

## Navigating the sector during the new Trump administration



(from left to right) Sean Rose, Leah Bradley, Jeff Thielman, Jessica Mendieta and Anne Ohlrich.

On December 17, the Providers' Council convened a pivotal webinar, "Navigating the Future of Human Services: Challenges and Opportunities with a New Administration." The event brought together sector leaders for an insightful panel discussion, offering diverse perspectives and actionable strategies to prepare for the incoming administration.

The discussion featured distinguished leaders in the human services sector: Leah Bradley, executive director of Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance; Jessica Mendieta, policy associate at National Council of Nonprofits; Anne Ohlrich, executive director of Immigrants Assistance Center; Sean Rose, president and CEO of Thrive Support & Advocacy; and Jeff Thielman, president and CEO

of International Institute of New England.

Mendieta opened the discussion by outlining the National Council of Nonprofits' top priorities for 2025. She noted that while Congress will likely rely on a continuing resolution to fund the federal government, nonprofits awaiting earmarked funding will face delays

NAVIGATING, see page 3

## Council to refile two bills to address human services' workforce crisis

The Providers' Council is preparing to refile two key legislative proposals in January that would address critical challenges facing the human services workforce: pay fairness and the substantial burden of student loan debt among community-based human services workers.

The first bill, *An Act Relative to a Livable Wage for Human Services Workers*, seeks to eliminate the pay disparity between community-based human services employees and state workers performing similar roles. Sponsored by Sen. Cindy Friedman and Rep. Mindy Domb, the legislation outlines a timeline to achieve pay equity, aiming to improve recruitment and retention in a sector that has more than 160,000 jobs in the state.

In 2024, the Providers' Council successfully advo-

ated for the inclusion of key reporting language in the FY '25 state budget that calls for the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to release a report by April 1, 2025 regarding ongoing and proposed initiatives to promote equitable wages for community-based human services workers and those working at state-operated programs.

The second bill, *An Act Relative to a Loan Repayment Program for Human Services Workers*, focuses on alleviating the financial burden of student loans for human services workers. Sponsored by Sen. Sal DiDomenico and Rep. Jeffrey Roy, the proposal would allow workers with an associate, bachelor's or master's degree to apply for funding to help pay back student loans.

LEGISLATION, see page 3

## A VIEW FROM THE HILL

~ A commentary from a legislator on human services ~

By Senate President Karen E. Spilka

Happy New Year! As we kick off 2025 and a new two-year legislative session, I want to take a moment to say how thankful I am to have the privilege to continue to work on behalf of the people of Massachusetts — and how deeply grateful I am for my continued partnership with the Providers' Council as we work to put care into action by passing meaningful legislation that positively impacts lives.

This past October, I was thrilled to join Governor Healey and state education leaders at MassBay Community College to launch MassEducate, the state's program for universal free community college, which I first proposed in January 2023. With this important new initiative, we have changed conversations about attending college from 'I wish' to 'I will'



Senate President Karen E. Spilka

for thousands of people across the Commonwealth and made it possible for them to achieve their dreams regardless of age or family background.

SPLIKA, see page 3

## Council concludes 2024 with achievements and plans for 50th year

Following a year of significant accomplishments and renewed commitment to strengthening the human services sector in 2024, the Providers' Council will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary and five decades of achievements in 2025.

Last year's significant milestones included securing a record \$390 million in the Chapter 257 Reserve, providing critical funding for human services and worker salaries, and overseeing implementation of a \$16.5 million student loan repayment program for human services workers.

Advocacy remained a cornerstone of the Council's work. The Council's grassroots advocacy initiative, The Caring Force, mobilized and energized advocates across the state with more than 1,500 TCF members attending the organization's State House rally



Throughout 2025, the Council will celebrate its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

in Boston or one of five regional rallies throughout the state in Peabody, Taunton, Framingham, Westfield and Worcester. The State House event once again featured TCF members advo-

ACHIEVEMENTS, see page 4



## Citizens Inn names Melissa González as new Executive Director

Citizens Inn announced that Melissa González has been selected as the organization's new executive director effective November 25, 2024.

González is an experienced nonprofit leader and strategist with over two decades of experience driving social impact and nonprofit sustainability. She joined Citizens Inn as its deputy executive director in September 2023 and has served as its interim executive director since July 2024. Prior to Citizens Inn, González served in several high-impact roles at organizations such as Everyday Boston, Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS), Revjen and Cove Strategy.

"We believe that Melissa's leadership skills will enable her to work closely with the Citizens Inn team to successfully guide the organization over the coming years," said Martha Holden, president of the Board of Directors at Citizens Inn. "We are confident that under her leadership, Citizens Inn will continue provide optimal service to the people who are most vulnerable in our community."



Melissa González

Massachusetts Housing Alliance (CMHA) to open a Day Resource Center at 134 Gold Street in the city.

The Day Resource Center is designed to be a place where individuals experiencing homelessness will have access to services in one location. This model will facilitate access to housing, employment and other resources. Clients will be able to visit the Resource Center during daytime hours and have access to bathrooms, showers, charging stations, laundry and storage lockers. The site will be designed to welcome all individuals experiencing homelessness.

## Gabriel Vonleh, President and CEO of Opportunities for Inclusion, passes away

Opportunities for Inclusion announced the sudden passing of President and CEO Gabriel Vonleh on December 10, following medical complications from a short illness.

The Board of Directors appointed Mark Beaumont, the organization's Executive Director of Operations and Personnel for the past three years, as Interim Chief Executive Officer.

Vonleh was known for his leadership and commitment to improving the lives of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. His passing was a significant loss to the organization and the community it served.



Gabriel Vonleh

## Nine Council members named Top Places to Work by The Boston Globe

On December 4, *The Boston Globe* released its Top Places to Work 2024 list, and nine Providers' Council members were named among the honorees, including **Advocates, American Training Inc., FamilyAid Boston, Justice Resource Institute (JRI), Northeast Arc, Riverside Community Care, Vinfen and Wayside Youth and Family Support Network.**

FamilyAid, Northeast Arc and Wayside were also recognized by the Globe as DEI champions. This year, 175 companies made the Globe's annual list, including 39 being honored for the first time.

## Worcester Partners with Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance to Open Day Resource Center

Worcester officials announced in late November that the city will partner with **Central**

## May Institute displays student's artwork at May Center



**May Institute** will be displaying student artwork in the atrium of the May Center School for Autism and Developmental Disabilities in Randolph. All images are renditions of a project orchestrated by Laurie Mathews, the May Center's art teacher.

The project involved using oil pastels on colored construction paper. The artwork image of a cat's face with an abstract version of a bird on its forehead was inspired by artist Paul Klee's 1928 oil painting entitled, "Cat and Bird." The students completed the project by using teacher-directed dot-to-dot and paper-folding techniques as guides throughout the process. The bird was created by drawing a sideways figure eight and adding short lines and a dot.

**Want to highlight the artwork of your program participants?  
Contact Maureen at [mlynch@providers.org](mailto:mlynch@providers.org) for more information.**

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## LEGISLATION: Council refiles two bills

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This refiled initiative builds on the strong demand demonstrated by the MA Repay Program, a one-time AR-PA-funded loan repayment effort launched in early 2024. The program received requests from human services workers totaling almost four times the \$16.5 million allocated, providing relief to over 700 workers but leaving many without assistance. This overwhelming response highlights the urgent need for a permanent, well-funded student loan repayment program.

These legislative efforts mark a crucial step toward addressing the workforce crisis in the human services sector, enhancing financial stability for its workers and safeguarding the sustainability of essential services for resi-

dents across Massachusetts.

To strengthen support for these critical bills, The Caring Force Rally will return to the State House on Thursday, May 8, uniting human services workers, individuals served and advocates from across Massachusetts. Together, they will rally for livable wages and student loan relief, emphasizing the urgent need for these legislative initiatives.

Additionally, The Caring Force will host regional rallies, creating more opportunities for sector stakeholders to connect directly with legislators in their communities. Stay tuned for updates on rally dates and advocacy opportunities, which will be shared on The Caring Force's social media channels, including Facebook, X and Instagram (@TheCaringForce).

## ACHIEVEMENTS: Council plans for its 50<sup>th</sup> year

Continued from Page 1

ating for services and salaries under the building's gold dome, while regional rallies created opportunities for advocates to connect directly with legislators in their own communities — amplifying the call for action statewide.

In addition to its advocacy work, the Council expanded its educational initiatives in 2024. The Council's graduate-level Certificate in Nonprofit Human Services Management Program, offered in partnership with Suffolk University, saw nearly 50 future leaders complete the program. The Council also hosted nearly 40 learning sessions and webinars, addressing critical issues within the sector and providing members with valuable resources to enhance their skills and expertise.

At its 49<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention & Expo, Envision the Possibilities, the Council further demonstrated its commitment to workforce development by awarding four scholarships totaling a record \$25,000 to

human services workers, supporting their continued education and professional growth. The event also provided learning opportunities for Council members at 34 different workshops.

Looking ahead to 2025, the Council is poised to build on its successes by embarking on its new three-year strategic plan. The Council will adopt a new mission statement: "Advancing the interests of the human services sector and providers through advocacy, education, and engagement of diverse stakeholders for collective impact." This mission will guide the Council's efforts to strengthen the human services sector with its vision of "building the strongest human services sector in the United States."

As the Providers' Council celebrates 50 years of impact in 2025, it extends its gratitude to its members for their contributions to a successful 2024. The Council looks forward to continuing its vital work with its members as it enters the next chapter of advocacy, education and innovation.

## SPILKA: Senate focused on supporting affordable healthcare and education

Continued from Page 1

The ability to attend community college for free will have positive intergenerational impacts, as parents won't have to decide between paying for tuition and providing for their families. At the same time, their children will have a role model who has gained an advanced education and will be able to imagine the same for themselves.

Having more residents obtaining associates degrees — or transferring into four-year institutions — will help address our workforce challenges as a state. This is how we make Massachusetts more competitive: by investing in our people. I am very excited for MassEducat, which is available to any resident without a bachelor's degree. I encourage you to check it out and tell your friends and family!

As we celebrate the expansion of higher education opportunities in Massachusetts, it is important to acknowledge that, for many of us, the high cost of housing, groceries, child or elder care and transportation are squeezing family budgets and causing stress. That's why the Senate will be fully focused on addressing costs and affordability as we head into this legislative session, starting with healthcare.

Even in a divided country, one thing most of us can agree on is that the cost of prescription drugs is too high. According to recent research from KFF, 82 per cent of Americans have said that the cost of their medication is 'unreasonable' — a percentage that cuts across demographics, geography and political affiliation. If we want to make measurable progress in addressing high costs, starting with prescription drug prices would have the highest impact for the most people.

The Senate has long been a leader in developing policies to address the high cost of prescription drugs. The HEALTH Act, passed by the Senate in 2017, proposed policies to incorporate pharmaceutical costs into the state's annual health care cost oversight process and ensure that consumers are offered the lowest available prices at the pharmacy.

The Senate also led the way, beginning in fiscal year 2020, in authorizing MassHealth to negotiate supplemental drug rebates, saving the state millions of dollars each year. In 2019, the Senate passed the first iteration of the PACT Act, proposing several important policy initiatives to rein in drug costs and improve patient access. In 2022 and 2024, the Senate passed updated versions of the PACT Act, which included expanded measures to lower costs and protect patients.

I firmly believe that the residents of Massachusetts should not have to wait any longer to pay lower costs at the pharmacy. To that end, lowering the cost of prescription drugs remains a top priority as we head into the new year. We will also be looking at comprehensive healthcare reform, including taking a close look at primary care delivery, pharmacy benefit managers and a robust response to the influence of private equity in the healthcare space.

Just as healthcare should be a conversation between a patient and provider without government getting in the way, we should also be free from the influence of private companies as we make the decisions that are best for our health and well-being. As a leader of healthcare reform for over 20 years, it's time for Massachusetts to put the patient and provider back at the center of our healthcare ecosystem, and the Senate looks forward to taking action to make that happen.



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# NAVIGATING: Panel discusses post-election strategies for nonprofits

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until a formal budget is passed. Despite the uncertainty, Mendieta highlighted opportunities for regulatory changes that could benefit the sector. The National Council of Nonprofits is currently advocating for the Charitable Act, which would increase charitable giving incentives. It is also supporting the Streamlining Federal Grants Act, designed to simplify grant processes and empower small nonprofits to access federal resources.

A key focus of the conversation was the new administration's proposed immigration policies. Thielman discussed the potential impacts of mass deportations, including the closure of resettlement agencies and reductions in the workforce—challenges observed during the first Trump administration.

Ohlrich offered practical solutions for nonprofits to support affected clients and staff. Her organization has been hosting preparedness clinics and distributing "family preparedness" packets, which include step-by-step guides for families and American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) "know your rights" cards outlining Fourth Amendment protections.

To mitigate some of the risks surrounding immigration reform, several organizations have connected with local law enforcement. Bradley and Ohlrich both stated that they have been routinely meeting with law enforcement officers to set up meetings with staff and clients, as well as maintain open communication.

Bradley and Rose turned the discussion to

organizational preparedness. Bradley shared strategies her team has implemented, including maximizing funding opportunities and ensuring financial records are audit-ready in anticipation of federal scrutiny.

Rose underscored the need to support staff amid uncertainty, highlighting his organization's monthly wellness initiatives. "Each month focuses on a theme, like mindfulness or physical fitness. In January, our theme will be gratitude," Rose shared. These events provide employees with tools to care for their mental health, fostering resilience during challenging times.

When asked what to expect from the new administration, panelists agreed that while the future remains unpredictable, the past offers valuable insights.

"The first 100 days will likely center on tax reform," Mendieta noted, "which gives advocates a window to engage their legislators."

Ohlrich cautioned that executive orders could bring swift changes, as seen in the previous Trump administration. "It will be an adventure," she remarked.

Throughout the discussion, panelists reiterated a shared priority: workforce wellness and organizational preparedness. By empowering staff, fostering collaboration and maintaining strong advocacy efforts, the human services sector can better navigate the challenges ahead.

The Providers' Council remains steadfast in its mission to connect, champion and inform organizations during this uncertain time. For more information or support in preparing for the incoming administration, please contact Caroline O'Neill.


## CALENDAR OF EVENTS • JANUARY 2025

- What:** **Impact of Peer/Clinician Group Co-Facilitation Across Populations**  
**When:** Tuesday, January 14  
**Time:** 1 p.m. to 2 p.m.  
**Presenter:** Riverside Community Care presenters: Kimberly Fisher, Vice President; Katharine Tyler, Assistant Vice President; Amie Sica, Vice President; Brandi Ditch, Assistant Vice President; Julie Greiner-Ferris, Senior Director  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** Free; Event for Council Provider Members only
- What:** **Embodied Trauma Care**  
**When:** Thursday, January 23  
**Time:** 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.  
**Presenter:** David Emerson, YACEP, TCTSY-F, Co-Director, the Center for Trauma and Embodiment at JRI  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** Free; Event for Council Provider Members only
- What:** **From Suffrage to Selma — Celebrating Black Women's Fight for Equality with Johnnie Hamilton-Mason**  
**When:** Thursday, January 23  
**Time:** 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
**Presenter:** Dr. Johnnie Hamilton-Mason  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** Free; Event for Council Provider Members only
- What:** **The Effects of Outdoor Involvement on Well-being**  
**When:** Thursday, January 23  
**Time:** 7:30 p.m. to 9 p.m.  
**Presenter:** Maureen Clark, PhD, LICSW, Associate Professor, BSW Program Director, Westfield State University and Makena Shea, BSW, MSW Student, Westfield State University  
**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](https://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](mailto:nlamarre@providers.org)



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