

New Bedford Resident Collects 1200 Signatures in Hopes of Overturning Parks Department Parking Mandate

As reported on New Bedford Live yesterday afternoon:

Vicky Hansen Souto has collected over 1200 signatures and presented them to Ward 6 City Councilor Ryan Pereira.

The petition is asking the park board to rescind the decision to install parking meters at the Noah's park and playground. At present the park is free to enjoy for city residents and their families.

This park is ? percent handicapped accessible and one of a kind. Says the petition.

If anyone would like to sign the petition, Vicky will be at the Noah's playground for about another hour today and will be back tomorrow afternoon around 12 .

Survivors of sexual assault, abuse urge passage of Massachusetts Gov. Baker's public safety legislation

Today, Governor Charlie Baker and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito joined Secretary of Public Safety and Security Terrence Reidy,

survivors, advocates and law enforcement officials for a roundtable discussion highlighting the importance of the Administration's dangerousness legislation, which would provide comprehensive new protections for survivors of sexual assault, domestic violence, exploitation and other crimes. This is the third regional roundtable since the legislation was refiled in December 2021. Other participants included representatives from Community VOICES, advocates from the Worcester County District Attorney's Office of Victim Witness Services and other survivors who attended in support of the legislation.

Watch the roundtable [here](#).

Today's roundtable is part of the Administration's continued efforts to work with the survivor community to demonstrate the importance of its public safety proposals and deliver commonsense protections for survivors of violent crime. Similar roundtables were held in Plymouth in December 2021 and Springfield in March 2022, and Lt. Governor Karyn Polito testified on the legislative package in January before the Joint Committee on the Judiciary alongside survivors. The Administration continues to focus on the importance of survivors' stories to demonstrate the human impact of the current gaps in the system, and the legislation has also been endorsed by the Massachusetts Office of Victims' Assistance (MOVA).

"Hearing these survivors share their stories and the trauma they have lived with underscores the urgency with which we must act to close these loopholes and better protect survivors and communities," said Governor Charlie Baker. "We are honored and grateful to work alongside the survivor and advocacy communities to make the case for this legislation so we can improve protections and prevent future stories like the ones we heard today. We urge the Legislature to move on these bills."

“As Chair of the Governor’s Council to Address Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence, I have spent years working side by side with survivors, advocates and providers to deliver the resources and supports these resilient men and women need to live successful and safe lives,” said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito. “This legislation represents a critical next step we can take together to build on that work to improve protections for survivors and hold offenders accountable.”

“As noted by a survivor at a recent roundtable discussion, ‘it is a basic human right to feel safe,’” said Public Safety and Security Secretary Terrence Reidy. “Hearing the lived experience of survivors reinforces the urgent need for Massachusetts to strengthen the dangerousness law and enact common sense changes to protect vulnerable citizens who deserve better.”

“This bill brings needed changes so we can better protect victims and the community from dangerous individuals,” said Worcester County District Attorney Joseph Early. “As prosecutors, this is our main goal when we request a dangerousness hearing. This commonsense legislation is much-needed and closes loopholes that prevent us from fulfilling our goal of advocating for victims and protecting the community.”

“Today’s roundtable participants illustrated the impact of living in fear, which can only be addressed through safeguards that do not exist in the Commonwealth’s current law,” said Jennifer Lane, President of Community Voices. “Community Voices supports this legislation because it empowers survivors of traumatic abuse with the critical protections needed to begin the healing process and rebuild their lives. Communities become less safe when we ignore Voices of Survivors!”

An Act to Protect Victims of Crimes and the Public: First filed in 2018, the Administration’s proposal would expand the list of offenses that can provide grounds for a dangerousness

hearing and close certain loopholes at the start and end of the criminal process that currently limit or prevent effective action to address legitimate safety concerns. It would strengthen the ability of judges to enforce the conditions of pre-trial release by empowering police to detain people who they observe violating court-ordered release conditions; current law does not allow this, and instead requires a court to first issue a warrant. Under this proposal, judges will be empowered to revoke a person's release when the offender has violated a court-ordered condition, such as an order to stay away from a victim, or from a public playground. Current law requires an additional finding of dangerousness before release may be revoked.

The legislation also expands the list of offenses which can provide grounds for a dangerousness hearing including crimes of sexual abuse and crimes of threatened or potential violence. It also follows the long-standing federal model in including a defendant's history of serious criminal convictions as grounds that may warrant a dangerousness hearing. Current law requires courts to focus only on the crime charged and ignore a defendant's criminal history when determining whether the defendant may be the subject of this sort of hearing.

An Act Relative to the Harmful Distribution of Sexually Explicit Visual Materials: First filed in 2017, this legislation seeks to close a loophole under current law by creating penalties for adults who distribute a sexually explicit image for purposes of revenge or embarrassment. While current law addresses non-consensual recording of an unsuspecting person, it does not address instances where someone distributes an image without consent regardless of whether the initial image may have been taken with consent. This legislation closes the gap in state law by creating a new felony offense and empowering judges in criminal proceedings to ensure an explicit image in question is permanently

destroyed.

Learn more about the legislation [here](#).

New Bedford Port Authority Provides Statement on Marine Park and Playground Parking

The following was provided by the New Bedford Port Authority:

The children and families who use the Noah's Place playground have always been given front and center consideration in the work to formulate a new parking policy at Marine Park, especially families with children with disabilities. To suggest otherwise is to ignore the many efforts undertaken over the past several months to engage supporters of Noah's Place, refine the parking approach based on their feedback, and ensure that these children and families are not unfairly burdened.

First and foremost, it is important for families with children with disabilities to understand that ANY vehicle displaying a valid disability placard/plate has free and unlimited duration parking access at ANY parking space located in Marine Park, whether metered or not, and whether designated as a handicap space or not.

Vehicles with handicap placards/plates will never be ticketed at the more than 200 spaces located across the playground and park. (There are four spaces at the playground specifically reserved for vehicles with disability placards/plates, and eight spaces within the parking area designated for the

marina).

This practice is consistent with the approach elsewhere in the City of New Bedford and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. City parking supervisors do not ticket vehicles with disability placards at downtown meters, and vehicles with disability placards are not charged at state parks, state beaches, or other ADA-accessible facilities across the state.

Families using vehicles without handicap placards/plates have 25 dedicated spaces adjacent to the playground available to them. These families are being provided free parking during the first two hours of their visit to the playground.

The new parking policy is designed to be a seasonal, text-to-pay program, in place from April 15 to October 31. Signage at the 29 (25+4) total playground spots and the 172 (164+8) total Marine Park spots will provide instructions and background information for the text-to-pay program. The same program was implemented successfully in the summer of 2021 at New Bedford public beaches.

As noted above, visitors who sign-in via a phone-based app receive two free hours at the playground. These visitors receive a text message 15 minutes prior to the expiration of their two free hours. They can then choose to extend their time via their phone. Mistaken claims have been made to the media claiming that the app would automatically charge visitors for additional time if visitors fail to "check-out" via the app. This is not correct. Visitors can simply leave at any time without taking any further action, without concern about charges or enforcement.

The new parking policy for the playground and Marine Park came before the Park Board on two separate occasions, in February and March. Supporters of Noah's Place were engaged well before any Park Board votes took place, and offered input on several issues, including the number of initial hours made free to

families without handicap placards/plates who visit the playground.

The need for a new parking policy became evident over the summer of 2021 as the seasonal demand on parking spaces and a related increase in trash, drew widespread complaints from families, recreational boaters, and other users of the Marine Park. The New Bedford Port Authority and City of New Bedford Department of Parks, Recreation, and Beaches, worked together for several months to understand the parking needs of all users, while taking into account the special considerations of families with children with disabilities.

The policy reflects the overall priority placed on family needs: All vehicles with handicap placards/plates can park anywhere for free, for an unlimited duration. For the first time, dedicated spaces are provided to playground visitors. Families receive free parking for a period of time that covers the duration of many playground visits. And any revenues generated from parking will be redirected back into improvements on site.

The City and Port Authority are committed to continually assessing the operation of the parking policy over the coming season and making adjustments as appropriate.

For media inquiries please contact Mike Lawrence, City of New Bedford Public Information Officer at (508) 979-1410, or Michael.Lawrence@NewBedford-Ma.gov

Massachusetts Gov. Baker

appoints Jeanne Pinado as Chair of the MassHousing Board of Directors

“Governor Charlie Baker swore in Jeanne Pinado as Chair of the Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency (MassHousing) Board of Directors. Pinado brings over three decades of experience in real estate development, asset management, sales and debt financing. Pinado currently serves as Executive Vice President at Colliers International. Prior to that role, she served as Madison Park Development’s CEO for over 20 years.

Pinado is the first woman of color to serve as Chair of the MassHousing Board of Directors.

“Jeanne Pinado’s decades of experience in real estate development and asset management make her well qualified to serve as Chair of the MassHousing Board,” said Governor Charlie Baker. “MassHousing’s successful record of increasing affordable housing options is critically important to addressing the Commonwealth’s housing challenges. Jeanne’s depth of knowledge and proven leadership in these areas will help create more homeownership opportunities throughout Massachusetts.”

“Our Administration is pleased to designate Jeanne Pinado Chair of MassHousing’s Board, where she will play an instrumental role in expanding housing opportunities across the state,” said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito. “Jeanne brings years of expertise in real estate and community development to this role, and we are appreciative of her willingness to serve.”

About Jeanne Pinado

Jeanne Pinado currently serves as an Executive Vice President

at Collier International. She previously served as CEO of Madison Park Development, a multifamily real estate owner/developer with annual revenues of more than \$20 million, from 1998-2019. Prior to Madison Park, she served as Senior Equity Investment Officer of Massachusetts Housing Investment Corporation. Pinado began her career in the financial services industry in New York City and worked as a project manager for developer Metropolitan Structures.

Pinado is also a mayoral appointee to the Boston Zoning Board of Appeals as well as a former gubernatorial appointee to chair the Multifamily Advisory Board of Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency. She is an executive board member of A Better City and serves as board President of NeighborhoodWorks Capital Corporation, a national community development finance institution. Pinado is a past president and current Policy Leadership Council member of CHAPA (Citizen's Housing and Planning Association). Pinado earned her Bachelor's in Arts in Economics from the University of Virginia and her Master's in Business Administration in Finance from Columbia University. She resides in Boston with her family.

About MassHousing

MassHousing (The Massachusetts Housing Finance Agency) is an independent, quasi-public agency created in 1966 and charged with providing financing for affordable housing in Massachusetts. The Agency raises capital by selling bonds and lends the proceeds to low- and moderate-income homebuyers and homeowners, and to developers who build or preserve affordable and/or mixed-income rental housing. MassHousing does not use taxpayer dollars to sustain its operations, although it administers some publicly funded programs on behalf of the Commonwealth. Since its inception, MassHousing has provided more than \$24.3 billion for affordable housing." -Mass.gov.

Massachusetts to Begin Distribution of \$500 payments to Low-Income Workers

The Baker-Polito Administration today announced the start of distribution of the first round of \$500 payments for low-income workers under the COVID-19 Essential Employee Premium Pay Program. The payments will be mailed to approximately 500,000 people over the next week.

These payments were previously announced last month and represent the first round of a \$460 million program passed by the Massachusetts Legislature and signed by Governor Baker as part of a \$4 billion spending plan for American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds. Under this program created by the Legislature, the Administration was provided flexibility to design the program and develop eligibility parameters to ensure this critical support is provided quickly to workers across the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts residents will be eligible for first round payments if, based on filed 2020 Massachusetts tax returns, their income from employment was at least \$12,750 – the equivalent to working 20 hours/week for 50 weeks at minimum wage as of 2020 – and their total income put them below 300% of the federal poverty level.

Individuals who received unemployment compensation in 2020 will not be eligible for the first round of payments, nor will Commonwealth executive branch employees who received or will receive a one-time payment from the state as their employer. Eligible individuals will receive the payment in the form of a

check mailed to them. Checks will be mailed in batches in the coming days.

[Click here](#) for more information on eligibility.

For questions about eligibility, a dedicated call center is available at (866) 750-9803 and is open Monday through Friday, 9am – 4pm.

[Click here](#) to view answers to frequently asked questions (FAQs).

The legislation creating the Premium Pay program included \$500 million in total for low-income essential workers; this \$460 million program comprises the majority of those funds, and \$40 million was allocated to fund previous agreements with state employee unions. This first round of payments, worth \$250 million, will be made based on 2020 returns. Following the 2021 tax filing season, the next round of payments will be made using information from 2021 returns.

Information on plans to disburse subsequent rounds of funds will be released in the future.

UPDATED: Massachusetts House of Representatives to vote on bill banning hair discrimination

UPDATE: *The bill aimed at banning race-based discrimination targeting hair texture and hairstyles was unanimously approved Thursday by the Massachusetts House.*

The Massachusetts House of Representatives will soon vote on legislation that would ban employers from hair discrimination and bar schools from adding a policy that would ban specific hairstyles.

The discrimination would protect those individuals with natural hairstyles like twists, braids, or locks and when it comes to schools they will not have the ability to “impair or prohibit” natural hairstyles.

This vote comes right after President Biden voiced his support of the federal CROWN Act that prohibits discrimination based on a person’s hair texture or hairstyle if that style or texture is commonly associated with a particular race or national origin.

If successfully passed, the Bay State would be the 15th state to embrace the so-called CROWN Act.

New Bedford Wins Federal Homeless Assistance Funds

Mayor Jon Mitchell announced today that the City of New Bedford has been awarded \$2,090,727 in homeless assistance funding by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), as part of a competitive grant process under HUD’s Continuum of Care Program.

HUD’s Continuum of Care grants provide critically needed support to local programs that serve individuals and families experiencing homelessness. The federal department recently

announced a total of \$2.65 billion in awards to renew and expand support to thousands of local homeless assistance programs across the nation.

New Bedford's grant funds are awarded through a very competitive national application process, with local application efforts led by the City's Office of Housing and Community Development. The office coordinates the City's comprehensive response to homelessness, using a Continuum of Care methodology and working with the local Homeless Service Provider Network.

A Continuum of Care is a community's plan or strategy to organize and deliver housing and services to meet the specific needs of people who are in a housing crisis and/or are experiencing homelessness, as they move toward stable housing and maximum self-sufficiency. The strategy includes action steps to break cycles of homelessness.

HUD grant funding supports an array of interventions for individuals and families experiencing homelessness, particularly those living in places not meant for habitation, staying in shelters, or at imminent risk of becoming homeless. Each year, HUD funding serves hundreds of people through a coordinated entry system, emergency shelter, rapid rehousing, transitional housing, and permanent housing programs.

"The awarding of this grant highlights the important work that we are doing to address homelessness through the Homeless Service Provider Network," Mayor Jon Mitchell said. "I want to thank the more than 50 network stakeholders, community leaders, and organizations who work with the City on a daily basis, without fanfare, to address the complex issue of homelessness in New Bedford. This funding will enable that work to continue and will strengthen our efforts to stabilize the lives of the homeless in our city."

Patrick Sullivan, director of the City's Office of Housing and

Community Development, said: “The funding received through these grants is essential for people experiencing homelessness. This very competitive Continuum of Care application requires a high degree of collaboration and coordination with our homeless service providers and partners. Our office works with the Homeless Service Provider Network’s executive committee to ensure that New Bedford puts forth a competitive application, so that New Bedford ‘s most vulnerable populations receive the highest level of services and access to safe, permanent housing.”

The grant funding will support eight local programs, along with data and strategic planning efforts. Funds will be distributed to the following programs and agencies:

■ Family Preservation Program (SEMCOA)	\$ 411,708
■ Welcome Home (Steppingstone)	\$ 308,815
■ Portico (Catholic Social Services)	\$ 725,211
■ Step Up (PAACA)	\$316,917
■ Prism (Catholic Social Services)	\$ 132,155
■ The Call – Coordinated Entry (Catholic Social Services)	\$ 50,000
■ Homeless Management Information System	\$ 74,524
■ Planning Grant	\$ 71,397

For more information about the City’s efforts to address homelessness, contact the City of New Bedford’s Office of Housing & Community Development at (508) 979-1500 or visit the Homeless Service Provider Network’s website at www.nbhspn.com.

Massachusetts House Resolution Calls for Helping Resettle Ukrainian Refugees

Matt Murphy

State House News Service

The House plans to take up a resolution as soon as Thursday calling on the Biden administration and Gov. Charlie Baker to give “expedited consideration” to Ukrainian refugees seeking to enter the United States and resettle in Massachusetts.

As Russia’s war against Ukraine continues to prompt millions to flee the country, House Speaker Ron Mariano, with the support of Minority Leader Brad Jones, circulated a resolution on Tuesday intended to demonstrate the House’s solidarity with the people of Ukraine and their fight to protect their sovereignty.

“Massachusetts House of Representatives hereby calls upon the Federal government and the Baker Administration to immediately provide for expedited consideration for Ukrainian refugees seeking to enter the United States and Massachusetts,” the resolution states, in part. The House approved \$10 million in a mid-year spending bill passed last week to assist with the resettlement of Ukrainian refugees seeking to relocate to Massachusetts.

The United Nations has estimated that 3 million Ukrainians have fled the country so far, with many crossing over into Poland, and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees has said that number could climb as high as 4 million.

The House meets in a formal session on Thursday, and Mariano gave legislators until 5 p.m. on Wednesday to sign on to the resolution, according to an email shared with the News

Service. Baker signed an executive order earlier this month directing all executive branch agencies to review all state contracts and terminate any agreements with Russian state-owned companies. That order also directed the state Office for Refugees and Immigrants to work with the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement and other agencies to support Ukrainian immigrants and refugees fleeing the conflict.

Founders of Boston Nonprofit Indicted on Fraud Charges

The founders of a local nonprofit, Violence in Boston (VIB), have been indicted by a federal grand jury in connection with a series of alleged schemes designed to defraud VIB and its donors, the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance and a mortgage lending business based in Chicago.

Monica Cannon-Grant, 41, and her husband Clark Grant, 38, both of Taunton, were charged in an 18-count indictment with two counts of wire fraud conspiracy; one count of conspiracy; 13 counts of wire fraud; and one count of making false statements to a mortgage lending business. The indictment also charges Cannon-Grant with one count of mail fraud.

Cannon-Grant was arrested this morning and will make her initial appearance in federal court in Boston later today. Grant was previously charged by criminal complaint in October 2021 with one count of wire fraud and one count of false statements on a loan and credit application. An arraignment date for Grant has not yet been scheduled by the Court.

Cannon-Grant is the founder and CEO of VIB, an anti-violence nonprofit formally established in 2017, the stated purpose of

which is to reduce violence, raise social awareness and aid community causes in Boston, among other purposes. Grant is Cannon-Grant's husband, a founding director of VIB, and until recently a full-time employee for a commuter services company since July 2018.

The indictment alleges that the defendants conspired to use VIB as a vehicle to solicit and receive charitable contributions from institutional and individual donors that they then used for a wide range of personal expenses and to enrich themselves while concealing such expenditures from VIB directors, officers and others. Specifically, from 2017 through at least 2020, it is alleged that Cannon-Grant and Grant exercised exclusive control over VIB financial accounts and diverted VIB money to themselves through cash withdrawals, cashed checks, debit purchases and transfers to their personal bank accounts.

On numerous occasions between 2017 through 2021, Cannon-Grant allegedly applied for public and private funded grants and donations in which she represented the funds were to be used for VIB charitable purposes. However, it is alleged that Cannon-Grant and Grant used grant and donation money to pay for personal expenses including, among other things, hotel reservations; groceries; gas; car rentals; auto repairs; Uber rides; restaurants; food deliveries; nail salons; and personal travel. The defendants did not disclose to other VIB directors or VIB's bookkeepers or financial auditors that they had used VIB funds for such payments.

The defendants also allegedly conspired to defraud the Massachusetts Department of Unemployment Assistance (DUA) by collecting Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA) benefits while at the same time collecting income from a variety of sources, including VIB funds utilized for Cannon-Grant and Grant's personal expenses, consulting fees paid to Cannon-Grant, compensation paid directly by VIB to Cannon-Grant, and the annual salary paid to Grant by his employer for his full-

time job. According to the indictment, beginning in or about May 2020 through 2021, Grant and Cannon-Grant fraudulently applied for PUA benefits, created by Congress in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, that they knew they were not eligible to receive. The defendants allegedly coordinated the submission of false online applications and certifications for PUA funds, concealed their income, used the fraudulently obtained PUA funds to pay for their joint household expenses and other personal expenditures, and created and submitted phony documentation in order to continue receiving weekly PUA COVID-19 benefits.

Additionally, the defendants allegedly conspired to defraud an Illinois-based mortgage lender when applying for a home mortgage loan in July 2021. Specifically, it is alleged that from in or about May 2021 through July 2021, Grant and Cannon-Grant submitted to the mortgage lender false information and fraudulent documentation that represented VIB assets as personal assets and concealed the fraudulent nature of Grant's PUA income, as well as the fraudulent nature of gift funds Grant received in order to help pay for mortgage fees and closing costs.

If you have information pertaining to the crimes alleged against the defendants, you may contact the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Massachusetts at: (617) 748-3663.

The charges of wire fraud conspiracy each provide for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000 or twice the gross gain or loss from the offense. The charge of conspiracy provides for a sentence of up to five years in prison, three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000. The charges of wire fraud each provide for a sentence of up to 20 years in prison, up to three years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$250,000 or twice the gross gain or loss from the offense. The charge of making false statements to a mortgage lending business provides for a sentence of up to 30

years in prison, up to five years of supervised release and a fine of up to \$1 million. Sentences are imposed by a federal district court judge based upon the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and statutes which govern the determination of a sentence in a criminal case.

First Assistant United States Attorney Joshua S. Levy; Massachusetts Inspector General Glenn A. Cunha; Ketty Larco-Ward, Inspector in Charge of the U.S. Postal Inspection Service; Jonathan Mellone, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General, Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigation; Joleen D. Simpson, Special Agent in Charge of the Internal Revenue Service's Criminal Investigations in Boston; and Christina Scaringi, Special Agent in Charge of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Inspector General, Northeast Region, made the announcement today. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Dustin Chao and Adam Deitch of the Criminal Division are prosecuting the case.

On May 17, 2021, the Attorney General established the COVID-19 Fraud Enforcement Task Force to marshal the resources of the Department of Justice in partnership with agencies across government to enhance efforts to combat and prevent pandemic-related fraud. The Task Force bolsters efforts to investigate and prosecute the most culpable domestic and international criminal actors and assists agencies tasked with administering relief programs to prevent fraud by, among other methods, augmenting and incorporating existing coordination mechanisms, identifying resources and techniques to uncover fraudulent actors and their schemes, and sharing and harnessing information and insights gained from prior enforcement efforts. For more information on the Department's response to the pandemic, please visit <https://www.justice.gov/coronavirus>.

Anyone with information about allegations of attempted fraud involving COVID-19 can report it by calling the Department of

Justice's National Center for Disaster Fraud (NCDF) Hotline at 866-720-5721 or via the NCDF Web Complaint Form at: <https://www.justice.gov/disaster-fraud/ncdf-disaster-complaint-form>.

The details contained in the indictment are allegations. The defendants are presumed innocent unless and until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt in a court of law.

Massachusetts Drivers Past “Tipping Point” On Gas Prices

Chris Lisinski

State House News Service

With gas tax relief not favored by Beacon Hill Democrats, average prices at the pump in Massachusetts rose another 19 cents over the past week and analysts remain unsure how long the trend will continue.

AAA Northeast said Monday that the average price for a gallon of gas in Massachusetts is \$4.35 on Monday, 86 cents higher than one month ago and \$1.60 higher than one year ago. The Bay State's average gas prices are 3 cents higher than the United States as a whole, according to AAA.

A survey AAA published last week found that \$4 per gallon likely represents a “tipping point” for most motorists. About 59 percent of Americans the organization surveyed said they would change their driving habits or lifestyle if the cost for a gallon of gas hit \$4, most of whom said they would choose to drive less. Gas prices have skyrocketed to record levels, driven in part by Russia's invasion of Ukraine and resulting

increases in the cost of crude oil. AAA Northeast said the price of crude oil recently fell back below \$110 per barrel after peaking at \$123 per barrel, which might relieve some of the steady pressure on drivers.

“It bears reminding that the cost of oil accounts for about 50% of what drivers pay at the pump,” said AAA Northeast Director of Public and Government Affairs Mary Maguire. “This war is roiling an already tight global oil market and making it hard to determine if we are near a peak for pump prices, or if they keep grinding higher. It all depends on the direction of oil prices.”

The Massachusetts House last week rejected a proposal from Republican lawmakers to suspend the state’s 24 cents per gallon gas tax until prices fall below \$3.70 a gallon. Speaker Ronald Mariano called the proposal a “stunt,” while Revenue Committee Co-chair Rep. Mark Cusack said his panel is “looking at real relief for families, not political gimmicks.”

Republican Gov. Charlie Baker hinted earlier in the month he may explore gas tax relief but so far has not made a major push or weighed in on the House’s vote.