

OPINION: Dartmouth resident: “Is joining a protest more threatening than provoking an insurrection?”

The following is an opinion sent to New Bedford Guide. It does not reflect the opinion of New Bedford Guide, nor is it an OP-ED. In fairness and objectivity, we share opinions from our readers whether we agree or disagree with their opinion.

Do you have a counter opinion to this opinion? Have an opinion about something else? Email us at info@newbedfordguide.com.

“If the polling of state legislators’ votes for president were allowed it would probably be a safe bet that the same individuals who voted to expel the two state representatives in Tennessee enthusiastically supported Donald Trump.

The double standard of accountability in politics is not new, but the sheer hypocrisy of so many legislators ignoring illegal, unconstitutional, democracy – defying antics of Trump, and his sycophantic cronies, and then punishing elected officials for expressing their outrage at the continuing murder of school children, is astounding.

If the expulsion of duly elected legislators is not reversed immediately, by a clamoring electorate or a court of law, then it will become the template for so many states that have elected majority right wing Republican legislatures, city councils, town committees and boards.

It is important to keep this story actively front and center in the news as other elected officials nationwide will follow

suit and utilize arcane, or outdated, rules or regulations to expel or silence the opposition. Having been unsuccessful at defeating their opponents in the voting booth they can accomplish their objectives by threat of expulsion for existing rules, or creating new ones.

The result will be far worse than any voting suppression that is being implemented as expulsion will accomplish the same insidious objective.”-Betty Ussach, Dartmouth.

OPINION: “MAGA voters are losing their minds over Bragg’s shot across the bow!”

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“Alvin Bragg’s shot across the bow:

The New York indictment of Donald Trump is probably the first of others to come in the next few months. District Attorney Bragg’s momentous decision to move forward on the most questionably significant violation of law, is as much a signal to other prosecutors that the rule of law must, and can be, applied to former presidents, as it is to Donald Trump that he is not invulnerable.

While MAGA voters, donators and legislators are losing their minds and spewing vindictive and threatening rhetoric, this is

the perfect time to bring forth the other state and federal indictments. Lindsey Graham can cry and Jim Jordan can announce as many investigative committees and subpoenas as will satisfy his base and ego, but the reality will be that the charges may very well be obstruction of justice, election interference, incitement to riot and possibly treason. Clearly placing Trump in much more serious jeopardy than any previous criminal or civil violations.

State and federal prosecutorial resources will outnumber any personal or donated funds for the defense of Trump and perhaps for the first time, he will have to be careful in allocating which monies go to his campaign, lawyers, or into his pockets.

No rally will surpass the media attention to each court appearance, filed motions, affidavits, and rulings during the long process of discovery and pretrial hearings. The left and right media will air those portions most aligned with their positions. But, unlike the court of public opinion, there will be documentation to be assessed by judges, that will have to withstand scrutiny far stricter than media talking heads and opportunistic legislators.

Alvin Bragg's indictments will recede as the other courts hopefully take over the battle to demonstrate that the rule of law has not been abandoned by the American judicial system."- Betty Ussach Schwartz.

City of New Bedford announces 2023 election calendar,

nomination papers available

“The Board of Election Commissioners advises the public that the 2023 Municipal Election Calendar is now set. Nomination Papers for Local Office will be available starting on Tuesday, April 4th. The Election Office is located in City Hall, 133 William St. Room 114. Office hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Candidates need to sign up and will be given an information packet that contains the Election Calendar and nomination papers.

Before issuance of nomination papers, the candidate must sign a statement containing their name, address, and the office the person intends to be a candidate. Anyone other than the candidate must present a signed authorization to secure papers on their behalf.

Candidates must obtain 50 certified signatures, per MGL 53 9A, to be eligible to appear on the Preliminary Ballot scheduled for October 3rd.

The Municipal Election is scheduled for Tuesday, November 7, 2023.

In the Preliminary Municipal Election, New Bedford voters will be casting their votes for Mayor, Assesor-At-Large, School Committee, Councilors-At-Large, and Ward Councilors.

For more information, contact Election Commissioner Manuel DeBrito Jr. at (508) 979-1420.

**City of New Bedford
Municipal Election Calendar
Preliminary Election – October 3, 2023**

Municipal Election – November 7, 2023

APRIL 4: First day on which nomination papers can be obtained from the office of the Board of Election Commissioners for the offices of the Mayor, City Council, Assessor-At-Large, and School Committee. Each candidate must sign with the Board of Election Commissioners before he/she can obtain papers. A signed statement containing the person's name, address, and the office for which the person intends to be a candidate. Each candidate will be issued five (5) nomination papers.

JULY 28 at 5:00 P.M.: Last day and hour to obtain nomination papers from the Board of Election Commissioners.

AUGUST 1 at 5:00 P.M.: Last day and hour to submit nomination papers to the Board of Election Commissioners for certification of signatures.

AUGUST 15 at 5:00 P.M.: Last day and hour to officially accept nominations once signatures are certified with the Board of Election Commissioners.

AUGUST 17 at 5:00 P.M.: Last day and hour for filing withdrawals or objections of nomination papers with the Board of Election Commissioners.

SEPTEMBER 22 at 5:00 P.M.: Last day to register to vote for the Preliminary Election.

SEPTEMBER 26 at 5:00 P.M.: Last day and hour to apply for a mail-in or absentee preliminary ballot.

OCTOBER 2 at 12:00 P.M.: Last day and hour to apply for an in-person absentee preliminary ballot.

OCTOBER 3: PRELIMINARY ELECTION – POLLS OPEN 7:00 A.M. – 8:00 P.M.

OCTOBER 9 at 5:00 P.M.: Last day and hour to file recount

petition with Board of Election Commissioners.

OCTOBER 28 at 5:00 P.M.: Last day to register to vote for the Municipal Election.

OCTOBER 31 at 5:00 P.M.: Last day and hour to apply for a mail-in or absentee election ballot.

NOVEMBER 6 at 12:00 P.M.: Last day and hour to apply for an in-person absentee election ballot.

NOVEMBER 7: MUNICIPAL ELECTION – POLLS OPEN 7:00 A.M. – 8:00 P.M.

NOVEMBER 17 at 5:00 P.M.: Last day and hour to file for a recount for the Election.

New Bedford School Committee Inaugurates Academic Achievement Subcommittee

The New Bedford School Committee is launching its Academic Achievement Subcommittee and a new reference tool to support families in their effort to engage in deeper discussions around district performance.

The NBPS Academic Achievement Public Dashboard will equip families with key information on how the school system is performing. The dashboard is a project of the NBPS Academic Achievement Subcommittee, which is comprised of Mayor Jon Mitchell and School Committee members, Bruce J. Oliveira and Joaquim “Jack” Livramento.

Mayor Mitchell stated, "The purpose of the Academic Achievement Subcommittee is to establish a platform in which school performance data that goes beyond the high-level information normally presented at the full School Committee hearings can be discussed, analyzed, and tracked according to the district's annual goals. We believe it will enhance the public's understanding of the work of the school system, and the opportunities it offers the City's children."

Noting the dashboard's easy-to-use format, Superintendent Thomas Anderson stated, "Parents will be able to easily check the district's benchmarks for progress through graphics. The dashboard is organized by elementary, middle, and high school levels that display comparative bar charts for a snapshot of progress. The creation of this tool, similar to the NBPS COVID tracker used during the pandemic, will provide the public with a wider lens on our district data points aligned with our strategic plan."

"The Academic Achievement Subcommittee and Public Dashboard are groundbreaking efforts by a Mayor and Superintendent to provide the public with a deeper understanding about the student outcomes that are most important for academic success," says Andrew Wolk, founder of Finding Common Purpose, the organization that developed the public dashboard. The organization was recommended after a consultation with former Massachusetts Secretary of Education and current Harvard professor, Paul Reville.

"I salute Mayor Mitchell and Superintendent Anderson for their courage in setting clear goals and providing a mechanism to report to the public on progress," said Reville.

The dashboard features metrics that are aligned with the Superintendent's annual goals. At the Elementary level, the dashboard data begins with Kindergarten Early Literacy benchmarks, quantified by Star Assessments. Preparing students to read is one of the primary responsibilities of school

systems, and this early literacy assessment helps gauge where students are in the early grades. NBPS uses this data to establish action plans to best support student progress on a positive trajectory as they become highly literate.

Reading English Proficiency is documented in part by Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results in Third Grade. The third grade marks the transition from “learning to read” to “reading to learn.” Students who are proficient in reading at the end of third grade will be best set up for success in all subject areas as they move through school. To increase the number of students who are proficient at the end of third grade, NBPS provides additional literacy development resources to early elementary classrooms.

At the Middle School level, a key benchmark is the Sixth Grade Math Student Growth Percentile (MCAS). As most students make the transition from elementary school to middle school, math concepts get more complex. High levels of growth in 6th grade can be used as an indicator for students who are prepared to engage with these math concepts and those in science and technology. Acceleration is the focus of the new math curriculum the district is adopting.

Another important indicator at this level is chronic absenteeism – when a student has missed 10% of the school year at any point in time – schools implement attendance strategies to identify the root cause of the absences and encourage students to attend school every day.

At the High School level, English Language Arts (ELA) 9 Pass Rates (Gradebooks) is an important ELA benchmark. Students who are highly successful in their first year of high school English are more likely to participate in advanced coursework, like AP classes, in English, Social Studies/History, and the Arts later in high school.

In math, the Algebra I Pass Rate (Gradebooks) is a key

benchmark. Students who are highly successful in their first year of high school Math are more likely to participate in advanced coursework, like AP classes, in Math, Technology, and the Sciences later in high school.

“These indicators and more are covered on the Academic Achievement Public Dashboard. It is our hope that parents will refer to it regularly as a tool to inform their questions about their child’s education,” Mayor Mitchell added.

The first meeting of the Academic Achievement Subcommittee will take place on Wednesday, April 5, 6:30 p.m. at the Paul Rodrigues Administration Building. The public may view the meeting via Zoom: Meeting ID: 833 8264 2295, Passcode: 614559.

A link to the NBPS Academic Achievement Public Dashboard will be available on www.newbedfordschools.org.

Massachusetts May See Flood Of New Drivers, Fees

By Sam Drysdale
State House News Service

If all 200,000 newly-eligible undocumented immigrants apply for a driver’s license next fiscal year, their applications would far exceed the number of first-time license applications the Registry of Motor Vehicles issues every year.

On average, about 120,000 people in Massachusetts get a driver’s license for the first time each year, according to the Department of Transportation.

Under the new law the state passed last year, which upheld by

voters who shot down a repeal effort at the ballot box, Massachusetts residents without legal status will be eligible to apply for a license for the first time on July 1.

With a few months until this new group of people will become eligible all at once, the RMV is preparing for an influx of applicants.

The Registry anticipates hiring approximately 140 new workers and has already started that hiring process and planning for July, according to the RMV.

For some agencies, such as the MBTA, that are facing worker shortages and hiring struggles, the state is offering sign-on bonuses for new workers. But the RMV said it is currently not considering this tactic to fill the extra 140 positions.

The fiscal year 2023 state budget included about \$9 million for initial start-up costs for the Registry and Gov. Maura Healey is recommending that \$28 million be spent in fiscal year 2024 to implement the law.

The Healey administration has repeatedly said that standard RMV fees will offset the investment to bolster the Registry's capacity.

"And just one really important point, the fees that are collected, the vast majority of the resources that we're asking to be allocated, we will be recouping when folks are coming in to obtain their licenses, like everybody else who goes to the RMV and pays a fee," Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll said recently during an appearance on WCVB's "On The Record" program.

If all 200,000 newly-eligible residents apply for a license in fiscal year 2024, fees could more than counterbalance the governor's recommended \$28 million in funding, according to the Executive Office of Administration and Finance.

The Registry would receive about \$30.5 million in total revenue from the permit application fee, the road test fee and the license issuance fee from the new applicants, according to A&F.

If perhaps 70,000 of the 200,000 individuals also have a vehicle and plan to execute RMV transactions in connection with that vehicle, including paying the plate registration fee and the title fee, A&F said, the Registry would receive an additional \$9.4 million.

As of January 2022, a typical five-year car license costs \$75, driver's education certificates cost \$15, registration fees can cost up to \$100 and title certificates \$75, according to the RMV.

The \$28 million Healey recommends, if approved by the Legislature, would be used to train staff to verify new ID documents from other countries, hire more customer service representatives and road test examiners, invest in new technology to expand service operations, and develop procedures to ensure data privacy, Transportation Secretary Gina Fiandaca said at a department of transportation board meeting last week.

"Our registry leaders have been preparing for this both in personnel, you also have individuals who help with the driver's tests themselves, language acuity, so we are gearing up to make sure we're ready and have those adequate assets," Driscoll said. "These dollars are important to make sure we can do that, and again a lot of these resources are going to be recouped as members of the undocumented community come in to take those licenses, or take their driving tests."

The Legislature overrode former Gov. Charlie Baker's veto of the licensing bill to make it law. Baker said last year that the Registry of Motor Vehicles lacks the expertise to verify the many types of documents that other countries issue and

which will be relied upon as proof of identity.

Elizabeth Warren Announces Massachusetts Senate Reelection Campaign

The following is a press release sent to us by Senator Warren:

Today U.S. Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) officially announced her reelection campaign in a video on social media. Warren is running for re-election to deliver results for the Commonwealth, end corruption in Washington, make our economy work for the middle class, and protect our democracy.

“I first ran for Senate because I saw how the system is rigged for the rich and powerful and against everyone else. I won because Massachusetts voters know it, too. And now I’m running for Senate again because there’s a lot more we’ve got to do,” Senator Warren said in the video announcement. “Pass a wealth tax. Make child care affordable. Protect our coastal communities. Build a 21st century transportation system across all of Massachusetts. Oh, and like I’ve been saying for years – put stricter rules on banks so they don’t crash and hurt working people.”

“We know it won’t be easy. We’ve seen the powerful forces against us and how extreme the Republicans are. But the last ten years have taught us that when we organize, when we hold those in power accountable, when we fight righteous fights – then we can make positive change,” said Senator Warren. “That’s why I’m running for Senate – are you with us?”

The announcement video includes people from across Massachusetts and elected leaders such as U.S. Senator Ed Markey, U.S. Representative Ayanna Pressley and Boston Mayor Michelle Wu.

“Elizabeth is my partner in the Senate – and I have seen this perpetual energy machine up close. Passing a tax on greedy corporations paying zero taxes? She got it done,” said Senator Markey. “Making billionaires cry on TV? Done.”

“It’s always impossible, until it’s done. She never loses sight of the people,” said Representative Pressley. “She never forgets that policy is about people’s lives.”

“She won billions in funding for projects across our state, like a new electric school bus fleet,” added Mayor Wu “to help achieve a city Green New Deal!”

Massachusetts Gov. Healey files \$734 Million supplemental budget; universal school meals, clean energy, MBTA hiring

“The Healey-Driscoll administration filed a \$734 million supplemental budget to provide additional funding for core programs and services, such as COVID-era workforce and public health programs, and to make other one-time priority investments.

The funding proposed in this bill builds on the investments made in Governor Maura Healey and Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll's proposed budget recommendation for Fiscal Year 2024, with additional support for the state's universal school meals pilot program, clean energy and technology, and additional resources for the MBTA to better recruit and retain employees.

"In our Supplemental Budget, Lieutenant Governor Driscoll and I are proposing additional investments that will move us forward on our goals of increasing affordability, competitiveness and equity in Massachusetts," said Governor Healey. "The universal school meals program has proven to be a success in expanding access to nutritious meals for all students, and it's essential that we keep it running and evaluate our options for the future. We also know that workforce shortages are fueling the serious service issues at the MBTA, which is why we are proposing dedicated funding for hiring and retention. And this funding will play a key role in supporting our efforts to tackle the climate crisis and make Massachusetts a global leader in the clean energy economy."

"This supplemental budget will provide the funding needed to make sure critical programs that Massachusetts residents rely on are continued and expanded," said Lieutenant Governor Driscoll. "We look forward to working with our partners in the Legislature to advance universal school meals, clean energy and technology, and hiring at the MBTA, as well as ensure we are adequately supporting our health care workforce as the COVID-19 public health emergency comes to an end."

This bill fulfills Governor Healey's commitment to triple the operating budget of the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center with an additional \$35 million for the agency to keep Massachusetts on the cutting edge of clean technology and decarbonization efforts and to forge new partnerships with public higher education institutions and trades to grow the clean energy industry. This funding would be in addition to the new money

proposed for MassCEC in the administration's House 1 budget recommendation, and MassCEC would be authorized by this bill to establish the Salem Offshore Wind Terminal to further the creation of new green jobs.

This legislation requests an additional \$171 million to extend state-funded universal free school meals through the 2023-2024 school year. It also directs the Executive Office of Education to report by early next year on options to reform, modify or extend this program in a way that promotes equity, maximizes federal revenue and improves predictability and sustainability of funding into the future. The Healey-Driscoll Administration previously requested additional funding to continue the program through the end of the 2022-2023 school year.

The bill proposes \$20 million to enable the MBTA to better recruit and retain employees to meet its needs and deliver safe, reliable service across the system. This includes money that would be used to increase and expand hiring and retention bonuses, boost entry-level pay for bus operators, and develop a robust marketing campaign to support hiring efforts.

The bill also directs \$200 million toward a Critical Health and Human Services and Workforce Reserve to cover projected deficiencies in Fiscal Year 2023 and expenses in early Fiscal Year 2024 for the continuation of COVID-19 response and mitigation efforts. This includes temporary staffing relied upon to respond to health crises in our nursing homes, group care settings, state hospitals, and Soldiers' Homes.

The bill's workforce funding is necessary to ensure there are enough health professionals, including licensed practical nurses (LPNs) and certified nursing assistants (CNAs), to meet the needs of vulnerable residents under state care while we transition beyond the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The Healey-Driscoll administration is also proposing \$10 million to create a new LPN career ladder program to support

nursing facilities and home- and community-based services providers in their efforts to retain direct care staff and upskill them to LPNs. The program would fund no-interest loans and grants to support the cost of attending an LPN certification program, as well as living expenses while attending.

“We are pleased to have the resources necessary to continue to support critical health services for our most vulnerable residents, to build new pipelines for residents to start and advance their careers, and to make record investments in areas like clean energy that will ensure the Massachusetts economy is well positioned to grow and thrive,” said Administration and Finance Secretary Matthew J. Gorzkowicz

Other key investments recommended in this bill include:

- \$75 million for Chapter 766 rate relief to assist school districts in managing extraordinary increases in tuition prices for approved special education placement programs
- \$60 million to support caseworkers and staff at the Department of Transitional Assistance
- \$20 million for a bridge to stabilize critical victim service programs throughout the Commonwealth and ensure continued access to trauma-informed services in light of decreased federal funding through the Victims of Crime Act
- \$10 million to double the Cultural Facilities Fund for the Massachusetts Cultural Council
- \$5 million for the Martin Richard Field House
- \$3.5 million to support the redetermination process at MassHealth
- \$2 million for the celebration of the 250th Anniversary of the American Revolution

- \$100 million supplemental transfer to the pension fund, as agreed to with the House and Senate as part of the consensus revenue process to fully pay down pension liabilities attributable to the 2015 Early Retirement Incentive Program ahead of schedule.

Additionally, several outside sections would make recommended adjustments to municipal finance laws and governance. One of these changes would give municipalities more flexibility in how they spend opioid settlement money – making it easier for cities and towns to quickly use these resources for treatment and recovery services. They will also simplify accounting and fiscal rules regarding revolving funds, insurance proceeds and mitigation agreements. A separate section would also provide raises for sheriffs.

Finally, the administration is proposing to extend three Public Health Orders issued in connection with the COVID-19 public health emergency beyond the end of the emergency declaration on May 11. This legislation would permanently extend staffing flexibilities for advanced life support ambulances; temporarily extend staffing flexibilities for freestanding dialysis providers, and temporarily extend flexibilities for the administration of prescription medications to clients of state agencies who reside in community settings.

The spending recommended in this bill would be covered by a mix of available General Fund revenue and one-time resources.

Read the Governor's supplemental budget filing letter [here](#) and the bill [here](#)."

Massachusetts Health Care Spending Surge Comes At “Time Of Disruption”

A new report estimates that per capita health care expenditures in Massachusetts shot up 9 percent in 2021 after having dropped 2.3 percent in 2020, giving elected officials and policymakers fresh data two days ahead of hearing that could consider how the health costs oversight system put in place by a 2012 cost control law can account for the myriad changes brought on or exacerbated by the pandemic.

The Center for Health Information and Analysis, created under that 2012 law, released its annual report on Monday examining health care spending trends in 2021. The independent agency estimated total health care spending in Massachusetts at \$67.9 billion in 2021, and a per capita health care expenditure of \$9,715 per resident.

Use of the health care system and spending on it were held down in 2020 when routine care and scheduled procedures were put on hold to focus on reacting to the onset of the pandemic. As society and the economy inched back open in 2021, people sought more care and the intensity of the services needed was up. CHIA said that led to faster spending growth and strain on capacity across the health care system.

“Adding to financial pressures, 2021 saw the expiration of federal provider relief funds, and payers recorded losses due to claims costs exceeding premium revenues. At the same time, Massachusetts residents continued to face affordability challenges accessing needed care,” CHIA wrote in its report.

Massachusetts considers itself a model for health care reform, and since a 2006 law signed by Gov. Mitt Romney, the state has required most residents to obtain at least a minimum level of

insurance coverage or pay a tax penalty.

A 2022 survey found that nearly 90 percent of Bay Staters are satisfied with the quality of care, their own health plan and the ease of access to care, but costs remain a significant issue and regular barrier to actually seeking care.

Sixty-three percent said the cost of co-pays and bills have been a problem for their family's finances, ranking third behind only the costs of groceries and gas in the survey conducted by Beacon Research. Prescription drug prices and monthly health insurance premiums have each been problematic for 57 percent of people. And 42 percent said that they at least occasionally put off seeing a doctor, getting a test or having a procedure because of the cost.

CHIA Executive Director Lauren Peters said the report released ahead of Wednesday's Joint Committee on Health Care Financing and Health Policy Commission hearing provides a snapshot of "a time of disruption and evolving challenges for patients, consumers and the health care system at large."

"The unprecedented impact of COVID-19 is evidenced by the reversal of many historical trends related to health care spending and utilization in 2020 and a rebounding effect in 2021," Peters said. Because of "the anomalous nature of this period," the report that CHIA released Monday focused on the three-year period from 2019 through 2021 to "provide a more accurate and contextualized picture of the health care system in the Commonwealth," Peters said.

CHIA said that per resident health care expenditures increased at an annualized rate of 3.2 percent from 2019 through 2021 with increases in all service categories.

Pharmacy spending outpaced all other categories though, rising 9.6 percent from \$10.6 billion in 2019 to \$12.7 billion in 2021 before accounting for prescription drug rebates. In 2021 alone, gross prescription drug expenditures grew 11.1 percent.

Rebates reduced pharmacy spending by \$3.1 billion in 2021, to \$9.7 billion. Prescription drug rebates are estimated to have grown from \$2.3 billion in 2019 to \$3.1 billion over the last three years. After those rebates, spending for prescription drugs increased at an annualized rate of 7.5 percent from 2019 to 2021, CHIA said.

Between 2019 and 2021, premiums climbed at an annualized rate of 4.7 percent and claims covered by payers and employers increased at a rate of 5.7 percent, surpassing growth in wages and salaries (3.6 percent) and regional inflation (2.2 percent), CHIA said.

Member cost-sharing among private health plans rose 16.9 percent in 2021 to \$58 per member per month. Enrollment in high deductible health plans, under which patients pay more out of pocket before insurance kicks in, grew by 4.1 percent and now accounts for 42.7 percent of enrollments in the private market, the report said.

The CHIA report found that overall acute hospital profitability, measured by the median total margin, was 5.2 percent in hospital fiscal year 2021 – up 2.6 percentage points on the year. The statewide median operating margin was 1.1 percent, a decrease of 0.2 percentage points, and the median non-operating margin was 3 percent, up 2.5 percentage points. Hospitals counted \$386 million in federal and state relief funding in their operating revenue in HFY 2021 compared to \$2.1 billion in HFY 2020, CHIA said.

Also Monday, the Massachusetts Health & Hospital Association said that its own recent survey found that hospitals spent \$1.3 billion more for temporary staffing in fiscal year 2022 (\$1.52 billion) than they did pre-pandemic in fiscal 2019 (\$204 million). Seventy-seven percent of the spending was on temporary nurses.

Well short of the number of workers needed, hospitals are also

offering big signing and retention bonuses, and have increased average hourly wages for in-house staff from 13 percent to 20 percent, MHA said.

“The healthcare workforce market in Massachusetts and around the U.S. has been upended and it is unclear where the change is taking us,” MHA President and CEO Steve Walsh said. “The traveler agencies and temporary-worker trend has introduced a highly volatile variable in the budgeting and forecasting models hospitals use to remain financially stable and accessible to patients. Any state effort to analyze and constrain healthcare cost growth must recognize this dramatic workforce shift now occurring. This is a trend that demands our collective policy focus.”

Massachusetts Association of Health Plans President and CEO Lora Pellegrini said that insurers took financial losses in 2021 because premium revenue could not keep pace with claims costs as people again sought care in-person and expanded coverage requirements stayed in place.

She specifically pointed to prescription drug spending as “a significant and ongoing challenge to containing health care costs” and lamented that the area is “absent from accountability to the state’s cost growth benchmark.”

“As health insurance premiums reflect the cost of care, it is critical that the state take action to address these rising health care costs. In conjunction with a strong benchmark, we urge the state to take steps to hold all entities accountable for cost growth, enhancing competition, and correcting market dysfunction,” Pellegrini said.

Although the Legislature approved some major reforms including a landmark mental health access bill last session, the governor, House and Senate each prioritized a different aspect of the health care world, leaving numerous loose ends that lawmakers could elect to pick back up between now and July

2024.

The House last session approved legislation that would update the regulatory process for large health care providers trying to expand into markets covered by smaller, financially vulnerable community hospitals. In part, the House leadership priority bill would have allowed the HPC to examine not just merger and acquisition costs and impacts but also probe the market impacts of hospital expansions.

The Senate never took it up for a debate or a vote.

Meanwhile, the House never took up a Senate-approved bill that would cap out-of-pocket insulin spending at \$25 per month, require pharmaceutical companies to notify the state before significant price increases or rolling out new drugs, and subject drug manufacturers and pharmacy benefit managers to both the HPC's annual cost trend hearings and to examination by CHIA.

The HPC itself has been vocal about its desire to see lawmakers ramp up its regulatory might, subject medical industry power players to additional scrutiny and limitations, and lessen the burden residents face from health insurance premiums and cost-sharing.

"Entering the new session, there is no real starting point for the next round of reform, but growing realization that action is necessary to prevent system closures and spiraling costs," the Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation wrote in a memo earlier this year previewing topics likely up for debate on Beacon Hill this session.

[Michael P. Norton contributed to this report.]

OPINION: “New Bedford’s Mayor and councilors are showing no value to their employees”

The following is an opinion sent to New Bedford Guide. It does not reflect the opinion of New Bedford Guide, nor is it an OP-ED. In fairness and objectivity, we share opinions from our readers whether we agree or disagree with their opinion.

“New Bedford Residents, please read:

New Bedford’s Mayor and councilors are showing no value to their employees of the city. The city councilors that New Bedford residents elect to gain your confidence are letting the Mayor do what he’s doing to your city servants and police.

What is he really doing with your tax dollars is the question. If the Mayor isn’t helping keep these positions filled, the city employees with the police are applying for jobs and obtaining them in surrounding towns and cities for a better wage. What is this telling the New Bedford residents? Wake up, people! This is your city.

The City of New Bedford has over 60 positions available because the City doesn’t provide a fair and competitive wage. The numbers are rising!! Residents have to start asking where your your tax dollars are going!

It’s happening with your safety and your public servants! What are the city councilors that you elected doing for you???

Your city workers are:

- Building custodians that clean your city buildings
- Mechanics that maintain city vehicles, fire, police, Ems,

sanders & plows, all city vehicles

- Electricians, plumbers, carpenters that take care of your buildings, lights and plumbing issues.
- Welders that take care of all equipment to run the city
- Dispatchers that watch over your safety & police & Ems
- Animal control that take care of the city with wildlife
- Airport staff that takes care of the airport
- Various positions at your water dept that takes part of your water & sewer issues, to maintaining your city streets
- Zoo dept that takes care of your public zoo
- Building inspectors that inspect your buildings for codes
- Sanitarians that look over your city to make sure your health is important
- Numerous positions in every office throughout the city that takes care of entering all work of everyone, to billing all vendors for all this work being done on a Daily Basis.
- Parking enforcement to make sure everyone is following parking issues

All these positions that are a big part of the city, a lot of the people don't know are out there. Positions the people pay for. This city needs a fair wage and your Mayor and councilors are holding back your money and holding back your services that the city is supposed to be providing you, the people of New Bedford.

The numbers are rising

It's on the AFSME Greater New Bedford Page. Please help us to get this out to all who read your page. This page is a great resource for the people of New Bedford and we hope to have your support! 0Robert Vicente."-AFSME LOCAL 851.

Senators Warren and Markey Reintroduce Resolution Memorializing Those Lost to COVID-19

United States Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Edward J. Markey (D-Mass.) reintroduced a resolution to memorialize those lost to COVID-19. The resolution would designate the first Monday in March as “COVID-19 Victims Memorial Day.” The resolution was first introduced in August of 2021.

“Many of our families, friends, and communities are still struggling with the impact of COVID-19 and coping with the loss of loved ones the pandemic stole from us too soon,” said Senator Warren. “This resolution will give long-overdue recognition and honor to those we have lost to COVID-19.”

“Too many families know the pain and have felt the heartbreak that is losing a loved one to COVID-19,” said Senator Markey. “As we approach the third year of this pandemic, we must continue to honor the lives of the more than one million of our fellow Americans – friends, neighbors, loved ones – who have been lost to this horrible disease. This resolution recognizes our nation’s immeasurable mourning and serves as a reminder for Congress to renew its commitment to protecting communities from this ongoing public health crisis.”

There have been more than 100 million cases of COVID-19 in the United States, and over 1.1 million Americans who have tragically lost their lives to this disease. COVID-19 has had a disproportionate impact on low-income communities and communities of color, exacerbating existing inequities that were already prevalent in our health systems and that must be addressed.

The resolution is supported by the advocacy organization, Marked By COVID.

“We must mark our losses together to brace against a nation’s crushing sadness. Upstanders like Senator Warren and Rep. Stanton, as well as countless activists and individuals, have shown me and my family solidarity in both pain and progress,” said Kristin Urquiza, co-founder of Marked By Covid. “We are unified in our commitment to observe Covid Memorial Day – and remember people like my dad Mark – on the first Monday of March, in perpetuity.”

Representative Greg Stanton (D-Ariz.) reintroduced this resolution in the U.S. House of Representatives.