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House Bill 706 e-Newsletter

No.3
June 2005

Greetings!

In the Massachusetts legislative process, sponsorship doesn't always indicate active support. With this in mind, we want to extend our sincere thanks to State Representatives **Frank Smizik, Alice Wolf, Kay Khan and Ellen Story** for submitting letters of support for HB706 to the Joint Judiciary Committee. We hope that over the coming week, [the other 10 co-sponsors of HB706](#) will write to the committee expressing their support for this bill. **Take a moment to remind your legislators** that HB706 offers their constituents an opportunity to take an active role in applying international human rights standards and treaties to attain social justice in the Commonwealth. **Encourage them to work behind the scenes to move HB706 out of committee with a favorable recommendation.**

News

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[MA Legislature's Joint Judiciary Committee Hearing on HB706](#)

Repeatedly, we were told, "get your people there on time." And all 14 individuals slated to give testimony on behalf of the Massachusetts Human Rights Bill (along with lots of additional HB706 supporters) were indeed there promptly at 1 p.m. on Tuesday June 7 when the legislative hearing scheduled by the

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 Social Responsibility

Joint Judiciary Committee opened.

In Massachusetts, the Committee hearing is the entry point for public commentary on proposed legislation. However, over 100 separate bills were scheduled for the June 7 hearing.

It was muggy and hot both inside and outside the crowded, windowless chamber in the basement of the State House. At around 4 p.m., State Representative Alice Wolf sent a message to the committee co-chairs requesting that Cathy Albisa (National Social and Economic Human Rights Initiative) be taken "out of turn" so that she could catch her plane back to New York City. By 6:15 p.m., the ranks of HB706's supporters were severely depleted, but our bill still had not been called.

Only co-chairs State Representative O'Flaherty and State Senator Creedon remained to ask questions of the four individuals giving prepared testimony when the hearing on HB706 finally began at 6:45 p.m. In addition to these four (Joe Wronka, Mei-Mei Ellerman, Dottie Stevens and Monica Driggers), Amy Agigian and Laura Roskos also spoke on behalf of the bill. There was no public testimony offered opposing HB706.

Several of our panelists submitted written statements to the committee. Here are a few excerpts from their submissions:

"Human rights brings a human-centered approach to evaluating government performance and ensuring that policies and programs are responsive, efficient and fair. . . . Anchoring our assessments of government performance in a model that centers human dignity and equality ensures that government fulfills its first and most significant obligation: *to represent and serve the people*. But it also dresses this lofty goal in sensible clothing that should appeal to all who support efficient and streamlined governance: e.g. a pro-active approach that seeks to identify problems and gaps before they squander resources and/or cause egregious harms."

--**Barbara Schulman**, former MA resident now coordinator of the [New York City Human Rights Initiative](#)

"The work on HB 706 recognizes that the citizens of the State of Massachusetts must be guaranteed basic economic and social rights standards in order to protect the liberty and dignity that every democracy owes to its citizens. . . . It cannot be a question of investing in education at the cost of protecting health, or investing in security at the cost of education--but rather solutions must emerge from a solid commitment to guarantee all fundamental rights."

--**Catherine Albisa**, executive director of the [National Economic and Social Rights Initiative](#)

"Passing HB 706 is an important step in bringing the state of Massachusetts in line with the UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, and other international human rights agreements. . . . I fervently urge the Massachusetts Joint Judiciary Committee to vote in favor of HB 706, to help our state regain its leadership role in the fight for human rights, and ensure not just the well-being, but the very survival of hundreds of thousands of women, children and men,

Social Responsibility

- HarborCOV, Inc.
- Healthcare for All
- Human Rights Education Associates
- League of Women Voters of Massachusetts
- Martín 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
- Peace and Justice Committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts
- Physicians for Human Rights
- ROCA, 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](#)

Related Links

[Joint Judiciary Committee](#)

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both international and domestic victims of modern day slavery."
 --**Mei-Mei Ellerman**, resident of Wellesley and coordinator of the [Polaris Project Boston Chapter](#)

Full text of these and other written statements submitted at the June 7 hearing will soon be 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 to vote on the bill. Statements should be sent to the **Joint Judiciary Committee, Room 138, State House, Boston 02133**. Please also make a copy for our archives.

Now More Than Ever

On June 2, lead sponsor Ellen Story hosted a briefing on HB706 which was attended by about 15 legislative aides and State Rep. Byron Rushing. Simmons College biology professor Connie Chow and Florinda Russo, deputy director of Amnesty International's Northeast Regional Office, fielded questions for over an hour while providing lively commentary on the benefits HB706 would offer the Commonwealth.

Interest in HB706 is growing within the legislature. **If you have not yet spoken to your state representative or senator about this initiative, please do so now.**

Women as Human Rights Defenders

Upcoming Event at Brockton City Hall
 39 Montauk Road
 June 22, 7:00 p.m.

An informal talk and interactive learning circle with **Rita Arditti** (right), author of *Searching for Life: the Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo and the Disappeared Children of Argentina*, and **Laura Roskos**, activist-in-residence at Suffolk University's Center for Women's Health and Human Rights. We'll share stories of courageous women confronting injustice and practice using a human rights lens to frame injustices in our own communities. We will also discuss the implications of the Massachusetts Human Rights Bill (HB706) for activists working on women's issues such as sexual and domestic violence, health care, and living-wage jobs. Free and open to the public.

This event is sponsored by the Brockton Mayor's Commission on the Status of Women. Contact Katie Stanton at 508-584-4315 for more information.

Summer is a great time to host a human rights focused event in your community. We'd be happy to help. Write to us at info@masscedaw.org or phone the initiative at 617-461-3230.

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

[Center for New Words](#)

[AAUW Newsletter](#)

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Join our mailing list!

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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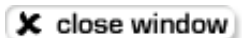
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