

Sen. Miranda: It's time to show up for human services workers

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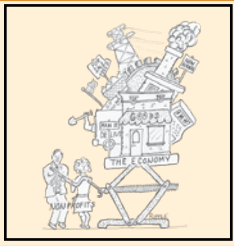
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THE PROVIDER

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The Newspaper of the Providers' Council

June 2025

Council celebrates 50 Years of Impact: Start of the Suffolk Program

The Providers' Council is turning 50 in 2025, and we're proud to be Celebrating 50 Years of Impact with our dedicated members and partners. As part of this milestone, *The Provider* will feature a year-long series highlighting some of the Council's most significant achievements. This month, we're spotlighting the beginning of the Council's partnership with Suffolk University.

Suffolk University's Moakley Center for Public Management and the Providers' Council began collaborating in 2002 on the human service management certificate program. The program was designed to provide access to a graduate-level education at a significant discount to promote educational accessibility and assist human service workers in advancing their careers. Participants in the program are enrolled from September to May and complete five blocks of classes covering current topics and skills relevant to the human services sector. The program provides graduates of the Certificate Program with a well-rounded skill set to be successful managers in today's human service sector.

The program was originally designed to address the need for new leadership within the human services community. Former Providers' Council President/CEO Michael Weekes and former Moakley Center director, the late Sandy Matava, were instrumental in developing the program. "We feel that providers will gain tremendously from this program. It will not only help with recruitment and retention problems in the industry but also develop critical staff leadership for the health and human services environment," stated Sara Morrison in the January 2002 edition of *The Provider*. Morrison served as the research

SUFFOLK, see page 7

13th Annual Caring Force Rally draws nearly 600 to the State House



A group of Caring Force members holds up a sign in support of human services workers.

Standing at the podium in the Great Hall of the State House, Jawaan Kellam reminded many of the human services workers gathered before him why the work he and so many of his peers do within human services is vital to the community.

"Let's talk real," he said. "These are heavy times. Our communities are hurting — from past trauma and present

pain. People ask, 'What's the answer?' — and I tell them: we are. Human services workers are the bridge between breakdown and breakthrough."

But to maintain that bridge, human services workers need more.

A sea of gold shirts filled the State House on May 8 as nearly 600 Caring

CARING FORCE, see page 8

Join the Council for its golden anniversary convention: 50 Years Together: Celebrating Today, Shaping Tomorrow

The Providers' Council is excited to announce that it will be honoring the sector's past, present and future this year at the 50th Annual Convention & Expo themed *50 Years Together: Celebrating Today, Shaping Tomorrow*.

The Council's golden anniversary convention will be held at the Marriott Copley Place Hotel in Boston on Monday, October 6. The largest one-day convening of human services professionals in the Northeast will once again provide an opportunity

for learning, celebrating, networking and engaging, as the sector will come together to recognize accomplishments it has made over the past 50 years while looking toward the future of the sector.

The Providers' Council is once again planning to have a variety of workshops, which will be of varying lengths in 2025 and provide a wide-range of options for the entire human services community. These

CONVENTION, see page 7

Senate passes \$61.4 billion FY '26 budget

On May 22, the Senate approved a fiscal year 2026 budget totaling approximately \$61.4 billion by a 38-2 vote. This version increases state spending by over 6% compared to the budget signed by Governor Maura Healey last summer — more than double the previous year's growth rate. The Senate added \$81.1 million through amendments, primarily for local earmarks, bringing the total to about \$61.4 billion — slightly below the House's nearly \$61.5 billion proposal.

Chapter 257 continues to be funded at the \$207 million proposed by both the House and the Governor, which represents an increase of \$34 million, or 19.65%, from FY '24 (The Council compared the Chapter 257 line item to the FY '24 budget, rather than the FY '25 budget, because the number of Chapter 257 rates reviewed by EO-HHS alternate in proportion every other year).

Thanks to the advocacy from Providers' Council members with CIES contracts, the budget included the following language:

"provided further, that the department shall expend not less than the amounts expended in fiscal year 2025 for the young parents program and the competitive integrated employment services program."

Other items of interest include:

JUD line item 0339-1011 – Community-based Re-entry Programs – were funded at the same levels proposed in the HWM budget.

DAR line item 2511-0105 – Emergency Food Assistance – dropped from \$55 million to about \$42.1 million, a 23% decrease from the HWM proposal.

DTA line item 4401-1000 – Employment Services Program – were funded at \$20.5 million as proposed by the governor, a 9.01% increase from the HWM proposal.

DYS line items 4200-0100 – Non-Res Services for Committee Population; **4200-0200** – Residen-

BUDGET, see page 7



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Children's Services of Roxbury hires new CFO

Children's Services of Roxbury (CSR) announced the hiring of Maria Chung as its new chief financial officer. Chung, a certified public accountant who was the CFO at HRI Hospital in Brookline, assumed her new role on May 12, 2025.



Maria Chung

Chung holds a Master of Science degree in corporate finance from Bentley University and a Bachelor of Science in Accounting from UMAss Boston. She has worked for several prominent health care organizations over the last 20 years, including the Franciscan Hospital for Children, Shriners Hospital for Children and Boston Medical Center.

"Everyone at CSR is so excited that Maria is joining our leadership team," said CSR's President and CEO Sandra McCroom. "It was clear to our community that Maria was inspired by the work we do, and, given her exceptional financial experience, I know she will quickly make a positive impact here."

The Home for Little Wanderers welcomes Rick Musiol as Chief External Affairs Officer

The Home for Little Wanderers has appointed Rick Musiol as its new chief External Affairs officer. Musiol officially joined the agency on May 5, and will oversee government relations, external partnerships and community engagement efforts.



Rick Musiol

Musiol brings a wealth of leadership experience in external affairs and civic engagement. He most recently served as Director of External Affairs and Community Engagement at Vineyard Offshore, a leading U.S. offshore wind de-

veloper.

"The Home for Little Wanderers has an incredible legacy of meeting children and families with compassion, dignity and unwavering support. I'm honored to join an organization so deeply committed to strengthening communities and expanding opportunity for every child," Musiol said.

Bridge Over Troubled Waters adds Paul Mitrokostas to its board

Bridge Over Troubled Waters (Bridge) announced the admission of Paul Mitrokostas to its Board of Directors.



Paul Mitrokostas

Mitrokostas is the Head of Global Credit Markets at Liberty Mutual Investments (LMI), the investment firm for Liberty Mutual Insurance. In this position, he oversees the firm's public and private leveraged corporate credit portfolio and brings a broad background across investing, operations, finance and law.

"I'm honored to join the Board of Bridge Over Troubled Waters and to support an organization that plays such a vital role in the lives of Boston's most vulnerable youth," said Mitrokostas. "Bridge is making a real difference, and I'm eager to contribute to expanding its impact and ensuring every young person has the opportunity to thrive."

Jane Doe Inc. celebrates with coalition members and supporters at 'Spring Into Action' fundraiser

Earlier this month, more than 100 people came together at the Artists for Humanity EpiCenter in South Boston to celebrate and support Jane Doe Inc. (JDI), The Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence.

JDI's "Spring Into Action" fundraiser — revived after a two year hiatus —

North Suffolk Community Services releases podcast focused on young adult mental health



On May 7, Youth Elemento, a program of North Suffolk Community Services (NSCS), celebrated the premier of "Chelsea Speaks!" a podcast about mental health created by and for young adults. The podcast aims to fill a gap in resources for the 16-22 age group by breaking down stigma and connecting peers to resources.

raised more than \$75,000 to fund JDI's work on behalf of survivors, advocates, and service providers across Massachusetts. Spring Into Action and JDI's ongoing work are supported by the generosity of sponsors including Diamond level sponsors Mintz and Uber, and by the contributions of many more corporate, community and individual partners.

90 Years Strong celebrates the legacy of Gerry Wright

On May 21, the human services community came together at Loring Greenough House in Jamaica Plain to celebrate the legacy of Gerry Wright. The event served as a birthday and retirement celebration as Wright both celebrates his 90th birthday, and steps down from his current role as CEO of Community Service Care.

Peter Moser

Jeff Hirsch

Cathy Reuben

Tierra Jenkins

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Hirsch Roberts Weinstein attorneys know and understand the nuances of the human services industry and provide practical and sensitive advice. Since 1986, we have proudly worked with human services organizations and their leadership teams to provide tailored human resources guidance and leadership training for executive, managers, and supervisors. For more info, please contact Jeffrey Hirsch at 617-348-4300 or jhirsch@hrwlawyers.com.

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About the Agency

Roman Music Therapy Services, located in Wakefield, MA, is a dynamic organization using the power of music to promote growth, connection and wellness. Since its founding in 2006, the agency has become a trusted provider of music therapy services across the Greater Boston and North Shore area, working with individuals of all ages and abilities.

From small beginnings, Roman Music Therapy Services has expanded to serve schools, early intervention programs, day habilitation centers, long-term care facilities and community organizations. Professionally trained and credentialed music therapists use music interventions to achieve individualized and group therapeutic goals. The agency is committed to providing high-quality, evidence-based care that is person-centered and culturally responsive.

Roman Music Therapy Services is widely recognized for its original early childhood program, Sprouting Melodies®, and workplace wellness initiative, Staff Beats®. These offerings reflect the agency's broader mission: to make music accessible and impactful in every stage of life.

Roman Music Therapy Services is funded through a blend of service contracts, private pay, third-party billing, grants and partnerships with school districts, nonprofits and local government agencies. As an agency, they continue to expand their reach while remaining rooted in community values and therapeutic excellence.

Music heals: Roman Music Therapy Services supports community development

Roman Music Therapy Services provides music therapy to individuals of all ages and abilities, offering a wide range of programs.

For young children, Roman Music Therapy Services offers both individual and group music therapy. Families can participate in Sprouting Melodies®, an award-winning early childhood music program that supports developmental growth, family connection and social engagement through interactive music-making.

Children and adults with disabilities benefit from music therapy sessions offered in schools, community programs and at the Roman Music Therapy Services center. These sessions are tailored to support communication, social skills, motor development and emotional expression. Whether working with an individual or a group, therapists use music to foster growth in a supportive, engaging environment.

Roman Music Therapy Services works in day programs and assisted living communities for older adults. Music therapy for older adults offers benefits including movement, socialization and comfort focused on enhancing the wellbeing of participants.

In medical settings, Roman Music Therapy Services provides specialized services in a Neonatal Intensive Care Unit in Boston, using music to support infant development and family bonding.

In-services, trainings and workshops are also offered for companies and organizations looking to use music as a tool for team building, outreach, education,



Roman Music Therapy Services helps program participants heal through music

and wellness. While especially relevant to those in education and human services, these lively and interactive programs can be adapted to benefit professionals in any field looking to incorporate music into their work environment.

The agency also facilitates events such as karaoke nights, birthday parties and private events designed to promote inclusion, participation and well-being. These universal programs are open to all and emphasize the power of shared music-making to build connections.

Finally, Roman Music Therapy Services serves as a resource for music therapists across the country, offering clinical supervision and coaching for private practice development. Through this work, the agency continues to advance the field and support the growth of other professionals.

With a commitment to accessibility, collaboration and excellence, Roman Music Therapy Services continues to expand the impact of music therapy across communities.

Executive Leadership

Meredith Pizzi, MPA, MT-BC, is the founder and CEO of Roman Music Therapy Services.



Meredith Pizzi

Under her leadership, the agency has grown from a solo private practice into a respected provider of music therapy services across Massachusetts, offering programs in schools, early intervention, healthcare and community settings.

She holds a bachelor of science in music therapy from Duquesne University and a master's in public administration from Suffolk University. Her expertise and passion are informed by early work in developmental disabilities, early intervention and family-centered care.

Pizzi is the co-creator of Sprouting Melodies®, the first nationally branded music therapy-based early childhood program, and the co-founder and CEO of Raising Harmony, an organization dedicated to providing tools and trainings for music therapists, early childhood professionals and anyone caring for young children.

As CEO, Pizzi brings a strategic focus on clinical excellence, sustainable growth and community impact. Her vision for the future includes expanding access to music therapy through innovative service delivery models, strengthening partnerships and empowering the next generation of leaders in the field. Her leadership is grounded in a belief that music is a powerful tool for wellness, community-building and human connection.

SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

Ryan Pillsbury hopes to make a difference in the lives of children

Ryan Pillsbury has been a cornerstone at HopeWell for over 18 years, serving the Taunton and southeastern Massachusetts community as a comprehensive foster care worker. Ryan's tireless commitment, depth of knowledge and clinical insight and authentic capacity for connection with each child and family reflect the absolute best of what HopeWell stands for.

Pillsbury holds a bachelor of science in psychology and is a Licensed Social Worker (LSW). More importantly, he's committed to continuous learning, attending countless training and professional development opportunities, most recently completing a motivational interviewing advanced training. Pillsbury is always eager to implement new learnings and can be counted on as a role model and mentor to newer workers, offering guidance, humor and support from his wealth of experience and knowledge.

In his role, Pillsbury works closely with both youth experiencing foster care and their foster parents to ensure their stability, positive progress, safety and well-being. His daily responsibilities include weekly home visits, supporting children's emotional and physical needs, encouraging independent living skills, collaborating with other community providers, and supporting youth reunification and permanency planning. Pillsbury is a steadfast advocate for the youth he serves and is known for being a consistent, reliable



Ryan Pillsbury has worked with HopeWell for almost two decades.

support during moments of crisis or transition.

In Pillsbury's words, "I do this work in the hope that I might help make a difference in a youth's life and that I have a role to play along their path to realizing their goals and dreams. What I enjoy most is being witness to the achievements and successes they experience along the way." Pillsbury's calm presence and quick wit endear him to youth, families, coworkers, and collaterals alike. Shaheer Mustafa, HopeWell's President and CEO says, "Ryan embodies our ethos at HopeWell. We talk about Care in Action. Pillsbury shows up for families and he does it while holding our values at the center. He engages youth around their strengths, is always willing to learn, conducts himself with integrity and is rooted in empathy."

Jay Gamache connects through curiosity at Incompass

Jay Gamache, a behavior specialist at Incompass Human Services, has been with the organization for several years, recently transitioning from his role as a day habilitation program manager. In his current position, Gamache serves as a crucial link between clinical staff and direct care providers, helping to unify service delivery and strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration.

Gamache impacts the lives of so many people through his daily work includes completing assessments, guiding the implementation of Positive Behavior Support (PBS) strategies, refining data collection methods and supporting person-centered goal development. His input has helped the people he serves achieve their goals and expand their supportive services.

A dedicated lifelong learner, Gamache is finalizing his certification as a registered behavior technician (RBT). He continually seeks out training and resources to elevate his skills and enhance care. His curiosity and drive are matched by his ability to translate knowledge into practical, lasting results.

"Jay brings a sense of urgency and empathy to every hallway, conversation, and care plan," says clinical director, Brandon Richard. "He doesn't just do the work — he transforms the environment around him."

When asked why he works in human services, Gamache explains, "I got into this line of work because I care deeply about people. At Incompass, I have



Jay Gamache has taken advantage of several educational opportunities to enhance his ability to connect with program participants.

the privilege of empowering individuals to lead meaningful lives — and that means everything to me. It's not always easy, but it's always worth it. I also do this because I believe the people doing this work deserve to be seen, heard, and valued. There's nothing more fulfilling than witnessing the impact we make together as a team."

Gamache's calm demeanor, warm humor and intuitive communication style make him a trusted presence across programs. He is widely respected for his ability to de-escalate tense moments, build trust and model values that reflect the Incompass mission.

Gamache exemplifies what it means to be an Incompass Care Champion — leading with heart, driving innovation, and building connections that matter.

Leading with compassion and science at a time of rising autism rates

By Lauren Solotar

The CDC's latest report on autism prevalence reflects the importance of early diagnosis and access to critical services. According to the data, 1 in 31 eight-year-olds in the United States were identified with autism in 2022 — the highest rate ever recorded. This marks an increase from just two years earlier, when the number stood at 1 in 36.

The increase in autism diagnosis is due to a multitude of factors including progress in early screening, greater public awareness, expanded diagnostic criteria, an increase in the number of adults who receive a diagnosis later in life and better access to diagnostic services — particularly in communities that have historically been overlooked. For the first time, the data show that Black, Hispanic and Asian/Pacific Islander children are now being diagnosed at higher rates than white children. We also see encouraging gains in the identification of autism in girls. These are signs that we are moving in the right direction toward greater equity. But we cannot stop at diagnosis.

Every family that walks through our doors teaches us that identifying autism is only the beginning. What comes next — intervention, support and lifelong services (when needed) — is what truly changes lives. And for many families in the country, these services remain difficult to access, unaffordable or simply unavailable.

This is especially true for profoundly autistic individuals — those who are minimally verbal or nonverbal, have co-occurring intellectual disabilities and require around-the-clock care. These individuals make up an estimated 27% of the autism population, yet their needs are often left out of the conversation.

To address this, we recently published *Profound Autism: A Parent's Guide*, a first-of-its-kind resource from the National Autism Center at May Institute. This guide was created for families who are navigating the complex and often isolating world of profound autism. It offers practical, evidence-based strategies to improve quality of life — not just for the individual, but for the entire family.

We developed this guide because families told us what they needed: tools for building communication skills, managing self-injury, navigating daily living tasks and coping with the intense stress that often accompanies caregiving. We listened. And we drew on 70 years of

experience supporting individuals with significant needs to create a resource grounded in both science and compassion.

A 2023 CDC study found that profoundly autistic children are more likely to be female, born preterm or with low birth weight and from racially and economically marginalized backgrounds. Many experience severe behaviors and medical complications. These realities demand a robust, targeted response from our field — one that recognizes the urgency of providing tailored services, training more clinicians and advocating for policy solutions that support families across the lifespan.

We know that autism is a spectrum and is unique to each individual. I have had the privilege of witnessing the accomplishments of autistic individuals in our programs who use assistive technology to communicate, hold jobs, build friendships, create art and live joyful lives. I have also seen the resilience of families who meet each challenge with courage and love. Their stories are proof that with the right support, meaningful progress is possible.

But these outcomes are not guaranteed. They require a system that is ready and resourced to meet the needs of every individual — regardless of age, race, income or level of disability.

As a state with a proud tradition of innovation and leadership in human services, Massachusetts is well-positioned to lead this charge. But we cannot do it alone. We need investment in early intervention, inclusive education, adult services and caregiver supports. We need to build the workforce, strengthen provider networks and ensure that the voices of profoundly autistic individuals and their families are heard and centered in policy decisions.

This moment calls for focus — and for unity. We must come together as providers, educators, policymakers and advocates to ensure that our systems rise to meet the growing needs of our community.

At May Institute, we are committed to leading with science, compassion and integrity. The rising autism prevalence is more than a headline — it's a reminder that every child and every family deserve our full attention, our best thinking and our unwavering support.

Lauren Solotar is the president and CEO at May Institute.

Juneteenth: Justice in Practice

By Shannon M. Rudder

Growing up, Juneteenth was one of my most cherished holidays. It marked the beginning of summer with a powerful two-day community celebration, kicked off by an exhilarating two-mile parade. The streets pulsed with the energy of dancers, the cadence of drill teams and the proud, purposeful steps of community leaders of all ages. Neighbors lined the route, cheering us on and waving flags that honored a legacy rooted in resilience and unity. The thunder of Djembe drums and soul-stirring melodies filled the air, while the rich aromas of BBQ, fried fish, incense, shea butter and fragrant oils created an irresistible invitation to gather. By the time we reached Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, we were immersed — body and spirit — in a vibrant expression of community and joy. I watched spellbound, as folk engaged with one another in celebration and connection.

As I grew older, I found myself seeking Juneteenth celebrations across the country. No matter the location, I felt at home within the mosaic of the African diaspora — welcoming, powerful and united. Every festival served as a living testament to our collective strength, a jubilant affirmation of Black heritage, triumph and the enduring pursuit of justice. Juneteenth fueled my path as a change agent and continues to inspire me now as a non-profit leader.

A LEGACY ROOTED IN JUSTICE

While Juneteenth became a federal holiday in 2021, it has been celebrated in Black communities for more than 150 years. On June 19, 1865 — more than two years after the Emancipation Proclamation — Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, to enforce the end of slavery. Over 250,000 Black Americans in Texas were finally freed. Juneteenth marks this historic moment as the true beginning of freedom for many, and it continues to symbolize Black liberation, resilience and the ongoing struggle for justice. This history also reminds that justice in America has often come slowly — and only through relentless advocacy. The delay in emancipation for enslaved Texans reveals that freedom is not just a moment in history, but a continuous journey.

Today there is a growing movement to erase Black history from schools and public discourse. This erasure is harmful, as it prevents future generations from learning about the struggles and triumphs of Black Americans. Protecting Black history is a vital act of resistance against these efforts. For those of us in

the human services field, Juneteenth carries deep relevance. We are uniquely positioned to honor Juneteenth in ways that go beyond celebration, as we stand on the front lines of social justice — advocating for individuals and families, confronting systemic barriers and working toward a more equitable society. Whether addressing housing instability, providing mental health support, advancing education or ensuring access to basic needs, our work is rooted in a commitment to justice that echoes the spirit of Juneteenth.

Our role as bridge builders between institutions and communities gives us a powerful opportunity to elevate marginalized voices, facilitate courageous conversations about race and history, while creating inclusive spaces for reflection and healing, for both those we serve and our own colleagues. Juneteenth invites us to engage in these actions with intention — to foster dialogue, deepen cultural understanding and champion equity in both our professional environments and the broader systems we touch.

Moreover, human service professionals play a vital role in healing and empowerment. Many of the individuals and families we serve carry the weight of generational trauma from systemic oppression. By affirming their strength, celebrating their culture and honoring their stories, we reinforce the resilience, dignity and JOY that Juneteenth embodies.

IN SOLIDARITY AND COMMITMENT

This Juneteenth, take time to honor the day through education, celebration and meaningful action. By doing so, we reaffirm essential values: that dignity, equity and justice are not just ideals for which to strive; they are vital to the health and well-being of every individual and community.

As we celebrate this year, let us do so with reverence, joy and a firm resolve to carry the spirit of Juneteenth forward — not just on June 19th, but every day in our classrooms and clinics, in boardrooms and block parties.

Dr. King encourages us, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." But only when we refuse to let it stay still. Only when we push. Only when we pull. Let this Juneteenth reignite our urgency. Let us bend the arc not with caution — but with courage. Not with silence — but with solidarity. Not someday — but now.

Happy Juneteenth!

Shannon Rudder is the president & CEO at Martin Luther King, Jr. Family Services, Inc.

It's a beautiful (and necessary!) thing: celebrating Pride Month

By Lydia M. Todd

Living in this Commonwealth allows us to be our most authentic, unique, individual selves, and truly embrace our varied and layered identities. Given all that is going on in the world, we celebrate that Massachusetts takes pride in our support for diversity and difference, and for those individuals and communities that have been historically marginalized. We pride ourselves in offering safe harbor for those who need it; our attorney general stands by our right to name and celebrate our differences, and to publicly declare our allyship for one another. We reject having people forced to live in the shadows, in fear for their safety. We want everyone to be able to come out and play! We are fiercely proud of this, and in the human service sector, that pride is magnified. Everyone deserves a free and safe existence.

Recently, I had the opportunity to defend programming to ensure inclusive access and services for young

people in the LGBTQIA+ community, specifically those who are non-binary, transgender and gender fluid. This caused me to reflect even more on how these young people experience the world, and messaging about how they fit in. For those of us who work with children and young people who identify in these ways, it is a no brainer that visibility — being SEEN — is key to a positive self-concept and good mental health. LGBTQIA+ youth and young adults have a higher prevalence of anxiety and depression, and higher rates of suicide attempts, according to a Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report published by the CDC in 2020. According to an article published in *Nature Human Behaviour* in 2024, in states with anti-transgender laws, suicide attempts among trans and non-binary youth increase by 72%. Making sure that youth and young adults are supported and that they can "own" their identities publicly is critical to keeping them safe.

According to the National Health Law

Program, one way to do this is by expressing support; youth with at least one supportive adult in their lives fare much better and are 40% less likely to report a suicide attempt in the past year. And what better way to express our support than to get out and celebrate Pride Month?

Because the entire month of June is designated as Pride Month, we should all be able to find some time to mark this. The young people we serve benefit from the visibility and sense of camaraderie and belonging that Pride Month brings. It allows them to safely express their authentic selves and celebrate who they are. Celebrating Pride Month is important for allies, as well, as we stand with others in celebration of their identities. It raises awareness, helps people reflect on their biases and breaks down barriers.

In human services, we have a unique opportunity to combine the celebration of Pride Month with our work. We can look at our local calendars and identify events that are appropriate for the

people we serve and consider attending as a group. If we are in a day/outpatient setting, we can post Pride Month events and help people feel safe talking about them.

Let us not lose sight of the fact that Pride Month is also just a lot of fun. We can dress expressively, creatively and join the celebratory and colorful atmosphere that brings us joy and respite. If we cannot get out, we can create our own Pride Month celebration in our homes, workspaces or programs, with decorations, sharing music, books and movies by LGBTQIA+ artists, watching documentaries to learn more, and discussing ideas with colleagues and people we serve. There are many ways to celebrate Pride Month, and right now it is more important than ever that we stand together, loud, and proud: We are who we are, and we are proud to be here. Whether we identify as LGBTQIA+ or not, we will not be silenced.

Lydia Todd is the executive director at NFI Massachusetts.

THE PROVIDER

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Care providers deserve housing affordability. **VIEW FROM THE HILL** PAGE 6

Bridges Homeward builds permanency. **PROVIDER PROFILE** PAGE 3

Climbing the hill of belonging. **EDITORIAL** PAGE 4

THE PROVIDER

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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. Maureen Healey's and the House Ways & Means Committee, the Senate proposed investing \$173 million in the Chapter 257 Revenue Line item (1599.4902), representing an increase of \$94 million, or nearly 119%, from FY '23. The Council composed the Chapter 257 line item to the FY '23 budget, rather than the FY '23 budget, because the number of Chapter 257 cases reviewed by ECHHS attorneys is proportionally higher than in previous years.

State all funded the Chapter 257 Revenue 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 Watkins. "As our sector's living crisis continues to worsen, pay increases to attract more workers are most important than ever."

The SWM budget proposal included higher funding amounts than the SWM budget proposed for two Departments of Children & Families line items. There was a 36.35% increase to DCF Family Resource Centers and an 8.41% increase to DCF and DEA Related Child Care. However, the SWM proposal decreased funding in several other line items compared to the



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1/20

A VIEW FROM THE HILL

A commentary from a legislator
on human services



It's time to show up for human services workers

By Sen. Liz Miranda

I was deeply honored and touched to receive the Caring Bear Award from The Caring Force on May 8. It means the world to be recognized by a sector that I hold in such high esteem.

Human service workers are the backbone of many communities around the commonwealth. They support people through some of their most vulnerable moments — when a child enters foster care, when a person struggling with addiction begins recovery or when an older adult needs support to safely age at home.

I have personally felt the impact of human service workers. I grew up as one of 11 children, and my brothers and father were incarcerated during my childhood. My mother supported the family through her work as a cook. Her incredible generosity and strength were unwavering, but I couldn't have gotten to where I am today without human service workers. Interventions from St. Mary's, Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) and Catholic Charities helped guide my family through my early years and ultimately enabled me to attend Wellesley College. Their work changed my life, as it has for countless others.

But despite the enormous value they provide and the many lives they touch, too many human service workers are struggling to afford life in Massachusetts. One-third of these workers spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Many hold second or third jobs just to pay rent or afford childcare. It is unacceptable that individuals who are responsible for lifting others up are left behind as a consequence of state inaction. Massachusetts is too expensive to continue allowing human service workers to be paid low wages for some of the most important work that gets done in the Commonwealth.

And we cannot ignore the racial disparities that run through this issue. 80% of human services workers in Massachusetts are women, and 36% are people of color. These communities are overrepresented in the human service workforce compared

to the general population. Thus, when we underpay and undervalue these workers, we are also perpetuating racial wealth inequality, and the gender pay gap. Equity must be more than a buzzword — it must be reflected in our policies and, just as importantly, our paychecks.

That's why I'm proud to be supporting The Caring Force's legislative agenda — two bills that directly address making living affordable for human service workers.

The first would create a loan repayment program for human services workers — easing the burden of student debt for those who chose service over salary. Those who serve the public should not be punished financially but rewarded with the dignity and respect of making an adequate, living wage. By boosting the affordability of human service education for aspiring college students, we can increase the supply of talented, dedicated workers.

The second bill would ensure a livable wage for human services workers. There is a longstanding disparity between salaries for nonprofit human services employees and their counterparts in state government. This disparity is undermining the nonprofit sector's ability to recruit and maintain human service workers. Additionally, as the largest purchaser of nonprofit human services, the state should not achieve cost savings at the expense of fair compensation for the workforce it relies on.

Human service workers show up for Massachusetts every single day — It's time we show up for them. By passing these two bills, we have an opportunity to support this essential workforce, correct the disincentivization of human service work, and strengthen the care systems our communities rely on. Let's honor the people who make healing possible, who hold others up in their hardest moments, and who, too often, are left without support themselves.

Senator Liz Miranda represents the 2nd Suffolk District in the Massachusetts House of Representatives.



Sen. Liz Miranda

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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SUFFOLK: Council's partnership with Suffolk University has provided educational opportunities for members since 2002

Continued from page 1

and education associate for the Council at the time.

The inaugural class graduated 27 students, who all earned a Certificate in Community Human Service Management, the first iteration of the Certificate in Nonprofit Human Services Management Program that runs each academic year today. Kit Newton, a senior program director for Bay Cove Human Services, was one of those graduates, who contributed these remarks to the December 2002 issue of *The Provider*:

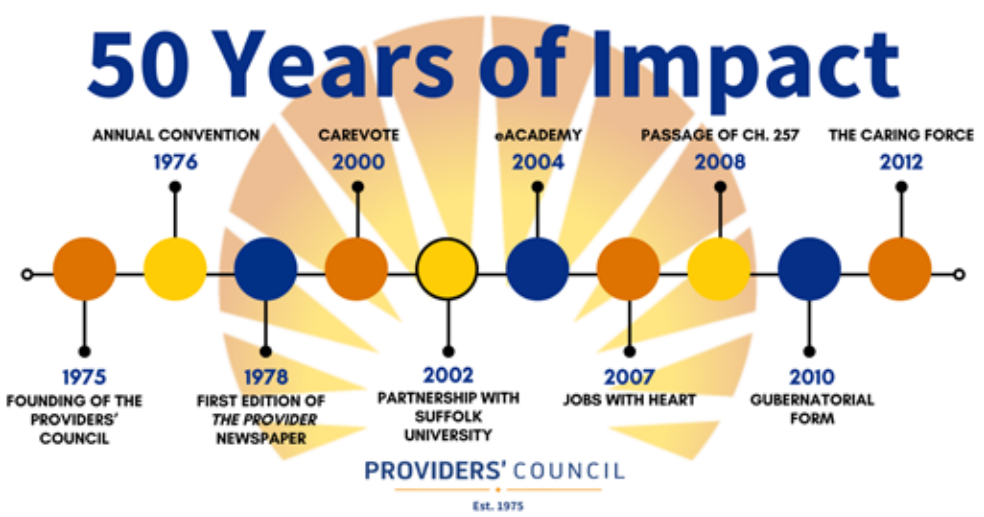
"One of the most valuable parts of this course is making connections with other professionals in the same field," said Newton. "I have also acquired new skills such as how to develop a job description... In addition, I better under-

stand what it takes to run an organization since this course gives students the 'whole picture.'"

Today, the program has grown significantly over the past 23 years, graduating about 750 students, including the Council's current president and CEO, Bill Yelenak. The Council is proud to say that 44 future leaders will be graduating from the program in 2025.

As the Providers' Council enters its next 50 years, the partnership the Council has fostered with Suffolk University through the Certificate Program remains one of the cornerstones of its educational offerings.

For more information on the certificate program and other academic opportunities available through Suffolk University, please contact Nina Lamarre at nlamarre@providers.org.



The Council's partnership with Suffolk University has led to about 750 students graduating with a Certificate in Nonprofit Human Services Management Program. The program remains one of the cornerstones of the Council's educational offerings.

BUDGET: \$61.4 billion budget passed by Senate

Continued from page 1

tial Services for Detained Population; **4200-0300** – Residential Services for Committed Population were funded at the same levels proposed in the HWM budget.

DPH line item 4512-0103 – HIV/AIDS Prevention Treatment and Services – were funded at \$31.8 million as proposed by the Governor, a 9% decrease from the HWM proposal.

DPH line item 4512-0200 – Bureau of Substance Addiction Services – dropped from \$194.4 million to \$179.6 million, a decrease of 7.62% from the HWM budget.

DPH line item 4513-1136 – Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence Services – rose from \$74.7 million to \$79.8 million, an increase of 6.79% from the HWM proposal.

DCF line item 4800-1100 – Social Workers for Case Management – were funded at the same levels proposed in

the HWM budget.

DMH line item 5042-5000 – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services – increased from \$128.5 million to \$131.5 million, an increase of 2.32% from the HWM proposal.

DMH line item 5046-0000 – Adult Mental Health and Support Services – increased from \$661.9 million to \$689.9 million, an increase of 4.24% from the HWM proposal.

DMH line item 5047-0001 – Emergency Services and Mental Health Care – were funded at the same levels proposed in the HWM budget.

DDS line items 5911-2000 – Transportation Services; **5920-2000** – Community Residential Services; **5920-2025** – Community Day and Work Programs; **5920-3000** – Respite Family Supports, were funded at the same levels proposed in the HWM budget.

HLC line item 7004-0101 – Emergency Assistance – Family Shelter and Services – were funded at the same

levels proposed in the HWM budget, which represented \$50 million decrease from governor's budget.

HLC line item 7004-0102 – Homeless Individual Shelters – dropped from \$115.7 million to \$110.7 million, a decrease of 4.32% from the HWM proposal.

HLC 7004-9024 – Mass. Rental Voucher Program – dropped from \$258.1 million to \$253.3 million, a decrease of 1.86% from the HWM proposal.

The full Senate budget is available to the public on the Massachusetts state website. The preliminary analysis from the Providers' Council, which tracks frequently discussed human services line items, is on the Council's website, www.providers.org.

Fiscal year 2026 begins July 1. To discuss any of these line items or ask that other line items be tracked, please contact Caroline O'Neill at coneill@providers.org.

CONVENTION: Celebrating the Council's 50th anniversary convention

Continued from page 1

workshops are featured in the convention registration brochure and on the Council's website, and convention presenters receive complimentary admittance to the day's full program. The Council will also have specific wellness and discussion sessions at this year's event.

The Council's Education & Convention Committee reviews all completed submissions based on its workshop description, learning objectives, presenters' experience with the topic, and the presentation's relevance to human services providers.

Applications for workshops closed on June 1, but for applicants looking for more information on the application process, please contact Nina Lamarre at nlamarre@providers.org.

Sponsorship, expo and advertising opportunities are also available; more information is available on the Council's website at providers.org or by contacting Ann Schuler at aschuler@providers.org.

To continue advancing future leaders in the human services sector and supporting their educational opportunities, the Council launched a "50K for 50 Years" scholarship fund in recognition of its 50th anniversary.

Scholarship recipients will be recognized at our 50th Annual Convention & Expo. The Council will keep members updated on the application process for these scholarships when they open. For more information on the scholarship fund, please contact Ann Schuler at aschuler@providers.org.

The Council is excited to celebrate *50 Years Together* with its members and looks forward to seeing members of the sector at this year's convention.

Council testifies on student loan repayment bill

Two members of The Caring Force joined Providers' Council President/CEO Bill Yelenak in May to testify in support of legislation filed on behalf of the Council that would create a student loan program for community-based human services workers.

The Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities heard testimony on *An act relative to a student loan repayment program for human services workers* (H.283 | S.119). Yelenak urged the committee to build upon the success of \$16.5 million in one-time American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that were used for human services student loan repayment and distributed last year.

Yelenak stated that there was massive demand for last year's program and highlighted the overwhelming need in the sector. "Over 3,100 human services workers applied for the program, requesting a collective total of nearly \$63 million. The demand was so high that the portal had to close early," he added.

Yelenak was joined by two members of The Caring Force: Jawaan Kellam, a clinician at The Home for Little Wanderers, and Elaina Schreckenberger, an operations manager at Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD).

Kellam's spoke about the needed investment in a sector that is performing life-changing work every day: "This bill is not a handout — it's a hand up. It says: We see you. We value you. Your work matters. Because if we lose our workforce, we lose our impact."

Schreckenberger, who spoke at a Caring Force Rally in 2023 about student loan repayment, was one of the recipients of last year's funding. "While this job can be very rewarding when we are able to



Jawaan Kellam (left) from The Home for Little Wanderers and Elaina Schreckenberger (right) from Action for Boston Community Development testify before the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities.

assist clients, it is hard when I and my staff are not able to have our own needs met," she said, adding the student loan repayment funding has allowed her to remain in the sector doing what she loves.

Reps. Jeffrey Roy and Sean Garballey, as well as Sen. Sal DiDomenico, are the sponsors of the bills. Roy submitted testimony in favor of the bill:

"Human service workers perform an extremely difficult job for woefully low wages. Assisting with repayment of student loans could help alleviate some of the financial burdens that new graduates face when choosing to work in their field of study," he wrote. "Given the cost of liv-

ing in Massachusetts and the value added by ensuring that those who are in need receive the best care the Commonwealth can give them, H. 283 seems a small step to show our human service workers that we value their important contributions."

Video of Yelenak, Kellam and Schreckenberger delivering testimony is available to watch on The Caring Force's YouTube channel.

The Joint Committee has 60 days to take action on this bill, where it will either be sent to study or favorably reported out to another committee. For more information, please contact Caroline O'Neill at coneill@providers.org.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS • JUNE 2025

What:	Free, Members-Only Webinar: Inside Out Leadership – Understanding and Managing Emotions in the Workplace
When:	Monday, June 2
Time:	1:00 to 2:00 p.m.
Presenters:	Shari Simpson, Senior Manager of Thought Leadership, Paylocity
Where:	Online via Zoom
Cost:	Free; Event for Council Provider Members only
What:	Community Webinar: Co-occurring Disorders, Trauma and Addiction
When:	Tuesday, June 3
Time:	12:00 to 1:30 p.m.
Presenters:	Tanagra M. Melgarejo, MSW and Joe Pereira, LICSW, CAS
Where:	Online via Zoom
Cost:	Free; Event for Council Provider Members only
What:	Associate Member Webinar: Building Inclusive Workplaces – USI’s Partnership with Diversio
When:	Tuesday, June 3
Time:	1:00 to 2:00 p.m.
Presenters:	Katone Roberts, National Diversity & Inclusion Manager, USI Insurance Services and Anya Klimbovskaia, Co-Founder, Chief Operating Officer, Diversio
Where:	Online via Zoom
Cost:	Free; Event for Council Provider Members only
What:	Reducing the Impact of Trauma Exposure and Cultivating Personal Resilience
When:	Thursday, June 5
Time:	1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
Presenters:	Stacie Watson, CPC
Where:	Online via Zoom
Cost:	\$50 for Members; \$125 for Non-Members
What:	Free Webinar: Let’s Illuminate Human Services – Understanding the Solar Upgrading Nonprofits (SUN) Program
When:	Wednesday, June 11
Time:	10:00 to 11:00 a.m.
Presenters:	Madeleine Barr, Rachel Gentile and Sanne Wright, Resonant Energy
Where:	Online via Zoom
Cost:	Free; Event for Council Provider Members only
What:	Free Lawyers Clearinghouse Training: CORI – What Nonprofits Need to Know to Help Their Clients
When:	Wednesday, June 11
Time:	10:00 to 11:30 a.m.
Presenters:	Crispin Birnbaum, Access to Justice Fellow
Where:	Online via Zoom
Cost:	Free; Event for Council Provider Members only
What:	Community Training: Perilous Times – Advocating for Older Adults and People with Disabilities
When:	Thursday, June 12
Time:	8:00 a.m. to 4:15 p.m.
Presenters:	Hosted by NASW-MA
Where:	Online via Zoom
Cost:	\$110 (Early Bird price)
What:	Provider Member Hosted Training: Free Mental Health First Aid Training
When:	Thursday, June 12
Time:	8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.
Presenters:	Hosted by Northeast Arc
Where:	1 Southside Road, Danvers, MA 01923
Cost:	Free; Event for Council Provider Members only
What:	Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging (DEIB) Roundtable: Moving Forward in Uncertain Times
When:	Tuesday, June 17
Time:	10:00 to 11:00 a.m.
Presenters:	Shavon Andrews, Team Lead and Senior HR Consultant and Elizabeth Stasiowski, Team Lead and Finance Associate Director at Insource Services
Where:	Online via Zoom
Cost:	Free; Event for Council Provider Members only
What:	Free, Members-Only Webinar: Civility – Building Respectful and Collaborative Work Environments
When:	Tuesday, June 17
Time:	1:00 to 2:00 p.m.
Presenters:	Jim Ognibene, M.Ed
Where:	Online via Zoom
Cost:	Free; Event for Council Provider Members only
What:	Free, Members-Only Webinar: Navigating Grief in Human Services
When:	Tuesday, June 24
Time:	10:00 to 11:00 a.m.
Presenters:	Lindsey Monahan, End of Life Doula/Grief Specialist, Senior Clinician, The Sovner Center, Bridgewell
Where:	Online via Zoom
Cost:	Free; Event for Council Provider Members only

Pre-registration for these events is required unless otherwise noted. Please visit providers.org/events to learn more and register for the event you wish to attend.

Questions? Call 508.598.9800 or email Nina Lamarre at nlamarre@providers.org

CARING FORCE: State House packed with nearly 600 human services supporters



Stephanie Steed, president and CEO of 18 Degrees and chair of The Caring Force Committee, addresses the crowd at the 13th Annual State House Rally.

Continued from page 1

Force members rallied in support of The Caring Force’s legislative priorities: *An act relative student loan repayment program for human services workers* (S.119 | H.283) and *A livable wage for human services workers* (S.130 | H.223).

From heartfelt speeches to personal stories, the rally served as a call to the Commonwealth for fair wages, student loan relief and better funding for the human services sector. The energy in the room was electric as human services workers, persons served and family members collectively called for change.

The Caring Force was honored to spotlight five voices from the sector: Kellam, a licensed social worker and clinician at The Home for Little Wanderers; Rosalee Sánchez, as residential manager at NFI; and Jillian Delphia, Myah House and A’Sharia Supreme, youth served by 18 Degrees.

Sánchez was once in the same group home she now manages. She recounted how her time as a youth at NFI’s program was shaped by the essential workers who provided her constant care.

“One of the saddest but most common situations I saw as a youth was when someone I had built a strong connection with left their work, often for better pay. As youth in care, we go from having a daily routine and seeing someone on the regular to an empty feeling,” said Sánchez. “Yes, there are ‘boundaries’ between [youth] and staff, but in reality, it is the staff who make the greatest impact on our lives. ... Staff go from teaching us, spending time with us to always showing up no matter what, through the hard, the sad, the anger, seeing us at our highest and our lowest and not once ever making us feel judged.”

Bill Yelenak, Council president and CEO, and Stephanie Steed, TCF Committee Chair and president and CEO of 18 Degrees, recognized two champions for the sector at the rally. The Caring Force presented Representative Lindsay Sabadosa (1st Hampshire) and Senator Liz Miranda (2nd Suffolk) with Caring

Bear awards for their support of the human services sector. Yelenak also presented former Caring Force Committee Chair and NFI Executive Director, Lydia Todd, with a Caring Bear award for her outstanding leadership and support of The Caring Force.

“To do the work that you do, you do it out of love, you do it out of supporting people that need a little bit extra help, so I want to thank you,” Miranda said. “I want to encourage you to make sure that elected officials in this building know that whether you live in Wellsley, whether you live in Roxbury, whether you live in Pittsfield or P-Town, you deserve dignity, you deserve love and you deserve the support that you deserve in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.”

The Caring Force not only had the pleasure of hearing from members within the sector, but also from their legislators, who spoke about the importance of the sector within the Massachusetts community. Former Caring Bear recipient and longtime friend of the sector, Senate President Karen Spilka, shared how being the legal guardian of her sister with Down Syndrome is the reason she became a legislator and is what motivates her to this day.

“On days that are tough and frustrating... I think of my sister Susie. [She] still helps ground me to know this is why I do what I do: to continue to improve the lives of people and make sure they have the most opportunities and possibilities for them to be self-sufficient, productive and live their lives in the way they want to.”

The rally wrapped up on a high note, with plenty of smiles, photos and cries of support for the sector as Caring Force members began to fill the halls of the State House to speak with their legislators directly about the need for student loan repayment and livable wages for all workers within the sector.

For members who were unable to attend, the full rally is available on The Caring Force’s YouTube channel. For more information on The Caring Force and upcoming rallies, please contact Isabella A. Lee at ilee@providers.org.

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REGIONAL RALLY

 Merrimack Valley Regional Rally

 June 6, 2025

 Northern Essex Community College

 www.providers.org/caring-force

For more information

