

# Massachusetts Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley sponsors bill to allow felons to vote

“Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley (MA-07) and Senator Peter Welch (D-VT) unveiled the Inclusive Democracy Act, brand new, first-of-its-kind legislation that would end felony disenfranchisement in Federal elections and guarantee the right to vote for incarcerated citizens. The lawmakers’ bill comes as an estimated 4.6 million citizens – disproportionately Black and brown citizens – are denied voting rights because of a criminal conviction.

The legislation was unveiled at a press conference earlier today. Rep. Pressley read an excerpt of a testimony provided by Al-Ameen Patterson, who is currently incarcerated at MIC-Norfolk, at a historic hearing at the Massachusetts State House earlier this year. Footage of the press conference can be viewed [here](#) and photos are available [here](#).

“Too often, citizens behind the wall and those with a record are wrongfully stripped of their sacred right to vote and denied the opportunity to participate in our democracy. With Republicans and the Supreme Court stopping at nothing to undermine voting rights and exclude Black and brown folks from participating in our democracy, we must protect and expand access to the ballot box – including for incarcerated citizens,” said Rep. Pressley. “As someone whose family has been personally impacted by mass incarceration, I’m proud to partner with Senator Welch on the Inclusive Democracy Act to ensure everyone can make their voice heard in our democracy. Momentum is growing in states across the country and Congress must follow suit by swiftly passing this crucial legislation.”

“Our democracy is at its strongest when everyone can equitably

take part in it. Yet millions of Americans are denied their right to engage in our democratic process as a result of antiquated state felony disenfranchisement laws that disproportionately impact Black Americans and women. Today I'm proud to introduce the Inclusive Democracy Act with Congresswoman Pressley, a step forward in restoring the voices of millions of Americans and ensuring everyone has the right to vote," said Sen. Welch. "This bill is all about helping disenfranchised voters who have been systemically robbed of their right to participate in our democratic process. I'm going to keep working to strengthen and modernize the Voting Rights Act and combat practices like gerrymandering designed to deprive marginalized communities of their right to vote. Laws from the Jim Crow-era have no place in modern America, and we must always vigorously oppose and condemn those who scheme to exclude marginalized communities from participating in our democracy."

The practice of felony disenfranchisement is biased, counterproductive, and deters eligible voters from civic engagement. By entangling the criminal legal system in our elections, people who are disproportionately affected, especially Black citizens, are unfairly disenfranchised and excluded from representation. Additionally, there are inconsistent systems across 48 states that treat different crimes as felonies and set different standards for disenfranchisement.

The Inclusive Democracy Act is groundbreaking legislation that would end felony disenfranchisement in Federal elections. Specifically, the bill would:

- Guarantee the right to vote in Federal elections for citizens who have criminal convictions;
- Require State and Federal entities to notify individuals who are convicted, incarcerated, on probation, or on parole of their right to vote in Federal elections;
- Outline the process for citizens in carceral settings to

register to vote by mail, if registration is required by their State;

- Outline the process for citizens in carceral settings to vote by mail, including protecting and prioritizing election mail, curing ballots with mistakes, and casting a provision ballot;
  - Ensure citizens in carceral settings have access to information about elections through mechanisms available to them such as the internet, campaigns, and third party groups;
  - Provide guidance to State officials to not prosecute citizens in carceral settings who complete an election ballot that includes an election they are not eligible to vote in; and
  - Provide a private right of action to enforce this legislation.”-Congresswoman Ayanna Pressley’s Office.
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# Massachusetts Family Shelter Placements More Than Doubled Under Governor Healey

By Sam Drysdale □  
State House News Service

While lawmakers on Beacon Hill have deliberated over sending aid to the state’s emergency assistance system, the number of families that are finding safe housing in those shelters has grown by 105 percent in the last eleven months, according to data recently acquired by the News Service.

On Jan. 4, the first day of the two-year legislative session, there were 3,676 families in emergency assistance (EA) shelter, records from the Executive Office of Housing and

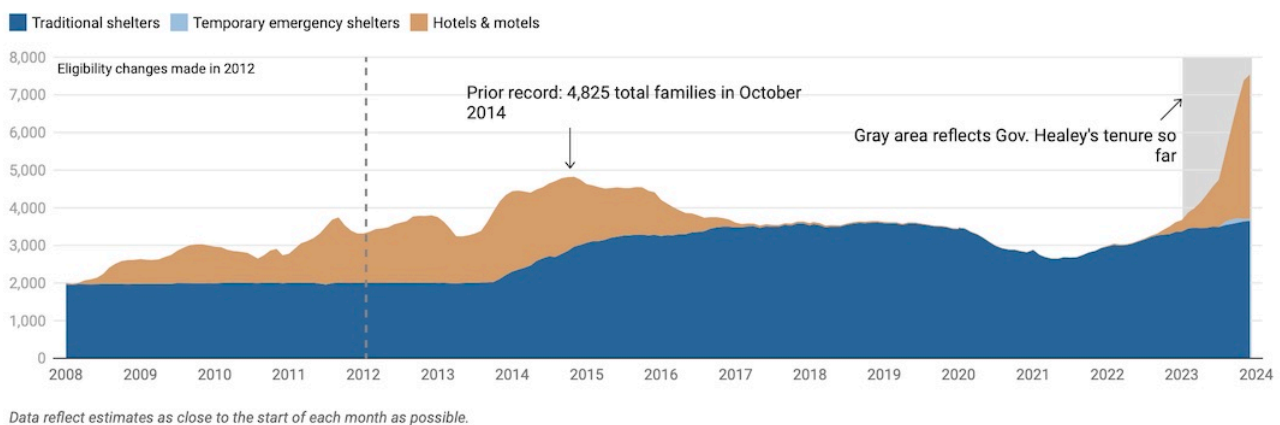
Livable Communities show. That number stood at 7,531 as of Wednesday, with an additional 174 families on a waiting list Gov. Maura Healey created.

The spike in the number of families entering the system has occurred almost entirely during Healey's administration. The increase has been steady this year, but picked up in the second half of 2023. More families came into the system in the four months between August and December than in the first seven months of the year.

The record-breaking number of enrollees also far surpasses the previous high in available data – 4,825 families were sheltered in the system in October 2014.

### **Demand on Mass. emergency shelter system has exploded**

While increases began toward end of the Baker administration, the sharpest escalation in shelter placements has occurred during the Healey administration.



In the fall of 2014, 2,971 families were placed in traditional shelters and 1,854 were housed in hotels and motels. As that peak declined over the next several years, the state shifted away from placing families in hotels, the data show.

By 2021, from month to month no more than 10 families at a time were living in motels and hotels through the EA system.

However, as the state began to be inundated with new arrivals

into the system late last year – largely fueled by migrants, refugees and asylum seekers fleeing humanitarian crises in other countries – the number of families staying in hotels and motels has exploded.

Over the past year, the number of families living in hotels and motels grew by more than 1,000 percent.

It began taking off last fall, shortly after Massachusetts made headlines nationwide when Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis flew 48 unsuspecting migrants to Martha's Vineyard on Sept. 14, 2022.

The 45 families living in hotels and motels through the EA system in September 2022 more than doubled to 124 by October. This is around the time former Gov. Charlie Baker began calling attention to the issue, claiming the EA system was on a path to run out of room and money.

By January, there were 303 families living in motels and hotels. Eleven months later, as of Dec. 6, the last day of available data, that number was up to 3,656 families.

As Baker was preparing to leave office, his administration predicted in December 2022 that the EA system would burn through available funding and no longer be able to guarantee spots for eligible families by late March 2023. House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Aaron Michlewitz responded by saying the governor's prediction seemed "like a very arbitrary number."

"You go back to the previous 90 days, and there was never a discussion about this before that point in time," Michlewitz said last December. In the 90 days he referred to, the number of families in shelter had grown by about 570, according to the data the News Service obtained.

Fast forward a year, and the Ways and Means chairman just finished negotiating one of the most contentious bills of the

session so far, which will inject \$250 million into the shelter system that in the last year has overflowed with homeless families and is on pace to burn through its \$325 million annual appropriation well before the end of the fiscal year.

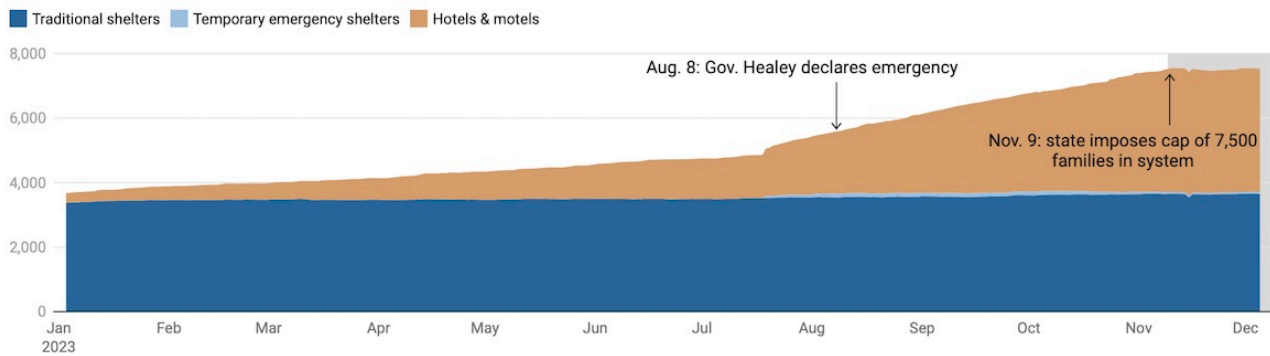
Democrats approved a supplemental budget on Monday that pours more money into the shelter system and school districts that have had to take in children without a permanent home halfway through the school year. It is the second emergency injection of funds they've sent to the shelters in 2023 – after a supplemental budget this spring spent \$85 million to expand the capacity of the EA system.

“Currently, around 30-40 families arrive each day in Massachusetts seeking temporary housing, but only 15-20 families exit the emergency shelter system on a daily basis. The discrepancy in these numbers has crippled the Commonwealth's ability to house and feed both migrant and unhoused families in need,” members of the state's congressional delegation wrote in a letter to Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas and FEMA Administrator Deanne Caswell on Wednesday, asking for an increase in federal aid.

As the system has more than doubled in size over less than a year, almost all growth has been through using “overflow” hotel and motel rooms.

### **Families in Massachusetts emergency shelter system**

State officials have primarily used hotels and motels to accomodate rise in migrants and vulnerable families seeking shelter.



The number of families living in “traditional shelters” has only grown by about 300, according to the EOHLC data. These are the official EA shelter units staffed by contracted homeless service providers.

On Jan. 3, when the total number of enrolled families was 3,676, the vast majority – 3,373 – of those families were in traditional shelters. As the total number of families grew to 7,543 by the beginning of December, the amount in traditional shelters stayed fairly flat, at 3,653.

System administrators also appear to be shifting families from hotels and motels into traditional shelter.

Between Tuesday and Wednesday this week, only six new families were admitted into the EA system. However, the number of families in traditional shelters went up by 165, about the same amount as those who left hotel housing.

So-called “temporary emergency shelters” were used for the first time on July 19, when 62 families were sent to these “short-term shelters that provide a path for families that are medically complex, do not have benefits, or need assistance navigating system.”

Temporary shelter capacity peaked on Aug. 7, with 117 families. This was the day before Healey declared a state of emergency around the shelter crisis. The number of families began to decrease again on Oct. 16 – the same day Healey announced the state would no longer guarantee shelter for all

eligible families.

As of Wednesday, there were 57 families in this short-term housing.

Since the state implemented Healey's capacity limit on Nov. 9, the number of families placed on a waitlist to stand by for an open space in the shelter system has steadily increased.

EOHLC does not publicly share this data on its EA system dashboard, but when asked, a spokesperson for the office has shared updates on how many families are on the waitlist.

On Nov. 13 – four days after the system hit the cap of 7,500 – 22 families were waiting for a spot. By Nov. 20, that number was up to 102. Most recently, the EOHLC spokesperson said on Tuesday that 174 families were standing by for a call.

In the meantime, these families have been encouraged to go to community organizations for help, and some overflow beds have been made available through the United Way of Massachusetts and at the Massachusetts Department of Transportation building. Reports have emerged of people sleeping in cars, churches and at Logan International Airport.

Asked Thursday on WBUR's Radio Boston to respond to reports that some families have been sleeping outdoors, Healey responded that her administration has "made every effort to house people" and that she wasn't "aware of the specifics there."

Healey said the number of people coming into the state is going down.

"I think the numbers coming into Logan have really dropped significantly. I don't know what that's about entirely. Some of it, I think, has to do with the weather. We've had families who have been staying and housed in Florida and in Virginia who left to come here, some of whom have now returned," the



governor said.

The data on EOHLC's dashboard does not include information about exits from the EA system, but the total number of families enrolled has stayed near Healey's cap of 7,500 since it went into effect on Nov. 9. Meanwhile, the waitlist is growing.

Lawmakers argued for months that they were not getting enough information from the governor's administration about the EA system. In the bill they passed Monday that included the \$250 million infusion, legislators also included requirements that Healey's housing and finance secretaries provide comprehensive and frequent reports on the status of the families staying in the state's shelters.

House Ways and Means spokesperson Blake Webber said Thursday that the language in the law "doesn't speak to making [the reports] publicly available" and that "typically it's not the practice of the committee to make such reports public unless required to."

The Senate voted against making the reports publicly available online during its debate last month on the underlying supplemental budget bill.

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**OPINION: "U.S. is no longer a beacon of Democracy, but a beacon to the far-right, MAGA**

# regime”

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“For many decades, especially after World War Two, the United States was seen as a beacon of democracy by many nations struggling to achieve a similar form of government and freedom and equality for all.

Even though the United States, in reality, did not measure up to the attributed equality, the concept was aspired to by many Americans and politicians. And undeniably there was some modicum of equality achieved by minority groups, women and immigrants.

However, during the Trumpian MAGA regime and subsequent empowerment of right wing unmuzzled legislators, politicians and grieving supporters, many hard won protections were erased. And publicly proclaimed hatred for others was encouraged and acted upon.

Trumpism became the new beacon for many previously democratic nations that have now turned the voting majority into right wing nationalists and xenophobes. Denmark’s newly elected leader is the most disheartening example of a previously democratic and humane nation mimicking the Trumpian model.

The United States is slowly providing the template for extreme nationalism, which all too frequently became the root cause of barbaric wars.”-Betty Ussach, Dartmouth.

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# Massachusetts Cancer Patients Demand Relief From Related Dental Bills

By Alison Kuznitz  
State House News Service

Cancer patients and survivors grappling with radiation treatment aftereffects and out-of-pocket dental bills totaling thousands of dollars sought financial relief from Beacon Hill lawmakers Tuesday.

Denise DeSimone, a throat and neck cancer survivor, said the lack of saliva in her mouth, caused by 40 radiation treatments, set off a slew of dental problems that required extractions and crowns. She ended up paying \$8,000 to replace her two front teeth, and she estimates her seven to eight crowns cost \$4,000 each.

DeSimone sought to rally support for a Rep. Paul McMurtry proposal (H 1094) that would require health insurers to “provide coverage for a dental procedure that is related to or resulting from a medical condition for which coverage is provided.”

Dental complications, including deteriorating teeth, caused by radiation treatment only worsen over time, she and fellow survivors told the Joint Committee on Financial Services.

“This bill is not just about dental care – it is about restoring dignity, confidence and our ability to live healthy and fulfilling lives,” DeSimone said at a hearing, as she noted the bill is also cost-effective. “By providing

comprehensive dental care, we prevent further complications, reduce the need for additional medical interventions, and ultimately save dollars in the long run.”

Insurance companies typically do not consider cancer patients’ related dental care to be medically necessary, meaning those individuals are forced to saddle the cost burden, a McMurtry aide told the News Service.

The bill was reported out favorably last session by the committee, but the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing later sent it to study.

Massachusetts Oncology Patients, Survivors, and Supporters (MOPSS), an advocacy group focused on the legislation, said the bill is supported by the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Mass General Brigham, Massachusetts Society of Clinical Oncologists, Mass Eye and Ear, Massachusetts Society of Otolaryngology/Head and Neck Surgery, and Boston Medical Center, among other organizations.

Dr. Mark Varvares, a head and neck surgeon at Mass Eye and Ear, said he’s had patients mortgage their homes to afford a denture-like device that costs tens of thousands of dollars. The device is needed when surgeons remove part of their patients’ mouths to treat their cancer, he said.

Patients must have a full dental evaluation before undergoing radiation treatment, Varvares said. But he’s seen “many” patients who cannot afford dental care, such as a full mouth extraction, and therefore cannot proceed with radiation as their cancer spreads, he said.

“This lack of coverage for patients to get basic dental care before their head-neck cancer treatment is threatening their survival,” Varvares said. “Something has got to be done about it – we see it over and over again.”

Thomas Healy, founder of MOPSS, said the bill would create a

new framework for health insurers, which have historically handled dental and cancer treatments separately.

“When a patient identifies they have dry mouth or lack of saliva, that’s the time for the people in oncology to get involved on that dental issue. That’s when the door is going to start to open for the oncology patients,” Healy said. “Hopefully, that conversation starts to take place from oncology with the dental and the insurance company to start that process.”

Amy Gross, who survived rare nasal cavity cancer, said she tries to practice hygiene measures to protect her teeth, such as extra rinsing and brushing. Gross said she’s always had good teeth, but radiation is likely to affect her oral health.

“I fear the day when my preventive measures fail, and I start down the road of root canals, crowns, tooth extraction, dentures, implants. I may lose my teeth, and I have no idea if it’s going to be covered,” Gross said.

She added, “Patients find themselves well into decades of survivorship having to argue with both insurance and dental insurance companies for basic oral procedures, dentures, prosthetics and implants that impact our health and daily quality of life.”

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**OPINION: In support of Umass  
Dartmouth Chancellor Mark**

# Fuller

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By Massachusetts State Representative Christopher Markey.

The most challenging part of public service is saying “no” to the people you like and care for. Authentic leadership in public service regularly leads to these difficult situations. Making those tough decisions is uncomfortable and challenging. Yet standing up for what is right, regardless of personal consequences, earns you respect. Chancellor Mark Fuller and his handling of the Star Store situation earned my respect and confidence.

The decision Chancellor Fuller inherited in the Star Store was undoubtedly difficult and hurt good people, but it was carried out for the betterment of the University. Since then, he has faced unrelenting criticism that is without an appreciation for the circumstances or reasoning behind the closure.

He made a choice I wish he did not have to make. A decision was thrust upon him with few options and even less time. It was a decision that would never make everyone happy, but ultimately, it had to be made. We have entrusted Chancellor Fuller with the health of our University, and he has distinguished himself as a worthy caretaker.

The circumstances surrounding the Star Store closure have been utterly unfair to students, and my deepest sympathy is with

the members of the CVPA program. We must commit ourselves to providing these students with the support and education they paid for. With growing confidence, the University is working towards solutions that will give the CVPA students the facilities they deserve and require.

However, the facts matter when discussing the program and the University's future. Frankly, I have been disgusted with the quality of discourse surrounding the Star Store closure. The blame for this situation does not fall squarely at the Chancellor's feet. It was a situation brewing for 24 years.

Warning signs have been present since the creation of the Star Store campus. Please don't take my word for it; take the word of the Inspector General. He is quoted in a September 30, 1999, letter to Commissioner Hines of the Division of Capital Asset Management:

".....it is important to point out that in 1996, this Office [Office of Inspector General] had strongly recommended that Governor Weld veto the legislation that created the entire process [the redevelopment of the Star Store]. Therefore, this letter should not be interpreted to mean that the public interest is protected in this transaction."

The last several chancellors did not create this concerning deal; it was dropped in their laps. Regardless, the Chancellor did his part to try to preserve the Star Store campus by advocating for the \$2.7 million rent in the state budget. Unfortunately, when the funds did not appear in the state budget in mid-August, he was left with little choice and less than a month before the start of the fall semester.

UMASS Dartmouth was forced to weigh the benefits of taking on a damaged building and all its liability against the needs of 7,457 students studying at a school with over \$600 million in deferred campus maintenance. Assuming ownership of the building would cost the school \$3 million in upfront

maintenance costs. That equates to an additional and unexpected \$25,000/ student in the CVPA program. The assumption of ownership is a high-stakes investment that could jeopardize the fiscal well-being of the University. Given the circumstances, Fuller chose the thousands of students who tied their futures to UMASS Dartmouth.

Given UMASS Dartmouth's resources, Chancellor Fuller has demonstrated a unique skill to maximize the University's strengths and value to the community. Mark Fuller has an acute understanding of the promise and opportunity at UMass Dartmouth. Under the leadership of Chancellor Fuller, the University has enjoyed a renaissance that has attracted some of the best students in the world looking for a diverse and enriched on-campus experience.

UMass Dartmouth currently provides 61 majors and 42 master's degree programs. It has students from 51 countries and 46 states, and over 80% of its students call Massachusetts home. It provides top research education in mechanical engineering, marine science, business, and nursing. The University produces skilled professionals in the industries essential to the economic well-being and future of the South Coast.

Of these future professionals 38% are students of color and 57% are first-generation college students. Furthermore, UMASS Dartmouth ranked as the third-best Massachusetts school on the Social Mobility Index. Education is the single greatest creator of wealth in our society. UMASS Dartmouth provides an affordable education and training to many in our community. This foundation has allowed thousands of individuals to excel in business, engineering, science, medicine, and the arts.

Rest assured; the importance of this mission is not lost on the Chancellor. Mark Fuller is a first-generation college graduate who has dedicated his professional life to working for the betterment of the higher education system. He rescued the Eisenberg Business School, raised millions of dollars for



public universities, and brought positive and focused leadership to UMass Dartmouth.

UMASS Dartmouth's leadership team has turned around a campus experiencing a consistent decline in enrollment and retention. Between 2010 and 2019, enrollment at UMass-Dartmouth fell 16%. Yet hope is on the horizon as the class of 2026 is the largest enrolled at the University in 3 years.

An energized spirit on campus exposes students to cultural activities, school sporting events, and thousands of community service hours. The campus community is thriving; we should all be excited about that. While I appreciate the emotion attached to our current situation, there is a larger community for which Chancellor Fuller is responsible.

The Star Store campus was undoubtedly essential to the school's connection to downtown New Bedford. Our governor, state delegation, mayor, and city council will work with the Star Store owner to maximize the building's use for our community and the arts.

The building's absence is disappointing. However, the closure is not a symptom of the impending collapse prophesized by fearmongers. While Chancellor Fuller is a convenient rhetorical boogiemer for sweeping speeches and hatchet-job editorials, the facts reveal that he was a responsible steward of the University. Simply put, when you need a new roof for your home, you can't spend your money on an addition.

Let's be clear on the purpose and mission of UMASS Dartmouth. This public university is tasked with providing cost-effective education in a broad range of fields and professions. Despite recent claims, the Star Store was not a miracle cure for post-industrial economic downturn, years of systemic racial inequities, or any other ills that plague our society. However, the University can provide a high-quality education to the leaders of tomorrow. Those students are the school's

most valuable asset. Those students will continue the march of progress and growth far longer than any brick-and-mortar building. Their access to education is paramount to our community and reliant on the sustained financial well-being of UMASS Dartmouth.

We can all agree that UMASS Dartmouth is the cornerstone of our community. It enriches the lives of our young people while providing our local neighborhoods with skilled professionals. Like anything, the school and its facilities are not perfect. We will continue the work of improving our University and finding solutions to support our displaced CVPA students. As we labor through this unfortunate situation, I hope we focus on solutions rather than fabricating convenient villains to fit our reactionary narratives. Chancellor Fuller is a talented leader who deserves our support as he navigates this difficult moment for the University.

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## **Protest for Israel ceasefire scheduled in New Bedford for December 10th**

The following was sent to us from the rally organizers:

“There will be a rally and march on Sunday, December 10th 2023 at 1 PM in downtown New Bedford, MA to demand: permanent ceasefire now, end US funding of genocide, and end Israeli apartheid.

The rally and march will begin at 1pm at Wings Court, New Bedford. (Wings Court is at 790 Pleasant Street, New Bedford MA 02740.)”

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# OPINION: “Calling for resignation of New Bedford City Council President Morad”

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“I am calling for the Resignation of City Council President Linda Morad. The reason I am calling for her resignation is her actions as of late are unhinged, unprofessional, threatening and she is a threat to the city’s democracy.

As a councilor her job is to work for the people. Last night at the Special Tax Meeting Linda Morad ordered Dennis Farias to close and lock the council doors while more than 6 councilors were in the chambers, possibly breaking laws for which I am seeking all avenues and advice on. She then came out and mocked us in the hallway, which I have on video.

Outside of the building she stuck her tongue out at us like a 2-year old toddler, which I also have on video.

Also captured on video is her calling constituents ‘assholes.’ Also allegedly she in possession of a video where she lost control of the chambers during the 11/14 appointments and briefings meeting (FOIA Pending). At this same meeting she reportedly called a colleague of her’s an asshole.

In my opinion Linda has become unhinged, unprofessional, is an immediate threat to our city's democracy and she needs to be removed from the chambers immediately.

At any professional job, you would be fired for your actions, as not only are they childish, they are unprofessional, threatening and don't represent this beautiful city I call home. As a citizens of New Bedford I call for your resignation. Feel free to reach me with any questions at 508-250-2614. Thank you."-Craig Ptaszenski.

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## **Historical displays in disrepair or outright destroyed at Fort Taber draw ire of New Bedford veterans**

On Wednesday afternoon I paid a visit to the military museum at Fort Rodman in New Bedford. This is an amazing place to get lost in history, and if you are from the area you might even see memorabilia of an old family member which you did not know existed. I stumbled upon a photo of my uncle who served in Korea!

While there are endless stories I plan to cover, I felt obligated to address the concerns of the veterans who volunteer at the museum. When I told them I am a local journalist, every single volunteer pleaded that I help them get the signs repaired at the Fort. It's a simple request, yet they have had no luck getting the City of New Bedford to complete this task.

When leaving the museum I asked myself, "How bad could these signs really be?" As I walked out the door one volunteer who is also a Vietnam veteran, gave me his final pitch and told me to go take a look for myself.

I took a walk along Fort Taber and snapped some photos of the displays which should stand as an educational resource to teach the public about the rich history of New Bedford. I will just post the photos and let you decide if these displays are something to be proud of...



*Steven Richard photo.*





Steven Richard photo.



Steven Richard photo.



Steven Richard photo.

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# Massachusetts Department of Public Health Calls for Tougher Action by Cannabis

# Industry to Improve Health and Safety After Work-related Asthma Death

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH) today released an **investigative report** outlining additional steps the cannabis industry should take to prevent work-related asthma and sent a bulletin to health care providers in the Commonwealth urging vigilance in identifying work-related asthma among workers in that industry.

These steps were taken after an investigation conducted by DPH and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) confirmed that the first known occupational asthma fatality in the US cannabis workforce happened last year in Massachusetts. The bulletin reminds providers that they are mandated to report cases of work-related asthma and other respiratory diseases to DPH.

The investigation, which was highlighted in today's Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, focused on the circumstances surrounding the death of a 27-year-old production technician who suffered a fatal asthma attack in January 2022 while at work at an indoor cannabis cultivation and processing facility in Massachusetts. The worker's death occurred seven months after she started employment at the facility and three months after she began working as a flower technician, which involved processing and handling whole and ground cannabis flower buds.

While this is the only known asthma death in the US cannabis industry, other cases of non-fatal respiratory disease among Massachusetts workers in that industry have been reported. Cannabis industry workers can be routinely exposed to various occupational respiratory hazards, including cannabis dust,



mold, volatile organic compounds, pollen, bacterial endotoxins, pesticides, soil components, and cleaning disinfectants, which can cause and/or exacerbate chronic diseases, like asthma, if not addressed. Massachusetts has more than 500 licensed cannabis industry employers that provides jobs to 22,000 workers.

“The legalized cannabis industry in Massachusetts is relatively new and the impact on the health and safety of workers demands our careful attention,” said Public Health Commissioner Robert Goldstein, MD, PhD. “As this workforce continues to expand, it will require all of us working together – state and federal agencies, regulators, healthcare providers, and the cannabis industry – to improve working conditions for these employees. At DPH, we will continue to identify and follow up on these cases using our long-standing public health surveillance system for work-related respiratory disease and continue to work with our partners on documenting cases, building evidence around workplace hazards, and on intervention and policy.”

Work-related asthma – or asthma caused or exacerbated by exposures at work – is underrecognized in part because work-related asthma symptoms and industry and occupation data are not routinely collected as part of the physical exam or documented in the medical record, the bulletin to health care providers states.

Approximately 17 percent of new-onset adult asthma cases are related to workplace exposures. Regardless of the cause, an estimated 22-to-58 percent of adults with asthma nationwide suffer work-related exacerbations, according to the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). In Massachusetts, an estimated 200,000 adults have work-related asthma, data from DPH’s Occupational Health Surveillance Program show.

Early recognition of work-related asthma can lead to both

medical and workplace interventions that improve patient outcomes and mitigate exposure to the source.

In its bulletin, DPH urged health care providers to:

- Ask patients with new or worsening respiratory or allergic symptoms what they do for work and how it affects their health.
- Perform diagnostic testing, such as allergy testing, pulmonary imaging, and/or spirometry.
- Recommend workplace changes to avoid further exposure, as avoidance of workplace exposure is imperative.
- Report cases of work-related asthma and other work-related respiratory diseases to DPH, as required by law.

Employers also play a critical role in prevention.

The report on the investigation of the Massachusetts worker's death was prepared by DPH's Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) program, which conducts investigations on the causes of work-related fatalities. The report includes six recommendations for cannabis employers, equipment manufacturers, and the state's Cannabis Control Commission to improve the health and safety of cannabis industry workers.

"This investigation, which is part of an ongoing collaboration between OSHA and DPH, has identified cannabis dust as an occupational allergen with the potential to cause fatal occupational asthma," said Virginia Weaver, MD, MPH, Lead Physician, OSHA Occupational Medicine Resident Elective. "The case indicates the importance of identifying allergens in the workplace as early as possible and the need for experienced healthcare providers to manage workers who develop occupational allergies."

To improve worker safety, the investigative report recommended that:

- Employers should assess and control hazardous materials in

the workplace, including asthmagens.

- Employers should ensure that all workers are properly trained about hazardous materials in the workplace.
- Employers should develop and implement a comprehensive safety and health program that addresses hazard recognition, avoidance of unsafe conditions, and proper use of equipment.
- Employers should implement a medical surveillance program to monitor the health of their workers.
- Equipment manufacturers should adopt and implement the concept of Prevention through Design (PtD) to identify potential hazards associated with equipment and then eliminate these hazards through design changes.
- Industry licensing agencies in Massachusetts should consider how they can further support the health and safety of cannabis industry workers.

“Levels of exposure to cannabis dust at work are much higher than what is present during recreational use,” said Emily Sparer-Fine, Director of DPH’s Occupational Health Surveillance Program. “Work processes that include grinding and concentrating an allergen need to be better controlled. It is critical for employers to assess and control exposure to hazardous materials, including the respiratory hazards found in the cannabis processing facilities, such as cannabis dust.”

Employers should utilize the Commonwealth’s Department of Labor Standards’ free and confidential On-Site Consultation service designed to help them recognize and control possible safety and health hazards at their worksites and establish and improve safety and health programs. The goal of the service is to prevent injuries and illnesses that are the result of hazardous workplace conditions and practices.

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# **New Bedford City Council meetings, several key Committee meetings will now be streamed live**

"The New Bedford City Council is pleased to announce the live streaming of regular City Council Meetings and several key Committee Meetings. After several successful 'test' runs, the City Council is officially making the public aware that the meetings can now be viewed live on the City's website.

Key features of the live stream include high-definition video and sound, corresponding agendas which enable viewers to follow along as meetings progress, and the ability to view past meetings in the Archive section.

## **Meetings that will be live-streamed are as follows:**

- All Regular & Special Meetings of the full City Council
- Special Committee on Affordable Housing & Homeless Affairs
- Committee on Appointments & Briefings
- Committee on Cannabis Regulation & Host Community Agreements Review
- Committee on City Property
- Committee on Environmental Affairs
- Committee on Ordinances
- Committee on Public Safety & Neighborhoods
- Committee on Veterans' Affairs, Elderly, Youth, Health & Housing & Disability Issues

"As a body committed to representing each and every member of our City, my colleagues and I are pleased that our proceedings and deliberations will now be accessible to the public without delay," said City Council President Linda Morad. "This is an objective we have been working toward for quite some time now.

After some technical challenges we are grateful for the efforts of the City MIS Department, New Bedford Cable Access and our Team in the City Council Office in bringing this important goal to fruition. We encourage the citizenry of New Bedford to view the City Council and Council Committee meetings via the live stream to stay informed on important City issues.”

The live stream can vbe found on the City of New Bedford’s Home Page, by clicking on ‘Meetings” under the ‘Quicklinks’ headings, or by using the following link: <https://www.newbedfordma.gov/meetings/>. Live meetings can be viewed while in progress, while past meetings are available by clicking on ‘Archives.’

For additional information, please contact City Clerk Dennis W. Farias at 508.979.1449.”-City of New Bedford.