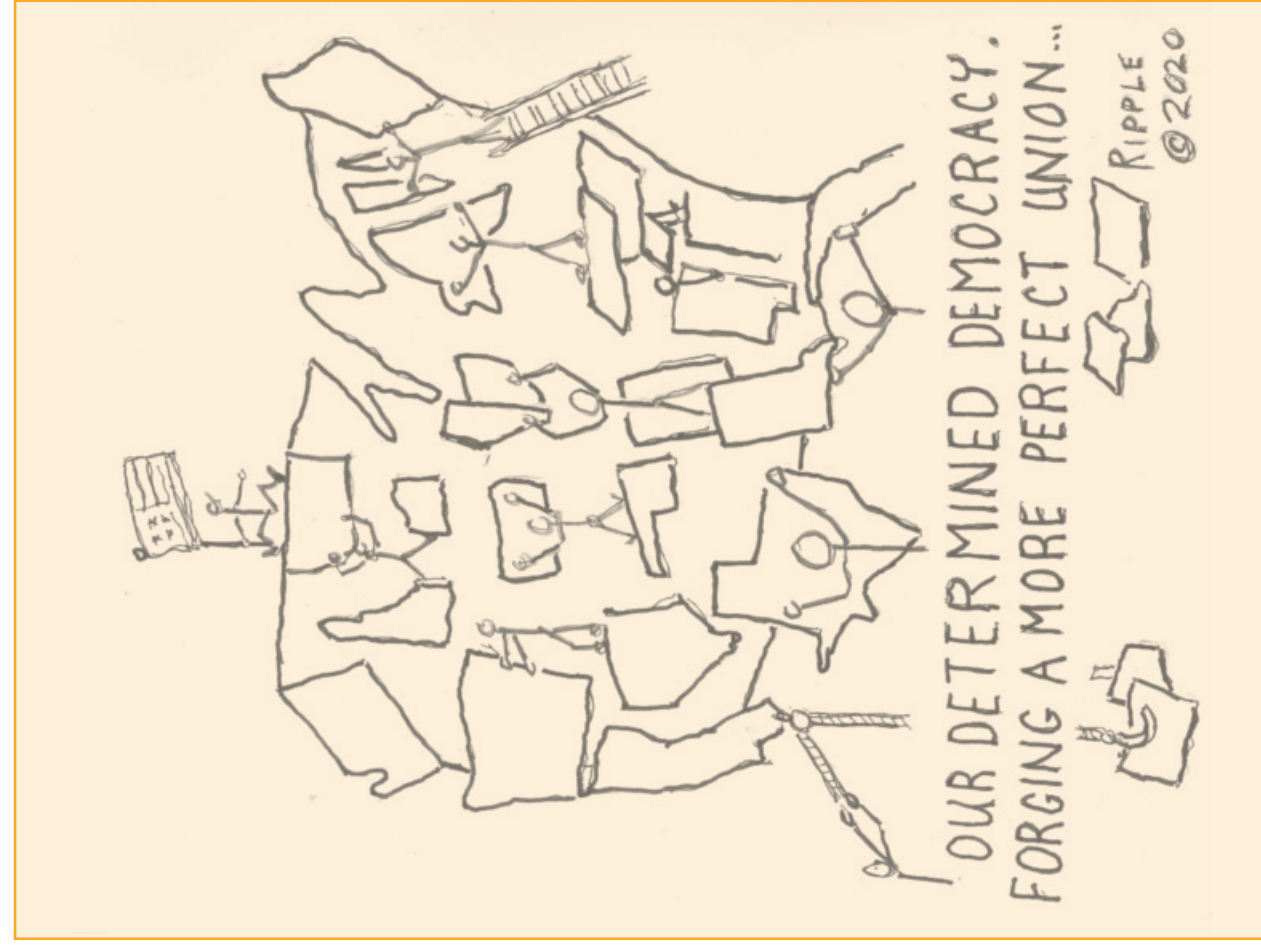
At the end of the last legislative session, the Massachusetts Senate passed - and the Governor signed into law - landmark legislation that creates a first-in-the-nation civilian-led Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission (POST) to standardize the certification, training and decertification of police officers. As a social worker myself, I am extremely proud to say that this commission will include a social worker nominated by the Massachusetts chapter of the National Association of Social Workers.

This is part of a larger shift in resources towards community-based crisis response. The bill expands the mandate of the Center for Responsive Training in Crisis Intervention to include providing police training on de-escalation tactics and techniques in crisis response situations, best practices for protest response that minimize use of force, community policing principles, and training in institutional and structural racism and implicit bias.

It also directs the Community Policing and Behavioral Health Advisory Council to review crisis intervention methods with a focus on community-based intervention programs that are more appropriate for responding to mental health crises.

Even without the unforeseen events of this year, mental health would have been a priority for both the Senate and me. Last year, we passed the Mental Health ABC Act to invest in the behavioral health workforce pipeline and provide the state with more effective tools to enforce mental health parity laws. We also, in coordination with the Baker administration, created the "More to the Story" public awareness campaign, which reinforces that good mental health starts in our interactions with loved ones.

Yet this year has underlined how much more remains to be done. Not just now, but every year we need to keep talking about mental health



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BEACON HILL: Budget nears final stages; eyes on next year

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most recent available data.

Unemployment Insurance: The Providers' Council had sought a second extension of the time period nonprofits that self-insure have to pay the Department of Unemployment Assistance for claims. While an extension done earlier this year gave nonprofits until mid-December to pay any claims from March 2020 to present day, the final Conference Committee budget included a provision to extend the deadline to June 30, 2021. Gov. Baker maintained the extension.

CIES: The Providers' Council and more than a dozen members supported language in the House budget that would create a funding floor of Competitive Integrated Employment Services, the state's only welfare-to-work program. The Senate allocated funding for the program, but did not include a funding floor. The final conference budget omitted the funding floor.

ALTR: An amendment to ensure new rates for Adult Long-Term Residential Services were effective July 1, 2020 was rejected in both the House and the Senate. The administration - which held a hearing in March and planned to implement rates July 1 - changed the implementation date to January 1, 2021. The Council also testified at a Chapter 257 hearing, urging EOHHS to implement the rates effective July 1, 2020. EOHHS since indicated it would not implement the new rates until January 1, 2021.

The final budget proposal was still being debated at press time. The Governor took issue with a policy section dealing with certain language around abortions, including allowing a 16- or 17-year-old to get an abortion without the consent of a parent or guardian. While he proposed changes to the Legislature, the House rejected those changes 49-107 on Wednesday, December 16. The Senate still had to act on the budget.

The budget, submitted to the Governor in the last full month of the legislative session, underscores the impact COVID-19 had on the regular budget process. Typically, the Legislature sends the budget to the Governor in mid- to late-June with the goal of having a spending plan in place for the start of the state's new fiscal year on July 1.

Conference Committees

As legislators reached consensus on an FY '21 spending plan, several conference committees were also working on their own compromises on the issues of police reform, economic development, health care, transportation and climate change.

A police reform compromise was reached in late November and sent to Gov. Baker in December. The legislature proposed a new body: The Massachusetts Peace Officer Standards and Training Commission, which would have the power to certify and decertify officers, creating licensing standards. Baker returned the bill to legislators with several changes - he urged lawmakers to change the commission's setup and remove a proposed ban on using facial recognition technology.

At press time, the Senate had passed a new, scaled-down bill that curtailed restrictions on the software, but does not ban it, and limits the powers of a civilian-led commission.

The conference committees debating issues of economic development, health care (which includes telehealth provisions), transportation and climate change had not yet reached a compromise at press time.

Coming in 2021

The new legislative session begins on January 6, 2021. The Providers' Council will work with legislative champions to file its priorities that were not resolved during the last session. For more information on the Council's legislation or other public policy matters, please contact Bill Yelenak at bill@providers.org.

Cardinal Cushing Centers opens new MarketPlace in Hanover



Cardinal Cushing Centers in Hanover, which supports individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, recently opened a new, 20,000-square-foot building complex called the MarketPlace on Route 53. It includes a coffee and pastry shop called The Cushing Café, a gift shop called Unique Boutique, and Take 2, a thrift store. Left: Adult Service program participant, Ari Tannenbaum, stopped by to check out the goods at Take 2. At right: Cushing Board Member Joannice Jaxtiner and her son, Michael Jaxtiner Barry, came to support the MarketPlace opening.

President-elect Biden preparing to assume office Jan. 20

President-elect Joe Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris are actively engaged in forming their cabinet and senior staff as they prepare to assume office on January 20, 2021.

In moves aimed toward fulfilling Biden's "Build Back Better" pledge with the cornerstones of COVID-19 recovery, racial equity, economic recovery and climate change reversal, the new administration is beginning to broadly shape its agenda.

Committed to featuring a leader-

ship team that better resembles this nation, a few of Biden's notable nominees and potential appointments are Marcia Fudge, Housing and Urban Development; Xavier Becerra, Health and Human Services; Susan Rice, Domestic Policy; Pete Buttigieg, Transportation; Lloyd Austin, Defense; Neera Tanden, Office of Management and Budget; and Janet Yellen, Treasury.

For an updated list of transition news and related matters visit www.buildbackbetter.gov.

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What: **SOLD-OUT! Certificate in Supervision Series**
Winter 2021

When: Wednesday, January 19 - March 30, 2021

Time: 9:00 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.

Where: via Zoom

Trainers: Jim Ognibene, Visioneer Consulting
Ginny Maglio, Optimum Development
Comma Williams, Comma Williams Enterprises
Wally Coyle, E. Wallace Coyle Associates

Cost: \$600 members; \$900 non-members

Application for 18 social work CE credits has been submitted. Contact Patrick Daily at pdaily@providers.org to be placed on the waitlist.

What: **Success as a New Supervisor**

When: Tuesdays, February 23 and March 9, 2021

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

Where: via Zoom

Trainers: Jim Ognibene, Visioneer Consulting

Cost: \$140 members; \$200 non-members

What: **Personal and Organizational Journey Towards**

Race Equity

When: Thursdays, March 18 and March 25

Time: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Where: via Zoom

Trainers: Barbara Holland, Chief Diversity Officer, Advocates

Comma Williams, Comma Williams Enterprises

Cost: \$140 members; \$200 non-members

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

Visit www.providers.org/events to learn more and register for the event you wish to attend. Questions? Call 508.598.9700.

Banner advertising now available on Jobs with Heart!



Jobs with Heart, the Providers' Council's job site and the leading spot for human services jobs in Massachusetts set new records this year, with **1.3 million job exposures** and **117,000 job views**. More than 2,200 jobs were posted in 2020.

Posting is **free** for Council members! Visit jobswithheart.org today to post a job! *Need help? Please contact byelenak@providers.org.*

New in 2021 — **banner advertisements** are now available on *Jobs with Heart*! Learn more at providers.org/jwhads. Prices for members start at \$750 for a three-month engagement.



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