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Subject: HB706 Human Rights for All e-Newsletter
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House Bill 706 e-Newsletter

No.4
July/August 2005

Greetings!

Even though the state legislature is taking a break, local government and non-governmental groups are taking a lead in prioritizing the human rights concerns of the citizens of the state.

The Barnstable County Assembly of Delegates has been holding hearings on a proposal to establish a Human Rights Commission. The Boston Women's Fund and collaborators have been soliciting input for a "State of Women and Girls in Massachusetts" address in January.

You too can contribute to a grassroots response to report human rights violations resulting from the Patriot Act. Time is short (deadline August 29th), so act NOW.

Last but not least, August 26th is Women's Equality Day. Celebrate the 85th anniversary of the Suffrage Amendment to the U.S. Bill of Rights! One way to do so is to request a bundle of pocket-sized versions of CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, also known as the international bill of rights for women, to give to your friends, colleagues and legislators.

News and Actions

- [State of Massachusetts Women and Girls](#)
- [Support the establishment of a Human Rights Commission on the Cape](#)
- [Urgent: Have you Witnessed Human Rights being Violated under the US Patriot Act?](#)
- [Do you have a portable copy of CEDAW?](#)

State of Massachusetts Women and Girls

A coalition of groups, spear-headed by the Boston Women's Fund, is planning an event in January of 2006 as an alternative to the traditional State of the State and State of the City messages from the government. We feel that the issues of concern and the realities faced by women and girls are glaringly absent from these official messages.

In order to highlight the voices and concerns of women living in Massachusetts communities, MassCEDAW is asking: "If you had a chance to dialogue with State legislators and politicians on critical issues in your community that affect women and girls disproportionately, which would be the three most important issues on the agenda?"

Please send your responses to info@masscedaw.org by September 5. Also let us know if you'd like to be added to the event's mailing list or want to be involved in planning this event.

- [HB706 Testimonies now online](#)
- [Who we are](#)

Support the establishment of a Human Rights Commission on the Cape

Barnstable County Government is the glue that binds together the 15 distinct towns of Cape Cod, administering over \$26 million in funding for economic development, domestic violence prevention, human services, and the arts. But in addition to providing programs and services, county government could take a more assertive position in ensuring the human dignity and human rights of visitors and residents. At least that's the view held by the Anti-discrimination Task Force formed early this year to advocate for the creation of a Barnstable County Human Rights Commission.

Over the past 10 years, the county itself has commissioned six different studies, each of which demonstrated that discrimination is a daily occurrence on Cape Cod. In preparing their proposal, task force members combed through back issues of the Cape Cod Times to identify incidents in which Cape Cod residents suffered harassment, abuse, or discrimination because of who they were. Some examples included verbal harassment of lesbians, racial profiling of persons of color, physical attacks on Native Americans and public facilities that are inaccessible to the elderly and disabled. These specific examples were supplemented with data drawn from complaints filed with the Massachusetts Commission Against Discrimination, including information on the amounts paid out by government agencies in awards to public employees who had been discriminated against in the workplace.

Johanna Flax, a spokesperson for the task force, sees the proposed commission as playing a strong educative role in addition to actively mediating disputes. The proposed commission will be a resource for people facing any form of discrimination in their daily lives. But, in addition, by clearly communicating norms and standards of behavior that respect and protect human rights universally, the commission can work with businesses, institutions, and government agencies to evolve a set of best practices that can have a tangible effect in improving life for everyone, especially vulnerable populations.

Members of the county's assembly of delegates will hold a third and final hearing on the merits of this proposal on Wednesday, September 7 at 7 p.m. at the Cape Cod Senior Residence's dining hall at 100 Dr. Julius Kelly Lane in the town of Pocasset. The public is invited to attend and speak. Those who cannot attend, are invited to submit statements to Speaker Thomas Bernardo via e-mail (aofd@cape.com) or post (First District Courthouse, P.O. Box 427, Barnstable, MA 02130).

Urgent: Have you Witnessed Human Rights being Violated under the US Patriot Act?

If so, we need the information by **August 29th**. The Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute invites your assistance in responding to a request from the Geneva-based United Nations Human Rights Committee. The Committee has invited U.S. residents and U.S.-

Related Links

[Joint Judiciary Committee](#)

[Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute](#)

[Women's Equality Day](#)

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based non-governmental organizations to provide documentation on human rights violations occurring in the United States in the course of enforcing the U.S. Patriot Act. For information on the human rights most closely related to the areas covered by the U.S. Patriot Act, see the International [Covenant](#) on Civil and Political Rights.

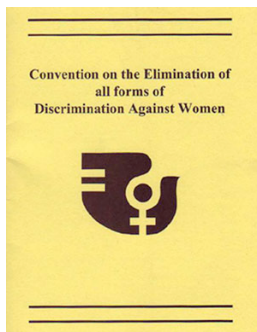
These violations may have involved non-citizens, people of Middle Eastern heritage, library users, foreign students, incarcerated persons, or any others. This documentation can take a fairly simple form. Simply stick to the facts and include:

1. the date of the incident
2. the place where the incident occurred
3. a brief description of the incident
4. the name of the government official or agent involved
5. the name of the victim/s whose rights were violated
6. information on any complaint or lawsuit subsequently filed by the victim
7. your name and contact information.

Please send your documentation of such incidents to 2005@mcli.org no later than **Monday, August 29**.

The UN Human Rights Committee is charged with monitoring compliance with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights but does not have the capacity to collect data at the grassroots level. Some of the data provided to the Meiklejohn Institute may be included in shadow reports filed subsequent to the next U.S. government official report under the ICCPR, which is currently overdue.

Do you have a portable copy of CEDAW?



You may want to get re-aquainted with the rights enshrined in CEDAW before you comment on the State of Massachusetts Women and Girls. Copies of the CEDAW passport (4" x 3") may be ordered for \$5 per 10 copies, inclusive of postage and handling. Send us an [email](#) with the number you want (in multiples of 10), together with your mailing address, and mail your check to The Massachusetts CEDAW Project c/o The Center for Women's Health and

Human Rights, Suffolk University, 8 Ashburton Place, Boston, MA 02108.

HB706 Testimonies now online

If you are still doubtful of how a human rights approach can effectively tackle our immediate concerns, please read the many written testimonies on behalf of the bill, now available on-line at www.masscedaw.org. The committee will continue to accept written testimony on behalf of HB706 until it meets in executive session in September to vote on the bill. Statements should be sent to the Joint Judiciary Committee, Room 138, State House, Boston 02133. Please send us a copy for our archives.

Who we are

The Massachusetts Human Rights for All Initiative is a collaborative response of Amnesty International, the Coalition for a Strong United Nations, the Massachusetts CEDAW Project, Massachusetts Welfare Rights Union, Survivor's Inc. and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, to the opportunity HB706 offers for deepening our understanding of and commitment to universal human rights.

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