



Legislative Priorities

MHLAC’s legislative advocacy is one part of our mission to advance the rights of people with mental health challenges across Massachusetts. Our focus on systemic reform leads us to support meaningful legislation in the following areas: **Education, Parole, Children, Families, and Court Involvement, and Mental Health Systems.**

EDUCATION

1. **An Act addressing school exclusion policies to remedy disparities in educational achievement**

H.730 (Rep. Ultrino) • S.376 (Sen. Jehlen)

Amends Massachusetts’ older school discipline statutes to avoid unintended consequences and the overuse of expulsion.

2. **An Act relative to affirming and maintaining equal access to public education for all children**

H.650 (Rep. Moran & Rep. Peisch) • S.436 (Sen. Payano & Sen. Domenico)

Preserves the right to public education regardless of disability or immigration status, ensures that school interpreters are qualified and trained, protects students with disabilities from inequitable school exclusion, and maintains special education protections for English learners with disabilities.

3. **An Act relative to safer schools**

HD.4297 (Rep. Sabadosa) • S.387 (Sen. Kennedy)

Limits the use of police powers in school, collects more data on student/police interactions, requires public reporting of that data in order to have School Resource Officers, and creates a grant program for schools seeking to implement safety practices that do not rely on school-based policing.

4. **An Act requiring accountability for inequalities in suspension and expulsion (RAISE Act)**

H.731 (Rep. Ultrino) • S.380 (Sen. Jehlen)

Incorporates disciplinary disparities into the state’s educational accountability system, requiring districts to plan for reducing such disparities the way they would for reducing those in achievement and graduation rates.

For more information contact Kate Nemens, MHLAC’s Legislative Advocacy Director
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PAROLE

5. **An Act establishing presumptive parole**

H.1960 (Rep. Rogers)

In keeping with parole “best practices,” this bill would shift the burden of proof from the person seeking parole to the Parole Board, while expanding evaluation requirements for those with disabilities and enlarging the Parole Board’s duties around the creation of viable release plans for those granted parole.

6. **An Act to promote equitable access to parole**

H.2694 (Rep. Sabadosa)

Reforms Parole Board composition to include at least 4 members with social science background, plus at least 1 person with lived experience. Parole is presumed unless the Parole Board establishes that the person would likely violate the law upon release. Among other updates, the bill also (a) requires individualized parole conditions no stricter than necessary and designed to ensure successful reentry; and (b) protects people from being re-incarcerated for technical (non-criminal) parole violations.

7. **An Act to reform parole supervision in the interest of justice**

S.1728 (Sen. Miranda)

Requires that parole conditions be individualized and narrowly tailored, while protecting people from being re-incarcerated for purely technical (non-criminal) parole violations. Also updates the parole revocation process to better ensure due process, transparency, and fairness.

CHILDREN, FAMILIES, AND COURT INVOLVEMENT

8. **An Act prohibiting discrimination against adults with disabilities in family and juvenile court proceedings**

H.1852 (Rep. Livingstone) • S.1164 (Sen. Lovely)

Requires Courts to determine if a parent's disability causes actual harm to a child based on evidence, and not assumptions about a parent’s disability, before making a negative custody or parenting time decision. Judges would be required to produce written findings as to the connection between a parent's disability and actual harm to a child and would also need to determine whether adaptive parenting equipment or supportive parenting services can alleviate that harm.

9. **An Act regarding families and children in need of assistance**

H.265 (Rep. Mendes) • S.141 (Sen. Kennedy)

Proposes changes to the Child Requiring Assistance system to ensure youth can receive the support they need to be present in school and obey rules without unnecessary court involvement.

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MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEMS

10. **An Act Modernizing the Six Fundamental Rights**

H.2211 (Rep. Higgins) • S.1389 (Sen. Cyr)

Proposes amendments to modernize, clarify, and expand upon current rights of individuals receiving mental health services in facilities. Improves communication methods, promotes individuals' dignity, and improves oversight of facilities.

11. **An Act to establish peer respite centers throughout the Commonwealth**

H.2231 (Rep. Sabadosa & Rep. Davis) • S.1383 (Sen. Comerford)

Establishes a peer respite, a home-like environment, where someone experiencing a behavioral or emotional crisis can stay for up to 2 weeks, in each county of the Commonwealth. Also creates two specific LGBTQIA+ affinity respites and two BIPOC affinity respites.

12. **An Act requiring mental health parity for disability policies**

H.2202 (Rep. Decker) • S.780 (Sen. Lovely)

Prevents disability insurance policies from limiting disability benefits for income replacement for those who are on leave from work due to a behavioral health diagnosis.

13. **OPPOSING: An Act to provide continuum of care for severe mental illness**

H.1801 (Rep. K. Ferguson, Rep. B. Jones) • S.1115 (Sen. C. Friedman, Sen. J. Keenan)

Allows a judge to compel a person to participate in involuntary mental health treatment while living in the community. Such involuntary outpatient commitment does not show improved mental health outcomes, nor result in more people getting care. It relies on coercion, is inconsistent with the principals of the disability rights and recovery movements and could also disproportionately impact BIPOC communities.