



Rep. Domb: The backbone of our safety net

VIEW FROM THE HILL
PAGE 6




Multicultural Wellness provides inclusive care

PROVIDER PROFILE
PAGE 3



Students provide hope for public service's future

EDITORIAL
PAGE 4



THE PROVIDER

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New Council series to help human services organizations grow and develop boards

To help organizations strengthen their boards of directors and increase future board development, the Providers' Council has launched a new webinar series on Building Strong Boards — Strategies for Growth, Governance and Advocacy.

The series will consist of four webinars that focus on board recruitment, governance assessments, retention methods and succession planning and board advocacy. Council members are invited to have a board member join them for the sessions at no additional cost.

"This is an incredible series that offers board leaders and CEOs the opportunity to engage with governance best practices," said Ann Schuler, the Council's director of education and membership. "An organization's board of directors helps set the tone, and we've heard from our members that board recruitment and retention can sometimes be challenging. This series will help members think about how to best strengthen their own boards."

The first session in this series was focused on building the most effective board to ensure success and prosperity. "Up-leveling Your Recruitment Game: Effectively Creating Board Recruitment Programs, Processes and Strategies for Organizational Success" took place on Feb. 11 and put a spotlight on the importance of board recruitment and understanding the critical



The Council has launched a new series of webinars for human services organizations that focus on cultivating, educating and retaining impactful board members.

role boards play in organizational initiatives.

The webinar gave current board members, leaders and CEOs a guide for building a board recruitment program that aligns with their organization's values and principles. This webinar was presented by

Eddrick Martin from Elevated Momentum, who shared valuable insight into commitment forms for board members.

"One way to get board members on the same page is to create a board mem-

BOARD SERIES, see page 7

The Council invites members to celebrate 50 Years of Impact

As the Council celebrates 50 Years of Impact in 2025, the organization will hold an evening event in Worcester this April to honor the past, celebrate the present and prepare for the future.

The Providers' Council's 50th Anniversary Celebration will take place on Wednesday, April 16 at Top of the Tower in Worcester from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. Members can register for the event here: <https://www.tfaforms.com/5165719>.

The Council's Annual Membership and Business Meeting (AMBM) — where the Council will elect officers and directors, review the Council's financials, hear from committees and discuss the successes achieved in 2024 — will begin at 4 p.m. and directly precede the celebration event.

"We look forward to coming together with Council members from across the Commonwealth to celebrate 50 Years of Impact in the human services sector," said Providers' Council President/CEO Bill Yelenak. "We are

AMBM, see page 7

Federal funding freeze sparks legal battles and policy uncertainty

The Trump administration in February issued more controversial policies, including revoking Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for Venezuelans and Haitians living in the United States, and lost several key legal challenges, including those pertaining to freezing federal funds and dismantling DEI programs. Brief updates on those issues are below:

REVOKING TPS FOR VENEZUELAN AND HAITIANS

The Department of Homeland Security announced in late February that it would vacate a decision by the Biden Administration to extend Temporary Protected Status (TPS) for 500,000 Haitians living in the United States, meaning they will lose work permits and could be eligible for deportation beginning August 3,



Since taking office, the Trump administration has created many policies that may impact the human services sector.

2025. The administration had already announced in early February it would end TPS for Venezuelans living in the

FEDERAL, see page 7

Council's first convention 50 years ago lead to lasting success

The Providers' Council is turning 50 in 2025! The organization is thrilled to be celebrating 50 Years of Impact with its members. In celebration of this milestone, *The Provider* will be running a series of articles throughout the year commemorating some of the Council's most important milestones in its first 50 years. This month, the Council wants to highlight the first Annual Convention & Expo in 1976.

Providers' Council founder Gerry Wright noted the first convention was more of a gathering — an event for people to connect and collaborate as they discussed the optimal path forward for what would eventually become the community-based human services sector in Massachusetts.

Wright, Doug Baird — the Council's first executive director — and Council staff orchestrated the first annual event in 1976 for what was known as the Massachusetts Council of Human Services Nonprof-

its. Wright noted the team had little formal training and limited resources, but he knew the importance of getting the first convention going to highlight the importance of collaboration. That first event was the precursor to what would eventually turn into the Council's Annual Convention & Expo.

"We didn't have a formula," Wright said. "Some people didn't want to meet for long, others wanted support from us; each person has their own opportunity to create."

Wright explained that there was a disconnect between those with a master's in social work (MSW) degree and those who had no formal training. He stated that the degree was standard at the time for those wishing to get involved in the sector, and part of the job of the Council was to bridge the gap between those who had formal training and those who didn't.

CONVENTION, see page 7



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Bay Cove Human Services announces Kevin Martone as new CEO



Kevin Martone

On February 12, **Bay Cove Human Services** announced the appointment of Kevin Martone as the organization's next chief executive officer. Martone will officially step into his role on March 17, 2025.

Martone joins Bay Cove from the Technical Assistance Corporation (TAC), a national nonprofit dedicated to enhancing behavioral health, homelessness and affordable housing systems across the country. Prior to his leadership at TAC, Kevin directed New Jersey's Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services.

RFK Community Alliance hires two new executive leaders and bids farewell to two others

On February 1, **RFK Community Alliance** welcomed Dana Green and Kathy Mills to its executive team, following the retirement of Cindy Wing and the pending retirement of Steve Young.

Dana Green joins the agency as senior vice president of organizational advancement. Kathy Mills, PhD, LICSW, joins the agency as interim chief operating officer.

Cindy Wing recently retired from the chief operating officer role after serving the organization in a variety of roles for over 20 years. Additionally, RFK Community Alliance is preparing to say goodbye to another retiring colleague, Steve Young, who served as the senior vice president of facilities and technology for 20 years.

The International Institute of New England hires Alexa Drolette as its senior director of principal and major gifts

On February 1, the **International Institute of New England (IINE)** announced Alexa Drolette as its new senior director of principal and major gifts. In her new role, Drolette will elevate IINE's individual and major giving portfolio and oversee the individual giving team. She will partner with IINE senior leadership to



Alexa Drolette

provide individual donors and prospects with opportunities to deepen their relationships with IINE.

Prior to her role with IINE, Drolette most recently worked as the director of development and communications at Lowell Community Charter Public School, where she served as the lead fundraiser and communications specialist with a focus on their ongoing capital campaign.

Thrive Support & Advocacy announces six new appointments and staff promotions

On January 14, **Thrive Support & Advocacy** announced six appointments, including internal promotions and new hires: Nancy Bishop, Guillermo Creamer Jr., DeMarr Langford, Claire Jean-Michel, Patrick Reardon and Tony Smith.

Bishop has joined Thrive as vice president of individualized and integrated services, overseeing the nonprofit's various residential programs, family support center services and clinical services. Langford has also joined Thrive as division director of residential services. Jean-Michel has taken on the role of Thrive's director of family support, overseeing programs that provide direct assistance, resources and guidance to families. Reardon has taken the position of Thrive's assistant director of community services, providing oversight of the nonprofit's in-home and community-support services.

Creamer has been promoted from his former position as Thrive's residential program director to director of residential services. Smith has also been promoted from his former position as Thrive's sunset program director to director of community employment and internships.

Vinfen to host its annual film festival

On March 15, **Vinfen** will host its annual film festival. The event will take place at GBH Studios in Boston and will use the power of

MetroWest Center for Independent Living welcomes Senate President Karen Spilka at its legislative forum



The MetroWest Center for Independent Living (MWCIL), in partnership with Easterseals MA and REquipment, held its legislative forum on January 31. All three nonprofits provide critical services to individuals with disabilities, providing support and resources to help them live, work and participate in their communities. The MetroWest legislative delegation showed up in force, both in person and virtually. Senate President Karen Spilka gave welcoming remarks via Zoom, sharing her support of the agencies and concern for the climate of confusion at the federal level.

MWCIL's Executive Director, Sadie Simone, highlighted the priorities of the Independent Living Centers (ILCs), including the need for increased investment in affordable, accessible housing, transportation and home and community-based services. ILCs are also advocating for an increase in funding, following years of level funding.

film to raise awareness, foster dialogue and fight against the discrimination and stigma faced by people with mental health conditions, intellectual and developmental disabilities and behavioral health challenges.

Offerings at this year's festival include three feature documentaries — Being Michelle, Gary Gulman: The Great Depress and The Ride Ahead, and a selection of short documentary and narrative films, including Roads to Recovery, Vince: The Punctual Vagrant and Jelly Brain. For more information, please visit Vinfen's website

new education and membership associate



Caroline Bakour

In early February, the **Providers' Council** welcomed Caroline Bakour as its new education and membership associate. In her new role, Bakour supports the Council's educational programming and membership efforts. She also assists with webinars, training sessions and annual events.

To connect with Caroline Bakour, email her at cbakour@providers.org.

Council welcomes Caroline Bakour as

Peter Moser

Tierra Jenkins

Richard Loftus

Kathleen Berney

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Liz Monnin-Browder

Sarah Ruter

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PROVIDER PROFILES

MULTICULTURAL WELLNESS

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About the Agency

Multicultural Wellness (MW) is a behavioral health agency located in the Vernon Hill section of Worcester. MW provides culture-centered treatment by recognizing and utilizing culture as a protective factor.

Today, MW employs approximately 50 individuals from various racial, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds to provide services to our diverse clientele. Over the past 20 years, Multicultural Wellness has grown from just providing outpatient therapy to an operation that provides a variety of services and contracts with the Massachusetts Department of Children and Families, Worcester Public Schools, Massachusetts Department of Public Health and the City of Worcester. In addition to therapeutic services, Multicultural Wellness has been contracted to provide training to law enforcement and youth serving agencies regarding the importance of cultural considerations and their influence on mental health.

MW continues to be creative and innovative in its approach to providing high quality mental health treatment to underserved and underrepresented communities. MW's diverse staff possesses a high level of cultural awareness and competence in helping members process, mitigate and heal from emotional wounds of various types of trauma and other therapeutic needs while empowering the member's personal agency by meeting them where they are. To ensure that its staff can tailor their treatment to the diverse and cultural needs of members, the agency provides on-going, cutting-edge training to introduce traditional and contemporary treatment modalities that best address the cultural and linguistic needs of members.

Multicultural Wellness takes a culturally inclusive approach to care

Based in the Vernon Hill section of Worcester, Multicultural Wellness (MW) is a behavioral health agency that focuses providing a safe space and voice for diverse populations that are often underserved and underrepresented on both the member and professional level.

The organization provides culture-centered treatment to its clients by recognizing and utilizing culture as a protective factor during treatment. The organization prioritizes the significance of culture, ethnicity and other social identities that shape and influence the worldviews of clients. Clinicians at MW understand how these contextual nuances help clients to gain insight into the social emotional learning process that leads to certain responses and behaviors from stressful environments and life situations.

Multicultural Wellness provides an all-inclusive environment that is culturally supportive and impactful to the needs of our diverse members by offering the following services:

- **Child Behavioral Health Initiative (CBHI) Services** is a community-based system of care to serve youth who have behavioral, emotional and mental health needs. CBHI services are available to children and adolescents under the age of 21 who are eligible for MassHealth, the Massachusetts Medicaid program and are diagnosed with a serious emotional, behavioral or psychiatric condition meeting the federal definition of serious emotional disturbances.
- **Additional therapeutic services** include in-home therapy, therapeutic training and support, therapeutic mentoring



Multicultural Wellness provides culture-centered treatment to its clients.

- **Substance Use and Gambling Disorder Services** recognizes the wide range of services needed to support one's recovery journey from addiction. MW's gambling disorder services seek to address core issues leading to the compulsion to gamble and help members establish skills that create a healthy life balance free of gambling.
- **Additional Substance Use and Gambling Disorder Services** include individual counseling, recovery coaching and recovery navigation
- **Other Services** include out-patient therapy, school-based therapy, parenting capacity evaluations and the Broader/New Horizons youth development program.

To learn more about the Multicultural Wellness and services the agency provides, please visit its website at www.multiculturalwellness.org

Executive Leadership

In conceptualizing the Multicultural Wellness (MW) in 2005, Dr. Debra Maddox, founder and CEO, had the vision of creating a behavioral health clinic that is at the forefront of addressing mental health inequities impacting the cultural capital of members within the field of mental health.



Debra Maddox

Through her work as a clinician at a community health center in the early 2000s, Dr. Maddox noticed that despite the growing diversity in consumers of mental health services, this diversity was not reflected in the clinical workforce. She further realized that these diverse consumers would disengage from services over time due to cultural mismatches between the clinician and client as well as the clinician's failure to weave culture as a central part of their treatment modalities.

True to her vision, Multicultural Wellness has the mission of "providing high quality mental health services to diverse communities and those who have been historically underserved and underrepresented in the mental health field." Dr. Maddox has provided mental health services to adults, children and families for over 32 years in Worcester and surrounding communities.

Dr. Maddox has received many accolades for her work including the Presidential Lifetime Achievement Award Issued by President Barack Obama, Katharine F. Erskine Award for Health, Science and Technology and the Worcester Business Journal Most Influential Professionals in Central Massachusetts Power 100.

SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

Dedicated to making a difference: the impact of Allison, Katie, and Fiona

Since August 2024, Allison, Katie and Fiona have been making a lasting impact at **Bridging Independent Living Together, Inc. (BILT, Inc.)** as social work interns, seamlessly balancing their academic responsibilities while immersing themselves in hands-on work that directly supports individuals with developmental disabilities. Their dedication, adaptability and enthusiasm for the field have made them invaluable members of the team.

From the start, these three have shown a deep commitment to their roles, taking an active part in group classes at the center while also managing individual case-loads. Their ability to connect with individuals, assess their needs and provide thoughtful, personalized support has been instrumental in empowering those they serve. Their work extends beyond direct care — each has taken on important administrative responsibilities that help ensure BILT's services run smoothly and efficiently.

"Allison, Katie and Fiona bring incredible energy and professionalism to everything they do," said a BILT staff member. "Their compassion, willingness to learn, and ability to collaborate with both clients and colleagues have made a real difference in our programs. They don't just show up — they engage, support, and truly embody BILT's mission."

What sets them apart is their ability to step up wherever they are needed. Whether working one-on-one with clients, assisting with programming or taking on behind-the-scenes tasks, they consistently demonstrate flexibility, professionalism



Allison, Katie and Fiona have made a tremendous impact at BILT, Inc.

and a genuine desire to make a positive impact. Their dedication to empowering individuals and their eagerness to grow as clinicians reflect their bright futures in the field of social work.

BILT, Inc. is grateful to have such motivated and compassionate individuals as part of the team. Their contributions have not gone unnoticed, and their hard work continues to enrich the lives of those they support.

"Allison, Katie and Fiona are not just interns — they are an essential part of BILT," a colleague shared. "Their dedication, passion and kindness inspire those around them, and we are lucky to have them."

Parks and aspiration: Ashraf Muguluma expands horizons at TILL

Ashraf Muguluma wanted the men he worked with to experience the trip of a lifetime. Mission accomplished.

Toward Independent Living and Learning (TILL) Residential Support Professional Ashraf Muguluma and his supervisor, Residential Coordinator Michelle Lannan, had taken the residents of the TILL home in Littleton, Massachusetts to New York, Vermont and Maine, but this trip would be different: a thirteen-day cross country expedition to national parks including Rocky Mountain in Colorado and Bryce Canyon, Zion and Arches in Utah. By day, Muguluma, Lannan and three residents toured in a TILL van, travelling as much as 13 hours a day. At night, they stayed at Airbnb's. Muguluma documented their trek with video and still photos they compiled into an album of breathtaking images. He would achieve his goal — to give the men he had got to know so well since he joined TILL "an experience they probably never would experience in their lifetime" — and then some.

In 2022, Lannan and Muguluma had taken "the guys" to Acadia National Park. The Maine trip demonstrated that the group could handle long drives but when Muguluma first proposed a two-week, cross-country trip, Lannan was apprehensive. Ultimately, she decided that "if you don't give them the chance to try to see if they're capable of it, you're just failing them from the start."

Chris, one of the men who has lived at the Littleton residence for more than fifteen years, still asks about that first trip.



Ashraf Muguluma works to expand the horizons of program participants at TILL.

His parents, Liz and Ray Geraneo, said that "it always puts a smile on his face when he sees the pictures of this fabulous trip...the gentlemen at the Littleton house are not just a job for Ashraf. He deeply cares about each of the men."

Lannan and Muguluma paged through the photo album. "They did well," she reflected. "Some of the walks we did were challenging but we did it..."

"I was so proud of them," added Muguluma.

In 2024, the Uganda native was named recipient of the Providers' Council's Gerry Wright Direct Service Employee Award, which he accepted at the Council's Annual Convention and Expo. In December, Muguluma was promoted to the role of Residence Manager at TILL's Littleton home.

"I got to know everything I know now from this house," he explained. "I feel like it's home."



William Yelenak
President / Publisher

Students provide hope for public service sector's future

Last month, I had the privilege to serve on a panel with other public service leaders at Suffolk University for *An Evening to Meet Our Distinguished Lecturer Geoff Beckwith and A Fireside Chat with Public Service Leaders*. The former president and CEO of the Massachusetts Municipal Association, Geoff Beckwith moderated a discussion on public service and asked leaders to share insights into the current political climate.

Also sitting on the panel were Andrea Cabral, former Massachusetts secretary of Public Safety and Security; Ron Walker, former Massachusetts secretary of Labor and Workforce Development; and State Rep. Erika Uytterhoeven, who represents the 27th Middlesex District in the Massachusetts State House. We were tasked by my alma mater, Suffolk University, with discussing the future of public service — especially in light of the harsh political climate in Washington, D.C. Geoff certainly set the stage for the event when he noted that “public service is indeed a high calling.”

“It is through our service to others — in government, in mission-driven nonprofits, in education, in our volunteer activities, that we build a better future for ourselves, our families, our neighbors, our community, region, nation and world,” he noted.

And with that frame, Andrea, Ron, Erika and I discussed with students, alumni, professors and others in attendance some of the bigger questions in public service. What are we doing to retain our “hopeful realism” and our ability to remain positive and focused when there is so much negativity in the air? What advice did we have to the people gathered who are wondering about their future and questioning whether to dedicate themselves to public service? And do we feel more hopeful or less hopeful about the future of public service than we did when we entered the room?

The answers certainly varied among the panel. I wrote in this space last month how while I had been filled with apprehension and anxiety at the prospect of the Trump administration in Washington, I had more recently been filled with pride, hope and determination that nonprofits and human services organizations will continue to do the work — serving hundreds of thousands of residents here in the Commonwealth — our friends and neighbors.

Before turning the microphone over to students to ask incredibly insightful questions, Geoff asked us a final question: What inspires us and keeps us going when we think about the future of public service and makes us hopeful for the future? Even though it may have seemed like pandering to some, I noted to our audience that it’s really the students themselves — and particularly those who have a relationship with the human services sector and/or who get to participate in the Provid-

ers’ Council’s Certificate in Nonprofit Human Services Management program with Suffolk University.

I talked about how I’ll be back at Suffolk University on Tremont Street in just three short months when I get to present certificates to our graduates of the certificate program. These are students who have taken a day out of their work schedules every week to travel to Suffolk University (or attend via Zoom) and learn about different aspects of human services management, including legal and ethical issues, financial management, organizational change and human resources issues. They’ve participated in discussion sections, worked on group projects, and no doubt had time taken away from their personal lives to complete the program’s homework. They’ve made sacrifices to further their learning and knowledge of human services because they’re dedicated to the work they do, the people they help and the difference they make in the world — all hallmarks of dedicated public servants.

This year, the Providers’ Council and Suffolk University will hold that graduation ceremony again in early June, and it will mark more than 750 future leaders who have gone through the program — and I’m proud to count myself among them as a graduate as well. Many certificate program graduates furthered their education by pursuing a master’s degree in public administration at Suffolk University (including the Council’s own Caroline O’Neill who has a projected graduation date of May 2025). Some today are leading organizations in the human services sector, and those I’ve spoken with often credit this program and the support from Suffolk University as a reason for where they are today.

Truthfully, gaining inspiration from the students in attendance was a popular choice for several of us on the panel — and how could it not be? In addition to all I noted that these students are doing above, they also took time out of their evening to attend a discussion on public service, hearing from those doing the work in the field they hope to pursue — or are already pursuing in some cases! And, as a group of students stood up right around 7:15 p.m. during the Q&A session to duck out a few minutes early, there was a logical explanation — they had a class to go to!

As I found determination last month witnessing the strength of human services organizations in the face of destructive Executive Orders from the new federal administration, I was equally inspired this month by engaging with Suffolk University students on the topic of public service. They’re dedicated to that “high calling” and they’re committed to “hopeful realism.” And it’s a certainty that the Commonwealth — and our world — will be in a better place thanks to their tireless efforts.



WHO'S NEXT?

EDITOR NOTE: The Council is appreciative to our longtime cartoonist Michael Ripple, who drew his last cartoon for us in 2021. We’ll share some of Michael’s “greatest hits” this year, as well as highlighting artwork from members’ program participants.

Want to highlight the artwork of your program participants?
Contact Maureen at mlynch@providers.org for more information.



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Aging services is essential in the state of Massachusetts

By Lisa Gurgone

For the past 50 years, older adults and their families have turned to the Commonwealth's network of 27 Aging Services Access Points (ASAPs) and Area Agencies on Aging (AAAs) for help navigating resources and services as they age with dignity in our communities. Mystic Valley Elder Services (MVES) is an ASAP/AAA working in close collaboration with the Executive Office of Aging & Independence (AGE) to support people living in the following cities and towns: Chelsea, Everett, Malden, Medford, Melrose, North Reading, Reading, Revere, Stoneham, Wakefield and Winthrop. MVES staff represent the diversity found in the communities we serve. Twenty-nine percent of MVES employees are over 60 years of age and people of color comprise 35% of our staff. Fifty-one MVES staff members are fluent in a language other than English.

According to the most recent US Census data, 18.1% of Massachusetts residents, or 1.2 million individuals, are age 65 and older. It is projected that by 2040 nearly one out of every five residents will be over the age of 65. The fastest growing age cohort of older adults in the Commonwealth is individuals age 85+ which has increased by over 200% since 2015. Nearly 70% of people turning age 65 will develop significant long term care needs in their lifetime.

Massachusetts is unique compared to other states because our legislature appropriates significant state funding to support our state Elder Home Care Program. This program provides daily, direct care services, such as home delivered meals, homemaking and home health aide services, to over 50,000 individuals that enable them to live safely in their own homes. Our Commonwealth has also made additional state investments beyond federal funding to support other critical programs such as Meals on Wheels, Elder Protective Services, SHINE Health Insurance Benefit counseling, and the Money Management program.

Our network works in close partnership with managed care organizations to leverage Medicaid dollars to address the social determinants of health needs of individuals enrolled in Senior Care Options, One Care and ACO programs. Eighty percent of the consumers MVES serves receive care through our home care and managed care programs

and would be impacted by proposals to block grant Medicaid.

Today, more than ever before, the needs of older adults are complex and vary greatly depending not only on functional ability but on a multitude of demographic factors including age, income, race, ethnicity and zip code. It is estimated that almost 300,000 individuals 65 and older in the Commonwealth have an income below what is needed to meet their basic needs. Among consumers enrolled in MVES home care programs, 51% report having a psychiatric diagnosis during their most recent assessment. All too often, older adults encounter barriers that impede their ability to access services leading to adverse health outcomes.

At the same time, our network is working to launch initiatives to address the needs of individuals turning 65 today and is looking for new supports to assist them. MVES recently conducted a needs assessment of our residents and found that many were interested in wellness and health promotion resources. MVES has also been working to connect people with technologies designed to support aging.

Even as the Commonwealth faces a very challenging fiscal outlook exacerbated by uncertainty at the federal level, our state must continue to invest in the necessary cost-saving services our aging network provides to support older adults. Investments in the Commonwealth's aging services network are not just good for our residents; they are also good fiscal policy for our state. A recent review of AGE consumer data issued in 2023 found that our ASAP network provides upstream interventions which save the Medicaid program anywhere from \$22,187 to as much as \$73,700 per enrollee per year.

Now is not the time to reduce what we offer as a Commonwealth. We should not be pulling back on our efforts to build the best resources to meet the needs of our aging population. MVES, and the aging network, are committed to working in close collaboration with our communities and partners in government to develop solutions that support existing programs while transforming our network to address the ever-changing needs as we all age and thrive throughout Massachusetts.

Lisa Gurgone is the CEO at Mystic Valley Elder Services.

Time to celebrate: DEIB work includes celebrations

By Sonia D'Alarcao

What is diversity and what does this look like in the workplace? Diversity refers to the range of apparent and non-apparent qualities, experiences and social and cultural identities that shape who we are, how we think and engage and are perceived by the world.

Nearly all workforces are diverse in some ways, but the human services sector is even more diverse than other sectors in Massachusetts. According to the Providers' Council 2018 report *The Face of the Human Services Sector* about one third of human services workers are people of color, and 1-in-5 human service workers are foreign-born. Research tells us that a diverse workforce leads to many positive business outcomes. We also have a responsibility to our diverse workforce, and populations served, to ensure that all people in our organizations' communities are included, respected and treated equitably.

The work of ensuring diversity, equity, inclusion, justice and accessibility (DEIJA) within organizations is a serious endeavor. It is critical to the creation and maintenance of workplaces where employees, people receiving services and visitors can feel a sense of belonging and can expect equitable treatment. These DEIJA efforts can include things like dismantling unjust systems by revamping policies and procedures, ensuring inclusive recruitment and hiring practices and supporting employees who experience discrimination. This is deep, and sometimes heavy work.

But not all DEIJA work is heavy. Alongside these efforts to dismantle unjust systems, DEIJA work should also include shifting organizational culture and creating welcoming environments. For some employees, the first step in their DEIJA journey is to learn and understand a bit about a culture or group that they are not a part of. They are ready to dip their toes into the waters of cultural appreciation. This can be accomplished through activities such as learning and development opportunities, book discussions, celebrations, community events and more. Honoring various cultural holidays and observances throughout the year can

expose the workforce to the joy and rich complexity of groups they may not be familiar with. And frankly, it can make us all feel good! Sharing a recipe for strudel during German American Heritage Month (October), visiting a colorful Holi festival (March) or offering ASL classes during Deaf History Month (April) are fun ways to engage employees while expanding their (and our) knowledge. This fosters greater understanding of others.

Organizations could consider curating weekly or monthly calendars to share in their community, creating social media posts to recognize various observances or planning activities that align with various holidays and observances. Don't limit yourself to one season — weave the celebration of holidays into your organization's culture year-round. Did you know that this month there are at least 21 different holidays or days of commemoration to acknowledge? That's 21 opportunities for learning and fun! Here's a quick rundown of some holidays and observance is March: The Nineteen-Day Fast, Ramadan, Clean Monday, Shrove Tuesday/Fat Tuesday/Mardi Gras, International Women's Day, Harriet Tubman Day, Purim, Maple Sugar Moon, Holi, Hola Mohalla, St. Patrick's Day, National LGBTQ Health Awareness Week, Ostara, Naw-Rúz, International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Khordad Sal, Transgender Day of Visibility and César Chávez Day. March is also Developmental Disabilities Awareness Month, Women's History Month, and Brain Injury Awareness Month. Phew! That's a lot of holidays and observances. What will you choose to learn about and share?

Celebrating and honoring holidays may seem like "fluff" at a time when the deep work of ensuring even basic rights for diverse populations is so necessary. Engaging and coalescing the workforce through cultural appreciation can be both an important first step towards a just and equitable future and a much-needed relief through engaging in communal joy. Together we can experience happiness and connection with our diverse communities. Let's celebrate!

Sonia D'Alarcao is the vice president of diversity, equity & inclusion of BAMSJ.

Chicagoland DEI Alliance: A Collective of Change-Makers to Face the Times

By Xavier Ramey

WHY WE NEED TO BUILD NETWORKS OF PRACTITIONERS

With the growing attacks on and retreats from the power of DEI as a lens through which we build our society and its institutions, Chicago is a prime place to convene and activate practitioners of DEI to meet the moment.

Over the past decade, the shape of the work and beliefs of DEI have expanded from simple HR and EEOC compliance to social justice-informed ideas about redistributive economics and centering marginalized voices. Today, workplaces are struggling to keep up with the demands of integration, innovation and the biases or prejudices people hold when they come into social spaces such as the workplace, schools and more. It's clear there is a need for a reset in how we consider "best practices," the goals of DEI. When you ask someone in Florida what DEI is, they may say something different from someone in New York. When you ask a business person the goal of DEI they will tell you something different from the social leader of a nonprofit.

THE GENESIS OF THE ALLIANCE

The Chicagoland DEI Alliance began as a volunteer-led community nearly a decade ago. It launched through a group of Chicagoland DEI leaders who wanted to share

best practices, network and grow together. After the murder of George Floyd in 2020, DEI leaders were in high demand, and the work accelerated. The volunteer nature of the Alliance was strained.

At the same time, the sector was and is still split into two main parties: in-house DEI leaders who work at various institutions and consultants who often serve these groups. Meetings began to be led more by the consultants and focused on teaching or providing access to new services. In-house DEI leaders, who have specific needs and challenges related to information confidentiality, burnout and institutional type or size began to detach. The last formal meeting was in 2022. In 2024, one of the founding Alliance leadership team members met with Xavier Ramey of Justice Informed about elevate the Alliance, given the rise in attacks on DEI. Justice Informed and the team worked through various ways to relaunch and reconvene the Alliance. Eventually, the leadership of the Alliance entrusted the growth and path forward for the Alliance to Justice Informed with the eventual outcome of the Chicagoland DEI Alliance re-launching in December 2024, powered by Justice Informed.

HOW DOES THE CHICAGOLAND DEI ALLIANCE WORK?

Currently, the Alliance meets weekly during a closed tactical session where DEI

practitioners of all levels convene to brainstorm their various challenges and build community. In-person events start in late March 2025, and regular quarterly town-halls and semi-annual convenings are scheduled for 2025. The group has two separate spaces, one for consultants and one for in-house groups, both managed by Justice Informed. The groups converge twice a year, and meet separately every month, with tactical sessions for anyone interested occurring each week.

ABOUT THE CHICAGOLAND DEI ALLIANCE

As an outcome, The Alliance works to advance clearer and more accurate definitions for DEI practices and theories, provide space for tactical discussions and support for DEI practitioners and improve the consistency and impact of DEI efforts within the myriad types of organizations and resources with which members lead. Its goals include:

- To cultivate a dynamic network of DEI practitioners who can bring their ideas, concerns, challenges and opportunities to a supportive community of other practitioners
- To host compelling discussions about cutting-edge DEI topics
- To hold space for ideas that challenge conventional norms for business and social growth, eventually producing

test cases and proof of concept opportunities for new DEI strategies

- To work towards the standardization of the ideas, cases, strategies, and outcomes of DEI

The Alliance is a non-partisan collaborative that sees social change as a business and societal imperative rather than a "good option for good business." We clearly see and acknowledge that we must find better solutions to the workplace and societal impacts of the racial wealth and employment gaps, the attacks on gender equity, the role of intersectionality in how we understand and discuss workplace and community relationships, and the lack of humanity that many persons with minoritized identities face when going to work or navigating our society.

We believe that the DEI sector (meaning the practitioners and advocates of DEI) must work to align itself definitionally, strategically and in its vision. The current DEI landscape is fractured, and the Alliance serves as a leveling space for people and ideas.

DEI Alliance members come from different organizations and backgrounds, but through a diversity of ideas and methodologies, our meetings and events bring the complexities of our work together to sharpen and find better solutions for our respective organizations, clients, and communities.

Xavier Ramey is the CEO of Justice Informed.

THE PROVIDER

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THE PROVIDER

Vol. 44 - No. 6 The Newspaper of the Providers' Council June 2023

Hundreds demand livable wages, loan repayment at TCF Rally



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 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.

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 Weckes. "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

A VIEW FROM THE HILL

A commentary from a legislator on human services



Human services workers are the backbone of Massachusetts' safety net

By Rep. Mindy Domb

We know that the many of the human service programs our friends, family members, co-workers, and neighbors need have all experienced significant challenges in recent years. In some cases, these challenges have changed the nature of the programs themselves and others have resulted in program eliminations. Changes in the workforce and severe worker shortages have been identified as contributing causes, since without these service providers, programs cannot be offered, options are eliminated, and efficacy is undermined. These worker shortages have been attributed in part to salaries and worker retention.

In my community, I've heard from human service organizations about the administrative burden in recruiting and training terrific people, only to have these individuals scooped up by a state program that provides an identical service but can pay more for the position. This disparity in worker pay between public and private positions for the same work can result in less availability of, and reduced access to, programs across the commonwealth. Meanwhile, many remaining staff in the public sector take second jobs to augment their limited income. This salary gap has made it increasingly difficult for nonprofit organizations to attract and retain qualified staff. The resulting job vacancies are rising, and program closures are becoming more likely, threatening these vital services for the Massachusetts residents who rely on them.

Addressing the workforce shortage by achieving parity between positions that provide the same work – whether you are a state employee or an employee of a community-based organization – is essential to sustain and increase our capacity to meet the growing demand

for these services in our communities.

The legislature has taken steps, last year we required the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to issue a report (due this spring) to propose guidance on eliminating this disparity and describe the funding needed to meet the sector's goals over a multi-year process.

An Act Relative to a Livable Wage for Human Services Workers (HD3396/SD1201) keeps us on track by addressing the growing pay disparity between community-based human services employees and their counterparts in state government who perform similar, and in some cases, identical roles. The legislation offers a timeline for achieving pay equity, with the goal of improving recruitment and retention in a sector that employs over 160,000 individuals and serves so many Commonwealth residents and their families.

Human services workers are the backbone of Massachusetts' safety net, offering care, support, and stability to our most vulnerable residents, their families and our communities. Passing this legislation is an investment in workers, a strategy to address worker shortages, a tool to prevent program closures, and a commitment to sustain the essential programs and services they provide. By eliminating the pay disparity between state employees and nonprofit human services workers, and setting a fiscally responsible schedule to accomplish this goal, this bill expresses our continuing support for the sector and the people who deliver and rely on its services.

Rep. Mindy Domb represents the 3rd Hampshire District in the Massachusetts House of Representatives.



Rep. Mindy Domb

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

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THE PROVIDERS' COUNCIL AND RESONANT ENERGY PRESENT,

LET'S ILLUMINATE HUMAN SERVICES

The Providers' Council is excited to partner with Resonant Energy to bring members information on The Solar Upgrading Nonprofits (SUN) program will support nonprofit human service providers across Massachusetts to explore the power of solar energy.

FEBRUARY 28
FROM 10:00 TO 11:00 A.M.

BOARD SERIES: Council creates new series to help strengthen human services' boards of directors

Continued from Page 1

ber commitment outline and form," stated Martin during the webinar. "It brings transparency and consistency to the recruiting process."

The second session in the series will highlight the importance of comprehensive board assessment. "Maximizing Impact: Tools for Boards and CEOs to Lead with Purpose" will take place on March 4, and be hosted by Eric Curtis and Toral Cowieson from Curtis Strategy.

The third session in the series will take place on April 10 and focus on steps boards can take to maximize their impact within an organization. It will be led by David Har-

ris from Interim Executive Solutions. The fourth and final webinar will be held by Lisa Simonetti from Hub Strategies in May, and it will focus on board advocacy and helping board members become more engaged with an organization's public policy efforts.

While the series has already started, organizations can jump in at any time and gain valuable tools and skills for board engagement and development. The Council plans on continuing to host webinars and other informational sessions centered on creating a strong organizational system for member agencies. For more information on upcoming trainings and educational opportunities, please contact Nina Lamarre at nlamarre@providers.org.



A board of directors is the foundation for an effective organization. The Council hopes to create a resource for agencies to create impactful boards through this series.

AMBM: the Council to host members for celebration, annual meeting

Continued from Page 1

excited to recognize how far we've come, the work that remains, and how we'll work to strengthen the community-based human services sector together into the future."

The 50th Anniversary Celebration will begin at 5 p.m. and include passed hors d'oeuvres, a cash bar, music and opportunities for sharing stories and making connections. Tickets for this event will be \$150 for members and \$250 for not-yet-members. If an individual is retired from a Providers' Council member organization, they are eligible for a special \$50 rate.

To continue advancing future leaders in the human services sector and supporting their educational opportunities, the Council is launching a "50K for 50 Years" scholarship fund in recognition of its 50th anniversary. Of the ticket price, \$50 will go directly to support the "50K for 50 Years" fund and help provide scholarships for Providers' Council member employees. Scholarship recipients will be recognized at our 50th Annual Convention & Expo on Monday, October 6, 2025.

For more information about the AMBM or the 50th Anniversary Celebration, please contact Ann Schuler at aschuler@providers.org.

WE WANT YOUR FEEDBACK!



Your feedback matters! We ask that CEOs, Executive Directors and/or Organizational Leaders to please fill out our survey regarding your experience as a Providers' Council Member.

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THE CARING FORCE

2025 Legislative Agenda, Presented by The Caring Force

MARCH 10 @ 2:00 P.M.

Agenda legislativa 2025, presentado por The Caring Force

MARCH 11 @ 2:00 P.M.



To view our legislative agenda, please visit our website at www.providers.org/public-policy/legislative-agenda/

FEDERAL: Federal freeze creates political uncertainty

Continued from Page 1

United States – an action that has already been met with a legal challenge from the National TPS Alliance.

The Republican in Springfield noted that Massachusetts has more than 80,000 Haitian residents. Several Haitians have also received work authorization status in the state, and some are working at human services organizations.

It remained unclear at press time if the National TPS Alliance would also file a legal challenge on behalf of Haitians living in the United States.

NATIONAL COUNCIL, DEMOCRACY FORWARD PROCEED WITH CASE V. OMB

The National Council of Nonprofits and Democracy Forward are proceeding with their lawsuit against the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which issued a directive on January 27 to freeze all new federal spending.

On Thursday, February 20, there was

a hearing in U.S. District Court on the National Council's motion for a preliminary injunction. The Trump administration filed an opposition to the injunction and requested that the National Council post a bond in the case. On Wednesday, February 25 a judge granted NCN's motion for a preliminary injunction to prevent unilateral federal funding freeze of all new federal spending attempted under OMB's funding freeze directive.

ADMINISTRATION LOSES KEY LEGAL CHALLENGE IN EFFORT TO DISMANTLE DEI PROGRAMS

A U.S. District court judge blocked executive orders from President Donald Trump on Friday, February 21 that seek to dismantle programs promoting diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. The EOs are likely unconstitutional, the judge ruled.

Organizations were still working at press time to learn how the judge's ruling would impact the executive orders or programs that had already been paused or threatened with a loss of funding if they did not comply.

CONVENTION: First convention sets the stage for annual tradition

Continued from Page 1

The Council also had to connect with leaders within the state government and the community to make the convention work. Wright had connected with the Kennedy family previously through his activism efforts, and he was able to get Senator Ted Kennedy to speak at the convention.

"We sent out programs telling everyone Kennedy was going to speak, but the day of, picketers and cameramen were there. I got a note from Kennedy saying he would never cross the picket lines," Wright recalled. "As long as the cameras were filming, [the picketers] wouldn't leave. I needed to get them to leave, and I was running around asking if they could just go for a few minutes. No one would leave."

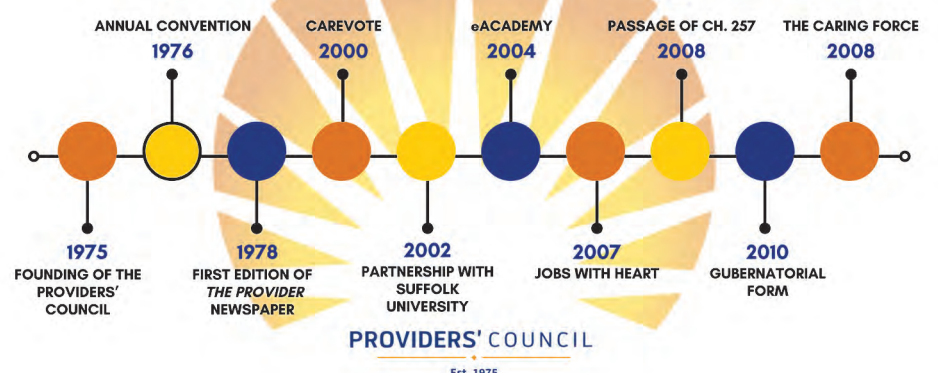
"So finally, I went over to the cameraman and tried to get him to leave. He said no way. So, I jumped into his car and drove it down the block," Wright remembered. "He

chased after the car, and so I drove it down the block and got out and threw the keys over the fence at the end of the street. Then I ran back, and the picketers had gone, allowing Kennedy to come."

While there were several challenges in getting the first convention off the ground, it has become an annual tradition for the Council, growing from a small gathering of human service providers to nearly 1,200 attendees from all areas of the human services workforce. Each year, the Council's Annual Convention & Expo continues to serve as a place to collaborate with others in the sector.

As the Council enters the next chapter in its history, it will continue to honor the original spirit of the convention: the connection and collaboration of hundreds of organizations that employ more than 160,000 people and provide critical services every day to hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts residents.

50 Years of Impact



The Council celebrates 50 Years of Impact by honoring the Council's first convention, which set the stage for the annual tradition for years to come.



Academy for Learning and Exchange

CALENDAR OF EVENTS • MARCH 2025

What: **Maximizing Impact: Tools for Boards and CEOs to Lead with Purpose**
When: Tuesday, March 4
Time: 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.
Presenters: Eric Curtis and Toral Cowieson, Curtis Strategy
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: \$50 for Members; \$125 for Non-Members

What: **The Burnout Blueprint: Unraveling the Web of Stress for Lasting Resilience**
When: Tuesday, March 11
Time: 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.
Presenters: Cait Donovan
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: \$50 for Members; \$125 for Non-Members

What: **Info Session: Certificate in Nonprofit Human Services Management**
When: Wednesday, March 12 & Thursday March 27
Time: 10 a.m. to 10:30 a.m. & 9 a.m. to 9:30 a.m.
Presenters: Council Staff and Representatives from Suffolk University
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free; Event for Council Provider Members only

What: **Conducting Effective Internal Investigations**
When: Tuesday, March 18
Time: 9:30 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Presenters: Jean Haertl, CEO at Safety and Respect at Work
Where: 100 Crossing Blvd. Suite 100, Framingham, MA 01702
Cost: \$300 for Members; \$500 for Non-Members

What: **SUN Program Office Hours (Hosted by Resonant Energy)**
When: Wednesday, March 19 & Friday, March 21
Time: 12 p.m. to 1 p.m.
Presenter: Resonant Energy
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free; Event for Council Provider Members only

What: **Social Work Practice with Migrants and Refugees – Perspectives on Culturally Appropriate Clinical Interventions**
When: Friday, March 21
Time: 9 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Presenter: Jibril Solomon, PhD
Where: Bridgewater State University
Cost: \$60 for Members and Non-Members

What: **Community Webinar: Social Justice in Social Work Practice – The Liberation Health Model of Practice**
When: Monday, March 24
Time: 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Presenter: Dr. Dawn Belkin-Martinez, MSW, PhD
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free; Event for Council Provider Members only

What: **Who’s Really Responsible for Employee Burnout?**
When: Tuesday, March 25
Time: 9:00 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.
Presenter: Deb Calvert, People First Productivity Solutions
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: \$50 for Members; \$125 for Non-Members

What: **When Safety Isn’t an Option – Navigating Housing Resources for Survivors in MA**
When: Thursday, March 27
Time: 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.
Presenter: Luray Fladd, LCSW, Program Coordinator, YWCA of Western Mass.
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free for NASW members; \$10 for Non-NASW Members

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 Lamarre at nlamarre@providers.org

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