Sen. Nick Collins: A stronger human services sector starts with affordability
View from the Hill
Page 6



Housing Families integrates multiple services to support those facing homelessness
Provider Profile
Page 3



Get in good trouble at the ballot box
Editorial
Page 4



THE PROVIDER

Volume 47 — No. 9 | The Newspaper of the Providers' Council | October 2026

Council gears up for 51st Annual Convention & Expo

The Providers' Council will celebrate its 51st Annual Convention & Expo: *Unshaken in Purpose*, with members, friends and supporters on Monday, October 26.

With less than a month left before the event, the Council is gearing up for a full day of workshops, award ceremonies, scholarship presentations and a keynote from national champion boxer Cam F. Awesome.

The Council will welcome Cam F. Awesome as its keynote speaker this year. Awesome is a former captain of Team USA, the author of *Becoming Awesome: Defeating Average Through Gratitude and Resilience*, and a featured athlete in the Netflix documentary *CounterPunch*. Building his career on turning setbacks into success, Awesome is excited to bring his unwavering positivity to this year's Annual Convention & Expo.

The Council will again offer 39 workshops across three blocks. Each block features 13 hour-long offerings, including traditional workshops, commissioner panels and networking sessions. This year's workshops include popular favorites like Legal and Financial Updates and Best Practices, along with sessions on emerging themes, including three on artificial intelligence.

The Caring Force will also host its second annual T-shirt design contest. The winning design will be featured on the back of The Caring Force's iconic gold T-shirt.

The contest challenges members to create a design in celebration of the upcoming 15th anniversary of The Caring Force's first State House rally. The top three designs will be announced at the convention.

The T-shirt with the winning design will be available for purchase on The Caring Force's online store following the convention. With so many opportunities to connect, learn and celebrate, the Council is excited to welcome attendees once again to the Marriott Copley Place Hotel in Boston.

For more information on the Council's 51st Annual Convention & Expo, please visit www.providersconvention.org.

Caring Force wraps up regional rally season with Western MA and Metro Boston rallies

The Caring Force has closed out its 2026 regional rally series with the Western MA and Metro Boston rallies. This year, The Caring Force hosted five regional rallies across the Commonwealth, bringing the grassroots advocacy movement to the communities they serve.

On Friday, September 18, more than 250 driven and enthusiastic members of The Caring Force came together at Westfield State University in Westfield, MA for the third annual Western MA Caring Force Rally. The event blended celebration with advocacy — recognizing the steadfast dedication of human services professionals across Western Massachusetts while calling for the support and resources they need to thrive.

Several organizations collaborated to make the event possible, including 18 Degrees, Berkshire County Arc, BFAIR, Center for Human Development, Gándara Center, Justice Resource Institute, Key Program, MHA, Inc., Riverside Industries Inc., River Valley Counseling Center, The Brien Center, ServiceNet, UCP of Western MA, and Viability. Lois Nesci, CEO of Gándara Center, served as the event's emcee.



Caring Force members raised their hands in the shape of a heart during the Western MA Caring Force Rally.

Speakers included Michael Giraud-Budd, a brain injury generalist at Berkshire County Arc; Patti Messina, the executive director of Northern Berkshire United Way and member of the board of directors at BFAIR; and Damaris Morales, a senior family partner at Gándara

CARING FORCE, see page 7

Council members advocate against proposed changes to Head Start guidelines

Back in August, the Trump administration announced its plan for a major rollback of federal Head Start requirements, removing many longstanding standards for education, health and program quality. With so many critical guidelines being cut, providers will soon face challenges navigating how best to provide services to low-income children and their families.

"The research on Head Start's impact is clear. Head Start children perform better in school, are more likely to graduate from high school and college and have higher lifetime wages for both themselves and their children," said Michelle Haimowitz, executive director of the Massachusetts Head Start Association (MHSA). "The rule proposed by the federal Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) would fundamentally upend the standards that enable generational benefits and make it harder for Head Start programs to deliver the high-quality services children and families deserve."

These proposed changes would mean a significant reduction in services, larger class sizes and fewer staff. Overall, the proposal rescinds over 90 percent of the current standards and replaces them with roughly 12 pages of minimal standards and requirements. Key changes to the educational programming at Head Start would eliminate several standards and best practices for teaching and learning, including guidelines on instruction and requirements for teacher credentials and class sizes.

Additionally, the revisions would strip many of the federal standards that protect child safety. Safety training and certification requirements, the Head Start rules that expressly prohibit abuse, neglect and corporal punishment, and requirements for child supervision, would all be removed, leaving those protections to state licensing.

Standards regarding services outside of education would also be cut including removing requirements for developmental and mental health screenings, requirements surrounding health and dental care and all standards for home visits.

"The harm of the proposed rule does not come from any one of the changes alone, it comes from the compounding impact of removing services and protections for the most vulnerable children and families," said Haimowitz. "Children learn best when their health and mental health are sound, when their teachers are consistent and qualified, when their unique needs are identified early, and

HEADSTART, see page 7

The Council amplifies the voice of the sector through CareVote

Ahead of the general election on November 3, the Council is offering support to members this voting season by once again providing voter registration services through CareVote.

CareVote was created to empower human services workers and the people they serve by making voter registration more accessible. It provides organizations with resources to set up voter registration tables, promote civic engagement and help individuals register or update their information, right at their workplace or program site.

In addition to offering Council members tabling support, the Council partnered with Nonprofit VOTE and the National Council of Nonprofits to create a specialized toolkit to share with members that encourages them to promote voter registration efforts at their own agencies. Organizations can find the

CAREVOTE, see page 7

PROVIDERS' COUNCIL
Envisioning change • Leading advocacy • Driving progress

Massachusetts Council of Human Services Providers, Inc.
100 Crossing Blvd. Suite 100
Framingham, MA 01702

PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit # 2475
Providence, RI

Providers News and Notes

Viability President & CEO Colleen Holmes announces retirement



Colleen Holmes

Colleen Holmes, president & CEO of **Viability**, has announced she will be retiring effective December 31, 2026.

Holmes began her human services career at Human Resources Unlimited, an agency that became Viability, where she worked for 11 years. Holmes continued to serve her community in various capacities through Girl Scouts of Central and Western MA. In 2020, after serving as president & CEO of 18 Degrees, Holmes returned to Viability, where she has served as president & CEO for nearly six years.

Doc Wayne announces Rebekah Roulier, LMHC, as executive director



Rebekah Roulier

Doc Wayne announced the appointment of Rebekah Roulier, LMHC, as executive director. Roulier previously served as the organization's managing director.

Throughout her 16-year tenure at Doc Wayne, Roulier has helped establish the organization as a national leader in using sport to make mental health support more accessible and engaging for young people, while advancing inclusive, trauma-informed outpatient care. Under her direction, Doc Wayne has broadened its scope beyond its pioneering sport-based therapy to include comprehensive outpatient clinical mental health services for youth, adults and families.

Thrive announces new president & CEO ahead of Sean Rose's departure

The board of directors of **Thrive Support & Advocacy** announced that Stacey Forrest, currently the organization's chief operating officer, has been appointed as Thrive's next president & CEO. Forrest will succeed Sean Rose, who is leaving Thrive to become chief of access, opportunity and equity for Worcester Public Schools.

As COO, Forrest worked on initiatives including Flourish, Thrive's food pantry, and the community-based day programs in Worcester and Marlborough, along with other programs that expanded support for the individuals and families Thrive serves.

Rose has served as Thrive's president & CEO for over six years. In addition to his role at Thrive, Rose has also served on the Providers' Council's Board of Directors since 2024.

Pine Street Inn names new board chair



Megan Gates

Pine Street Inn announced the appointment of Megan Gates as the new chair of its board of directors. Gates joined Pine Street's board in 2012 and has supported Pine Street for nearly two decades as a donor and volunteer. She succeeds Lorn Davis, who served on Pine Street's board for 17 years, including the last four as chair.

Gates, a partner at the law firm Covington & Burling LLP, specializes in representing corporate clients in the life sciences industry. Before joining Covington, she was a partner at Mintz Levin, where she served as chair of the corporate practice and co-chair of the securities and capital markets practice.

Additionally, Gates recently completed a term as president of the Boston Bar Foundation, where she helped to oversee the granting of over $2 million to civil legal aid organizations in and around Boston.

Housing Families and Citizens Inn announce plans to unite

Housing Families and **Citizens Inn** have announced that their boards of directors have signed a letter of intent to pursue a union between the two agencies, with a target date of November 1, 2026.

For more than 40 years, both organizations have provided critical support to individuals and families across the North Shore. Working together as a single organization, the agencies would expand their capacity to serve the region, advancing housing stability, food security and overall well-being.

Heading Home partners with two Patriots players to put a face on homelessness



Heading Home *announced a partnership with New England Patriots wide receiver DeMario "Pop" Douglas and running back Terrell Jennings to raise awareness of the side of family homelessness most people never see.*

The campaign will include on-air and streaming radio spots voiced by Douglas and Jennings, a long-form video conversation with Heading Home CEO Danielle Ferrier, filmed at a Heading Home family shelter, live reads, and short-form social content. The players will also spend time on site with Heading Home families. The campaign will launch this fall on 98.5 The Sports Hub.

Communities for People celebrates 50 years of transforming child welfare and supporting local youth

Communities for People (CFP) is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. To mark this milestone, CFP hosted a 50th Anniversary Celebration on Thursday, Oct. 1, 2026, from 6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. at the historic Endicott Estate in Dedham.

Award-winning reporter and producer Nicole Estaphan from WCVB's Chronicle served as master of ceremonies for the evening.

HUMAN SERVICES
PROVIDERS GET IT DONE











FOR MASSACHUSETTS

Provider Profiles

Housing Families

919 Eastern Ave. • Malden, MA 02148 • 781.322.9119 • housingfamilies.org

About the Agency

Founded in 1986, Housing Families began with a four-family shelter in Malden and has grown into a regional leader in preventing and ending homelessness. Today, Housing Families serves nearly 7,000 children, families and individuals each year across more than 30 Greater Boston communities through an integrated continuum of shelter, permanent supportive housing, homelessness prevention and legal services, mental health services, youth programming and street outreach.

As Housing Families celebrates its 40th anniversary in 2026, the organization is entering a new chapter of growth while remaining grounded in its mission to ensure housing stability to strengthen families, individuals and communities. In 2025, Housing Families received a transformative $5 million, five-year grant from the Bezos Day 1 Families Fund to expand housing navigation, stabilization services and flexible financial assistance for families experiencing homelessness. The investment will allow Housing Families to help more families move from homelessness into permanent housing and provide continued support as they establish long-term housing stability.

Housing Families continues to expand its services in response to evolving community needs. In November 2026, the organization will open its first family shelter location in East Boston, extending its geographic reach and bringing its comprehensive, housing-focused approach to a new Greater Boston community.

Housing Families integrates legal, clinical and housing support to tackle homelessness

Housing Families provides a comprehensive continuum of services designed to prevent homelessness, respond to immediate housing crises and help children, families and individuals achieve long-term housing stability and wellbeing. Services are provided across Greater Boston to people experiencing homelessness, housing instability and other barriers to maintaining safe, stable housing.

Housing Families operates emergency shelters for families and individuals experiencing homelessness, pairing safe accommodations with intensive case management, housing search and connections to community resources. After families transition from shelter into permanent housing, stabilization services help them maintain their tenancies and build lasting independence. The agency also operates BrightTurn Homes, its permanent supportive housing program, which combines affordable housing with individualized services for formerly homeless families and individuals with significant barriers to housing stability.

Housing Families provides extensive homelessness prevention services through its Legal Aid for Wellbeing & Stability (LAWS) program, including eviction defense, legal advice and representation, mediation, rental assistance and housing navigation. Community-based housing stability initiatives further connect residents with resources before a crisis results in displacement.

For people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, Housing Families' Mobile Street Outreach team brings basic necessities, housing-focused case management, clinical support, transportation and connections to shelter, health care, benefits and other resources directly into communities. During the winter months, Housing Families also operates regional warming centers, providing people experiencing homelessness with a safe place to stay during dangerously cold weather and connections to ongoing services.



Using multiple approaches, Housing Families supports individuals and families facing homelessness.

As a MassHealth Community Support Program for Homeless Individuals (CSP-HI) provider, Housing Families offers specialized housing support to eligible MassHealth members experiencing homelessness. Building on its experience serving families, Housing Families recently expanded CSP-HI services to individuals, increasing access to housing search, navigation and tenancy supports for people with complex housing and health needs.

Housing stability also requires addressing the needs of the whole person and family. Housing Families' mental health services through CareCollective provide accessible, trauma-informed clinical support, while EnrichEd offers therapeutic and educational programming for children and youth. The Community Resource Center provides food, clothing, diapers, hygiene products and other essentials.

Across its programs, Housing Families integrates housing, legal, clinical, educational and basic-needs supports to help people move from crisis toward safe, stable homes and long-term wellbeing.

Executive Leadership


Laura Rosi

Laura Rosi, Esq., is chief executive officer of Housing Families, where she has spent more than 17 years addressing housing instability and homelessness.

Rosi has worked side by side with families in emergency shelter to secure permanent homes, creating more effective housing search programs and partnering with local and state officials to improve access to shelter and permanent housing for vulnerable individuals and families.

Under Rosi's leadership as CEO, Housing Families has significantly expanded the number of households and communities it serves. This growth has been driven by strong relationships with community partners, municipalities, state agencies and other stakeholders, allowing Housing Families to tailor services to the distinct needs of communities across Greater Boston.

Rosi's commitment to affordable housing extends beyond Housing Families. She previously served on the board of Metro North Housing Corporation and has participated in regional coalitions focused on affordable housing development and housing as a social determinant of health.

Rosi is a graduate of the American University of Rome and earned her law degree from Suffolk University Law School.

Saluting The Caring Force

Myrian Ledesma embodies Project HOPE's mission of transformation

Myrian Ledesma embodies the change that **Project HOPE Boston** strives to create in families' lives. She has been part of the organization since 2018, when she started as an administrative staff member in the family child care program. In 2020, she stepped into the role of family partner, where she guided students through the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program. Most recently, in 2026, Ledesma was promoted to her current role as shelter director.

While working at Project HOPE, Ledesma has never stopped growing. Earning her Bachelor of Science degree in 2021 while learning from the families and staff around her, she grew both personally and professionally.

Beyond her education and experience, Ledesma brings empathy and positivity to her work every day. "I believe a smile, a kind word or simply creating a welcoming environment can make a difference," she says. "I do this work because I believe people deserve to be seen for who they are and not defined by what they are going through."

Ledesma's approach to her role carries particular weight given the difficult circumstances of the families she serves. As shelter director, she runs the daily operations of Project HOPE's shelter, which houses up to 15 families at once, and drives the effort to secure each one alternate housing. Many of these families have young children and face demoralizing barriers to financial stability. Ledesma makes sure every family at the shelter is treated with dignity and reminded that their current circumstances do not define their future.


Ledesma uplifts families in shelter through her role as shelter director.

"[Ledesma] has done an outstanding job stepping into her new role as shelter director," Tonya Jones, senior director of operations at Project HOPE, adds. "Taking over a role occupied by someone else for over 30 years can be difficult. Her leadership and compassion for our shelter staff and residents along with her understanding of Project HOPE Boston's mission will continue to keep our shelter operating at a high level."

Annie Eby empowers clients to live independently through empathy

In February of 2026, Annie Eby joined the **MetroWest Center for Independent Living (MWCIL)** as an independent living coordinator and long-term services and supports coordinator (LTSC). Eby quickly established herself as not just an advocate, but an empathic partner to her consumers.

Eby holds a bachelor's degree in sociology and anthropology, and she previously brought her skills to the field as an ABA technician working with school-age children. This blend of academic insight and hands-on experience allowed her to bring a deeply informed, holistic perspective to her role from day one.

In her current role, Eby provides core Independent Living (IL) services to adults with varying disabilities, focusing on community integration and personal autonomy. On a daily basis, Eby works directly with individuals to help them identify and achieve goals, helping them access community support and gain skills to support independence. Her approach centers on promoting self-determination and understanding the specific strengths of each consumer. One of Eby's early successes was encouraging one of her consumers to attend the agency's annual State House event and talk with legislators about their experience and challenges.

For Eby, the motivation to work in human services stems from personal experience. "My personal experiences with hardships are what inspired me to work in human services because I know firsthand the life-changing impact of having someone who genuinely has compassion, listens, cares, believes in you, and wants to help you," Eby noted. "I strive to be that person for others, and the most rewarding part of my work is seeing the confidence, growth, and relief I can help create when someone realizes they don't have to face their challenges alone."


Eby supports adults with disabilities as a long-term services and supports coordinator.

Her supervisor highlighted Eby's strengths, stating "Annie consistently brings positive and uplifting energy to her work while demonstrating a strong sense of empathy and compassion toward others. I can always count on Annie to go above and beyond to support her consumers. Her dedication is reflected in the meaningful progress they've made toward achieving their goals."

While Eby's time at MWCIL has been short, she has embodied the philosophy of Independent Living from the beginning.

Editorial



William Yelenak
President / Publisher

Get in good trouble at the ballot box

"The vote is precious. It is almost sacred. It is the most powerful nonviolent tool we have in a democratic society, and we must use it."

The late Rep. John Lewis said those words more than once over a long career of public service. He earned the right to. He was beaten on the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma in 1965 when marching for the right to vote, and he spent the rest of his life reminding Americans that the right he bled for only works when people use it.

This fall, Massachusetts voters have plenty of reasons to cast a ballot. With the Sept. 1 primary behind us, the ballot is set for Tuesday, Nov. 3. Gov. Maura Healey faces businessman Mike Minogue in the race for governor, and U.S. Sen. Ed Markey faces attorney John Deaton in the race for U.S. Senate. Voters will also choose a lieutenant governor, other constitutional officers, all nine members of our U.S. House delegation, 160 state representatives and 40 state senators.

They'll also decide the fate of nine ballot questions that include such items as a cap on state tax revenue with rebates to taxpayers, Election Day voter registration, top-two primaries, expanding the public records law to the Legislature and the governor's office, repealing recreational marijuana sales and repealing the state's 2024 gun law.

That's a lot of decisions.

The people we elect in November will write the FY '28 budget. They'll decide what goes into the Chapter 257 Reserve and whether the benchmark wages that drive our rates keep pace with inflation or fall further behind. When the new session opens in January, we'll refile our legislative agenda for 2027-2028 — and the people we elect will decide whether those bills become law. Those decisions shape whether a direct care worker can afford to stay in the job, and whether hundreds of thousands of Massachusetts residents can count on the services and supports they need.

Lewis understood that the ballot was only the beginning. In an essay he wrote shortly before his death in 2020, published in *The New York Times* on the day of his funeral, he urged ordinary people to redeem the soul of America by "getting in what I call good trouble, necessary trouble."

Voting is the most basic form of good trouble. It's how everyday people remind those in power who they work for. And it matters most in communities that campaigns tend to skip. Candidates spend their outreach dollars on people who have voted before. People without a long voting history — including many of the people we serve and many of the people we employ — rarely get a knock at the door, so they're less likely to vote and even less likely to get the knock next time.

Nonprofits can help break that cycle — and the evidence says we do. Nonprofit VOTE's 2024 Nonprofit Power report looked at more than 7,000 prospective voters in eight states who were contacted by nonprofits and human services organizations before the 2022 elections. Fifty-six percent of them voted, compared with 46 percent of demographically similar registered voters. That's a 10-point gap that grew even wider among low-income households, people of color and young people.

Breaking that cycle is why the Council started CareVote, our nonpartisan voter engagement initiative, more than two decades ago. We have never told anyone who to vote for — and we never will. What we care about is that the people who do this work, and the people who rely on it, have a say in who makes the decisions.

This month, we're adding a new tool. Working with the National Council of Nonprofits and Nonprofit VOTE, the Council is releasing the Providers' Council Voter Engagement Guide to our members. It covers the rules for staying nonpartisan as a 501(c)(3), Massachusetts registration and voting deadlines, how to run a voter registration drive, how to host a candidate forum, a sample email encouraging staff to register and the basics of a time-off-to-vote policy. It's written as much for the program manager who wants to set up a registration table in the lobby as for the executive director. If you'd like help putting it to work at your organization, CareVote can assist — email carevote@providers.org.

If you aren't registered to vote in Massachusetts, you have until Saturday, Oct. 24 to do it — and you can access the form online at www.sec.state.ma.us/ovr. Massachusetts does not currently offer same-day registration, so this is a firm deadline. Once you're registered, there are many ways to vote in the upcoming general election, including:

- Early in-person, which runs from Saturday, Oct. 17 through Friday, Oct. 30.
- By mail. Your application must reach your local election office by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 27. Your ballot must be postmarked by Nov. 3 and arrive at your local election office or drop box within three days, so mail it early.
- On Election Day, when polls will be open from at least 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. in municipalities across the state.

But registering to vote is only the first step. Take ownership of your vote. Learn who and what is on your ballot, and decide when and how you'll cast it. If you lead an organization, help your staff and the people you support do the same.

In that final essay, Lewis wrote about the right to vote: "You must use it because it is not guaranteed. You can lose it." He spent his entire life making sure we didn't. Go get in some good trouble for the people counting on you.







The Massachusetts nonprofit **Metro Housing|Boston** *hosted an online art auction, What Walls Can Hold, Sept. 2-16. Supporters and art enthusiasts were able to bid on pieces from established artists, with proceeds supporting Metro Housing's mission to provide services and resources that lead families and individuals to housing stability, economic security and an improved quality of life. The event ended with an in-person reception on the last day of the auction.*

Metro Housing was thrilled to feature work from nearly 50 artists in the auction, including Metro Housing Board Member Mary-Anne Morrison who generously donated two of her pieces to the auction, both titled A Glow Beneath the Surface.

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

PROVIDERS' COUNCIL
Envisioning change • Leading advocacy • Driving progress

100 Crossing Blvd., Suite 100 • Framingham, MA 01702
Telephone: 508.598.9800 • Fax: 508.599.2260
Email: info@providers.org • Online at http://www.providers.org

2026-2027 Board Officers

Chair
Chris White, *Road to Responsibility*

Vice Chair
Mia Alvarado, *Roxbury Youthworks*

Treasurer
Cheryl Fasano, *Mental Health Association*

Clerk
Michelle Smith, *AIDS Project Worcester*

Providers' Council Staff

President and Publisher
William Yelenak

Director of Finance and Operations
Tracy Jordan

Director of Education and Membership
Ann Schuler

Manager of Public Policy and Communications
Caroline O'Neill

eAcademy® LMS Manager
Dave Cerrone

Education and Training Coordinator
Nina Lamarre

Communications and Media Coordinator
Maureen Lynch

Public Policy and Advocacy Coordinator
Isabella A. Lee

Education and Membership Associate
Caroline Bakour

eAcademy® Support Associate
Molly Oram

Technology Associate
Dan Curley

Administrative and Operations Associate
John Da Silva

National Council of Nonprofits

Empowering Deaf survivors: Bridging the gap between communities

By Peggy Sabourin

September was Deaf Awareness Month, a time to celebrate Deaf culture, recognize the contributions of Deaf and Hard of Hearing individuals and reflect on the barriers that still exist in our communities. It is also a reminder that Deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors of sexual violence deserve equal access to support, advocacy and healing services. Awareness is the first step, but action is what truly bridges the gap.

My passion for this work is deeply personal. I grew up in a Deaf household as a hearing child, often referred to as a CODA, or Child of Deaf Adults. I watched my mother navigate a world that was not designed with Deaf people in mind. Everyday tasks, from accessing information to communicating with service providers, often required extraordinary effort. From a young age, I saw how easily Deaf individuals could be excluded when accessibility was treated as an afterthought instead of a necessity.

Those experiences shaped my understanding of the barriers that still exist today, especially for Deaf survivors of sexual violence. Survivors already face tremendous challenges when seeking help. For Deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors, those challenges are often intensified by communication barriers, lack of qualified interpreters and service providers who may not understand Deaf culture or accessible communication needs. Too often, survivors are left to navigate systems that were not built with them in mind.

Research has consistently shown that Deaf individuals experience sexual violence at higher rates than their hearing peers. Yet many survivors encounter major obstacles when trying to access resources, report abuse or find support. When services are inaccessible, survivors may feel isolated, unheard and unable to make informed decisions about their safety and recovery.

This is why the **Empowering Deaf Survivors: Enhancing Response and Support** training was developed by the **Deaf Survivors Program (DSP)** at Pathways for Change. This training educates professionals, community members and organizations about the realities Deaf survivors face and how to become more effective allies and advocates. Participants learn about Deaf culture, communication access, common misconceptions, barriers within existing systems and practical strategies for creating inclusive and accessible services. Most importantly, the training challenges people to see accessibility not as optional, but as a fundamental right.

The goal is not only to increase knowledge, but also to inspire meaningful change. When advocates, healthcare providers, law enforcement officers, educators, social service agencies and community members understand the needs of Deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors, they are better equipped to respond compassionately and effectively. Small changes, such as providing qualified interpreters, offering accessible communication options and creating Deaf-friendly environments, can have a profound impact on a survivor's ability to seek help and begin healing.

At Pathways for Change, Inc., we are committed to ensuring Deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors have access to the same high-quality services, advocacy and support as anyone else. Through the Deaf Survivors Program, survivors can receive free and confidential counseling, advocacy, safety planning, referrals and support from staff who understand Deaf culture and accessible communication. DSP can also provide support through ASL, videophone, Zoom and in-person meetings, helping survivors choose the communication method that works best for them.

DSP also helps survivors navigate medical, legal and community systems so they do not have to face those experiences alone. Advocates can offer accompaniment to hospitals, police departments, and court when needed, while also helping survivors understand their options and make decisions at their own pace. The program may also connect survivors with accessibility supports, such as communication accommodations or safety-related equipment, to reduce barriers and increase independence.

This Deaf Awareness Month, I invite every reader to become part of the solution. Share information about Pathways for Change, Inc.'s Deaf Survivors Program, encourage organizations to evaluate accessibility practices and advocate for communication access and inclusive services. Most importantly, help ensure survivors know they are not alone and that support is available. To access the Deaf Survivors Program hotline, call 508-502-7681. Every conversation, training and effort to improve accessibility brings us closer to communities where Deaf and Hard of Hearing survivors are seen, heard, valued and empowered to heal.

Peggy Sabourin is an outreach specialist at Pathways for Change.



Peggy Sabourin will be presenting at the 51st Annual Convention & Expo on supporting Deaf survivors.

The Starshine Players: Where play, puppetry and growth come to life

By Christopher Dellea



The Starshine Players allows children to explore complicated emotional topics and learn life skills through the world of puppetry.

Step into the world of puppetry and imagination and suddenly worries fade away. In their place emerge joy, curiosity and the freedom to explore new possibilities. Through storytelling, play and performance, children discover their voices, practice problem-solving and learn how to navigate challenges with confidence. These are just some of the goals of The Starshine Players.

My own journey at 18 Degrees began in early childhood education and later continued in school-age programs. Along the way, I saw firsthand how many children struggled with social-emotional skills. Every day brought new examples: a child who reacted with anger and threw a block, a child who cried instead of sharing or older students navigating bullying, teasing and friendship challenges.

Seeking new ways to connect with children, I began incorporating puppets into the classroom. The results were remarkable. Children gradually became more expressive, communication improved and classrooms filled with laughter, smiles and connection. That experience reinforced what I had always believed: theater has the power not only to teach important life lessons, but also to transform lives. It became the inspiration behind The Starshine Players.

Born from a love of theater arts and literacy, The Starshine Players creates opportunities for children ages 0 to 10 to be their authentic selves while strengthening social-emotional skills. The program incorporates a variety of puppets, from tiny hand puppets to Muppet-style characters and marionettes. Through engaging performances, children explore themes such as friendship, self-acceptance, kindness and bullying prevention.

One of the most unique aspects of the program is that many of the puppet skits are written by participants in Brave Spaces, an LGBTQIA+ youth group serving middle school students through young adults. Through their creativity and lived experiences, these young writers create meaningful stories that help younger children learn valuable lessons about empathy, inclusion and resilience.

Research highlights the value of what psychologists call psychological distance, the ability to create a safe emotional buffer when discussing difficult topics. When a puppet experiences bullying, exclusion or self-doubt, children can observe the situation without feeling personally targeted or defensive. This safe distance allows them to process emotions, reflect on solutions and stay engaged rather than overwhelmed.

Puppets also serve as powerful role models. Young children learn by watching others, and puppet characters can demonstrate friendship skills, cooperation, sharing and kindness in ways that are both engaging and memorable. Older children can learn practical language for resolving conflicts, apologizing, setting boundaries and standing up to bullying. By watching a puppet navigate challenges, children build the confidence and vocabulary to do the same in their own lives.

Perhaps most importantly, puppets are beautifully flawed. They may have messy hair, unusual voices or quirky characteristics that make them seem different. When these characters learn to embrace their differences, children receive a powerful message: being unique is not a weakness but a strength. For many young people, seeing a beloved character accept themselves can be a transformative experience that builds self-esteem and validates their own identities.

The magic of puppetry also supports emotional literacy. Children are often more comfortable talking about a puppet's feelings than their own. Questions such as, "Why do you think the puppet felt sad when no one sat with them?" can open the door to meaningful conversations and help children identify and express their emotions.

They say it takes a village to raise a child, and that village becomes even stronger when community organizations work together. Collaboration between human service providers and arts-based programs like The Starshine Players creates a more seamless support system for children and families. When a child experiences an emotional breakthrough, partnerships can help connect them to the resources and professional support they may need.

By weaving together creativity, storytelling and community collaboration, The Starshine Players helps children build confidence, empathy and resilience, one puppet show at a time.

Christopher Dellea is a youth services manager and LGBTQIA+ specialist at 18 Degrees.

Staying connected at the Jewish Family & Children's Service Memory Cafe

By Sarah Failla

Imagine waking up one day to find that all your friends have vanished from your life.

That's the reality many people experience following a dementia diagnosis, whether it's their own or their partner's. Friends may feel uncertain about what to say. Familiar activities become harder to navigate. Caregiving responsibilities can consume time and energy. Isolation sets in when support and companionship are needed most.

The consequences can be devastating. Yet despite increased awareness about Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, people living with cognitive changes face growing stigma and discrimination. For individuals with dementia, and for those who care about them, loneliness can become one of the most challenging aspects of the journey.

The need for support is growing. More than 1.2 million Massachusetts residents are age 65 or older, and by 2030, one in five Americans will be over age 65. More than a quarter of people over age 80 will develop a neurodegenerative disease. As our population ages, communities will need more opportunities for older adults and caregivers to remain connected, engaged and supported.

Memory Cafes are one response to that need.

Memory Cafes are welcoming social gatherings where people living with cognitive changes and their care partners come together for companionship and fun. One of the core principles is that nobody is expected to share a diagnosis. Participants gather around conversation and shared experienc-

MEMORY CAFE, see page 7



Donna Newman-Bluestein, a dance and movement therapist, leads Memory Cafe participants in movement with Beth Soltzberg, director of Alzheimer's and related dementias family support at JF&CS.

OLD COLONY YMCA'S 10TH ANNUAL

RISE UP GALA

Please join us in honoring
Vinnie & Nancy Marturano

Friday, October 23rd
Quincy Marriott



2026 Legacy Award Recipients, Vinnie & Nancy Marturano

the YMCA

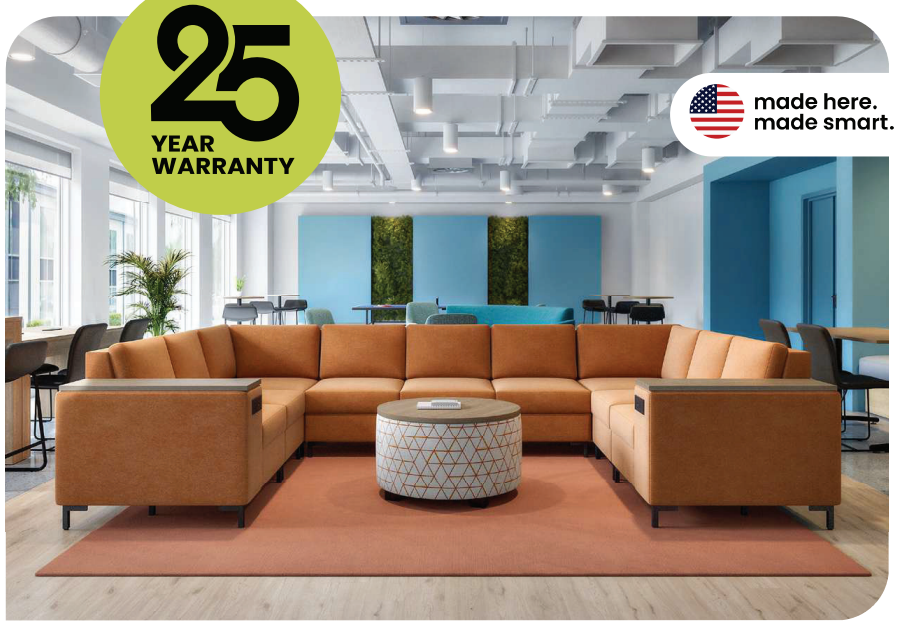
Help Your Community Rise Up

We're also thrilled to recognize **DELLBROOK** with this year's Call to Action Award.

Proceeds directly benefit children and families within the local community, helping to change lives for the better. Please scan the QR code for more information regarding sponsorships, tickets or to request an invitation.

PRIVACY.FLOWCODE.COM

RiseUp2026.givesmart.com



Sustainable Design for Community Living.



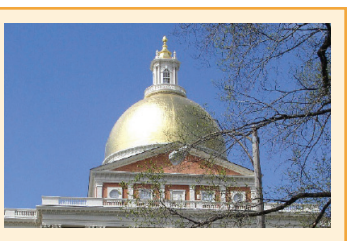
Jonathan Passarelli
District Manager - New England
jpassarelli@foliot.com
450.275.2239

foliot furniture

foliot.com

A View from the Hill

A commentary from a legislator on human services



A stronger human services workforce starts with affordability

By Senator Nick Collins



Sen. Nick Collins

Across Massachusetts, human service workers have built careers around helping others maintain their dignity and independence. Many have spent decades supporting people with disabilities, older adults, families in crisis and individuals in recovery. They stay in this work because they understand, in a very real way, how much it matters. But that sense of purpose does not exist in a vacuum. Human service workers face the same rising costs and financial pressures as everyone else, and increasingly, those realities are forcing talented and experienced people to decide whether they can afford to remain in the field.

That pressure is not unique to human services, but it is exactly why affordability has remained central to my work on Beacon Hill. The cost of everyday life continues to rise across Greater Boston. People do not experience inflation as a statistic. They feel it in the rent, the mortgage, the grocery bill, the utility bill and what remains in their paycheck at the end of the month. Nearly half of Massachusetts renters are spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing, leaving less for every other household expense.

That is why I fought for and helped secure more than $237 million in Unrestricted General Government Aid for Boston in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget, supporting the local services residents rely on every day, from public safety and parks to infrastructure and basic municipal operations. The budget also delivered more than $254 million in Chapter 70 education aid for Boston's public schools.

We are also beginning to see the benefits of the $1 billion tax relief package enacted in 2023, which expanded the Earned Income Tax Credit, doubled the base amount of the Senior Circuit Breaker, increased the rental deduction and expanded relief for families with children and dependents. These policies address different pressures, but they share the same goal: making it more affordable for people to live, work, raise families and remain in Massachusetts.

The human services workforce is not immune to those pressures. Nearly 150,000 people work in the sector, a workforce roughly comparable in size to the Commonwealth's construction industry. We may not always see the product of their labor rising above the skyline, but we see its impact every day in the lives of the people they support. Their work is measured in independence maintained, crises avoided, families stabilized and people given the chance to move forward.

We have made progress on affordability, but the work is not finished. Part of good governance is listening to the people closest to a problem when they tell us where the gaps remain. Human service workers and community-based providers understand better than most where our policies are working, where they are falling short, and what is making it harder to recruit and retain the people who deliver these essential services.

When they identify a gap that government can help close, we should take that seriously and be prepared to act.

For human service workers, affordability can determine whether a meaningful career is also a sustainable one. That is why I support S.119, *An act establishing a loan repayment program for human services workers*. The bill would help eligible workers manage student debt in exchange for a commitment to remain in the field. We should be encouraging people to enter fields like social work, behavioral health, direct care and recovery services, and help ensure that student debt does not become a reason they have to leave.

At the same time, we must address what workers are being paid once they are in the field. Today, two people can perform comparable human service work and serve the same population, with one employed directly by the Commonwealth and another employed by a community-based provider funded by the Commonwealth yet receive different compensation for that work. That is why I also support S.130, *An act relative to a livable wage for human services workers*. The Commonwealth has recognized that disparity, and we have a responsibility to address it.

These two bills address different sides of the same affordability challenge: making it financially possible to choose this work in the first place and making it sustainable to build a career doing it.

But legislation aimed at individual workers must also be matched by adequate support for the organizations that employ them. The Fiscal Year 2027 budget includes $175 million for Chapter 257 rate implementations, with provisions specifically focused on worker compensation and wage equity. I support continued investment in Chapter 257 so community-based providers have the resources to recruit, retain and fairly compensate the workforce Massachusetts depends on.

Human service workers spend their careers helping other people find stability. They work with our neighbors when they need support, advocacy, care or simply someone willing to stay in the room and help them find the next step.

Affordability policy should recognize that contribution. We have made important progress, but there is more work ahead. As providers and workers continue telling us where the pressure points remain, I intend to keep listening and working with them to close those gaps.

Human service work is where policy becomes personal. The people doing that work deserve policies that work for them, too.

Senator Nick Collins represents the 1st Suffolk District in the Massachusetts Senate.

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.

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW IN ONE PLACE

Looking for more information on the Council's 51st Annual Convention & Expo?

SCAN THE QR CODE

UNSHAKEN IN PURPOSE

MEMORY CAFE: JF&CS supports people living with cognitive changes through inclusion and fun

Continued from page 5

es rather than symptoms or limitations. Activities might include singing favorite songs, enjoying gentle movement, exploring art or interacting with visiting animals.

As one participant put it, "for 90 minutes, we are all humans."

At Jewish Family & Children's Service of Greater Boston (JF&CS), our Memory Cafe began in 2014 as the second in Massachusetts. Over the years, we have welcomed hundreds of participants and watched many become part of a close-knit community. Some attend for years alongside spouses, partners, children or friends. Others continue participating after the death of a loved one because of the relationships they have formed. College student volunteers become like grandchildren. New friendships take root. People find a place where they are seen for who they are, not defined by a diagnosis.

The JF&CS Memory Cafe is also much more than a stand-alone program.

Being embedded within JF&CS allows our Memory Cafe to serve as a gateway to the wide array of integrated services our agency offers under one roof. Our social workers' deep expertise in dementia enhances our ability to support older adults, families and caregivers navigating the challenges of aging.

At the same time, being part of a broader social service agency allows us to respond to the many needs that often intersect with aging and cognitive change. Through care management and our wider range of services, we can help people address mental health concerns, basic needs, benefits, bereavement and challenges facing adult children who are caring for aging parents while managing their own work and family responsibilities.

This integrated approach reflects something we see every day: people do not experience their challenges one at a time. A dementia diagnosis can affect emotional well-being, family relationships, financial stability and the ability to remain independent. Our holistic approach enables us to meet people where they are and help them access the support they need to age with dignity.

As interest in Memory Cafes grew, JF&CS began helping others replicate the model. Our Memory Cafe Percolator has supported organizations and community leaders interested in starting their own Memory Cafes, and today Massachusetts is home to one of the largest concentrations of Memory Cafes in the country. That work now continues through a broader movement, with the Memory Cafe Alliance seeking to expand access to Memory Cafes tenfold throughout the United States in the years ahead.

The success of Memory Cafes offers an important lesson for all of us in human services. Medical advances are essential and bring much-needed hope. But helping people live well with dementia also means helping people avoid social isolation and stay engaged in the world around them.

Across our lives, chances are that we or someone we love will experience cognitive change. When that happens, people need more than services alone. They need places where they feel welcome, understood and connected.

That is what a Memory Cafe provides.

Sarah Failla is the director of marketing and communications at Jewish Family & Children's Service.

HEAD START: Council and members oppose proposed Head Start changes

Continued from page 1

when their families have the resources and tools they need to thrive."

"Early Head Start is an incredibly effective service in part because of the strong program requirements currently in place," said Vicker DiGravio III, president and CEO of Riverside Community Care, a Massachusetts Head Start provider. "The changes proposed by the federal government will undermine program quality in ways that are very real. In no way are these changes in the best interests of Early Head Start providers and they are certainly not in the best interests of the families we support."

Following the announcement, HHS opened a public comment period. The Council and MHSA are encouraging organizations to submit comments regarding the changes and the effects they would have on their agency and community. The Council submitted comments and encourages all members, whether or not they run Head Start programs, to do the same.

MHSA has shared templates for submitting public comments, which can be found under the resources tab on its website.

"Head Start has always been about more than providing a classroom seat," wrote Community Teamwork, a Massachusetts Head Start provider, in its public comments. "It is about identifying barriers early, connecting families to services and giving children who face the greatest challenges an opportunity to enter school healthy, supported and ready to succeed. That fundamental promise must remain at the center of any changes to the program."

The comment period will be open until October 6. If members have any questions or would like support in drafting comments, please contact Caroline O'Neill at coneill@providers.org.

CAREVOTE: Council releases new voting resources through Nonprofit VOTE and NCN partnership

Continued from page 1

toolkit on the Council's designated CareVote page.

"This guide will show you how to integrate CareVote at your agency while staying fully nonpartisan, and it will answer your most frequently asked questions along the way," wrote Council President and CEO Bill Yelenak in a letter to members. "This is how civic power actually gets built — not through any single event or election, but through the sustained, cumulative effort of more people participating in our democracy. Every person you register helps amplify our collective voice on Beacon Hill and in every community across the state."

Massachusetts voters can register online through the Secretary of the Commonwealth's website, which needs to be completed 10 days before the election. Voters are able to cast ballots in person on Election Day, early in person or by mail. There is additional information on voting via mail on the Secretary of the Commonwealth's website.

The general election will take place on Tuesday, November 3. Voters must register by Saturday, October 24 for the general election. Those choosing to vote by mail-in-ballot must submit their application by 5 p.m. on Tuesday, Oct. 27. Early voting will run from Saturday, Oct. 17 to Friday, Oct. 30.

For more information about what positions are up for election and further voting deadlines, please visit www.sec.state.ma.us. For additional resources and to access the new voter guide, visit www.providers.org/public-policy/carevote/.

If organizations want to host their own voter registration tables or have any questions, please reach out to carevote@providers.org.

CARING FORCE: Council's advocacy coalition closes out 2026 rally season

Continued from page 1

ra Center. Their stories highlighted both the essential work human services workers do in their communities and the challenges of doing it without a livable wage.

Morales recounted how low wages drove her out of the sector, but she missed the work so much that she came back, knowing she still wouldn't earn a livable wage. "I want to continue my education in human services," said Morales. "I want to grow professionally, strengthen my skills and give even more to the people and communities I serve. But I can't afford to take on student loan debt, and I don't have the time to go back to school when I must work a second job just to make ends meet."

Giraud-Budd shared how financial instability affects him and his coworkers. "There is not a lot of room for error living on wages of a human services worker," said Giraud-Budd. "One bad car repair bill, one health care problem, an unexpected personal emergency and you could fall behind in an instant."

The rally also featured a legislative panel, which included Sen. Jo Comerford and Reps. Mindy Domb, Patricia Duffy and Kelly Pease, who all spoke about the vital role human services workers play in their communities.

The rally ended with a dance party facilitated by The Friendship Band, an inclusive, resident rock band made up of clients from ServiceNet's Whole Children and Milestones programs. Overall, the gathering served as a meaningful and unifying moment for the region's human services community to close out National Direct Support Professional Recognition Week.

The following Friday, more than 150 determined and energetic members of The Caring Force came together at the WORK Inc. headquarters in Dorchester, MA for the first-ever Metro Boston Caring Force Rally.

The Metro Boston Caring Force Rally was organized by a coalition of dedicated human services organizations, including Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), Bay Cove Human Services, Casa Esperanza, Children's Services of Roxbury, Communities for People, COMPASS, Family Independence, Justice Resource Institute, Morgan Memorial Goodwill, North Suffolk Community Services, Roxbury Youthworks, Sojourner House, The Home for Little Wanderers, TILL Inc., Victory Programs and WORK Inc. Sandra McCroom, president and CEO of Children's Services of Roxbury, served as the event's emcee.

The rally featured several empowered human services workers who shared their experiences working in the sector. Speakers included Laquinta Bryan, a program coordinator for Communities for People; Maniasha Baez, a veteran direct support professional at North Suffolk Community Services; and Waleska Surita, a family member of a client at WORK, Inc.

"We are fostering lives. We are helping fix broken dreams so people can become whole again. We help youth regain normalcy — and in doing that work, for kids dealing with real mental health struggles, we find our own kind of normalcy too," said Bryan. "We don't just help someone get to a doctor's appointment. We are in the room, live, assessing mental health crises in real time, helping people find ways to self-regulate in their hardest moments. It's exhausting to be a caregiver for other people's families and still try to show up for your own... People in this field love what they do. They stay in relationships with the people they've served long after the program ends. We are 100 percent bought into the mission. So why does it feel like we're being punished for caring?"

"Being passionate about your work does not make the cost of living disappear. Being dedicated does not make groceries cheaper.



City Councilor Brian Worrell (second row, left) Craig Gordon (second row, middle) and Rep. Chris Worrell (second row, right) pose with TCF advocates from Communities for People at the Metro Boston rally on Sept. 25.

Being committed does not make rent, childcare, transportation, or the other responsibilities of raising a family any less expensive. And when you are a single mother of five, those realities matter," said Baez. "We are asked to care for others, support others, and help people build more stable lives. But the people providing that support also deserve stability in their own lives."

The rally also featured a legislative panel, which included Sen. Nick Collins and Reps. Chris Worrell, Jay Livingstone and Brandy Fluker-Reid, who all spoke about the important role human services workers play in caring for the most vulnerable in the region. Boston City Councilors John FitzGerald (District 3) and Brian Worrell (District 4) also shared brief remarks.

While The Caring Force is done with its rally season, it will be attending one final event this year: The Massachusetts Direct Support Professionals Conference, which will be held on November 9-10 in Falmouth, MA. For more information on the conference or more information on either the Western MA or Metro Boston rallies, please visit thecar-ingforce.org.

ALEX
Academy for Learning and Exchange

Calendar of Events • October 2026

What: **Free, Members-Only Webinar: Field Experience – Implementation & Adoption of Case Management**
When: Tuesday, October 6
Time: 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.
Presenters: Jack Miszencin, director of client implementations, and Meaghan Riether, product manager, Salus
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free; Event for Council Provider Members-Only

What: **Provider Member Webinar: Substance Use Among Older Adults – Education and Engagement in Recovery Activities**
When: Tuesday, October 6
Time: 1:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Presenters: Alexis Kuerbis, PhD
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: $35; Event for Council Provider Members-Only

What: **Free, Members-Only Webinar: Build a Better Benefits System – Exploring CHOICE Plans**
When: Thursday, October 8
Time: 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Presenter: Joe Lawler, senior vice president; Valerie Francis, senior vice president; Mark Steiner, executive sales consultant; Jennifer Stone, senior account manager, employee benefits, USI Insurance Services
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free; Event for Council Provider Members-Only

What: **Associate Member Webinar: Cyber Threats Today – Claim Trends, Cyber Crime, and Risk Services**
When: Wednesday, October 14
Time: 11:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.
Presenters: Rehman Khan, AVP, cyber risk management, Mark Hoover, claim counsel, bond & specialty claims, Nelda Cronin, senior claim counsel, Travelers
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free

What: **Community Webinar: Peeling Back the Layers of Grief**
When: Wednesday, October 21
Time: 12:00 to 1:30 p.m.
Presenters: Ryan Loiselle, MSW, LICSW
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: $15, NASW members; $42 Non-NASW members

What: **SOLD OUT: 51st Annual Convention & Expo**
When: Monday, October 26
Time: 9:00 to 5:00 p.m.
Presenters: See Convention Website
Where: Marriott Copley Place Hotel, Boston, MA

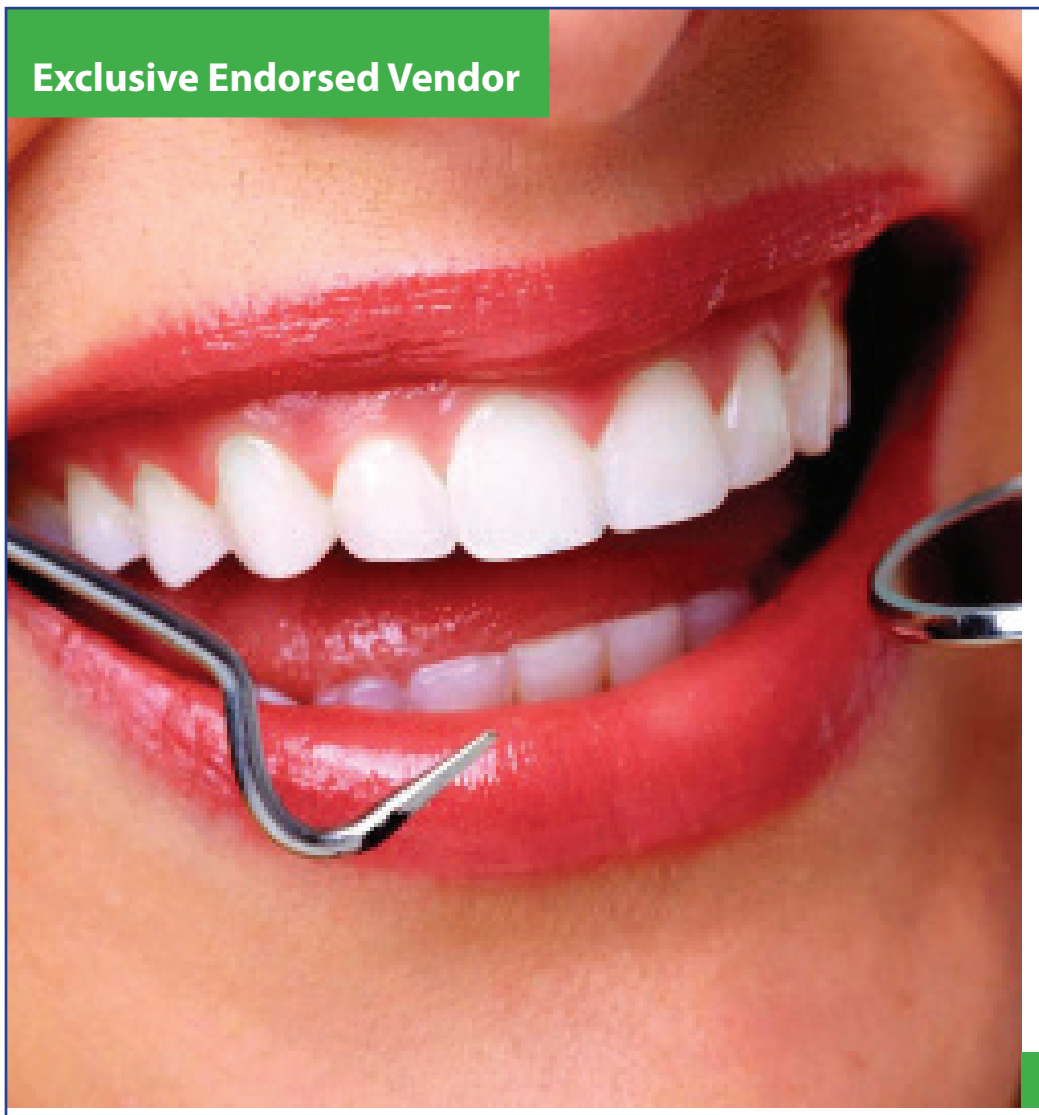
What: **Free, Members-Only Webinar: The Supplier Diversity Program (SDP) for Health and Human Service Providers**
When: Wednesday, October 28
Time: 10:00 to 11:00 a.m.
Presenters: Katherine Thomas, training and policy manager, Massachusetts Supplier Diversity Office
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free; Event for Council Provider Members-Only

What: **Associate Member Webinar: Financial Strategy for Profitability and Growth**
When: Thursday, October 29
Time: 2:00 to 3:00 p.m.
Presenters: Margo Amrein, principal, CLA
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free

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

Exclusive Endorsed Vendor



EXCITING NEWS!

USI is pleased to announce that the Providers' Council Delta Dental program is renewing with a 3-year hold!
No increase to rates through 2027
and...
now covering mouthguards, enhanced flouride and sealant coverage, enhanced implant coverage and more.

The Delta Dental program is one of the Council's most popular programs. Interested Council members can receive a **free, no-obligation analysis** of their potential savings through the Delta Dental program.

USI | DELTA DENTAL | PROVIDERS' COUNCIL

DENTAL | VISION | LIFE | SHORT-TERM DISABILITY | LONG-TERM DISABILITY

JOSEPH J. LAWLER, CEBS
PARTNER | SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT
EMPLOYEE BENEFITS
USI INSURANCE SERVICES
HUMAN & SOCIAL SERVICES PRACTICE
Joe.Lawler@usi.com

www.usi.com | 855.874.0123

© 2025 USI Insurance Services. All rights reserved.