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Public Policy Fall Newsletter

The past few months were incredibly busy. The legislative session ended, with the passage of the Equal Pay law and the Trans Rights law. Our department is spending the fall educating guests, volunteers, and supporters about the upcoming election. Look for an election 2016 e-newsletter later this month.

-Mehreen Butt, Director of Public Policy

Elections

This summer, Public Policy has been training guest leaders to help us register other guests and community members to vote. With their help, we registered over 50 people to vote in the month of August alone!

Join us this fall as Public Policy hosts debate screenings, candidate forums, and voter registration drives.

Don't forget, Massachusetts voters will have the option of Early Voting for the Presidential Election this year. If you live in Boston, check out this [calendar of early voting locations](#) to choose the time and place that is most convenient for you! If you live outside of Boston, you can contact your city hall or the [Secretary of State's office](#) to find your early voting locations and times.



Guests Advocate for Homelessness & Poverty Bills



The Public Policy program strives to engage and empower our guests through the democratic process. As the legislative session drew to a close, guest leaders shared their personal stories and advocated for bills to address homelessness and poverty.

In partnership with the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless (Coalition), Rosie's Place supports House Bill 1129, *An Act providing a homeless bill of rights*. With the bill stalled in the House Committee on Ways and Means, Public

Policy organized a phone bank. Guests called Representatives from the Boston Delegation and asked for their support for HB1129. Guests shared stories of discrimination they encountered during periods of homelessness and explained why it was important to them that the state formally recognize that people experiencing homelessness have the same rights and privileges as any other resident of the Commonwealth.

Rosie's Place also joined the Coalition in advocating for critical improvements to the Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children program (HB529).



Cochise, one of our guest leaders, graciously agreed to share her story at a legislative briefing organized by the Coalition. Speaking in front of a room filled with legislators and staffers, Cochise emphasized that increasing the benefit is a matter of human dignity.

Unfortunately, neither bill made it out of committee before the end of the formal session. Rosie's Place will continue working with the Coalition to advocate for these critical bills through informal session and into the 2016-2017 legislative cycle.

#BlackWomenLead



In July, two women from Rosie's Place joined other Black women leaders from across Massachusetts and "took their seats" in the replica United States Senate Chamber at the Edward M. Kennedy Institute. Boston City Councilor Ayanna Pressley organized the event, inviting 100 "Sister Senators" to join her for a historic photo.

Sitting together in the chamber, the women symbolically took ownership of a space from which they have traditionally been excluded. To date, only one Black woman has ever served in the United States Senate, and none currently serve.

Together with Higher Heights, a national organization dedicated to harnessing Black women's political power and leadership potential, Councilor Pressley celebrated the many ways that Black women are leaders in their communities and called everyone to imagine a future with equitable representation in government.

Rosie's Place shares the goal of equitable representation for women and women of color. We were thrilled to join Councilor Pressley, Higher Heights, and the 100 Sister Senators for this powerful event.

[Click here for a Boston Magazine article on the event.](#)

Raise Up

The Fair Share amendment passed its second hurdle this spring. On May 18th, Rosie's Place guests and staff watched from the gallery as 137 Massachusetts Senators and Representatives voted to advance the ballot initiative through its first Constitutional Convention. In order to reach the ballot in 2018, the amendment must again receive at least 50 votes at a Constitutional Convention in 2017. Over the next year, Rosie's Place staff and guest leaders will continue to educate community members and legislators about the Fair Share amendment.



Rosie's Place is a member of the Raise Up Massachusetts Coalition, a non-partisan group of community organizations, religious groups, labor unions, and business groups committed to building an economy that works for everyone. We support the Fair Share amendment to create a progressive income tax and generate increased revenue for our public education and transportation systems.

Visit our website for more information about the [Fair Share amendment](#) and Rosie's Place's commitment to address [income inequality](#).

Voter ID Laws

This summer, federal appeals courts ruled that voting ID laws in Texas, North Carolina, and Wisconsin were unconstitutional. As a result, certain provisions in Texas' voting laws were remanded back to lower courts for restitution while the identification requirements in North Carolina and Wisconsin were struck down in their entirety. Opponents of the voting ID laws argued these requirements were excessively strict and "were created solely to keep minority and other traditionally Democratic voters away from the polls." Given the upcoming presidential election, these decisions represented important gains for voting rights.

Proponents of stricter voting identification requirements argue that it is a necessary solution to counter voter fraud and ensure electoral integrity. However, most research on voting has found that voter fraud is rare and voter impersonation, which the ID requirements are intended to guard against, is “nearly non-existent.” In reality, most of the problems associated with “voter fraud” are due to unintended mistakes by either voters or election administrators.

North Carolina, Texas, and Wisconsin are appealing their respective decisions. All three states have observed unprecedented growth in both their minority populations and minority voter turnout. For now however, these decisions will ensure more accessible voting practices that will support, not impede, fairer representation for an increasingly diverse electorate.

Summer Interns

Public Policy would like to say thank you to Marybeth Nametz, our summer intern, for all her hard work. Marybeth led countless games of political bingo in the sitting room and coordinated many successful guest trainings and field trips.

We are also grateful to all the Rosie’s Place summer interns for their help advocating for our veto override priorities. Just before the legislature met for one of their weekend sessions at the end of July, Public Policy took the group of interns to the State House. Working together, the interns visited legislative offices and asked for support for homelessness prevention, welfare benefits, and early voting veto overrides.

We are happy to report that the legislature successfully overrode all four vetoes.



About Rosie's Place

Rosie's Place was founded in 1974 as the first women’s shelter in the United States. Our mission is to provide a safe and nurturing environment that helps poor and homeless women maintain their dignity, seek opportunity and find security in their lives. [Read more.](#)

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