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## House Bill 706 e-Newsletter

No.7  
March 2006

### Greetings!

The Joint Judiciary Committee has asked for and been granted an extension of “one to two months” to complete work on the hundreds of bills assigned to them this session, of which **House Bill 706, the Massachusetts Human Rights for All Act**, is one. Although U.S. compliance with international treaty law has been in the headlines more often than usual lately, HB706 has had to struggle to become a priority for our beleaguered state legislature. And, beleaguered it is. The legislature has been in a reactive mode this term as crisis after crisis seems to drive the agenda. House Bill 706 takes a road less traveled in that it aims to improve state government.

The study authorized by HB706 would help the Commonwealth understand how the state’s legal framework could be in greater alignment with international human rights standards where those standards exceed what is currently in place. **It signals that Massachusetts will take a proactive stance in reducing the likelihood that human rights abuses and violations would occur within the Commonwealth and offer those whose rights are violated in the future a stronger legal footing for advancing their claims.** Numerous State Reps and their aides claim that the pursuit of reform measures such as this are inappropriate for tough times like ours, where over a half a million Massachusetts residents are bereft of health insurance and gun violence is overtaking the streets of our urban neighborhoods. How should a leader respond to such crises? We insist that the most adequate responses are those that move us towards a more satisfying long term goal: a Commonwealth respectful and protective of everyone’s human rights. While HB706 seems aspirational in these crisis-driven times, integrating international human rights standards and process values

### 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

into state law would show our state's leadership at its best.

What you can do now:

1. Monitor the joint judiciary committee to help ensure that when they decide to "exec" the bill, someone knowledgeable about the campaign in support of HB706 is in the room. Call 617-461-3230 if you have any info on where and when they'll be meeting, and/or go yourself!
2. Make it real: if you have a story about a local human rights violation that you witnessed, suffered or perpetrated, write to your state legislator about it. Explain how more thorough human rights education, a stronger human rights legal culture, or stricter due diligence on the part of the state in human rights protection could have prevented or remedied the situation. Remind him or her that HB706 speaks to the situation you're describing. And send us a copy at [info@masscedaw.org](mailto:info@masscedaw.org).

## News and Comments

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### [Trina Jackson Reflects on the US Human Rights Network National Conference](#)

Human rights mobilize communities most at risk and build the leadership, knowledge and skills of those affected to defend their rights. This was one of the core messages at the US Human Rights Network National Conference last November 11-13 in Atlanta. Under the theme, "No Retreat, No Compromise," activists in different areas of work gathered to learn strategies for using the human rights framework to advance social justice in the US.

Even though there is still tension within the social justice movement about the usefulness of a human rights framework, there were numerous examples presented at the conference of how human rights is currently being used to win battles against worker exploitation, environmental injustice, healthcare inequities, racial discrimination, anti-immigrant, housing discrimination, police brutality, sexual harassment, and voter intimidation. A critical organizing strategy is a using a "participatory model," whereby communities are educated about international human rights standards and then apply those standards to their local situation. This process enables communities to see themselves in a larger context, and breaks through the sense of isolation that comes with systemic

### 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

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oppression.

The conference also organized caucuses in different issue areas, ranging from the death penalty to workers rights. The most glaring omission was a caucus on violence against women, a topic that was missing from the overall conference agenda. When I inquired about it, I understood that neither a proposal was submitted nor did anyone suggest it as a caucus prior to the conference. I was invited, however, to petition for a caucus on site, and upon doing so, attracted nine people from different issue areas, all whom considered violence against women an important human rights issue. We discussed how human rights applied to women's status is still primarily considered an international issue and the pervasive myth of US women having attained complete equality. This reflects a need to clarify why women's rights are important to the US human rights framework.

More public education is needed about human rights standards; community-based organizations need to know how to apply human rights standards to local work, and how to implement international standards into local policy and lawmaking.

--by Trina Jackson

*Editor's Note: The Massachusetts CEDAW Project offers two participatory training modules customizable for use by local organizations as either a special community event or as part of their usual programming. Contact [us](#) for more information.*

For more conference highlights, see [www.ushrnetwork.org](http://www.ushrnetwork.org)

#### Human Rights Education Bill passed in Mississippi

With the passage of Senate Bill 2718 by the Mississippi House of Representatives on March 14, the State Board of Education will have official sanction to include civil rights and human rights education in all public schools, effective July 2006.

According to the [Hattiesburg American](#), the state superintendent of education Hank Bounds is enthusiastic about the opportunity to include information about the civil rights movement in the curriculum. While he and other educators in the state will have the advice and assistance of the Mississippi Civil Rights Education Commission, to be established in accordance with the bill, to incorporate civil rights history and issues in a variety of classes and programs, he and the Commission might also look further north to Minnesota for examples to introduce human rights thinking and practice in the schools.

To support the Minnesota Human Rights Commission's "Educate to Eliminate" initiative that aims to prevent rights violations before they occur, the Commission partnered with the University of Minnesota Human Rights Resource Center to create model lesson plans that would create an environment of mutual respect, learn about examples of human rights violations around the world and in the US, and provide students with the opportunity to develop actions that promote human rights in their community or school. The "This is my home" Tool Kit was designed to meet the state's

education and the right to housing

[Center for Housing Rights and Evictions](#)

[Amnesty International's Human Rights Education program](#)

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K- 12 standards. It was distributed to all schools in Fall 2005 and is supported by a [website](#).

While individual teachers and organizations such as [Human Rights Education Associates](#) have been engaged in incorporating human rights education in schools, such recent state-wide initiatives in Mississippi and Minnesota to infuse rights-based education into K-12 curriculum set a new trend in the United States. With the UN Decade of Human Rights Education behind us, and the more recent World Programme for Human Rights Education ahead, with its emphasis on elementary and secondary education, the Mississippi and Minnesota initiatives provide another way by which states can engage in the international human rights community. We hope that activists and educators here in Massachusetts will be inspired to launch similar efforts.

### Report: Panel on Women and US Human Rights Organizing

MassCEDAW, together with the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom's [Advancing Human Rights Issues Committee](#), organized a roundtable Monday evening, March 6 during the UN Commission on the Status of Women meeting in New York. Titled "Women Engaged: Powerful Multipliers in US Human Rights Organizing," it was hosted by the Columbia University Partnership for International Development at the Columbia School of Social Work.



Tonya Williams (left) and Ejim Dike.

Laura Roskos moderated, with informative, enthusiastic presentations by Tonya Williams, [Women & Katrina Project](#), US Human Rights Network; Ejim Dike, [New York City Human Rights Initiative](#), Urban Justice Center; and Marilyn Clement [HealthCare Now!](#) about their work.

Ms. Williams noted how, in its response to Hurricane Katrina, the U.S. government failed to follow the human rights guidelines it utilizes when providing disaster relief abroad and demonstrated how established human rights language provides an inclusive framework for meeting the needs of all people—homeowners and renters, citizens and non-citizens, men and women, teenagers and babies—affected. Following this same method of applying international human rights principles and perspectives to domestic crises, Ms. Clement argued for the adoption of U.S. House Resolution 676, which essentially extends Medicaid so that “everyone is in, no one is out” of a national health care plan. The New York City initiative described by Ms. Dike would integrate human rights standards of non-discrimination into the laws of the city, which could make a substantial difference in the allocation of city resources. The New York City initiative builds on and extends the successful implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination (CEDAW) by San

Francisco, and aims to improve the accountability structures established by that effort.

### US violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: VAWA

*International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, Article 3: "The States Parties to the present Covenant undertake to ensure the equal right of men and women to the enjoyment of all civil and political rights set forth in the present Covenant."*

Yet: US-based civil society organizations submitted the following analysis to the UN Human Rights Committee in January 2006, as part of a longer memo detailing US violations of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

"While the federal Violence Against Women Act ("VAWA") (discussed in ¶¶ 81-86 and Annex II of the U.S. Government's Second and Third Periodic Report) reflects a serious effort to encourage, through offering grants, programs to prohibit gender violence and to protect as well as support the victims of private gender violence, it fails in some key respects to adequately address the several critical aspects of the problem.

As a result of two U.S. Supreme Court cases decided after VAWA was enacted, *United States v. Morrison*, 529 U.S. 598 (2000), and *Castle Rock v. Gonzales*, 125 S.Ct. 2796 (2005), there is no federal civil remedy to compensate women (1) for violence by private actors or (2) for the failure of a state actor (such as the police) to protect women from and prevent domestic violence. Availability of state law remedies vary from state to state. Most state laws immunize state actors for failure to take protective action. Recognizing the heightened danger for immigrant battered women who depend upon spouses to gain legal status in the U.S., VAWA also provides for the possibility that these women can self-petition. This critical remedy is not being implemented properly; nor is it available to many immigrant battered women because it does not provide them with legal assistance or with materials in their languages. Moreover, there are no federal laws specifically prohibiting employment and housing discrimination against victims of domestic violence, thus forcing women to choose between their safety and their economic security. Because VAWA does not set and implement a national standard, existing protection for domestic violence victims is an uneven patchwork of state judicial decisions, state legislation, and municipal ordinances."

### Housing is a human right--Fight housing discrimination in Boston

Join the team of testers to fight housing discrimination. The greater Boston area is suffering from housing discrimination against Hispanics and Asian Americans as well as other protected tenants. In order to improve the Fair Housing Center's capacity and promote fair housing in Hispanic and Asian American community, the center is in need of expanding the tester pool. They are looking for people to recruit Hispanic and Asian American testers to enforce fair housing in their communities. Call Stephan Choo, Fair Housing Coordinator at 617-399- 0491 x103 or [email him](mailto:schoo@bostonfairhousing.org) at [schoo@bostonfairhousing.org](mailto:schoo@bostonfairhousing.org) to be included in the next training. You can also check out the [Fair Housing Center](#) of Greater Boston's

website, [www.bostonfairhousing.org](http://www.bostonfairhousing.org).

Read the [online version](#) of *Survival News* and read the lead article "Housing is a Human Right". This issue of the paper also features many of the Human Rights for All activities in the last 6 months.

### Save the Date: Economic HR Violations Documentation Workshop

"Lessons from Katrina: engaging students in documenting violations of economic human rights in our communities," a workshop for service learning coordinators and supervising instructors, will be held from 12-4 p.m. on Tuesday, May 16 at Suffolk Law School. RSVP or direct questions to [servicelearning@suffolk.edu](mailto:servicelearning@suffolk.edu).

Co-sponsored by the Center for Women's Health and Human Rights and the S.O.U.L.S. Community Service Center (Suffolk U), the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, the Economic Human Rights Project, Human Rights Education Associates, and the Massachusetts CEDAW Project.

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