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Hundreds demand livable wages, loan repayment at TCF Rally



As a direct care worker for ServiceNet, a Springfield-based mental health and human services agency, 28-year-old Olivia Moultrie has spent the past seven years supporting vulnerable Massachusetts residents as their “caregiver, friend, counselor, CNA, chef, driver and advocate.”

Yet despite all the services she

provides to clients in her role as a direct care worker, Moultrie is so underpaid that she cannot afford any of them herself — according to the MIT Living Wage Calculator, she earns \$4,500 a year less than what would qualify as a livable wage. Money is so tight that she is unable to move out of her parents’ home, and if her check engine light comes on in her car, she

notes her only recourse is to “pray it goes away.”

“I like my job because I provide a service to people that are in need, and it takes a special type of person to do this job,” Moultrie said. “Direct care staff keep people alive for a living. Don’t we deserve to live ours too?”

RALLY, see page 7

SWM budget includes \$173M for Ch. 257

The human services sector will almost certainly receive millions of additional state dollars next year following the early-May release of the Senate Ways & Means Committee’s FY ’24 budget proposal, a \$55.8 billion spending plan.

Just like the budget proposals from Gov. Maura Healey’s and the House Ways & Means Committee, the Senate proposed investing \$173 million in the in the Chapter 257 Reserve line item (1599-6903), representing an increase of \$94 million, or nearly 119%, from FY ’22. The Council compared the Chapter 257 line item to the FY ’22 budget, rather than the FY ’23 budget, because the number of Chapter 257 rates reviewed by EOHHS alternate in proportion every other year.

With the three groups all submitting the same funding amount in their respective proposals, there is very little chance the amount will be amended during the budget negotiation process.

“The Council is very grateful that the Senate, House and Gov. Healey

have all funded the Chapter 257 Reserve at \$173 million. This investment will support increasing the critically low wages for community-based human services workers,” said Providers’ Council President and CEO Michael Weekes. “As our sector’s hiring crisis continues to worsen, pay increases to attract more workers are more important than ever.”

The SWM budget proposal included higher funding amounts than the HWM budget proposal for two Department of Children & Families line items: there was a 36.25% increase to DCF Family Resource Centers and an 8.41% increase to DCF and DTA Related Child Care. However, the SWM proposal decreased funding to several other line items compared to the HWM budget: there was a 13.2% decrease to Vocational Rehabilitation for People with Disabilities, a 6.98% decrease to HIV/AIDS Prevention Treatment and Services and a 5.94% decrease to HomeBASE.

SENATE, see page 7

Providers discuss workforce challenges at regional meetings

Following the release of the latest University of Massachusetts Donahue Institute report on the human services workforce last month — *Essential or Not? The Critical Need for Human Services Workers* — the Human Services Providers Charitable Foundation, Inc. (HSPCF) started a series of five regional meetings across the Commonwealth throughout May and June to engage providers in discussions about the sector’s workforce crisis.

“The report highlighted several eye-opening and alarming realities facing our sector, so it was important to connect with human services organizations to discuss our takeaways and collaborate on ways to address some of the lingering issues we are all facing,” said Providers’ Council President and CEO Michael Weekes.

According to the report, between 2016 and 2020 employment at human services nonprofits declined 10% and



Provider members discuss workforce issues at a regional meeting held in Peabody on May 11.

the number of establishments providing human services increased by 11%, emphasizing the difficulty providers have had filling open positions while responding to increased community need. In addition, the report determined that an estimated 30,000 client-facing positions are vacant in Massachusetts.

MEETINGS, see page 7

The Professional Center for Child Development rebrands as Partners in Child Development

Officials from **The Professional Center for Child Development** announced in mid-May that the organization had rebranded as **Partners in Child Development (PCD)**, unveiling a new logo and website alongside the new name, though maintaining the same mission.

Based in Andover and Lawrence, PCD was founded 50 years ago to provide respite care services for a few local families and now serves more than 2,000 children annually. The nonprofit updated its name to better reflect the work it does, and the strategic and impactful community relationships required to do it. The new logo and website are part of a larger rebranding strategy to convey the growth vision and the impact the organization has had on the lives of the children and families it serves.

"In this day and age, nothing happens without a partnership," said Executive Director Chris Hunt. "As we head into a future of expansion through innovation in educational practices and new therapeutic approaches to better serve our students and families, we are pleased to focus on these pivotal relationships that span the entire community and region."



Youth Villages raises \$1.1 million for LifeSet program at spring celebration

Officials from **Youth Villages** announced in early May that its team in

Massachusetts and New Hampshire held its annual spring celebration at the Fairmont Copley Plaza in Boston, which drew over 300 attendees and raised \$1.1 million for its LifeSet program.

LifeSet is an individualized, evidence-informed, community-based program in which specialists meet face-to-face with young people aging out of foster care to provide comprehensive support as they transition from state services to independence.

Former Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker and Former First Lady Lauren Baker were also honored at the event for "their incredible work helping young people in the Commonwealth."



Former Governor Charlie Baker

Bridgewell raises \$320,000 at Imagine the Possibilities Gala

Bridgewell, a Peabody-based social and human services nonprofit, hosted its 2023 Imagine the Possibilities Gala at the Renaissance Boston Waterfront Hotel on April 28, where it raised \$320,000 to support its behavioral health, day habilitation, employment, housing and addiction recovery programs.

Bridgewell hosts the gala annually to highlight all that it and those it serves have achieved over the past year, to recognize and thank its partners and supporters and to raise financial support. This year's event was hosted by WCVB NewsCenter 5 Reporter Katie Thompson.

"Everyone in this room is an important part of Bridgewell's team of everyday heroes," President and CEO Chris

Healey visits Riverside Community Care to promote mental health resources



In early May, Gov. Maura Healey visited **Riverside Community Care's** Behavioral Health Center in Milford to speak with staff about their work providing mental health and substance use treatment in the community. Healey also signed a proclamation declaring May Mental Health Awareness Month in Massachusetts and kicked off the state's "Help is Here" campaign to raise awareness of behavioral health resources, including Community Behavioral Health Centers (CBHCs) and the Massachusetts Behavioral Health Help Line. Healey was joined by Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll and EOHHS Secretary Kate Walsh.

Tuttle said to attendees. "Without you and countless other supporters of our vital mission, the people we serve would not be able to accomplish all they do."

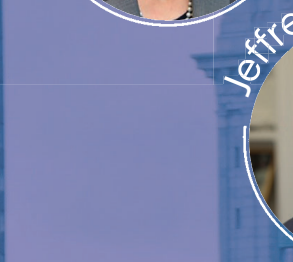
Eliot Community Human Services, Pine Street Inn, FamilyAid Boston receive millions from Boston to address homelessness

Boston Mayor Michelle Wu announced in May that the city will distribute \$16.5 million in federal grant funds to several organizations providing services and housing to those experiencing homelessness — particularly around Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard — including **Eliot Community Human Services, Pine Street Inn** and **FamilyAid Boston**.

Eliot Community Services will receive \$6.3 million over three years to house 105 individuals from the Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass area or other high-risk settings, either currently or recently unsheltered, who need both respite from the streets, medical stabilization, and a housing pathway.

Family Aid Boston will receive \$1.8 million to place 10 families with high service needs in transitional housing for 90 days, bridge to rapid rehousing, and work toward permanent housing placement.

Pine Street Inn will receive \$1.3 million over three years to stabilize 75 clients in Boston Housing Authority public housing and provide housing navigation and stabilization services.



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PROVIDER PROFILES

BRIDGES HOMEWARD

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About the Agency

In 1874, an orphanage called the Avon Home opened its doors near Harvard Square and housed eight children who attended the nearby school. By 1918, the Avon Home had grown to include foster care services, a therapy clinic and a community center, and throughout the 20th century it expanded its education and medical care services to meet the growing needs of the Cambridge community. The Avon Home officially became Cambridge Family & Children's Service in 1978, and later changed its name to Bridges Homeward in 2022 to reflect its expanding reach beyond Cambridge and its focus on building permanency.

Today, the well-known and trusted human services agency serves over 1,300 children, teens and families in Massachusetts every year.

Bridges Homeward doesn't offer quick fixes; its staff takes a much more in-depth and personalized approach. Sometimes, permanency in the organization's work means making sure a child can remain with their biological family, sometimes it means ensuring someone with a developmental disability can live with family instead of having to move to an institutional setting and sometimes it means finding a child in foster care a forever family.

Bridges Homeward builds permanency



Bridges Homeward serves over 1,300 children, teens and families in Massachusetts a year.

Bridges Homeward operates five different programs, each with its own permanency-focused services. The nonprofit's services are tailored to the unique needs and situations of everyone it serves, and the organization operates in collaboration with the Department of Children and Families and the Department of Developmental Services.

The **Adoption program** works to ensure that all children and teens have the opportunity to grow up in healthy, committed families that provides unconditional love, a sense of security and a community for the child to call their own. Bridges Homeward provides adoption planning and case management services for children and teens who face the greatest challenges to adoption: older children, sibling groups and children with medical, developmental, emotional or behavioral special needs.

Individuals with disabilities are supported through the **Developmental Disabilities program** which provides training, advocacy and social opportunities to individuals with disabilities and their families. The organization focuses on overcoming social barriers and integrating individuals into



the community by offering a wide range of tools, resources and individualized support services.

The **Family Services program** recruits, trains and supports adoptive and foster parents, making sure their entire journey goes as smoothly as possible. Bridges Homeward provides a wide range of services to prospective parents including training, matching youth with the right families and supporting families once they have found their match.

The **Family Support and Stabilization program** offers a range of services focused on strengthening overwhelmed families. The nonprofit ensures parents have the tools they need to navigate challenges and create stable family environments.

The **Intensive Foster Care program** finds transitional, therapeutic foster care for children – homes where they can live and thrive. The Bridges Homeward team of foster parents and social workers provides specialized, round-the-clock care, support and guidance. Through this collaboration, the agency supports the youth's successful transition into a permanent placement.

Executive Leadership

Bob Gittens became executive director of Bridges Homeward in 2016 and has led the agency through significant growth, including the expansion of its Family Support & Stabilization program and the launch of Weekend Family Connections, a collaboration with the Massachusetts Adoption Resource Exchange and DCF. But perhaps his biggest contribution to the agency is his initiative to embed permanency-informed social work practice into all of its programs.



Bob Gittens

Since 2017, Gittens has guided the development of the nonprofit's permanency practice, partnering with community leaders to train and support staff in an entirely permanency-focused approach to social work. With his leadership, Bridges Homeward remains an active leader in the Massachusetts Permanency Practice Alliance.

Gittens holds a JD degree from Northeastern University School of Law and a BA in political science from Northeastern.

After years of outstanding service, Gittens will step down from his position later this year. The agency recognizes his enormous influence which changed its practice for the better.

SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

Raines aims to end HIV stigma

Jillian Raines has worked for **Community Counseling of Bristol County (CCBC)** since 2017 in its HIV Medical Case Management Program and is also a trainer in its Crisis Prevention Institute. She is responsible for supporting individuals who are HIV positive, helping them connect to resources, adhere to medication and medical appointments, find stable housing and maintain critical benefits like health insurance and prescription coverage for HIV medications. In addition to her daily case management duties, Raines has helped nearly 50 clients find housing since she began working for CCBC.



At CCBC, Jillian Raines has helped nearly 50 clients find housing.

She is compassionate, hardworking and well-respected by her peers. Most importantly, the clients she supports rave about her and her nonstop advocacy, ability to handle difficult situations, hands-on involvement and willingness to go above and beyond to

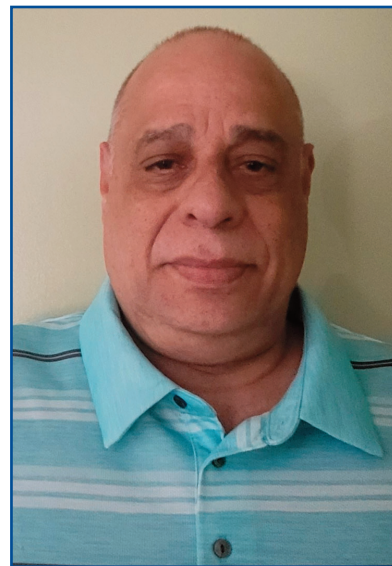
support them through difficult situations. At a recent group meeting, CCBC officials determined that each client present was permanently housed with Raines's support. They went on to discuss how she had really helped them over the last six years, with one stating that, "no matter what we need, we know we can call Jillian and she will do her best to support us."

Program Director Jessica Rebello said that Raines is an integral part of the Client Health Services Team and her passion for her clients is apparent in all that she does. She has been working in human services for over 20 years and is a source of great knowledge to program and clients.

She has also done a great job mentoring new staff. Raines often states she is dedicated to "ending the stigma of HIV," and she uses that dedication to drive her daily work. Her willingness to meet clients where they are and support them free of any judgement is one of her best attributes.

Martinez is MCS's go-to person

Francisco Martinez has worked as a direct care professional with **Multicultural Community Services of the Pioneer Valley, Inc. (MCS)** for over 20 years. MCS is a nonprofit offering a range of supports to individuals with intellectual disabilities, including residential, nursing, Adult Foster Care, ABA, ABI, Individual and Family Support services. Martinez works in both Individual and Family Supports with approximately a dozen people. He works with each person individually, typically in the community, and provides a range of services, including community integration, recreation, managing medical care and behavioral support. Martinez is MCS's go-to person for assistance in resolving complicated situations and emergencies.



Francisco Martinez supports individuals with disabilities at MCS.

Martinez moved to Massachusetts from Puerto Rico in 1989 with a background in business administration. While working full-time and continuing his education at night, he was pre-

sented with the opportunity to work in human services and found his calling. Martinez switched his studies from business to psychology and counseling, and graduated with a Master of Education degree before working for several years as a therapist for people with substance abuse and anger management issues. He also worked as a trainer for DCF and Adult Foster Care before moving full-time into his current position. Martinez credits the people who helped him find his path through the years as a catalyst for him wanting to support others to lead fulfilling lives, particularly those with intellectual disabilities.

Service Navigator Nilda Reyes has been Martinez's supervisor for over a decade and describes him as "the best direct care professional" she has ever worked with and someone who "has dramatically changed people's lives for the better." Martinez's dedication, easygoing demeanor, ability to connect with people and willingness to do whatever is needed to help his clients be successful is unparalleled.

EDITORIAL



Michael Weekes
President / Publisher

Belonging is part of the hill we climb

World legend and genius singer-songwriter Stevie Wonder recorded the song “Conversation Peace” nearly 30 years ago and it remains relevant to this day. In part he declared:

We can't pause, watch and say, "No this can't be"

When there's a plan by any means to have cleansing of one's ethnicity

And we shouldn't act as if we don't hear nor see

Like in the holocaust of six million Jews

And a hundred and fifty million blacks during slavery.

Like some of you, I approach the cacophony of nonsense in this nation with utter consternation and a perplexity to the level of insensitivity, intolerance, homophobic, antisemitic, racism and pure hatred casually spewed in our society. In fact, when it comes to hatred, it seems that there is a race to the bottom – all too often because the person or persons appear, act, sound or behave differently. That level of hatred contradicts the American principles that we cherish and are embedded in the nation's Declaration of Independence: “All men are created equal” and “are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

Unfortunately, we are no longer shocked by elected leaders like Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, who in 2022 signed into state law the so-called “Don't Say Gay” bill, preventing young school children from receiving any classroom instruction on sexual orientation or even gender identity. Last month, he signed another blatantly anti-LGBTQ+ bill, forcing restrictions on transgender health care, bathroom use, language and even drag performances in the state. He also defunded diversity, equity and inclusion programs in state universities, later remarking, “It was the American revolution that caused people to question slavery. No one questioned it before we decided as Americans that we are endowed by our creator with unalienable rights.”

Calling this revisionist history would be an understatement. Quakers and evangelical Christians (and other people who looked like him) were denouncing slavery long before the slave owners George Washington and Thomas Jefferson received notoriety. This is an abject example of racism, the absurdity to dismiss the yearnings for freedom of thousands of enslaved Africans since 1619. But he is not alone in this idiocy.

Look at Republican Senator Tommy Tuberville of Alabama, who feels the military needs more white supremacists and white nationalist, saying, “I call them Americans.” Very few are pushing back on the leaders fanning the flames of violence and intolerance. The former president, number 45, proclaimed the Jan. 6 insurrectionists, commonly described as white

supremacists, as “great people.” Even Massachusetts recorded the sixth highest state number of anti-Semitic incidents in 2022, according to the Anti-Defamation League. Governor Maura Healey remarked, “organized hate exists here in Massachusetts.” It's not a surprise that President Biden – in a recent address at Howard University – asserted, “the most dangerous terrorist threat to our homeland is white supremacy.” But as Stevie said, “we can't pause, watch and say, ‘no this can't be.’” We can act.

In June, we are likely to celebrate graduations, school vacations, weddings and the summer solstice. It is also a period of remembrance, celebration, recognition and awareness, including noting the month for LGBTQ+ Pride, Alzheimer's Awareness and Immigrants Awareness. All, at their core, promote a sense of belonging as we embrace our differences – none more essential than June's only national holiday, Juneteenth. June 19 marks the day that President Lincoln sent troops to Galveston, Texas to inform 250,000 enslaved Africans that they were indeed free, that the edict of All Men are Created Equal belonged to them as it did every person.

So here we are today – still struggling with belonging. The Council's Race, Diversity and Inclusion Committee, formed in 2016, recently affirmed a renewed statement to provide a context for our work, though it's not meant to be the final word on belonging; “*Belonging is a sense of being secure, recognized, affirmed and accepted equally such that full participation is possible. Belonging means that everyone is treated and feels like a full member of the larger community and can thrive. Belonging is a feeling that your insights and contribution are valued.*”

While I don't propose we need a national holiday for belonging – though it may be helpful – I believe the most effective change to our world likely be to assert belonging as an amendment to the US Constitution. Of course, it would be beyond a monumental task to get two thirds of both houses in Congress and three quarters of state legislatures to codify the right of every American to belong. But here we are, 234 years since the Constitution was ratified, still struggling, witnessing regression. We cannot surrender to bigotry, intolerance and hatred of the “other.”

As the first National Youth Poet Laureate, Amanda Gorman extolled in her beautiful poem “The Hill We Climb,” “*yes, we are far from polished, far from pristine, but that doesn't mean we are striving to form a union that is perfect. We are striving to forge our union with purpose. To compose a country committed to all cultures, colors, characters and conditions of man.*”

So I ask you, how do we advance belonging?



MEMBER SUBMITTED ARTWORK: This piece was created by a Seven Hills Foundation ASPIRE! artist and was exhibited at the Worcester Art Museum.

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Juneteenth is about more than just a day off from work

By Shaheer Mustafa

Juneteenth has long been celebrated by many African American and Black individuals and families across the United States, and here in Boston communities will gather at Franklin Park this year for Juneteenth celebrations. But the holiday was unknown to many Americans until recently, when the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement — in the wake of George Floyd’s murder — brought attention to it.

In 2021, Massachusetts passed a law that made Juneteenth a state holiday and President Biden soon thereafter made it a Federal Holiday. Prior to that, corporations ranging from Google to General Motors declared that Juneteenth would be a paid day off for employees as well. But Juneteenth is much more than another day off from work and given the role our sector plays in supporting communities of color (Black communities in particular), it is important for us to understand its significance.

Juneteenth marks the day in 1865 when Union troops, the majority of whom were members of the Army Corps’ U.S. Colored Troops, arrived in Galveston, Texas to bring news of the Emancipation Proclamation, which marked the end of slavery. Although the Emancipation Proclamation had taken effect nearly two and a half years earlier, on New Year’s Day in 1863, it could not be enforced in Confederate states and many slaveowners simply ignored it. Emancipation from slavery took place over a protracted period of time throughout the country. The approximately 250,000 slaves in Texas who learned of the Emancipation Proclamation on June 19, 1865, two months after the surrender

of Robert E. Lee and the Confederate Army at Appomattox, were the last to be freed. Yet another injustice Black Americans had to bear.

A hallmark of the first Juneteenth celebrations in Texas was the reunification of family members who had been separated through slavery. After the Civil War, one of the primary goals of newly-freed men and women was to locate children, siblings and spouses who had been lost to other slaveowners through auctions and trades.

While you can’t argue we’ve come a long way since 1865, we still have work to do. Black youth in Massachusetts are two and a half times more likely than white youth to come into contact with the Department of Children and Families. Black youth in Massachusetts are twice as likely NOT to meet the third grade ELA MCAS standard as their white peers and white families in Massachusetts have nine times as much wealth as black families. This remains a stain on our collective conscience.

As we continue our journey to find ways to come together across political, racial and other divides, Juneteenth provides a context in which to do that. It is a holiday for anyone who believes in family, freedom and joy.

I hope you enjoy your day off this Juneteenth. For those of you who’ve long celebrated Juneteenth, I hope you enjoy your family traditions. For those who are new to the holiday, I hope you find a way to mark the day with meaning and perhaps create a new tradition with your loved ones.

Shaheer Mustafa is the president and CEO of HopeWell.

Advocacy is essential to ensuring our work gets done

By Jo Ann Simons

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

The work we do matters and the only effective way to ensure it gets done is through advocacy.

I learned this 44 years ago, when my first child, Jonathan, was born with Down syndrome and four heart defects. As a result we faced a world of discrimination, indifference and ignorance. From my hospital bed, I made a list of all the things that went wrong after his birth, which grew exponentially upon his discharge: no family-to-family outreach, unnecessary medical tests, early intervention waiting lists, biases in camps and recreation programs, segregated classrooms, low pay for direct care workers, Turning 22 underfunding and staff who “dealt” with families, to name just a few.

I learned that, in addition to becoming a different kind of parent than I expected, I needed to become his advocate. While I knew that I wouldn’t want to change a thing about him, I decided that I would change the world for him. But I also knew – from my policy and planning background rooted in social work – that I would not be successful if I only changed the world for Jonathan. If I wanted change, I had to try to change the world for everyone with disabilities.

I have been a part of some of the most dramatic changes in our industry that has come about through our advocacy efforts and have learned a lot about what does and does not make those efforts effective. One time early in my career I was testifying at the State House as the director of advocacy for what was then the North Shore Arc, and I noticed that the legislators in attendance did not pay much attention to me as a professional when I spoke. However, when the next speaker – a parent – began testifying, legislators suddenly paid attention and started asking questions. That moment demonstrated to me the power that families had and continue to have when

advocating. Going forward, when I would return to speak to members of the Legislature each spring, I always began by identifying myself as a parent before mentioning my professional capacity.

I also told them that there were thousands of parents who were not there and would never make it to a State House hearing because they had been up all night and were barely holding it together with the extraordinary demands they face each day. One year, EOHHS had the brilliant idea to test the means of families who were raising their children at home in order for them to receive family support services. Meanwhile, families whose children resided in our then-seven state institutions faced not such means test. Hundreds of us descended upon the State House with our children, carrying wheelchairs into an inaccessible hearing room. The means test idea never saw the light of another day.

For every other invisible member of our communities — people of color, those experiencing homelessness and/or food insecurity, LGBTQ+ people, foster children, etc. — we must be their voices.

Much has changed since those days. We realized that families needed to step aside and let self-advocates lead in telling us what they need and how they need it. We forged partnerships with professionals and service providers, becoming invaluable allies.

We learned that it is not only important to contact our legislators, but also to support those who are our allies both personally and professionally. When we come around to ask for their help, we want to know that our human services community helps them. We know that advocacy begins locally, and I have watched as many of our colleagues and partners have taken on roles outside of their jobs, such as members of school committees, boards of health, city councils, event legislators and more. This ensures that our important issues can’t be ignored.

Jo Ann Simons is the CEO of Northeast Arc.

The opportunity is here — it’s time to bridge the digital divide

By Kim Shellenberger

Emerging from the pandemic, we find ourselves in a world where access to technology and digital skills are no longer a luxury, but a necessity to maintain social connection, engage in lifelong learning, obtain essential medical and behavioral health care, manage finances and navigate the community. At the same time, there are people living on the other side of the digital divide who can’t fully participate in modern life because they don’t have access to a device and/or don’t possess the skills to use it. As human services providers, we are all too aware of this disparity, because many of the people we serve have significant technology access and digital literacy barriers.

There are now unprecedented efforts underway, both at the federal and state levels, to bridge this digital divide. Last year, the Massachusetts Broadband Institute (MBI) announced a \$50 million Digital Equity Partnership program to fund efforts such as device distribution, digital literacy and enrollment in broadband and public WiFi. At the federal

level, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law provides \$45 billion to states in order to implement digital equity plans. Massachusetts expects to receive a minimum of \$100 million and potentially much more to support digital inclusion efforts. The human services sector is a critical partner in this effort; we serve people who are low-income, historically disadvantaged, “hard-to-reach” and fall on the other side of the digital divide; we work with people in service settings and in homes; and we are well-known and well-established in our communities.

Several human services providers were part of the first round of Digital Equity Partnership grant funding announced in April. Among them was Vinfen – the founding organization of the Human Services Alliance for Digital Equity (Alliance). The Alliance is a network of eight mental health and disability organizations including Advocates, Behavioral Health Network, Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston Center for Independent Living, Clinical Support Options, Open Sky Community Services and

Riverside Community Care.

As a network, we will deploy 15 Technology Navigators to work in people’s homes, mental health clinics, homeless shelters, Clubhouses and other service settings. The Tech Navigators will help people set personal technology goals and support them in achieving those goals through one-on-one digital literacy work, device purchase and set-up and enrollment in low-cost broadband programs. Through Vinfen’s pilot Tech Navigator program, we’ve seen how digital inclusion can improve lives:

- An outpatient mental health client, who had a smartphone but no computer or home WiFi, wanted to telehealth with her therapist. Vinfen’s Tech Navigator helped her obtain a computer, set it up and enroll in the Affordable Connectivity Program. After six tutoring sessions with the Tech Navigator, not only is she able to participate in telehealth, but she has also enrolled in online classes.
- A Clubhouse member

thought he would feel less anxious riding the bus if he could listen to music. The Tech Navigator helped him add memory to his phone, taught him how to download and use a free music app and provided him with low-cost headphones.

- A care coordination client was locked out of his email and not receiving responses to job and housing applications. The Tech Navigator helped him reset his password and taught him how to effectively navigate application portals.
- Another client had a smartphone but didn’t know how to text or use the camera. With digital tutoring, he is now taking pictures and texting them to his mother on a regular basis.

Next month, Massachusetts, through the MBI, will initiate a statewide process to create a digital equity plan that will go to the federal government for approval. This plan will guide the federal investments over the next few years. Human services

providers have an important perspective and should be part of the planning and implementation work.

Here are some specific ways to engage:

- Provide input into the statewide digital equity plan. Subscribe to the MBI newsletter at broadband.masstech.org for updates on how to participate.
- Use the MBI website (<https://broadband.masstech.org/news/mass-broadband-institute-announces-municipal-digital-equity-planning-program-participants>) to learn whether your municipality is one of the 24 cities and towns that have been awarded a digital equity planning grant.
- Use the MBI website for access to information and eligibility requirements for the open solicitation for digital equity partnership grants.

Kim Shellenberger is the chief strategy officer for Vinfen.

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1/20

A VIEW FROM THE HILL

*A commentary from a
 legislator on human services*



Let's care for our care providers with housing affordability

By Rep. Kip Diggs

My legislative district, the Second Barnstable District, has the highest proportion of senior citizens of any district in Massachusetts. It also has a significant number of persons living with disabilities, attracted to the area by the great work performed by such centers as Cape Abilities and the Cape Organization for Rights of the Disabled (CORD). In addition, it is home to the Cape's largest hospital, Cape Cod Hospital. These factors create an above-average demand for care providers, such as nurses and direct care workers, in the region.

These providers play a vital role in supporting our community's health and well-being, especially for these special populations. These workers tend to us when we are sick, comfort us when we are in pain, support us when we are in need. These professionals, in short, care for us. And right now, they need us to care about an issue severely affecting them.

This crucial workforce is facing a calamity that threatens their ability to live and work on Cape Cod: unaffordable housing. Despite playing such a vital role for so many people here on the Cape, space has not been reserved for them in our ever-rising housing market. Too many of our care professionals must pay exorbitant rents, live in suboptimal spaces and/or commute long distances. As a result, some of them end up having to leave the Cape altogether, taking their talents and caring service with them elsewhere.

This is a problem not just for these professionals, but for all of us. Without financially accessible housing, we risk losing the essential services that these nurses, direct care workers and other care providers offer our community. We risk compromising the quality and availability of health care on Cape Cod. We risk a diminished quality of life on the Cape.

Like these workers, I care. I care about their distressing situation. I care about this place (my home of 56 years) and how the community will be grossly impacted. I care about solving this problem. That is why I am committed to advocating for housing solutions that will benefit our nurses, care providers and all Cape Codders.

As a state representative, I am working with local officials, developers, nonprofits, community groups and legislative colleagues to help identify and pursue solutions that will increase the supply and diversity of housing options available for our region and its care workforce.

One solution that I have been a staunch supporter of is Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs). Better known as garage apartments or in-law suites, ADUs increase the density and diversity of housing stock without changing the landscape of neighborhoods. ADUs are especially beneficial to our

elderly and disabled populations because the units can be conveniently utilized by live-in nurses. That is why I have twice secured earmarks in the state's annual budget for the development of ADUs and why I co-sponsored an amendment in last session's economic development bill that would have permitted zoning for ADUs as a right statewide.



Rep. Kip Diggs

I have also encouraged our care workers to directly champion the development of housing at their local public meetings. A trio of Boston University professors analyzed Massachusetts zoning and planning board meeting minutes and found that only 15 percent of meeting participants show up in support of the construction of new housing, while 63 percent oppose new development projects. At minimum then, we need our care providers to show up and share their side of the debate with the decision-makers overseeing land-use if we want the issue to be reckoned with.

It will take more than these simple solutions to solve the issue, though. What we need to do is treat the Commonwealth's housing crisis for what it is: a crisis. When COVID-19 self-imprisoned our population and nearly cratered our economy, we turned Fenway Park and Gillette Stadium into giant testing (and later vaccination) clinics, providing cost-free tests (and later vaccines) to thousands of Bay Staters each day. While admittedly not quite as life-or-death, our housing crisis threatens to harm our population and economy too. The unaffordability of places to live will drive away crucial parts of the population, with negative effects on the economy and others' lives. The situation demands a larger response effort than it is currently getting.

I applaud Governor Healey for taking up the cause and re-establishing a dedicated Secretariat of Housing position as one of her first actions. I hope her appointee, Edward Augustus, will spearhead an effort to thoroughly address our housing crisis, once and for all. As a state representative and member of the Joint Committee on Housing, I am committed to working with Secretary Augustus to secure housing for our nurses and care providers workforce, on Cape Cod and throughout the Commonwealth. These professionals deserve nothing less than our gratitude and support, especially in the wake of a global, once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. They deserve, in sum, our care.

Representative Kip Diggs represents the 2nd Barnstable District in the Massachusetts House of Representatives.

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.

Legislators interested in writing a View from the Hill commentary for a future edition of *The Provider* are encouraged to contact Stefan Geller at sgeller@providers.org

SAVE THE date

48TH ANNUAL CONVENTION AND EXPO

Advocate Act Achieve

OCTOBER 2, 2023

MARRIOTT COPLEY PLACE HOTEL, BOSTON

RALLY: First held since 2019

MEETINGS: Valuable strategies shared

Continued from Page 1

Moultrie’s plea came during The Caring Force’s 11th Annual State House Rally and Advocacy Day in May, where nearly 500 human services workers, clients and advocates crowded the Great Hall of the State House for the first time since 2019 to urge legislators to pass the Providers’ Council’s legislative agenda, including bills to ensure workers are paid livable wages and to create a student loan repayment program.

Members of The Caring Force — the grassroots advocacy initiative of the Providers’ Council — emphasized during the rally that the sector’s hiring crisis is so dire that it has forced human services workers to be overworked, underpaid, indebted and burnt out, all while caring for the state’s most vulnerable residents.

“Most human service workers’ pay is so little that we often have two or more jobs,” said Alaisha Giles, a residential counselor at ServiceNet. “Why are we, the people that are providing 24-hour care to everyone’s loved ones, getting paid less than the people scanning food or scanning our clothes at T.J. Maxx or HomeGoods?”

“While this job can be very rewarding when we’re able to assist our clients, it is hard when I and my staff are not able to have our own needs met,” added Elaina Schreckenberger, an operations manager at Action for Boston Community Development. “The cost of living continues to increase, and we may often be eligible for our own programs because of how low our pay is in this sector.”

Multiple state legislators attended the rally to show their support for human services workers, including Senate President Karen

Spilka. Sen. Jo Comerford and Rep. Jack Lewis were honored with Caring Bear Awards for being dedicated legislative champions to the sector.

“We know that our workforce -- you -- need and deserve to feel supported,” Spilka said. “So please know that we in Massachusetts, in the state and the Senate, will continue to value and support you.”

Attendees of the rally then visited the offices their respective legislators, calling on them to pass *An act relative to a livable wage for human services workers* (H 191/ S 84) and *An act relative to a loan repayment program for human service workers* (H 214/ S 77).

The former, filed by Rep. Kay Khan and Sen. Cindy Friedman, would eliminate the pay disparity that exists between the salaries of human services workers employed by community-based human service providers and state employees holding similar job titles who perform similar work. The latter, filed by Reps. Jeffrey Roy and Smitty Pignatelli and Sen. Sal DiDomenico, would provide student loan repayment to human services workers who work at least 35 hours per week and have maintained 12 consecutive months of employment in the sector. Both bills are expected to be heard by the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities in June.

“The repayment bill will give me and other human service workers the chance to pursue higher education and help with the financial strain,” said Tonya Morris, a training specialist and senior survivor mentor at My Life, My Choice. “There is so much more work I want to do, but without the funding, I am unable to do so. This field deserves so much more than it is given, and the people in this field deserve recognition.”

Continued from Page 1

chusetts, more than one in six human services workers are classified as low-income (defined as earning less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level) and the median income of human services workers is just \$34,273 – \$15,000 less than the median income for the state overall.

During the regional meetings — which were held in Peabody, Framingham, Taunton, Springfield and Worcester — CEOs, Executive Directors, HR leaders and other senior staff members of human services nonprofits discussed specific challenges facing each of their organizations, as well as strategies that they have

implemented to mitigate their respective hiring challenges.

In addition to extensive vacancies, numerous attendees participated in discussions about challenges related to affordable housing, transportation, interview ghosting, high turnover and the state paying higher wages for the same positions, to name a few. Competition from the state for the same workers, according to one human services executive, often make providers feel like “a training ground for the Commonwealth.”

However, attendees also shared several valuable tips and strategies that have helped their organizations alleviate burdens on their workforce, such as offering

paid internships to undergraduate and graduate students to create pathways to employment, partnering with universities to support workers’ educations, creating cultures of support, embedding equity in the work culture and providing shadowing options to get applicants in the door.

“While livable wages and loan repayment remain the top priorities for addressing our sector’s hiring crisis, these regional meetings introduced attending members to several promising approaches to their hiring challenges,” Weekes said. “With the workforce crisis worsening with each passing day, collaboration and mutual support are more important than ever.”

SENATE: Few changes from HWM

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Other items of interest include:

- MRC line item 4120-6000 – Head Injury Treatment Services – rose from \$24.9 million in FY '23 to \$27.9 million, an increase of 12.2%.
- DTA line item 4408-1000 – Emergency Aid to Elderly Disabled & Children – rose from \$147.5 million in FY '23 to \$201.4 million, an increase of 36.6%.
- DCF line item 4800-0041 – Congregate Care Services – rose from \$336.9 million in

- FY '23 to \$431 million, an increase of nearly 28%.
- DMH line item 5046-0000 – Adult Mental Health and Support Services – rose from \$518.7 million in FY '23 to \$597.7 million, an increase of 15.2%.
- DDS line item 5920-2000 – Community Residential Services – rose from \$1.44 billion in FY '23 to \$1.72 billion, an increase of nearly 19%.
- DHCD line item 7004-9024 – Mass. Rental Voucher Program – rose from \$154.3 mil-


- lion in FY '23 to \$179.6 million, an increase of 16.4%.
- The Senate sorted through varied amendments and approved a final budget proposal on Thursday, May 25. The House and Senate will now appoint conferees to work through differences in the two spending plans with the goal of producing a Conference Committee budget in late June and sending the document to Gov. Healey for her signature or veto.
- The state’s next fiscal year begins July 1, 2024.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS • SUMMER 2023

What: Success as a New Supervisor

When: Tuesday, June 13 & Tuesday, June 20

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

Presenter: Jim Ognibene, Visioneer Consulting

Where: Day I - Providers' Council Training Center
Day II - Online via Zoom

Cost: \$200 for members | \$325 for nonmembers

What: Juneteenth in Action

When: Thursday, June 15

Time: 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.

Presenter: Shaplaie Brooks, Beyond DEI

Where: Online via Zoom

Cost: Free; Event for Council Provider Members only

What: The Supplier Diversity Program for Health and Human Service Providers

When: Thursday, June 29

Time: 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Presenters: Katherine Thomas, MA Supplier Diversity Office

Where: Online via Zoom

Cost: Free; Event for Council Provider Members only

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 Nina Walat at nwalat@providers.org.

Nominations are open for the 2023 Awards of Excellence

In preparation for the Providers' Council's 48th Annual Convention & Expo: *Advocate | Act | Achieve*, which will be held on Monday, Oct. 2 at the Marriott Copley Place Hotel, nominations have officially opened for the 2023 Awards of Excellence.

The Awards of Excellence honor those who have made contributions to the human services sector over the past year and cover 11 categories: Gerry Wright Direct Service Employee Award, Chief Executive Officer Award, Supervisor/Manager of the Year, Volunteer of the Year, Ruth M. Batson Advocate of the Year, Innovator of the Year, State Employee of the Year, Legislator of the Year, Municipal Official of the Year, Business Partnership Award and Media Award.

Nominations can be submitted by visiting the Awards of Excellence page at providers.org and filling out a web-form. The deadline to submit a nomination is Friday, June 30. All award nominees must be nominated by a



Council member organization, and only two nominations per agency per award can be accepted.

The Council selected *Advocate | Act | Achieve* to be the theme and focus of its event, the largest celebration of community-based human services in the Northeast. Past conventions have included more than 1,000 participants, 70-plus exhibitors and over 30 workshops.

Registration will be available at the Council's website in the coming months. For more information on the Awards of Excellence program, please contact Hannah Bolster at hbolster@providers.org.



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