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THE PROVIDER

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The Council Celebrates 50 Years of Impact: CareVote

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 founding of CareVote, the Council's nonpartisan voter registration initiative, launched in 2000.

CareVote was created to empower human services workers and the people they serve by making voter registration more accessible. Today, 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.

CareVote began as a one-time campaign ahead of the 2000 presidential election. Known then as CareVote 2000, the initiative was spearheaded by Stan Connors, executive director at Bay Cove Human Services, and Gary Lamson, president and CEO of Vinfen. Their goal was ambitious: register 20,000 voters in the human services sector before the election.

In the April 2000 edition of *The Provider*, Lamson explained the campaign's purpose: "It is a campaign to bring right and power to the human service community," he wrote. "If human service workers and those we serve don't vote, we won't get recognized and enjoy the full rights of citizenship."

He also pointed to some of the key challenges the campaign hoped to address — such as stigma and disengagement. "There are some attitudinal issues providers must overcome as we push forward with this campaign," he said at the time. "One is the stigma attached to people with disabilities. Another is a cynical viewpoint that people who receive government help should 'be grateful and keep quiet.'"

Lamson emphasized how important

CAREVOTE, see page 7

The Providers' Council Celebrates 50 Years of Impact with its members



(Left to right): Lois Nesci, Stephanie Steed and Danielle Letourneau stand together at the Providers' Council's 50th Anniversary Celebration.

The Providers' Council gathered 200 of its members and friends from around the sector to *Celebrate 50 Years of Impact* on Wednesday, April 16 at Top of the Tower in Worcester. Together, attendees honored not just the legacy of the Council, but the sector itself, while celebrating the contributions the sector makes to the community each day and envisioning a bigger and brighter future for human services.

"The Council is excited to be looking ahead

to the future of the sector, while recognizing the rich history that preceded us," said Providers' Council president & CEO, Bill Yelenak. "We are honored to have so many of our members and friends with us to celebrate not only our history, but also the history of human services in Massachusetts."

The Council began the night with its Annual Membership & Business Meeting

CELEBRATION, see page 7

Essential, not invisible: Caring Force Rally echoes across South of Boston

On Friday, April 11, more than 250 energized and passionate members of The Caring Force came together at the Clarion Hotel in Taunton for the first regional Caring Force Rally of the year. The event was a powerful blend of celebration and advocacy — recognizing the tireless work of human services professionals across while calling for the support and resources they need to thrive.

From heartfelt speeches to personal stories, the rally served as a rallying cry for justice, fair wages, student loan relief and better funding for the human services sector. The energy in the room was electric as attendees lifted their voices — not just for themselves, but for the individuals and families they support every day.

The South of Boston Caring Force Rally



More than 250 members of The Caring

RALLY, see page 7

House Ways and Means Committee proposes \$61.4 billion FY '26 budget

The House Ways & Means Committee released a \$61.4 billion FY '26 budget proposal on April 16, which has a combined traditional and wealth surtax spending about 6.4% higher than the budget Gov. Maura Healey signed last summer.

Representatives filed a total of 1,650 amendments to the House budget. *The Collaborative* — which includes the Providers' Council, the Association for Behavioral Healthcare (ABH), the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers (ADDP), and the Children's League of Massachusetts — supported an amendment filed by Representative Michael J. Finn. This amendment called on the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to adopt the 63rd percentile for all position benchmarks and increase funding for the corresponding line item by \$100 million to reflect the adjustment.

This amendment garnered over 50 co-sponsors but was unfortunately not included in the House Ways and Means budget proposal.

In his budget letter, Chairman Aaron Michlewitz noted, "\$207 million is allocated for the Chapter 257 rates, a large and well-deserved increase for human service workers across the Commonwealth."

This funding represents an increase of \$34 million, an increase of 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 EOHHS 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 spend not less than the amount spent 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** – Com-

BUDGET, see page 7



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Emmaus announces the appointment of Albert Hanscom as the next CEO

On April 16, Emmaus announced that Albert Hanscom has been selected to serve as the next CEO of Emmaus Inc. Hanscom will serve as interim CEO until July 1 and then transition to the CEO position.



Albert Hanscom

Over the last three decades, Hanscom has been a key member of the Emmaus team, spearheading operations and programming. His passion and dedication to the agency have been crucial to its success. Jeanine Murphy, CEO emeritus, stated, "During our nationwide search for the next CEO, Albert Hanscom stood out as the most qualified candidate to lead Emmaus into its next chapter. Our team at Emmaus is excited to welcome Al into this new role. I look forward to seeing the impact of his leadership."

Hildebrand has appointed Hadaryah T. Morgan, Esq. as its next CEO

Hadaryah T. Morgan, Esq., has been appointed as the next CEO at Hildebrand Family Self-Help Center, Inc. She succeeded Michael Hughes, CFO, who served as acting CEO following the retirement of Shiela Y. Moore in December 2024.



Hadaryah T. Morgan

Morgan most recently served as the COO and general counsel for the Center of Urban Community Services (CUCS), a non-profit organization focused on developing affordable housing and providing integrated programs that link housing, health and social services for homeless and low-income individuals and families in New York City.

RFK Community Alliance announces leadership transition

RFK Community Alliance announced on April 14 that president & CEO Dr. Michael W. Ames is stepping down after a decade with the organization. RFK Community Alliance is also pleased to announce



Michael W. Ames

that Dr. Kathy Mills, the agency's COO, will step in as interim CEO to lead the agency forward through this transition.

Under Ames's leadership, RFK Community Alliance has expanded its continuum of care, deepened its community-based impact and strengthened its commitment to providing trauma-focused, individualized services for the people it serves.

As part of his transition, Dr. Ames will begin stepping back from day-to-day responsibilities this week. He will remain involved in a consulting capacity, working closely with the executive team to ensure a smooth hand off.

Riverside Community Care appoints Sarah Macri to vice president, Developmental & Cognitive Services Division

Riverside Community Care has promoted Sarah Macri to vice president of the Developmental & Cognitive Services (DCS) division.



Sarah Macri

Sarah has been with Riverside since 2005, when she joined the DCS division as director of residential services. She later took a role in the organization's Quality Management department and then returned to DCS as a senior program director. She has served as the DCS division's assistant vice president since 2016.

Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services awarded \$50,000 Safety Net Grant from the Boston Foundation

Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services has received a \$50,000 Safety Net Grant from the Boston Foundation to support general operations and agency programs. These funds will be disbursed across all agency programs — including protective services, information and referrals, home delivered meals, behavioral health and care transitions initiatives — to best meet consumers' needs.

Open Sky's gala raises over \$200,000 to support Safe Homes Program for LGBTQIA+ youth

On April 14, Open Sky Community Services announced that more than \$200,000 was raised during its gala on April 4 to benefit the Safe Homes pro-

Viability's Cathy Tranfaglia honored with 2025 Light of Dawnn Award



Cathy Tranfaglia, program director of Community Integration Services at Viability Inc., has been selected as a recipient of the prestigious 2025 Light of Dawnn Award in recognition of her extraordinary commitment to strengthening communities and improving the lives of others.

gram, which is celebrating 30 years of serving LGBTQIA+ youth. Open Sky honored eight individuals and organizations during the event with its 2025 People of Courage Awards for their outstanding actions in support of equality and justice in Central Massachusetts.

"We are especially proud to be a member of the Central Massachusetts community, honoring so many wonderful individuals and organizations that epitomize the inclusion and belonging that has been at the core of our Safe Homes program for three decades," said Open Sky's president and CEO, Ken Bates.

Jane Doe Inc. presents 2025 Visionary Voice Award to Kishana Osei of the Mass. Women of Color Network

Jane Doe Inc. (JDI) presented Kishana Osei, executive director at the Massachusetts Women of Color Network (MAWOCN), with the National Sexual Violence Resource Center's (NSVRC) 2025 Visionary Voice Award on April 8.

JDI nominated Kishana in recognition of her 13 years of expertise and commitment to survivor communities, advocates in the field, and her work advancing racial justice in the movement to end sexual violence.

Providers' Council Celebrates 50 Years of Impact with members



Attendees observe the 50 Years of Impact timeline.



Eric Mitchell (left) and Kevin Martone (right) enjoy the 50th celebration.



(Left to right): Alexis Steel, Christina Bryant, Anne Corbin-Fennell and Sylvia Exantus stand together at the Council's 50th Anniversary Celebration.



(Left to right) Michael Weekes, Gerry Wright and Bill Yelenak celebrate the Providers' Council's 50th anniversary.



Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll addresses the crowd at the Council's 50th celebration.



President & CEO of the Key Program, Tammy Mello, addresses members.

PROVIDER PROFILES

THE BRIEN CENTER

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About the Agency

The Brien Center for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services is Berkshire County's leading provider of behavioral health and addiction services. Established over 100 years ago, the agency has a long-standing commitment to supporting individuals and families impacted by mental illness and substance use disorders. Originally formed as a small, community-based organization, The Brien Center has grown into a comprehensive, county-wide system of care, with multiple program sites serving children, adolescents, adults and families.

Through decades of service, The Brien Center has evolved to meet the changing needs of the community. It now provides a comprehensive continuum of care, including crisis intervention, outpatient therapy, residential treatment and case management, with specialized programs for co-occurring disorders.

The Brien Center is a nonprofit agency that receives the majority of its funding through a combination of state and federal contracts, grants and philanthropic support. With an annual operating budget of approximately \$30 million, the agency serves nearly 10,000 individuals each year — making it an essential lifeline for many in Berkshire County seeking recovery, stability and hope. A leading employer in the region's human services sector, The Brien Center employs more than 450 staff members who deliver compassionate, person-centered care. Its vision remains rooted in recovery, resilience and access to care for all.

Comprehensive, community-based behavioral health care in Berkshire County

The Brien Center for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services is the largest provider of community-based behavioral health care in Berkshire County, serving nearly 10,000 individuals annually. As a nonprofit agency with deep roots in the region, The Brien Center is committed to delivering high-quality, recovery-oriented care to individuals and families living with mental health conditions and substance use disorders.

A cornerstone of The Brien Center's crisis response system is its Community Behavioral Health Center (CBHC), which offers 24/7 access to urgent behavioral health services. Through Mobile Crisis Intervention (MCI) and on-site stabilization supports, the CBHC provides timely intervention, psychiatric assessment and care coordination — helping individuals avoid unnecessary hospitalization and recover safely in the community. The CBHC collaborates closely with area hospitals, first responders and social service providers to ensure seamless access to care.

For adults and families, The Brien Center offers a broad range of outpatient mental health and addiction recovery services, including individual therapy, group counseling, psychiatry and case management. Residential treatment is available through programs like Keenan House for Men, Keenan House North and Supportive Housing, all of which offer structured, therapeutic environments that emphasize personal responsibility and peer support.

The Adult Community Clinical Supports (ACCS) program provides individualized, community-based care to promote housing stability, wellness and independent living to individuals with chronic mental health needs.

Youth and families benefit from a robust menu of services offered by The Brien Center's Child and Adolescent Division. These include outpatient counseling, school-based substance use prevention, psychiatry and intensive supports such as In-Home Therapy (IHT), Intensive Care Coordination (ICC) and therapeutic day programming. Services are designed to keep families together and help children succeed at home, in school and in their communities.



The Brien Center is committed to delivering high-quality, recovery-oriented care.

ter's Child and Adolescent Division. These include outpatient counseling, school-based substance use prevention, psychiatry and intensive supports such as In-Home Therapy (IHT), Intensive Care Coordination (ICC) and therapeutic day programming. Services are designed to keep families together and help children succeed at home, in school and in their communities.

In addition, the Behavioral Health Community Partners (BHCP) program delivers care coordination for individuals with co-occurring mental health, substance use and complex medical needs. By addressing social determinants of health such as housing, transportation and food access, BHCP helps individuals achieve long-term recovery and improved quality of life.

Through a comprehensive, person-centered approach, The Brien Center continues to be a vital resource in Western Massachusetts assuring that mental health and addiction treatments are available when and where they are needed most.

Executive Leadership

Diana L. Knaebe, MSW, serves as the president and CEO of The Brien Center for Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services. Appointed on July 1, 2024, she has over 35 years of experience in the behavioral healthcare sector, having held leadership roles in both nonprofit and governmental organizations. Her previous positions include president of Memorial Behavioral Health and System Administrator of Behavioral Health at Memorial Health System in Springfield, Illinois, as well as state director of the Illinois Division of Mental Health and President/CEO of Heritage Behavioral Health Center in Decatur, Illinois. Knaebe began her career as a therapist in Michigan, where she and the organizations she led received numerous state and national awards for excellence in behavioral health.



Diana L. Knaebe

Known for her servant leadership style, Knaebe is recognized as a sound manager, innovative leader and courageous change agent. She is a strong communicator who works cooperatively with various stakeholders to find common ground and reach consensus. Her expertise in strategic organizational development and systems thinking provides vision and leadership for comprehensive, effective systems.

Knaebe holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from San Diego State University and a Master of Social Work degree from Western Michigan University.

SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

A steadfast advocate for families: Judith Cohen

FamilyAid empowers children and parents facing homelessness to secure and sustain housing — and since 2013, Judith Cohen has been a cornerstone of that mission.

As a housing specialist, Cohen works alongside case managers to address barriers to housing for the more than 1,500 children and parents living in FamilyAid's temporary housing each year. Her goal: ensure every family has a safe place to land when their shelter stay ends.

"I look at the whole family — no one is in shelter because life is easy," she says. "Many are facing incredible challenges beyond poverty or housing instability: kids on the spectrum or serious medical conditions like cancer or heart disease. We meet their needs in the moment and set them up for long-term stability."

Cohen's role grew significantly during her tenure. As one of the agency's longest-serving staff members, she's taken on increased responsibility as FamilyAid's reach has expanded nearly fourfold. She blends practical housing support with deep-rooted advocacy and helps families navigate complex service systems.

Her path to human services began unexpectedly, sparked by a neighbor who worked in the field. As she met more people and learned about the family shelter system in Massachusetts, she found herself drawn to the work — where she quickly discovered her calling.

Over the years, she's helped hundreds of children and parents transition out of homelessness. A few moments stay



Judith Cohen embodies FamilyAid's core values.

close to her heart: "There's a mom I worked with years ago. We got her and her daughters into subsidized housing, and I still run into her on the T. She tells me, 'You really made a difference in our lives.'"

"I love working at FamilyAid," she says. "Though the work can be challenging, there's no better provider in the state. If anyone can make the system work, it's our team."

"Whether supporting a family fleeing violence or celebrating a housing placement, Judith brings persistence, empathy and heart to every case," says president & CEO Larry Seamans.

Jessica Kuznar: A fierce force at Crystal Springs Inc.

Since joining Crystal Springs Inc. in 1999 as a recreation aide, Jessica Kuznar has been a constant source of passion, growth, and excellence. Now serving as the Director of Staff Training, Kuznar has spent more than two decades transforming not only the staff training program — but the people behind it.

Kuznar's commitment to quality, empowerment and person-centered care is unmistakable. She played a leading role in implementing a structured onboarding program that has greatly improved new hire experiences and outcomes. From the moment new team members step through our doors, they feel welcomed, prepared and connected — thanks to Kuznar's dedication to fostering a supportive and engaging environment.

Her unique training style emphasizes real-world scenarios, hands-on exercises and a deep respect for every learner. Kuznar has worked tirelessly to ensure that all staff members, regardless of their experience levels, receive the tools they need to succeed. Whether she's developing curriculum, leading group workshops, coaching one-on-one or jumping in after hours to provide a refresher, Kuznar brings care and cooperation to everything she does. Her training initiatives go far beyond compliance — they build lasting confidence, promote best practices, foster consistency and reinforce a strong culture rooted in Crystal Springs' core values.

Kuznar lives and leads by Crystal Springs' FIERCE values every day: fairness, integrity, engagement, respect and responsibility, care and cooperation and excellence.

Her colleagues describe her as a motivator, a mentor and a catalyst for positive change.



Jessica Kuznar has been with Crystal Springs for two decades.

Kuznar has been recognized as Employee of the Month multiple times and has been nominated for Employee of the Year, honors that reflect her enduring impact and commitment to Crystal Springs.

Beyond her formal achievements, Kuznar is known for her belief in the potential of every employee and every resident. She is someone who not only teaches but uplifts, who does not settle for "good enough" when "exceptional" is possible.

"Jessica's dedication isn't just inspiring — it's transformative. She sets the tone for excellence and brings out the best in everyone around her," said Kathleen Lovenbury, CEO at Crystal Springs Inc.

Kuznar's legacy is one of empowerment, growth, and fierce compassion. Her efforts ripple outward — building stronger teams, inspiring confidence and ultimately improving the lives of those the organization serves.

EDITORIAL



William Yelenak
President / Publisher

It all started with Gerry: Celebrating 50 Years of Impact within the sector

The Providers' Council came together with our members in April to Celebrate 50 Years of Impact during our 50th Anniversary Celebration at the Top of the Tower in Worcester.

The event was 50 years in the making and featured those who were there when the Providers' Council was founded; board and staff members from past and present; former, current and emerging leaders in the human services sector; and Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll, who shared remarks and presented the Council with a citation. The Council also unveiled its timeline that covered the history of the community-based system of care in Massachusetts — as well as the history of the Council itself.

In addition to emceeing the event, I was tasked with sharing brief introductory remarks to kick off our celebration, and I turned toward our history to quote one of the greatest sources of inspiration for the Council, the human services sector and me personally: Gerry Wright.

Gerry's the current chair emeritus on the Council's Board of Directors, but this story begins 50 years ago, as Gerry and a small group of dedicated professionals started the Council in 1975. That group of members formed the Council to represent their best interests, lead with a collective voice and provide opportunities for providers to connect, share and work together. When I was reviewing some of the Council's history in preparation for the event, I found a quote from Gerry right here in *The Provider* that stuck with me.

"In our work," Gerry wrote, "there are so many moments of frustration and futility as we climb the mountain in the never-ending task of providing services for those people needing our care and support in their quest for a fuller and more independent life. Yet, when we have reached the mountain-top with creative and dynamic perseverance, we know a moment of pure joy. We know the ultimate value of our profession: caring for human beings as human beings."

I wasn't the only one to recognize Gerry for his contributions to the human services sector and Providers' Council as we know them today. As other speakers came to the podium, they had similar stories to share. Our board chair, Shaheer Mustafa, recalled how Gerry founded Dynamic Action Residence Enterprise or DARE in 1964. DARE would eventually evolve into DARE Family Services and then HopeWell in 2017 — it's the organization that Shaheer runs today. Michael Weekes, the Council's former president & CEO, also recognized Gerry for all his contributions to the sector and the founding of the Council.

None of us would have been in that room celebrating the Council without the foresight of Gerry and his col-

leagues more than half a century ago to form the Providers' Council. Gerry was a member of that small group of dedicated professionals who started the Council many years ago — and it would have been hard for them to envision the growth of the Council and sector since.

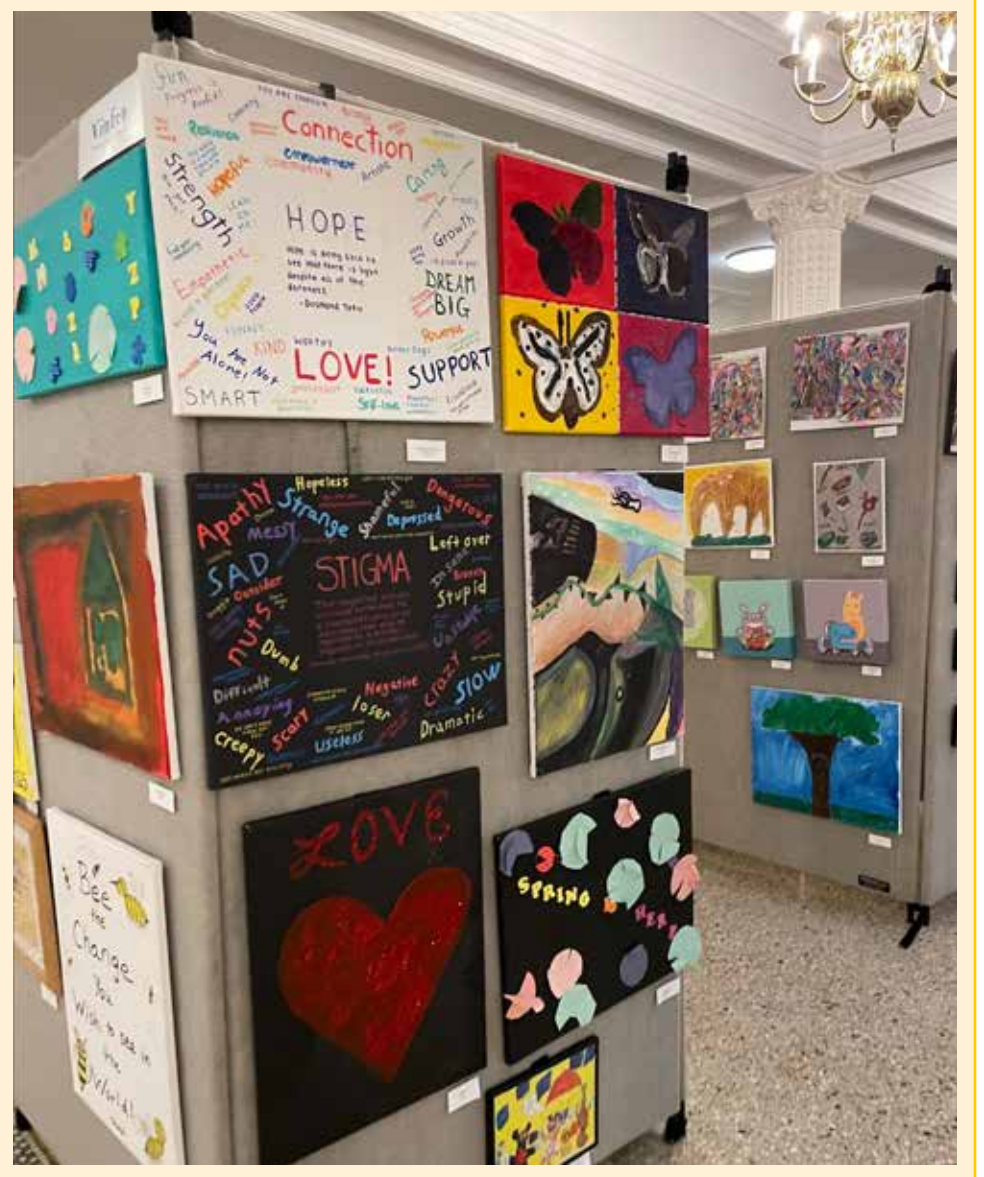
Today, the Council has 220 members across the state and represents a sector that has workers filling 160,000 jobs. Those dedicated caregivers provide essential services to hundreds of thousands of residents everyday, and they do it in partnership with the Commonwealth, with which the sector has billions of dollars in purchase of service contracts. Providers' Council members are located all across the Commonwealth — from the Berkshires to the Cape and the Islands, from Merrimack Valley through the South Coast and everywhere in between.

Gerry turned 90 earlier this year, and the Council's Board of Directors and staff had the opportunity to celebrate with him on this milestone birthday at our office in Framingham with a cake and celebration following a board meeting. Gerry's current organization, Community Service Care, also had a big announcement in April, as Gerry noted he would step down as CEO and pass the reins to Alison Yoos, now the acting CEO of the organization. And in that announcement, Gerry — of course — emphasized that "this work has never been about one person."

"It's about all of us, coming together, lifting each other up, and making a difference in the ways that matter most to us," Gerry wrote. "I'm beyond grateful for the time I've spent on this journey with you and look forward to continuing to support the organization in my new role as Direct Care Worker: Community Liaison. I cannot wait to see where we go next."

"My role has always been to provide the space, flexibility and support for those visions to take root and thrive," he added. "And now it's time for me to step back and make space for new leadership to carry this work forward."

While our 50th Anniversary Celebration at Top of the Tower has come to a close, we look forward to continuing to celebrate milestones with Gerry and all of you throughout this year. His organization is planning a celebration to recognize him this spring, and the Council plans to continue celebrating our 50th Anniversary and the sector's history later this year when we host our 50th Annual Convention & Expo: *50 Years Together: Celebrating Today, Shaping Tomorrow* on Monday, October 6 at the Marriott Copley Place Hotel in Boston. We hope you'll join us — and, of course, Gerry — to keep the celebration going and recognize the incredible history of not just the Providers' Council, but the entire human services sector in Massachusetts.



Over 100 artists from 14 Vinfen programs participated in an art exhibit at the State House showcasing the power to transform lives through art. The programs include ACCS, Gateway Arts, four Clubhouses, Employment Training Center, Community Care Partners, Long-term residences and PACT. Artists who submitted their artwork reside and participate in programs across their catchment area including Hyannis, Marshfield, Plymouth, Brookline, Quincy, Randolph, Dedham, Milton, Roslindale, Somerville, Boston, Haverhill, Lawrence and Lowell.

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



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Head Start is under attack

By Michelle Haimowitz

This year, Head Start celebrates its 60th birthday. Each day for nearly 60 years, Head Start has opened its doors to children, their families and our exceptional educators and staff. Through COVID and other challenging times, Head Start has made sure that all children and families receive the support and services they need above all else.

Today, Head Start is under attack. President Trump's budget proposes to completely eliminate Head Start, leaving children without care, parents out of work and teachers and employees fired. This budget proposal follows months of threats from the administration, from the temporary funding freeze in January, to the shuttering of five federal Head Start offices (including the Boston office) in April, leaving Massachusetts Head Start programs without federal counterparts, funding delays and uncertainties for Head Start programs.

Head Start is an essential member of communities across Massachusetts and the nation. Head Start and Early Head Start are federally funded programs that support families with young children who are living in poverty, in foster care, or experiencing homelessness. Head Start provides children from eligible families with high-quality early learning as well as medical, dental, vision, behavioral, health and nutrition services,

and provides family supports and services for Head Start parents. Here in Massachusetts, our 28 Head Start programs serve 11,651 young children and their families. Without Head Start, our nation's most vulnerable children will lose access to high-quality early learning as well as meals, health and vision screenings, dental services and the skills they need to enter kindergarten ready to learn.

Across Massachusetts, Head Start employs over 4,000 staff members as teachers, cooks, bus drivers, family service workers and more. Most Head Start families in Massachusetts include at least one working parent or a parent in job training or school. If President Trump's budget proposal is realized, between Head Start staff and parents, thousands of hardworking Bay Staters, will be out of work either due to the loss of child care or the elimination of their employer. A shutdown of Head Start would not only halt the learning and care for thousands of vulnerable children, but would raise unemployment and hurt the Massachusetts economy.

Congress must act now to protect Head Start and ensure that these services are there for all eligible children and families who depend on them.

Michelle Haimowitz is the executive director at the Massachusetts Head Start Association.

The importance of Sexual Assault Awareness Month

By Dr. Mary Speta

“I just feel like no one understands. No one cares.” I have sat in my office with countless women and heard those words time and time again. The aftermath of sexual assault can be brutal. In a society where sexual assault and violence are on the rise, it is crucial that we take the time to acknowledge the pain of these experiences and to highlight that they never should have happened.

Sexual Assault Awareness Month gives us an opportunity to elevate this conversation at a communal level for a few weeks out of the year. It's not a reason to ignore the topic for the remaining 11 months — rather, it is a unique way to concentrate awareness, prevention, recovery and educational efforts that connect people to resources and to safety. For those of us who are service providers, this can sometimes begin to feel rote and robotic, especially when we're handling real live situations in our work.

In our work at Amīrah serving people who have experienced sex trafficking, we walk alongside individuals whose sexual assaults turned a profit for their traffickers. It is the ultimate commodification of sexual violence, and one that can only exist where it is overlooked. Like other forms of sexual violence, sex trafficking is also on the rise in the United States, impacting the most vulnerable in our communities.

As a provider in this space, I personally know the pain of feeling like I'm on an uphill run that will never end. The reports of escalations and increases can make the work we do for sexual assault awareness feel small, unimportant and ineffective.

But this work matters — at so many different levels.

It matters for survivors. In a society where only 33% of sexual assaults are reported, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, people with lived experience need to know that they will be believed and helped if they come forward.

It matters for loved ones. Loved ones need resources for vicarious trauma and to know how to show up for the people in their lives who have experienced sexual violence. All loved ones need to know there is

help for them, too, and where to access it.

It matters for perpetrators and potential abusers. The more that sexual violence is normalized, the more sexual violence we see in society. When we elevate the conversation about sexual assault awareness, we push back against this normalization and communicate to individuals seeking to act out sexual violence that it is not permissible.

It matters for communities. According to the National Sexual Violence Resource Center (NSVRC), 81% of women and 43% of men reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment and/or assault in their lifetime. That is an astounding majority of our communities — communities asking for help to build safety and to work toward justice.

It matters for the future. We are operating in an era in which new types of sexual violence are being invented using technology, AI, social media and other online platforms. This is a unique moment in human history when we are fighting back against sexual violence that sometimes we don't even understand. Rather than being overwhelmed by it and risk becoming numb to its impact, it is crucial for the future of our society that we continue to create new pathways toward justice, healing and wholeness.

Violence begets violence until it is disrupted. That's where we come in — people seeking to build safety, promote justice and facilitate healing. Whether you are a service provider or not, your participation in Sexual Assault Awareness Month matters at all of these levels and beyond. The idea of ending sexual violence is too overwhelming for any one person, but it is not overwhelming when we combine forces and raise our voices together. This work is not about any one person doing everything — it is about everyone doing something and knowing with absoluteness that it matters. Violence wins when it convinces us that our efforts are unimportant. Anti-violence wins when we remain convinced that every act, big or small, is important and the many different people it matters for.

Dr. Mary Speta is the executive director at Amīrah, Inc.

The impact of our collective voice

By Stephanie Steed

In advocacy, the power of rallies is undeniable; they are a vital strategy to gather support and amplify the voices of those who often remain unheard. As the CEO of 18 Degrees, a human service agency in Western Massachusetts, and chair of The Caring Force Committee, I have seen firsthand how state-level policymakers significantly impact our initiatives. As a result, we have prioritized our agency's commitment to advocacy, stressing the importance of informing our staff and the individuals we serve about policymakers' essential role in our communities. By empowering our staff to become Ambassadors and Captains within The Caring Force, we ignite their passion to advocate for impactful change.

At 18 Degrees, we take pride in collaborating with a coalition of advocates within The Caring Force, dedicated to promoting policies that enhance the human services workforce in Massachusetts. Our objectives include strengthening advocacy for our participants and agency while enhancing the narrative surrounding our mission to champion access, opportunities, belonging and well-being for all and its significance.

When our workforce witnesses the power of collective action, they become motivated to take charge of their own advocacy initiatives. This awareness — that their voices, combined with those of their colleagues and community members, can drive significant change — is especially important in today's political climate, where legislators may not fully grasp the challenges faced by individuals and communities. By uniting at rallies, in a sea of yellow Caring Force shirts, we ensure that decision makers see us, our participants and the work we do.

Collective action not only strengthens our message but also underscores the significance of our work. At rallies, we call on legislators to endorse initiatives that bolster our efforts. The Caring Force rallies are essential for fostering self-advocacy and increasing awareness within the community. They are crucial in elevating our voices to express our concerns, educating the public about the challenges we face and thanking our senators and representatives for standing with us.

The first Caring Force State House Rally in 2012 was such a show of collaboration that it shut down the State House. Now, we

continue to expand our reach by hosting regional rallies. The human service sector is composed of a vast number of individuals throughout our state, and while 18 Degrees has a team of around 160 staff members serving approximately 5,000 participants, we understand the power of collaboration. This is why we prioritize our involvement in both regional and State House rallies. The Caring Force brings together diverse ideas, amplifying our impact on a larger scale. Ultimately, it's all about combining the ideas of many to impact many more while strengthening the human service workforce.

The Caring Force embodies the collective ideas of many, aiming to impact even more lives across the Commonwealth. With so many counting on us, rallying is a crucial way to demonstrate to our legislators that we are counting on them. Our training, compensation and preparation for the challenging work we do require the support of our legislators, enabling us to give back to our communities and assist those who are most vulnerable. We are grateful to all who have envisioned these rallies over the years; their grassroots innovation allows us to bring legislators along as we rally together.

The act of rallying is more than just a demonstration; it is a catalyst for change. It provides a platform for us to feel a sense of community and belonging and to advocate for the policies that will have a lasting impact on our lives. As we look to rally in May and beyond for causes that support the human services sector, we must remain committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive environment where everyone feels empowered to speak up. Together, we create a movement that brings attention to our concerns and inspires others to join us as we fight for the support and services needed. By coming together and ensuring that our legislators recognize our significance in the fabric of this Commonwealth, we can make a lasting impact on our communities and beyond.

A strong workforce in the human services field is essential, and rallies can be incredibly impactful. When we unite, we create meaningful change.

Stephanie Steed is the president & CEO at 18 Degrees and the chair of the Caring Force Committee.



Rep. Michelle Badger speaks with rally-goers.



Thalia McMillion (left) and Gerry Wright (right) stand together.



Legislators and panelists stand together after the rally.

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A VIEW FROM THE HILL

A commentary from a legislator on human services



Enhancing human services pay promotes women's economic equality

By Rep. Hannah Kane

The Massachusetts Caucus of Women Legislators (MCWL) is a bipartisan, bicameral group of women legislators dedicated to enhancing the economic status and equality of women, and to encourage and support women in all levels of government. As the current House Vice-Chair and former House Chair, I have had the honor of working to advance bills such as the Frances Perkins Workplace Equity Act and legislation to improve maternal health in Massachusetts. The Caucus recently announced priority bills for the current legislative session, including H.223 and S.130, *An Act relative to a livable wage for human services workers*, which was filed by Representative Mindy Domb in the House and Senator Cindy Friedman in the Senate. These bills aim to address pay disparities in the human services field between workers directly employed by the state and those working for private employers with state contracts.

Currently, state employees make significantly more than employees of human services nonprofits, even when they have similar job titles and responsibilities. In addition, Massachusetts is the largest purchaser of human services from community-based nonprofits, but the model budgets the Commonwealth creates for nonprofit human services organizations include salaries below what the state pays for similar positions. As a result, human services nonprofits face challenges recruiting and retaining employees because the pay their employees receive is not competitive, leaving vacancies that go unfilled and increasing the workload of remaining staff.

Disparities in pay not only result in workforce issues in the human services sector but perpetuate racial and gender inequities. According to a UMass Amherst Donahue Institute report published in 2023, approximately 80% of human services workers in Massachusetts are women, and 36% are people of color. This study also found that 17% of human services workers in Massachusetts earn wages below 200% of the federal poverty line, and one third spend more than 30% of their income on housing. Women across the state working for human services nonprofits provide essential services, from direct care to counseling, but struggle to make ends meet due to low pay. The growing demand for human services has highlighted the challenges human services workers face, as well as the need for competitive pay in the human services sector.

Representative Domb and Senator Friedman's legislation takes several steps to address the pay disparity between state human services employees and community-based nonprofit human

services workers. If signed into law, this bill would require the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Executive Office of Aging & Independence and the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities to increase the reimbursement rate for human services providers through 2029 until the average salary for direct care workers, clinicians and others matches those of comparable public sector employees. The bill also requires EOHHS to issue a report on the funding needed to close the gap in pay, and requires EOHHS, AGE and EOHLC to issue annual reports on progress made toward closing the pay gap. This bill has been assigned to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, and will receive a public hearing before the Committee.

The MCWL chose to prioritize this bill as part of our commitment to enhancing women's economic status and eliminating barriers. The Caucus supports efforts to ensure women are able to fully participate and succeed in the workplace and recognizes that low wages in women-majority sectors creates barriers to economic security for women. Guided by this strategic priority, the Caucus selected H.223/S.130 as one of five bills to focus on for the 194th legislative session. Passing this bill will improve pay for human services employees across Massachusetts, providing much-needed financial stability and opportunities for advancement to a predominantly female workforce. Furthermore, making salaries for community-based nonprofit human services providers competitive would help these organizations recruit and retain more staff, allowing providers to fill vacancies and provide much-needed services to vulnerable Massachusetts residents.

Human services workers are a critical part of our communities, working every day to support children, the elderly, individuals with disabilities and others in need of support to live an independent and dignified life. By reducing pay inequities in the human services workforce, Massachusetts can help women join and stay in human services without putting their economic well-being at risk. As a long-time Trustee for Seven Hills Foundation and as a legislator deeply committed to elevating women's economic opportunity, I look forward to working with my colleagues in the MCWL to advocate for our priority legislation, and for women across the Commonwealth.

Representative Hannah Kane represents the 11th Worcester District in the Massachusetts House of Representatives.



Rep. Hannah Kane

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.



CAREVOTE: Council’s one-time voter registration campaign turns into longstanding initiative

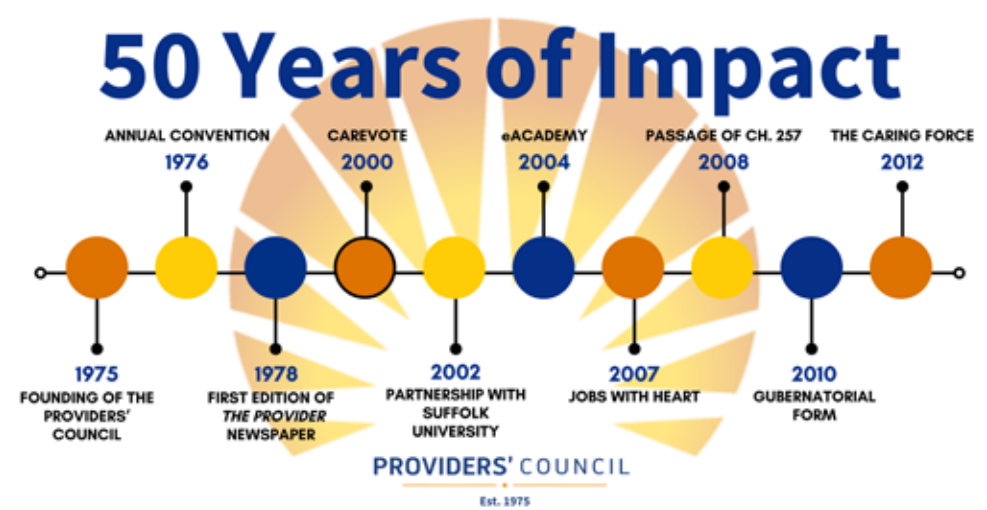
Continued from page 1

CareVote 2000 could be in shifting that narrative. He cited an informal survey showing that many care staff were either not registered or registered in the wrong community. “That’s why CareVote 2000 can make such a critical difference,” he noted.

Following its initial success, CareVote returned in 2004 and again in 2006 for the midterm elections. From there, it became a recurring and now permanent Council initiative — helping to sustain voter engagement every election season.

In recent years, CareVote has expanded its tools and resources, allowing human service organizations to run their own voter registration drives in addition to hosting Council-organized tables.

As the Providers’ Council enters its next 50 years, CareVote remains a key part of its mission — advancing civic participation and ensuring all voices



Originally beginning in 2000 has a one-time voter registration program, today, CareVote has expanded into a full initiative within the Council.

in the human services community are heard at the ballot box. For more information or to get involved

with CareVote, please contact Isabella A. Lee at ilee@providers.org.

RALLY: South of Boston Rally brings together more than 250 members of the Caring Force

Continued from page 1

ly was proudly organized by a coalition of dedicated human services organizations, including BAMSI, JRI, New England Village, The Arc of Plymouth County and Upper Cape Cod and Road to Responsibility. Their collaborative effort made this gathering a meaningful and unifying moment for the region’s human services community.

Peter Evers, president and CEO of BAMSI, brought humor and enthusiasm to the podium as the event’s emcee.

“What happened today was an amazing outpouring of love, frankly,” Evers told Marshfield Community Media (MCM) in an interview he did after the event. “We were celebrating the work that we do, but we’re also asking more of from our legislature. We called this group of people ‘essential workers’ back in COVID, and if they are essential, which they absolutely are, we should be paying them a rate that they can, as we heard today, afford to buy new clothes for their kids, put food on the table and not have to make difficult decisions about paying rent or feeding their families; we have to make sure that they get what they deserve and what they need.”

The rally’s centerpiece was a powerful panel of speakers who brought the

heart of human services to life through their personal stories. Each speaker underscored the vital role the sector plays in supporting individuals and families across South of Boston. The panel also highlighted the urgent need for legislative action, discussing how *An Act Relative to a Student Loan Repayment Program for Human Services Workers* (S.119|H.283) and *An Act Relative to a Livable Wage for Human Services Workers* (S.130|H.223) would transform not just their lives, but the well-being of entire communities.

The panel featured a diverse group of voices from the field: Kate Nelson, a dedicated direct support professional at The Arc of Plymouth and Upper Cape Cod; Deborah Price, a residential counselor at BAMSI; Sejal Shah, a member of BAMSI’s Board of Directors; and individuals served by BAMSI — Kurt Morss, Kenny Pike and Steven Poudrier — who shared moving testimonies about how human services have impacted their lives.

These stories serve as powerful reminders that the work of human services professionals goes beyond a job — it is a lifeline for countless individuals.

State Senator Michael Brady (Second Plymouth and Norfolk), delivered a powerful message of support for the sector. He emphasized the critical role human

service workers play and pledged to fight for better wages, student loan repayments and resources through his continued support for the Council’s bills.

Among those moved by the show of support was Rob Lever, a dedicated member of The Caring Force, who has worked on the front lines of human services for years. “It’s powerful when our state leaders show up, listen and truly understand the work we do,” Lever shared in an interview with MCM. “Their presence means they’re hearing our stories firsthand.”

State Reps. Michelle Badger and Kathy LaNatra also pledged their support for the Council’s legislative agenda, stating that the human service workers in our communities are vitally important to the Commonwealth.

The rally wrapped up on a high note, with plenty of smiles, photos, and unforgettable moments. One highlight: Senator Brady treating the crowd to a heartfelt rendition of “Some Kind of Wonderful,” bringing the spirited gathering to a joyful close.

The next Caring Force rally will be our 13th Annual State House Rally on May 8! For more information, or to RSVP for the rally, please visit www.providers.org/the-caring-force-2/.

BUDGET: House Ways and Means Committee releases its FY ’26 Budget

Continued from page 1

- munity-based Re-entry Programs – rose from \$12.5 million to \$16 million, an increase of 28.58%.
- **DAR line item 2511-0105** – Emergency Food Assistance – rose from \$42 million from to \$55 million, a change of 30.95%.
 - **DYS line items 4200-0100** – Non-Res Services for Committee Population; 4200-0200 – Residential Services for Detained Population; 4200-0300 – Residential Services for Committed Population were funded at the same levels proposed in the Governors 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 Governors budget.
 - **DTA line item 4401-1000** – Employment Service Program – dropped from \$20.5 million to \$18.8 million, a decrease of 8.27%.
 - **DPH line item 4512-0103** – HIV/AIDS Prevention Treatment and Services - increased from \$31.8 million to 35 million, an increase of 9.90%.
 - **DCF line item 4800-1100** – Social Workers for Case Management – dropped from \$334 million to \$327 million, a decrease of 2.10%.
 - **DMH line item 5042-5000** – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services – increased from \$115 million to \$128.5 million, a change of 11.73%.
 - **HLC line item 7004-0101** – Emergency Assistance – Family Shelter and Services – dropped from \$325.2 million to \$275.2 million, a decrease of 15.37%.
- The preliminary analysis from the Providers’ Council, which tracks frequently discussed human services line items, is on the Council’s website, providers.org. To discuss any of these line items or ask that other line items be tracked, please contact Caroline O’Neill (coneill@providers.org).

CELEBRATION: More than 200 members of the Council gather together to celebrate its 50th anniversary

Continued from page 1

(AMBM) and reflected on the past year as the organization looks ahead to 2025. During the AMBM, the Council reviewed the organization’s financial reports, heard from Council committees and discussed the successes achieved by the organization and its members in 2024. The Council also elected officers and directors, welcoming Leah Bradley, Central MA Housing Alliance; Craig Gordon, Communities for People; and Shannon Rudder, Martin Luther King Jr. Family Services to its Board of Directors.

Directly after the event, the Council began its 50th Anniversary Celebration. The celebration gave attendees an opportunity to connect with each other while taking the time to reflect on the incredible work of the sector with the community.

“Folks truly are individuals, there is not a one size fits all,” said Colleen Holmes, president & CEO of Viability. “And so to the degree that we acquire the skill sets and the mind-sets to be able to encompass all the range of the human experience, that will not only change the lives of the people that we serve for the better, but it will change the world for the better.”

The celebration featured speakers from

around the sector including former president & CEO of the Council, Michael Weekes, who spoke to the legacy of the Council and the sector. Weekes was followed by Tammy Mello, president & CEO of Key Program, who celebrated the sector’s current, everyday successes in caring for communities across the Commonwealth. Doneshia Jaminson, senior director of operations at BAMSI, ended the night with remarks about the future of the sector. The Council also welcomed Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll, who shared her remarks regarding the importance of the sector with attendees.

While the event highlighted the success of the sector, many members reflected on the path of progress that was fostered by generations of human services workers before them.

“It’s exciting to be here tonight,” said France Neff, president & CEO of Family Independence, “I remember when the Council started. We have depended on the Council for so many things.”

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. Of the ticket price, \$50 went directly to support the “50k for 50 Years” fund and help provide



Members and friends of the Council observe the 50 Years of Impact timeline.

scholarships for Providers’ Council member employees. Scholarship recipients will be recognized at our 50th Annual Convention & Expo on Monday, October 6, 2025.

Thank you to the sponsors who made this event possible. Influence Sponsors for the event included AAFCPAS, Casner & Edwards, Curtis Strategy, Enterprise Fleet Management, Hirsch Roberts Weinstein and

Resonant Energy. Direct IT also helped support the event as an Inspire Sponsor.

The Council extends its gratitude to everyone who contributed to the success of this event. As the Council continues to celebrate its 50th anniversary, it will continue to honor its original mission as it looks to build the strongest human services sector in the United States.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS • MAY 2025

What: Advocating for Human Services: What Board Members Need to Know
When: Thursday, May 1
Time: 3:00 to 4:30 p.m.
Presenters: Lisa Simonetti, Hub Strategies
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: \$50 for Members; \$125 for Non-Members

What: Info Session: Certificate in Nonprofit Human Services Management
When: Tuesday, May 6
Time: 2:00 to 2:30 p.m.
Presenters: Rae’Niqua Victorine and Brendan Burke, Suffolk University; Nina Lamarre, Providers’ Council
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free; Members only

What: 13th Annual Caring Force Rally
When: Thursday, May 8
Time: Begins at 10:00 a.m.
Where: Great Hall, State House (24 Beacon St. Boston, MA)

What: Community Webinar: Attachment Difficulties in Families with Addictions
When: Thursday, May 8
Time: 7:30 to 9:00 p.m.
Presenters: Rosemary Sullivan, PhD, LICSW, Chair and Professor of Social Work, Westfield State University
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: Free for NASW Members; \$10 non-NASW Members

What: Trust Is a 2-Way Street
When: Tuesday, May 20
Time: 9:00 to 10:30 a.m.
Presenters: Deb Calvert, People First Productivity Solutions
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: \$50 for Members; \$125 for Non-Members

What: Provider Member Hosted Webinar: What We Need to Know about the Immigration Crisis
When: Wednesday, May 21
Time: 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
Presenters: Alexandra Weber, Chief Advancement Officer and Senior Vice President at the International Institute of New England
Where: Online via Zoom
Cost: \$25 for Members

What: The Accountability Challenge
When: Tuesday, May 29
Time: 9:00 to 11:30 a.m.
Presenters: Garry Foisy, Partner, Principal Facilitator & Speaker, Dirigo
Where: Providers’ Council Training Center (100 Crossing Blvd., Suite 100 Framingham, MA 01702)
Cost: \$75 for Members; \$100 for Non-Members

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

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

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