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House Bill 706 e-Newsletter

No.5
December 1, 2005

Greetings!

Celebrate **Rosa Parks Human Rights Day** by phoning **State Representative Eugene O'Flaherty** today. It's now been nearly six months since the Joint Judiciary Committee held its public hearing on the Massachusetts Human Rights for All Bill (HB706). While testimony and letters in favor of the bill continue to arrive in the offices of committee members, the committee hasn't yet taken any action on the bill.

*With the inauguration of **Rosa Parks Human Rights Day** in the City of Boston and **International Human Rights Day** (December 10) just around the corner, isn't it about time for the committee to give this bill a favourable recommendation and move it along to the full legislature? The decision to call for a vote in Executive Committee rests almost entirely in the hands of **State Representative Eugene O'Flaherty**, house chair of the committee. Please, call him today at **617-722-2396**. Tell him we can't wait any longer for our human rights! Ask him to schedule a committee meeting now.*

Our sincere thanks to those state legislators and public officials who have written eloquently in Support of House Bill 706. The following excerpts from their [letters of support](#) filed with the Joint Judiciary Committee could make terrific talking points for your phone call to Rep. O'Flaherty:

- "This bill represents a vital first step towards making human rights a priority in Massachusetts. International human rights standards provide a valuable prism through which we can evaluate our own law and policies for everyone." *State Rep. Frank Smizik*

HB706 Supporters

- African and African American Development, Education, and Research Training Institute
- American Association of University Women - MA
- American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts
- Amherst Human Rights Commission
- Amnesty International USA
- ARISE for Social Justice
- Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence
- Association of Haitian Women
- Boston Black Women's Health Institute
- Boston Women's Fund
- Brockton Commission on the Status of Women
- Cambridge City Council
- Cambridge Human Rights Commission
- Cambridge Peace Commission
- Cambridge Women's Commission
- Center for New Words
- Center for Women's Health and Human Rights, Suffolk University
- Centro Presente
- Coalition for a Strong United Nations
- Citizens for an Informed Community (Greater Bridgewater)
- Community Change, Inc.
- Greater Boston Civil Rights Coalition
- Greater Boston Physicians for

- "Massachusetts residents have social, cultural, and economic needs that need to be viewed holistically." *State Rep. Kay Khan*
- "The Commonwealth should be proactive on securing the best possible policies for its residents." *State Rep. Ellen Story*
- "By passing this legislation and beginning a process of preliminary review, the legislature could ensure that universal principles are carefully incorporated in Massachusetts law wherever possible." *Boston City Councilor Felix Arroyo*

News and Comments

- [HB706 Supporters](#)
- [The Current Health Care Debate is ALL About Your Human Rights](#)
- [Save the Date: January 25, 2006](#)
- [NGO Involvement Can Help the United States Meet its Human Rights Obligations](#)
- [New Workshops Available from MassCEDAW](#)

The Current Health Care Debate is ALL About Your Human Rights

Human rights tells us that health care must be accessible, available, and culturally acceptable. A recent report from Pennsylvania's state legislature affirms that health care is a fundamental human right and not a commodity to be made available only to those who can afford it. The current healthcare crisis in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (600,000 Massachusetts residents are uninsured) demonstrates that our government has abandoned its legal responsibility, under Chapter 55 of the United Nations Charter, to "promote higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development. . . and universal respect for, and observance of, human rights."

[The Health Care for Massachusetts constitutional amendment](#) has been proposed as a means to resolve the state's health care crisis. This amendment would establish "affordable, comprehensive, and equitably financed" healthcare as a responsibility of the state. This is a tangible good, and one that could conceivably be scaled to an individual's income. However, the group of stakeholders referenced by the "equitably financed" clause in the amendment puts corporations, organizations, and interest groups on the same footing as individuals, rather than recognizing the primacy of human rights and needs.

While the editors of the HB706 newsletter urge every supporter of HB706 to also go on record as supporting the Health Care for Massachusetts amendment before the May 2006 constitutional congress, we believe that the positive implications of this amendment would be significantly strengthened by the passage of HB706.

HB706 will strengthen the positive outcomes of the Health Care for

Social Responsibility

- HarborCOV, Inc.
- Healthcare for All
- Human Rights Education Associates
- League of Women Voters of Massachusetts
- Martin Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights
- Massachusetts Association of Human Rights and Relations Commissions
- Massachusetts CEDAW Project
- Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women
- Massachusetts Correctional Legal Services
- Massachusetts Lawyers Alliance for World Security
- Massachusetts Welfare Rights Union
- Men's Resource Center (Amherst)
- National Association of Social Workers- Massachusetts Chapter
- National Association for Women- Massachusetts Chapter
- Peace and Justice Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
- Physicians for Human Rights
- ROCA, Inc.
- Somali Development Center, Inc.
- Somerville Women's Commission
- Survivors, Inc.
- Traprock Peace Center
- UDHR Project, Heller School, Brandeis University
- Unitarian Universalist Service Committee
- United for Justice with Peace
- University of Massachusetts Boston Human Rights Working Group
- Western Massachusetts Darfur Coalition
- WILD for Human Rights (San Francisco)
- Women's Action for New Directions, Newburyport Chapter
- Women's Bar Association
- Women's Community Cancer Project
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- Women's International Network (WIN) News
- Zonta Club of Northampton Area

It's not too late to join us!
Download our endorsement packet

[here](#)

Massachusetts amendment by:

- Making it impossible for the state to delegate responsibility for purchasing health care to the individual without state subsidy.
- Requiring the state to take proactive measures rather than reacting to future law suits, brought by plaintiffs at considerable expense.
- Expand the rights of individuals beyond medical care and into the workplace and environment, both of which can have significant impact on an individual's health.

HB706 will enhance the benefits of the Health Care for Massachusetts constitutional amendment. Ask your state legislators to support both.

Save the Date: January 25, 2006

Thirty years after the passage of the Massachusetts Equal Rights Amendment, what exactly *is* the *State of Women and Girls in Massachusetts*?

Find out on **January 25, 2006 at 11 a.m.** when the [Boston Women's Fund](#), its affiliates and allies, begin a new tradition on the state house staircase (2nd floor). This year's event, entitled "From Impoverishment to Economic Justice," will focus on themes of transformation and accountability. If your group would like to endorse this event or contribute to the planning process, please contact Hayat Imam at hayat@bostonwomensfund.org.

NGO Involvement Can Help the United States Meet its Human Rights Obligations

The United Nations Human Rights Committee has requested comments from US-based non-governmental and civil society organizations relative to reports recently submitted by the US regarding its implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The ICCPR sets global legal standards regarding the protection of civil liberties, criminal justice procedures, and citizenship/ immigrant rights.

During the fall meeting of the Committee at the UN office in Geneva, the US submitted its long overdue 2nd and 3rd periodic reports along with [an updated core document](#) for review. At the same time, the US also provided an updated appendix to the report filed this past spring to fulfill its obligations under the International Covenant Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Human Rights Committee had been highly critical of that earlier report which failed to discuss the treatment of prisoners held in Guantanamo and under armed forces control in Iraqi prisons.

The review of the US report will be held during the Committee's March 2006 meeting at UN headquarters in New York. In order to prepare its comments and questions in response to US reports, the Committee is soliciting information or "shadow reports" from US-based non- governmental and civil society organizations familiar with conditions and practices in the US relative to areas governed by the ICCPR. In preparing these reports, NGOs are asked to maximize coordination among themselves and meet a submission

Resources

[International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#)

[Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute](#)

[Global Rights](#)

["Stiffed by U.S., UN Asks Groups to Report on U.S. Rights Violations" by Niko Kyriakou](#)

[Health Care for Massachusetts Campaign](#)

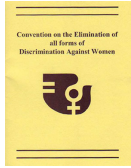


[Find out more!](#)

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deadline of **December 27, 2005**; organizations experienced in compiling and submitting such reports include Global Rights, the American Civil Liberties Union, and the Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Institute. For more information, contact Laura at the Center for Women's Health and Human Rights, Suffolk University, 617-994-4222.

New Workshops Available from MassCEDAW



1. Looking through the UDHR Lens/Human Rights Refresher

2. Bringing Human Rights Home: Localizing CEDAW and Other Human Rights Treaties

Timely and customized for audiences in Massachusetts, these interactive workshops run between 75 and 120 minutes and can be modified to fit your organization's regular meeting time. Contact Colleen Lynch at 617-994-4222 for scheduling or other information.

Read about **Survivors, Inc.** on Women's E-news.

Survivors, Inc. is a founding partner in the Massachusetts Human Rights for All Initiative.

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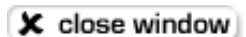
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