

Dear Friends,

As we make our way through 2014, I would like to begin by highlighting what my office has been working on, and where we are going in the coming months. My staff and I have been working to create positive changes within our district both legislatively and through community outreach initiatives to make our communities stronger, safer, and healthier. Within this month’s newsletter, you will find a brief update on my legislative priorities as well as the Fiscal Year 2015 budget, and information about programs I will be supporting as the process unfolds. In addition to the budget update, you will find a district update and summary of my continued efforts around gun violence, housing, education, youth employment and public health. As changes



Meeting with young people from Sociedad Latina at the State House on the importance of youth jobs

continue to occur in the legislature around the Affordable Care Act, I am excited to announce I will be holding a Small Business Breakfast in my district on March 7 to brief small business owners on how their business will be affected. More information on the Small Business Breakfast is available in the District Update section of

this newsletter.

If there is anything in this issue you have question or concerns about, please do not hesitate to contact my office. I value your opinions and appreciate your hard work to make our community strong and successful.

District Update

A few months ago, I hosted a Gun Violence Forum at the Anna Mae Cole Center in Bromley-Heath. This forum highlighted the public health and mental health underpinnings associated with gun violence in Boston. At this forum, there were several gun advocacy groups which included the LIPSTICK ladies from Citizens for Safety, Mothers for Justice and Peace and the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute. I also wanted to look at gun violence from an edu-

Gun Violence Forum

cation perspective. I was able to bring in doctors who have worked on reducing gun violence, including Michael Siegel, who teaches Community Health Sciences at Boston University and Glenn Pierce, the current Acting Director of the Institute for Security and Public Policy at Northeastern University. This forum was a way for me to get away from Beacon Hill and hear the perspectives from a community which is faced with this violence.

With several bills already filed in regards to addressing gun laws in Massachusetts, the House of Representatives will be looking to add tighter regulations to our gun laws in the Commonwealth. Gun violence is a public health issue that is affecting our communities and needs to be addressed legislatively. While we are addressing this issue on ways of improving our gun laws, I will bring my community’s perspective to the debate.

Bromley-Heath Community Health Survey

Bromley-Heath residents have faced unprecedented challenges in recent years, and concerns have emerged that social isolation and disengagement are prevalent features impacting the health of Bromley-Heath residents. To best identify and address these concerns, I worked with Urban Edge to conduct a coordinated and participatory mixed-method viability evaluation and health survey at the Bromley-Heath

housing development. Through the Bromley Heath Community Health Survey Initiative (BHCHSI), my office has collected over 227 surveys to date and counting, surpassing our original goal of 200. Our objective is to utilize the findings from this preliminary assessment in concurrence with other available public agency information to establish a framework aimed at improving living and health conditions for

Bromley-Heath residents, as well as broaden the investment of larger patient-centered community-based solutions. Our work will help inform other policymakers as health-care delivery models and payment systems are being designed. Our primary concern is to improve health outcomes for underserved and vulnerable communities in Massachusetts. Please look out for the results of my survey in the coming months!

Christmas Party

This holiday season we partnered with the Bromley-Heath Tenant Organization to host the Bromley-Heath Christmas party in December. Filling the event hall with children and parents, we invited Santa to fulfill these children's holiday wishes and we were able to give out over 150 presents this year. Giving out these toys was something that provided all who attended this event with some holiday spirit. Being able to unite the community for such joyful event was truly an incredible experience for all. Unfortunately, this was one of the last events that John Hudson, founder of the Institute for Behavioral and Attitude Change (IBAC), organized before he passed away suddenly. John was a tremendous advocate for the residents of Bromley and will be greatly missed.



From the left: Thomas Ruffen- Bromley-Heath Tenant President, John Hudson- IBAC, Charles Diggs- RCC, Michael Baker- My District Affairs Director

Legislative Update

Affordable Housing

Success in the Housing Bond Bill

A few months ago, a bond bill for housing and economic development projects emerged for debate, but included provisions that would serve to limit the preservation and creation of affordable housing within the Commonwealth. In these tough economic times, many families throughout the Commonwealth feel the strain of having to choose between paying rent, and paying for the everyday costs of raising a family. As Massachusetts ranks as the 7th least affordable state for renters in the country, this strain is especially felt by low income families who depend on our

existing stock of affordable housing.

I was happy to work closely with the Citizens Housing and Planning Association to preserve the Commonwealth's affordable housing law, Chapter 40B, within the Housing Bond Bill. Twenty-seven colleagues signed on to my letter asking the Conference Committee to remove provisions that would threaten our affordable housing resources within the Commonwealth. I am happy to say that the final bill advanced from Conference Committee without these harmful provisions, and was recently signed into law by Governor Patrick. Affordable housing is an essential resource for many families throughout Massachusetts, and I am proud to fight to preserve it.

Legislative Briefing on An Act to Improve Quality in Early Education Care Centers



This month, I hosted a legislative briefing in partnership with the Massachusetts Early Childhood Educators Union on my legislation H.477, *An Act to Improve Quality in Early Education Care Centers*. This legislation enables early education providers, such as teachers and directors, to provide quality services to some of the most vulnerable children in Massachusetts by allowing for the creation of a providers' organization and increased staff at child care centers. The providers' organization will negotiate with the Commonwealth on matters related to workforce development, professional development, training, conditions affecting recruitment, and retention of early educators.

In addition, it creates a collective framework for early educators to work with the Commonwealth to improve the services they provide through a negotiated agreement. This bill covers approximately 5,000 early educators working in 500 of the most resource-needy centers in the Commonwealth. I believe it is of the utmost importance to ensure children throughout Massachusetts, especially those in underserved communities, have the resources necessary for a successful education and life, and I believe this legislation will help early educators create the best possible educational environment.

Gas Leaks Legislation

Over the past months, many people from the district have voiced concern over the effects gas leaks have on the environment and public safety. I am proud to say I worked with my colleagues to unanimously pass a bill to further enhance the state's ability to anticipate, repair and guard against natural gas leaks. This legislation establishes a program to accelerate the process of replacing aging pipelines that will lower capital costs for companies and gas rates for consumers. The bill also creates uniform standards with requirements to ensure timely repairs and reevaluations. Anticipated im-

provements within this bill will reduce greenhouse emissions as an estimated 5,600 leak-prone pipes in Massachusetts are repaired. Not only will this help safeguard the public against possible explosions, but it will also have a positive effect on many of the trees within our district. I have seen a number of trees in my district deteriorate rapidly because of the methane released by gas distribution pipes. This bill will help remedy this issue and protect and preserve our green spaces.

Additionally, the legislation establishes a Gas Expansion Program

which makes natural gas service available to new consumers and allows companies to offer financing programs to those switching to natural gas. This should result in cost savings for households, businesses and municipalities. The legislation will also require gas companies to coordinate surveys, replacements and repairs with municipalities and state paving organizations. In addition, it will mandate gas companies to report location, classification and date of leak to DPU. Finally, this legislation will authorize DPU to establish a minimum winter patrol standard for cast-iron pipelines.

Upcoming Breakfast Panel for Small Businesses

Friday, March 7th, 9am- Hyde Square Task Force, 30 Sunnyside St, Jamaica Plain

This breakfast panel will highlight upcoming legislative initiatives and discuss how they will affect small businesses. Through this panel, I want to ensure that small businesses are informed about the changes regarding the Affordable Care Act and unemployment insurance. Currently, we have speakers from the Massachusetts Associated Health Plans and the Associate Industries of Massachusetts on the panel. This breakfast is open to the public. Please contact Michael Baker in my office if you have any questions about this event.

Early Education and Out of School Time Capital Fund

On February 4th, I was proud to be honored at an event hosted by the Children's Investment Fund and Community Economic Development Assistance Corporation to celebrate the new Early Education and Out of School Time Capital Fund. This session, I filed legislation that would establish a fund for early care and education (ECE) and out of school time (OST) facilities that serve low-income children to make significant improvements to their educational

infrastructure. Currently, only 15% of ECE centers and 8% of OST centers in Massachusetts were originally designed as educational settings. As a result, a high percentage of community-based programs lack appropriate, safe, healthy facilities.

Many children that grow up in underserved communities, often attend childcare facilities that are not suited for educational use. This Fund will ensure that these young

people have access to educational spaces and programs that support their optimal development. I am proud to have worked to have the Fund included within a recently enacted housing and community development bond bill which, for the first time, authorizes \$45 million to create a new Early Education and Out of School Time Capital Fund to improve the quality of these educational facilities.

FY14 Supplemental Budget

This month, I am proud to have worked with my colleagues in securing funding within the FY14 supplemental budget to fund economic development initiatives and essential programs for low income residents for the remainder of the 2014 fiscal year. Through the supplemental budget process, I worked to secure \$15 million for the recapitalization of the Brownfields Redevelopment Fund, which encourages development in economically-distressed areas by providing loans and grants for environmental site assessments and cleanup. The fund was depleted as of June 2013, leaving many projects stalled while awaiting funding. This recapitaliza-

tion is a step in the right direction in returning the Fund to its original funding level of \$60 million, and I am excited to continue to work towards further recapitalization during the FY15 budget process.

The supplemental budget also provides an additional \$20 million for heating assistance in the Commonwealth. Many low income residents continue to struggle with the increasing costs of heating their homes. With this severe winter, this increase in funding is extremely necessary to ensure our at-risk residents are safe.

As many families throughout the Commonwealth and the City of

Boston continue to struggle with homelessness, I am proud to have worked to secure an approximate \$45 million within the supplemental budget to provide low-income homeless families with access to housing.

Lastly, I am excited to say an additional \$1 million was allocated to the Youthworks Summer Jobs program to target at risk youth and provide summer employment for 10,000 youth to work in Boston. The Youthworks program is always an upmost priority for me, as I believe it is essential to help young people to support themselves and their families, as well as gain valuable work experience. As the FY15 budget process unfolds, I will work as I do every year to ensure this program receives increased funding.

Public Health Update

Following news reports of misinformation, conflicts of interest, and other issues surrounding the medical marijuana applications, Speaker DeLeo has asked me to investigate the licensing process. I sent a detailed letter to the Department of Public Health asking for more information on several key areas, including application review and scoring procedures, conflict of interest issues, local municipal support for dispensaries, and punitive actions, if any. I expect to find out more details about how these applications were reviewed, to determine if loopholes exist in the current regulation, and how we may go about ensuring a transparent and effective process in the future.

We are just past the midpoint in the legislature's 2-year session, and my responsibilities as Chairman of the Joint Committee on Public Health are keeping me busy. Since first convening in April of 2013, the committee has conducted 17 public hearings on 361 individual bills. So far, 77 bills have been acted upon by the committee, including 52 that have received favorable report. Legislative rules require all committees to make a

report on the bills assigned to them by the third Wednesday in March of the second year. This is known as the "Joint Rule 10" deadline. This session, that deadline falls on March 19, 2014, by which time the Committee on Public Health must decide which of the remaining bills will receive a favorable or unfavorable report and which bills will be placed in a order for further study because of outstanding legal, fiscal and policy questions or concerns.

My work as co-chair of the Conference Committee appointed to reconcile different versions of the bill regulating pharmacy compounding continues. The House of Representatives and the Senate both passed legislation addressing this critical issue late last year. Both bills seek to enhance transparency for both pharmacies and the state bodies regulating them, increase pharmacy accountability for maintaining quality control while setting clearer standards for pharmacies to meet, and ensure patient safety through rigorous inspection of compounding pharmacies. The House and Senate routinely pass bills that include amended or unique provisions, and

many times a 6-member Conference Committee is appointed to work out the differences. Once we have reconciled all the differences, the final version of the bill will receive a final vote of the legislature and be sent to the Governor for his approval.

In January, the House Committee on Ways and Means voted to support my bill establishing a state Office of Health Equity detailing its responsibilities for reducing racial and ethnic health disparities in the Commonwealth. Despite the gains Massachusetts has made in health care coverage, glaring health disparities between populations persist. Improving health disparities requires comprehensive, coordinated policy changes and interventions that address the wide range of factors beyond health insurance coverage that cause these disparities, including: economics and employment, housing and neighborhood conditions, and cultural and linguistic factors. The next step in the legislative process for my bill is a vote before the full House of Representatives.

Yours in Service,

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