

Massachusetts Sen. Markey on vote against environmental rollbacks, social program cuts

“Senator Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) issued the following statement today after voting against the debt deal:

“I was obligated by my commitment to our planet and to the everyday families across the Commonwealth and nation struggling to make ends meet to vote against the debt limit deal. This package will fast-track dirty fossil fuel projects at the expense of environmental justice and local communities, and will give Big Oil and Big Gas a Get Out of Jail Free card.

“This legislation will keep seniors and young families who rely on SNAP and TANF from keeping the lights on and putting food on the table. This legislation undermines bedrock environmental law and creates major new exemptions to the environmental permitting process, which will leave local, state, and Tribal leaders vulnerable and voiceless on polluting projects in their backyards. And this legislation fails entirely to address the transmission and staffing issues that are real blockades to bringing affordable clean energy onto our grid, adding a new yearslong delay to our effort to ensure our regional electric grids are resilient and interconnected in case of emergencies. Meanwhile, Americans face higher energy costs from fossil fuel profiteering, and corporate executives get bigger bonuses.

“Republicans racked up trillions in debt under Donald Trump, giving tax breaks to corporations and billionaires, and now would rather deprive struggling families of food and financial security than ask the wealthy to pay their fair share in

taxes. It's despicable that the GOP held our economy hostage, and I could not vote for legislation that put pipelines over lifelines. We must abolish the debt ceiling to bring an end to the Republicans' hostage-taking—for good.”

Fairhaven Fire Chief Correia “Services will need to be cut if proper funding is not obtained”

“The Fairhaven Fire Department handles over 4000 emergency calls annually. Each year our calls are increasing anywhere between 3-5%.

Our citizen demographic includes an aging population mainly housed in residences, but they are also located in three nursing homes, one assisted living complex, eight large elderly/low-income complexes. In addition, our Town has one urgent care center, one cancer center, and one dialysis center. All these equate to a very busy department.

Since 2017 we have stated the need to increase personnel to handle the increase in call volume. We also noted that we did not have enough reserves on shift, which caused an increase in overtime expenditures. We have publicly stated (at Finance Committee and Selectboard meetings) numerous times that our ideal shift staffing level would be nine (9) firefighters/paramedics. This staffing level would be needed to handle the current call volume and prepare for future demands.

The Town Administrator and the Selectboard have shifted funding around to support the addition of four (4) new firefighters. This is a necessary first step in providing a safe and adequate fire and EMS response. This funding allows us to cross-staff two ambulances with two firefighters and leave at least two/three firefighters back to handle additional EMS or fire calls. In addition, we will maintain a call department that supplements our personnel on scene to ensure the safety of our personnel and the public.

Unfortunately, this department has had to request additional funding for the past few years during the fiscal year. We do our best to stay within the budget each year, but with inflation and increased call volume, additional funding is needed to maintain services.

We will continue to offer you the best service possible with the allocated budget, but there will be a time when services will need to be cut if proper and consistent funding is not obtained. Without the override, the municipality will be working with a deficit that will affect this department and our ability to offer consistent services.

As your Fire Chief, and also a taxpayer, I support the override request. This will be the best way to allow the department to grow with the needs of the people.

If you have any questions regarding our current staffing, please email me at tcorreia@fairhaven-ma.gov."-Fairhaven Fire-EMS.

Onset/Wareham to Host First Ever Pride Ceremony

The following was released by the Onset Bay Association:

WHAT: Onset/Wareham to Hosts its First Event Pride Flag Ceremony and Reception

WHEN: Saturday, June 3, 5:30pm ET

WHERE: Bay View Park, 184 Onset Ave, Onset, MA

The Onset Bay Association is proud to support the first ever Pride Ceremony in Wareham this coming June! Pride Flag raising ceremonies are important to celebrate diversity, promote inclusivity and show support for our local LGBTQ+ community. This event will be an opportunity for the community to come together and show support for those who identify as LGBTQ+ and their allies as they have done in the past by issuing Pride Month Proclamations for the past few years! The event will feature singer and performer, Teddy Matthews, a Wareham resident and former American Idol contestant and our keynote speaker, Jeff Osswald, Onset Fire Chief. The event will be followed by a reception at the Onset Bay Center, where attendees can meet and network with other members of the community.

We would like to thank our sponsors, the Onset Bay Association, Buzzard Bay Coalition and Olson's Garden Center for their support in making this event possible.

For more information about the event, please contact the Onset Bay Association at (508) 295-7072.

Report Waves Red Flags On Massachusetts Costs, Outmigration

By Michael P. Norton
State House News Service

The “red flags are waving” across Massachusetts, with housing, transportation and migration patterns continuing to trend in the wrong direction, according to a new report.

Massachusetts had the lowest rental vacancy rate in the U.S. in 2022 and the second-highest median rents, Boston features the second-highest traffic delay times in the nation, and the state recently posted its highest outmigration numbers in 30 years, according to the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation.

“We’re seeing the future of our workforce, people aged 26 to 35, high-wage residents, and those in key sectors, dominate the outflow of residents and talent,” MTF President Doug Howgate said. “Massachusetts is facing a critical moment and it is imperative we address these challenges promptly to secure a prosperous future for our commonwealth.”

The report uses new data to update information that MTF compiled in December. The trendlines have not changed, Howgate said, adding that another round of data will contribute to at least one more update later this year.

MTF said that as the competition for talent and population growth intensifies, Massachusetts saw nearly 111,000 people leave the state between April 2020 and July 2022, exacerbating labor shortage challenges and workforce trends associated with an aging population.

Citing IRS data, the report says that tax filers between 26

and 35 years old dominated the outflow, raising fresh questions about whether Massachusetts can hold on to the competitive advantage it has long enjoyed due to its steady pool of recent college graduates. Reasons for leaving included worsening costs and quality of life, rising housing prices, unreliable MBTA service and congested roadways, and more affordable housing and warmer weather in other states.

At the other end of the age spectrum, the report says the number of Massachusetts residents 65 and older is projected to increase by 280,000 over the next seven years. The elevated numbers of people retiring in Massachusetts are adding to the workforce strains that are being reported across industries.

The report, "Can Massachusetts Overcome its Cost and Demographic Headwinds to Compete for Talent," warns that congestion and the state's "high costs and long commutes are pushing residents and business out."

In the technology sector – a traditional asset for Massachusetts – Texas, Florida, North Carolina, Colorado, and Washington gained a total of 160,000 new jobs over the past three years while Massachusetts lost 2,000 positions in the same period. Massachusetts ranked 33rd among states in computer tech jobs over that stretch, according to the report, trailing states like New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Montana, and West Virginia.

The state's high cost of living and affordability concerns have been a frequent talking point on Beacon Hill. House and Senate Democrats, along with Gov. Maura Healey, have been focused so far this year on coming up with an annual budget that they say will address some competitiveness concerns with targeted spending. A promised tax relief package remains a work in progress, but it appears likely that state leaders, who ditched their tax relief plans last year, may be able to coalesce around a nearly \$600 million tax relief bill for fiscal 2024.

Healey has made housing production a priority for her administration and is reorganizing the executive branch to achieve that goal, although it remains to be seen whether the state can overcome opposition to new units that for years has been backstopped by restrictive local zoning bylaws and ordinances.

Another wildcard for Massachusetts is its new income surtax on high earners. Democrats pushed the constitutional amendment to the 2022 ballot and voters approved it. Supporters say the 4 percent surtax on household income above \$1 million will lead to critical education and transportation investments, with \$1 billion in new spending poised for approval, but critics say the tax increase hurts the state's competitive position and will add to outmigration.

Massachusetts Eyes More Restrictive Student Cellphone Policies

Sam Drysdale
State House News Service

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Jeffrey Riley announced Tuesday that the department will “likely” create a matching grant program of up to \$1 million for districts that pilot a cellphone restriction policy.

This is “not a mandate at this time,” he said, “but we’re certainly interested in piloting more of this.”

Riley invited teachers, administrators and students from

schools that have instituted restrictions or bans to speak before the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education at their monthly meeting on Tuesday.

Some school representatives discussed their policies requiring students to give up their phones at the start of class. Other schools restrict phone use in hallways as well.

One school, the Eliot K-8 Innovation School in Boston, requires students to lock up their phones in magnetically-sealed pouches as they come in. Children can carry the encased phones, but the pouches can only be unlocked by a teacher or when students leave at the end of the day.

“Students get to actually feel that there is a phone in there, they just can’t actually open it,” said Eliot Executive Director Traci Walker Griffith. “For us it was this opportunity to build more opportunities for social interaction, both instructionally, academically, but the social-emotional needs that we needed from our students with each other.”

Walker Griffith added that “phones were not always part of school” – prompting an online response from Worcester School Committee member and field director with the Massachusetts Association of School Committees Tracy O’Connell Novick, who Tweeted, “There weren’t various kinds of automatic weaponry, either. So here we are.”

The Eliot School director said that in an emergency teachers have magnets in the classroom that unlock students’ phones from the sealed pouches.

Student reliance on devices has increased since COVID-19 lockdowns caused children to look to screens for social interaction and learning, educators said.

Gwyneth Zeeck, an 8th grade student at Eliot, said when school went back to being in-person she did not know how to make new

friends, and spent most of her time with people she already knew or retreating into her phone. Zeeck said since the phone ban was instituted she has started interacting with new people and could focus on “figuring out who I was beyond that screen that had been our lives for a year and a half.”

But reducing academic and social distractions might not be as easy as taking away students’ phones – and some on the panel said total bans don’t allow students to learn how to use phones responsibly and practice self control.

“With all these different types of cellphone policies I think that students aren’t given the initiative to, kind of, restrain themselves and learn how to deal with distractions. They’re just being told, ‘Leave your phone there,’” said Alexander Sproule, a student at Concord-Carlisle High School. “I don’t necessarily think that all these students are learning good strategies to focus and study on their own without the distraction, because they’re so used to just being told, ‘Put your phone away.’”

Milford High School student Tessa Scrimgeour said not having access to her phone in class makes her crave more time with her device after school.

“Sometimes I get home I’m like, ‘Oh, I haven’t been on my phone all day. I just had two hours of sports, all I want to do now is lay down and watch TikTok,” she said, referencing a popular social media site.

Zeeck, however, said not being able to use her cellphone during school was “a wake-up call,” and has helped her learn to not be glued to the screen after returning to in-person school.

Education Secretary Patrick Tutwiler asked the panelists how other technology like Apple Watches – which are compatible with iPhones and get text message and social media notifications – fit into the phone bans.

Scrimgeour responded that some students at her school bought Apple Watches and MacBooks, which can also receive text messages, to get around the policy. She said schools would need to adapt to new technologies to continue to effectively ban distracting devices.

There was not much discussion about the possible advantages of cellphones in the classroom, though Board Chair Katherine Craven asked if there was “any thought given, though, to the phone as a pedagogical tool,” or “a pathway to more learning.”

Educators responded that teachers have the option to return students’ phones if they want to use them in a lesson.

Addiction Treatment Beds in Massachusetts Imperiled By State Reimbursement Rates

By Sam Drysdale
State House News Service

As opioid overdose deaths remain high across the state, substance abuse treatment providers say that increasing reimbursement rates for Medicaid patients may be necessary to avoid closing available beds at addiction and recovery facilities.

MassHealth and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services are considering a score of rate changes, increasing how much providers are reimbursed when they admit a patient with Medicaid insurance for addiction treatment.

Providers are reimbursed for Medicaid patients at rates 50

percent below what they are paid on average by commercial insurers, David Matteodo, director of the Massachusetts Association of Behavioral Health Systems, said at a hearing on the rate change Monday.

“Our providers really want to treat MassHealth. But we simply cannot continue to do it with a rate that’s not viable,” Matteodo said.

Richard Curcuru, president and CEO of Cape Cod-based addiction center Gosnold, said his facility does not want to turn away Medicaid patients, but that they may need to close services in order to continue to treat them.

In 2016, 65 percent of Gosnold’s patients had commercial insurance and 35 percent used MassHealth, Curcuru said. Since then, commercial admissions have declined year after year, and in 2023 commercial payers represent about 20 percent of patients, compared to 80 percent on Medicaid.

“Even though the Medicaid rate was not sufficient back then, reimbursement from the commercial payers covered the shortfall we had on our Medicaid patients,” he said. “Currently, our expenses for detox exceed the Medicaid reimbursement. This means that there is a significant loss to the organization for every Medicaid patient we admit. This is obviously not sustainable.”

Gosnold is considering reducing the overall detox bed count or only taking commercial payers – something that is not in line with their mission as a rehabilitation and recovery facility, Curcuru said.

Behavioral health and substance use treatment centers around the state have canceled services in recent months, as the Medicaid reimbursement rate compounds with issues of short-staffing and increased safety problems.

In April, MiraVista Behavioral Health Center in Holyoke ended

some of its addiction programs, including detox beds, saying in a statement they made the decision to do so based on “the reality of inadequate state reimbursement, which falls millions of dollars short of the costs required to operate and sustain programming,” 22 News reported.

A few days later in Worcester, addiction and homelessness service provider Community Healthlink closed admissions to three inpatient programs after a state inspection. Members of SEIU Local 509 told the Worcester Telegram & Gazette that the union raised concerns about safety and staffing at the facility before the inspection.

“In addition to the reimbursement challenges, we have had similar expense challenges. Due to COVID, we have had to increase all expenses, but mostly staff salaries,” Curcuru said. “We’ve had to raise the salaries for most direct staff, especially nurses, considerably in an attempt to recruit and retain staff. The state has temporarily increased the rate a couple of times during this period to address this – but not to the extent that we’ve had to increase staffing salaries. This has resulted in approximately \$150,000 per month loss, or \$1.8 million annually, in our detox services.”

He added that Gosnold began renovating one of its facilities to open 33 new beds earlier this year, and the project will be completed by the end of May. But because of the company’s financial outlook, they may have to sell the facility to keep the beds that they currently have still open and operating.

“This is the most significant financial challenge Gosnold has experienced in the 50 years we have been providing services and I’m not sure we will survive if the rate is not comparable to what it costs us to deliver the care,” he said.

Meanwhile, the most recent public health data shows that opioid overdose deaths remain high, and increased amounts of the highly-addictive and deadly drugs fentanyl and xylazine

are being found on the streets.

In the first nine months of 2022, there were 1,696 confirmed and estimated opioid-related overdose deaths. That's about six deaths every day, but it's also about 25 fewer deaths than in the first nine months of 2021.

Last month, the state Bureau of Substance Addiction Services put out a clinical advisory on the presence of xylazine – an animal tranquilizer not meant for human consumption and called the “zombie drug” for the severe wounds and necessary amputations it causes – in Massachusetts' street drug supply.

“In Massachusetts, the opioid crisis continues to wreak havoc on countless lives,” said Jameson Pinette, regional vice president of Recovery Centers of America. “Increased Medicaid rates for substance use treatment is a crucial step in addressing this epidemic. By ensuring adequate reimbursement rates, we can improve access to quality treatment and care, attract and retain skilled professionals, reduce reliance on emergency services and improve patient outcomes.”

Mayor Mitchell presents New Bedford's FY 2024 Budget, healthcare reform to manage tax burden

“New Bedford, Massachusetts – Mayor Jon Mitchell presented his Fiscal Year 2024 City Budget to the New Bedford City Council on Wednesday, May 17, 2022. In total, the Fiscal Year 2024 budget totals \$513,169,319, of which the General Fund is the

largest component at \$458,910,392.

A Careful, Conservative Spending Blueprint

Mayor Mitchell expressed optimism regarding the City's continued economic progress, while also acknowledging global, national, and regional trends which could have impacts on the City in the future, and which demand "the same careful, conservative approach to budgeting that has served us so well in the past."

Mitchell cited several reasons for local optimism, including the City's substantial decline in unemployment since the pandemic, saying, "The local economy has demonstrated remarkable resilience and remains on a firm footing following the COVID-19 pandemic. The City's unemployment rate for the first six months of Fiscal Year 2023 has averaged 5%, having fallen from an average of nearly 17% during the first six months of the pandemic three years ago."

The Mayor also highlighted the positive impact of the development of offshore wind energy and the role of federal ARPA funding, saying, "After more than a decade of work to establish New Bedford as a leader in offshore wind energy, this month the first turbine components are arriving in our port from Europe in support of the first industrial-scale offshore wind project in America. In the months and years ahead, we can expect the economic impact of Vineyard Wind and successor projects to become increasingly evident, as New Bedford continues to be a focus of both public and industry investment."

"Additionally, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding from the federal government has allowed us to direct critical resources toward a range of local needs from housing to small business assistance, and helped the City pay for one-time costs and other budgetary expenses that we would have otherwise gone unfunded."

Concern About Erosion In Key Services Without New Spending Reforms

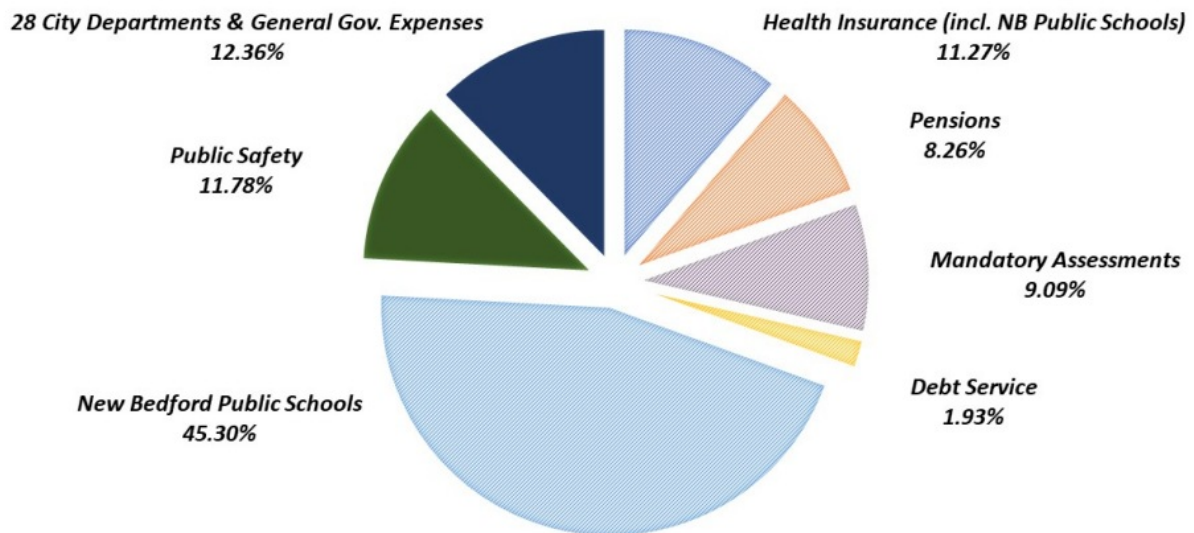
The Mayor made clear that new budget tactics were needed in key areas, like healthcare, saying, "It has become clear that there are limits to our strategy of lean budgeting. Over many years the City has pursued multiple rounds of budgetary belt-tightening. As a consequence, we are at, or nearly at, the point where we risk just not having the bodies to perform the necessary work.

When I took office in 2012, there were 1,136 full-time municipal (i.e. non-school department) employees on the payroll of the City of New Bedford. Fast-forwarding ten years later, in 2022, that figure was 1,029, or about 10% fewer full-time employees. In 2023, the figure likely fell further still."

Now a reduction in the size of the organization is not necessarily a bad thing. After a decade of modernization and reform, city government today is more efficient in many service areas than it has ever been, despite the elimination of positions. But it is also true that city government is now at risk of an erosion in its basic capacity to deliver effective services when the overwhelming share of the operating budget remains comprised of fast-growing, legally-mandated spending—while state aid and revenue growth fail to keep up. We have acted responsibly, but we also need to do more and consider reform in the key places in the budget that can deliver savings at a scale that can make a difference."

The Mayor noted that fixed costs and mandated assessments now account for \$110 million of General Fund expenditures in Fiscal Year 2024, while Net School Spending requirements account for another \$238 million. These total \$348 million in a \$458 million General Fund spending plan, which means 75% of the spending in the budget cannot be reduced, with the remaining 25% shared among more than two dozen city departments.

Fiscal Year 2024 General Fund Appropriations by Category



Note: Cross-hatched sections indicate mandated expense categories.

City of New Bedford photo.

Key To Managing Spending Is Reform of Healthcare

The Mayor argued that, with so much of the budget beyond the City's ability to control, the path forward must include strategic action in the areas that remain within its capacity to change, saying, "Without a doubt, healthcare reform is the area of the budget that would have the most positive impact on municipal finances.

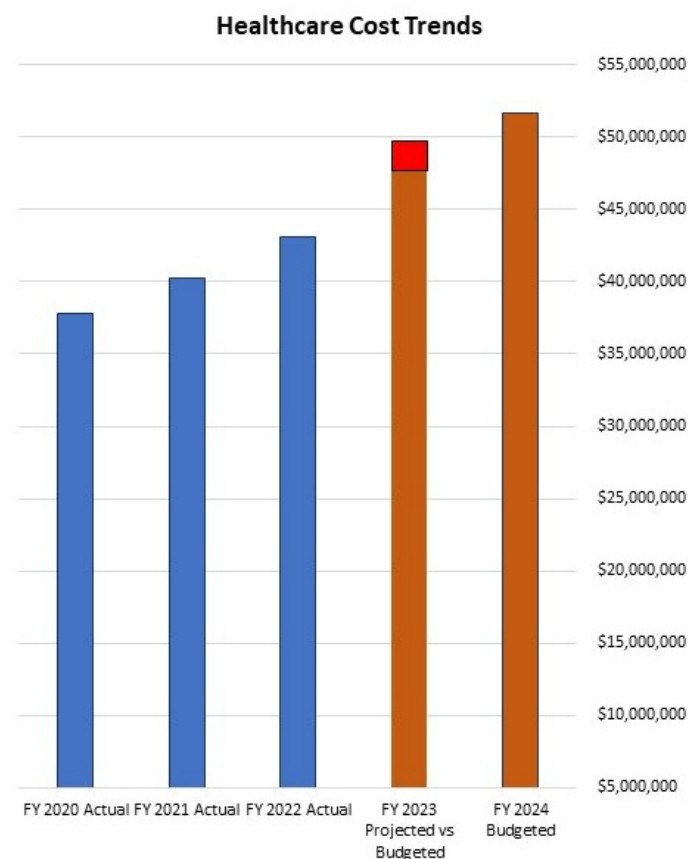
That is why I intend to refile my previous request for the City Council to vote to adopt Sections 21-23 of Chapter 32B of Massachusetts General Law, as so many other localities have done to better manage spiraling upward healthcare costs."

He added, "There is nothing particularly earth-shattering about these sections of state law. The Administration and public employee unions will continue to negotiate health insurance benefits as they have always done. The adoption of the state law will simply restore a level-playing field and equalize the negotiating positions of the two sides by allowing an independent, neutral arbiter to resolve differences when an impasse arises during negotiations."

"It is hard to understate how much healthcare spending

contributes to the property tax burden on our residents. Between 2012 and 2023, employee health insurance costs rose from approximately \$35 million to \$46 million, or nearly \$1 million per year every year.

“Worse yet, the rate of spending increase is growing fast this year, and there is good reason to believe healthcare spending may increase faster still in future years. It’s a problem that is not going away, and could get a whole lot worse. We are already long overdue in taking action on this issue. This budget includes \$51.7 million to cover healthcare costs, a full 10% increase over last year’s budget.”

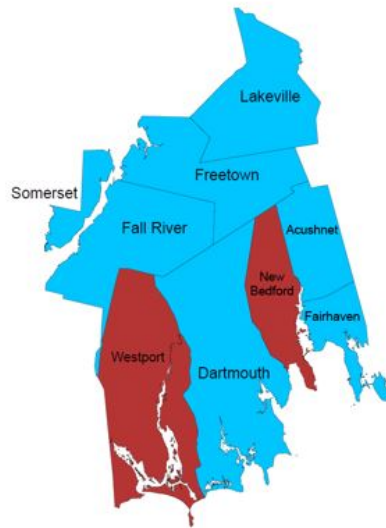


City of New Bedford photo.

The Mayor also noted that virtually every local government in Southeastern Massachusetts has now adopted Sections 21-23, saying, “New Bedford taxpayers deserve relief from the outsized budget pressure caused by the current health

insurance program, every bit as much as their neighbors in other communities.”

Cities & Towns That Allow A Neutral Arbiter in Local Government Healthcare Negotiations



City of New Bedford photo.

Other Sources of Fiscal Pressure

Mitchell noted that pension costs are another major budget item contributing to the burden on taxpayers, noting that both the Retirement Board and the City Council both possess a measure of local control that they could exercise to reduce the impact of rising pension costs on taxpayers—and, equally important, help ensure the future solvency of the pension system for today’s active employees who are counting on it to be there for them when they retire.

The Mayor cited the troubling unfunded liability of the City’s pension fund, which is only 52% funded. Out of 104 government retirement systems in Massachusetts, only six other systems are less funded than New Bedford’s. Taken together, health insurance, pension payments, and other insurance programs are increasing in FY 2024 by more than \$8 million.

The Mayor said, “New Bedford is near the very bottom of the list because we have been chronically unrealistic about the

affordability of pension benefit expansions in the past, and that needs to change.

He added, "The notion that we can successfully restrain overall spending by trimming elsewhere in the budget, but doing nothing on these key budget drivers, is simply ignoring the elephant in the room."

Funding for the School Department is projected to increase by \$23.1 million, or 10.5% to comply with the Commonwealth's minimum Net School Spending requirements. Likewise, mandatory assessments, which consist of funding for charter schools, continue to consume a larger share of the City's resources. The City's contribution to Charter School Sending Tuition has risen from approximately \$27 million in FY 2023 to \$30 million in FY 2024.

Concluding Remarks

The Mayor summarized the FY 2024 budget exercise, saying. "The preparation of any budget proposal is always a complex undertaking, and the current proposal has presented its fair share of challenges. Mandated expenses, recovering local receipts, cost pressures from inflation, and an uncertain economic environment are all significant considerations this year.

But we will meet these challenges by relying on the same cautious, deliberative approach and the effective partnership between the Administration and the City Council that has served us well in the past."-City of New Bedford.

Massachusetts Lawmakers Weigh Bills To Decriminalize Prostitution

By Sam Drysdale

State House News Service

Prostitution would be decriminalized in Massachusetts under bills discussed before the Judiciary Committee this week, though there is a deep divide among sex workers and activists about how far that decriminalization should go.

Two bills filed this session would decriminalize prostitution. One, however, would only repeal criminal penalties that apply to prostitutes themselves, leaving those who sell and purchase sex (“pimps” and “johns”) open to arrest and prosecution. Another bill filed by Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa seeks to entirely legalize the sex trade.

Dozens of people testified Tuesday afternoon – into Tuesday evening – at a Joint Committee on the Judiciary hearing in favor of a Rep. Mary Keefe and Sen. Cindy Friedman bill (H 1597 / S 983) to decriminalize prostitution while maintaining legal consequences for people who buy sex and those who exploit sex workers.

“The sex trade is rooted in United States history of exploitation of buying and selling humans,” said Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, who co-sponsored the House bill. “H 1597 would take a small step towards counteracting the stark history of our country and decriminalizing prostituted people, and allow them a pathway to exit the sex trade. I also want to point out that the sex trade exists all over the commonwealth of Massachusetts.”

Women and others who sell sex are often victims of human

trafficking, advocates said, and a criminal record of prostitution can limit career options, making it more difficult to leave the sex trade and make money in other ways.

The “partial decriminalization” bill would clear the criminal records of those who were arrested for selling sex, and direct money won in cases prosecuting those who buy or pimp out sex workers to the Victims of Human Trafficking Trust Fund.

It also focuses on creating “exit paths” for those who sell sex and feel they cannot get out of the life, partially through working with local and community-based organizations that already do this work.

Of the dozens of former prostitutes who testified on Tuesday, many said they entered the sex industry as children, became addicted to drugs (often given by pimps who wanted to control them) and wanted to get out but did not know how to until they were connected with survivor-led help groups.

“I was arrested for being a victim and treated like a criminal while my trafficker was able to come bail me out – going back into the hands of my trafficker instead of asking me if I wanted or needed help, and informing me that supportive exit services existed,” said sex trade survivor and founder and CEO of Worcester-based nonprofit Living In Freedom Together Audra Doody.

She added, “We already don’t have enough women to meet the demand. The buyers and exploiters will take our most vulnerable women and girls to fill this need. We cannot let that happen. We need to hold buyers, traffickers and exploiters accountable for using their position of power to buy and sell bodies.”

Indigo Kirsch, the outcomes and evaluation manager for My Life, My Choice, said youth who work in the sex trade are disproportionately Black, Indigenous or people of color, or LGBTQ+, and a majority are involved in the foster care system.

In the 2021 Massachusetts Youth Health survey conducted by the Office of Data Management and Outcomes Assessment and the Department of Public Health, about 41 percent of children surveyed were BIPOC, Kirsch said, compared to about 73 percent of the youth that My Life, My Choice works with. In the same survey, LGBTQ+ youth accounted for 25 percent of respondents, whereas 42 percent of the young people involved in the sex industry seeking help from the organization were.

Additionally, 86 percent of the My Life, My Choice youth mentored by the organization concerning their participation in the sex trade were involved in the foster care system, with 97 percent of BIPOC and 89 percent of LGBTQ+ mentees involved with the state's Department of Children and Families.

Advocates who spoke in favor of repealing criminal penalties for prostitutes said that Sabadosa's "full decriminalization" bill, and a Sabadosa and Sen. Liz Miranda bill to create a commission to study fully legalizing the sex work industry (H 1758 / S 1046), may have the "intention... to support marginalized communities," but instead "legitimizes sex buying, brothels and third party control."

The full decriminalization bill would expunge prostitution-related arrests related to purchasing and selling other people for sex, as well as selling a person's own body for sex. It would also expunge marijuana-related arrests.

Supporters say that decriminalizing the industry would give prostitutes more power, by being able to hold brothel owners accountable for bad practices such as sexual harassment, and screen sex buyers for sexually transmitted diseases.

Rebecca Clearly, an attorney for Decriminalize Sex Work, testified that the Keefe/Friedman bill denies the existence of "adult consensual sex workers," who would like to continue in the industry, but make it safer.

"The issue there, in that bill specifically, is when you

define adult consensual sex workers as prostituted persons not only does that equate that experience with exploitation, which diminishes exploitation, but it additionally prescribes on people the fact that they can't consent to sex work, even though they're adults making their own choices. And I think it's really risky to limit choice and bodily autonomy, generally, but especially in this moment," Clearly said.

Clearly was one of only two speakers who testified in favor of the bill, but she said there is widespread support among active sex workers, who cannot testify without "outing themselves" as engaging in criminal behavior.

Full decriminalization has been supported by the World Health Organization, UNAIDS, the Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, Human Rights Watch, Lambda Legal, the American Civil Liberties Union, and Freedom Network USA, Clearly said.

But for some in the hearing room, the bill would leave "exploiters who perpetrate violence and cause harm" unaccountable.

"We shouldn't have to give men who perpetrate sexual violence the legal right to buy consent," said Desiree Deimos, from Living In Freedom Together. "We should not have to give traffickers and pimps the right to file a 1099 for the profit they make off the bodies of women and girls. Legalizing a violent and oppressive system will not improve the health and safety for anyone, and it will never prevent human trafficking."

Lawyer: U.S. Attorney Rollins Will Resign This Week

By Chris Lisinski

State House News Service

MAY 16, 2023....Rachael Rollins, a former Suffolk County prosecutor who quickly rose in political prominence and often drew the ire of Republican lawmakers, will resign her role as U.S. attorney for Massachusetts this week because "her presence has become a distraction," her attorney said.

Rollins's attorney, former Justice Department Inspector General Michael Bromwich, announced Tuesday that she plans to submit a letter of resignation to President Joe Biden by the end of the day Friday, bringing a sudden end to a federal tenure that began less than a year and a half ago when Vice President Kamala Harris cast a decisive tiebreaking confirmation vote.

Bromwich did not provide a detailed reason or make explicit mention of previous press reports about a Justice Department watchdog investigation into Rollins.

"She is optimistic that the important work she started will continue but understands that her presence has become a distraction," Bromwich said. "The work of the office and the Department of Justice is far too important to be overshadowed by anything else."

The Associated Press reported in November that the DOJ's inspector general was probing Rollins's appearance at a political fundraiser with First Lady Jill Biden, her use of a personal cellphone for official business, and a trip she took to California paid for by an outside group.

Rollins previously faced scrutiny from the U.S. Office of

Special Counsel on whether her attendance at the July fundraiser in Andover violated the Hatch Act, which limits political activities by federal employees.

She defended her stop at the Democratic National Committee fundraiser. A day after the Boston Herald reported about her visit and published a photograph of her arriving at the event, Rollins tweeted, "I wasn't asked for a comment before this ran. It's almost as if the Herald didn't want to know I had approval to meet Dr. Biden & left early to speak at 2 community events last night."

"After the dust settles and she resigns, Rachael will make herself available to answer questions," Bromwich said Tuesday. "Until then, she reminds the public of the vitally important work the office does and thanks her colleagues for their service to the Commonwealth and our Nation."

It was not immediately clear who would take over the U.S. attorney role in Massachusetts once Rollins steps down. Her office confirmed that Rollins plans to resign but did not comment further.

A former assistant U.S. attorney, Rollins previously served as general counsel at the Department of Transportation and MBTA and as chief legal counsel for the Massachusetts Port Authority.

In 2018, she topped a five-way Democratic primary for Suffolk County district attorney, then cruised to victory in the general election with 80 percent of the vote.

She brought a reform-minded approach to the DA's office, calling for a "progressive prosecution" strategy that involved dismissing or diverting many nonviolent, lower-level cases.

The changes she pursued drew praise from criminal justice reform activists, who praised them as a way to focus resources on more serious offenses and break a cycle of incarceration.

Others were more critical, such as former Republican Gov. Charlie Baker's public safety chief, who warned that the prosecutorial approach did not "reflect the careful balance" in a 2018 criminal justice reform law.

In 2021, the National Bureau of Economic Research published an analysis of more than a decade of Suffolk County DA cases and concluded that not prosecuting defendants for lower-level crimes – like those that Rollins diverted – reduced subsequent arrests of those individuals.

After Biden picked Rollins in July 2021, Senate Republicans loudly objected and pointed to her record as prosecutor, alleging that her push to deprioritize some offenses was "radical."

The Senate split 50-50 along party lines, and Harris had to step in and cast the final vote to push Rollins over the line. She became the first Black woman and second woman ever to serve as U.S. attorney for Massachusetts.

City of New Bedford invites residents to public Open House on future and vision for city

"The City of New Bedford will host a Public Engagement Open House at Normandin Middle School (81 Felton Street, New Bedford, MA 02745) on Wednesday, May 17th from 6 PM to 8 PM. All community members are invited to learn about the Citywide Comprehensive Plan process and contribute by sharing their

vision for the future of New Bedford.

The Comprehensive Plan is a long-term guidance document for policy and decision-making in a variety of areas including Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Transportation & Mobility, Natural and Cultural Resources, Open Space & Recreation, Public Services & Facilities.

Community participation is an integral part of the Comprehensive Plan process and input from City residents will directly inform the goals and strategies that guide the next decade of New Bedford's development.

Residents can stop into the open-house-style event any time from 6 PM to 8 PM to participate in Comprehensive Plan activities and speak with representatives from City departments. Raffles, family activities, food, and drinks will also be provided at no cost. Interpreter services will be available.

The May 17th event is part of a series of public workshops and listening sessions taking place throughout 2023. Each event will allow residents to voice their visions and ideas for the future of our city.

Visit www.newbedfordplan.com to learn more about the Comprehensive Plan process, fill out a feedback form, sign up for updates, and see the event calendar.

Contact the Department of City Planning with any questions at (508) 979-1488 or Jennifer.Carloni@newbedford-ma.gov."