

Meeting the Challenge: PPLM's Equity Work Moves Forward



PPLM and PPAF staff and city officials at the Springfield Fast Track Cities implementation workshop in April. From left to right: Taneisha Mings (PPAF), Doris Castillo, Chelsea Isom, Sasha Jimenez (PPLM), Richard Johnson, Commissioner Helen Colton-Harris, Shelby Tippet, Brooke Pelletier, Corey Prachniak-Rincon.

Promoting health equity, especially in sexual and reproductive health, remains Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts' (PPLM's) top priority for the years ahead.

In Worcester, large populations of Latino/a/x and/or Hispanic people lack access to sexual and reproductive health care and education because of stigma, systemic racism, and other barriers. In 2021, PPLM and its community partners successfully overturned restrictions to sex education in the Worcester Public Schools district, finally securing access to comprehensive sex education for K-12 students. This victory laid the groundwork for PPLM to expand its health equity work, build political power, and increase involvement among the Latino/a/x and/or Hispanic communities.

In Springfield, PPLM's priority is to decrease HIV incidence among Black and Latino/a/x people, who are between 6 and 10 times more likely to be diagnosed with HIV than their white neighbors because of stigma and limited access to services. Through telehealth, PPLM is expanding access to pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP), medications that help prevent new HIV infections, by leading a new drive to reach young people. A standardized PrEP and PEP counseling program is reaching 75% of that population. On the advocacy side, the Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts (PPAF) is actively supporting community partners who provide HIV testing, treatment, and prevention services, while

working with leaders to advocate for city- and state-level policies aimed at HIV prevention.

As health equity work expands across the Commonwealth, PPLM is celebrating significant strides toward its goal of promoting diversity and equity in its workforce. Representation of people of color in managerial positions, historically a major challenge for PPLM, is the initial focus, supported by new equitable hiring practices such as requiring that candidate pools be made up of at least 50% people of color, and requiring that staff members of color be included in every phase of the screening and interview process. "Even in a tight job market, amid challenges posed by COVID 19, and bucking the 'Great Resignation' trend, we've made important progress towards our goal of having 27% of all our staff, management, and leadership positions held by staff of color by the end of 2022," says Brenda Hernandez, chief of equity and engagement at PPLM.

These equity initiatives are serving as models for other Planned Parenthood affiliates and health organizations across the country. Check pplm.org/healthequity and future *Advocates* for updates on this work.

ceo's corner

Charlie Abrahams



Dear Friends,

I won't mince words: we are up against the greatest threat to reproductive rights in a generation. As I write to you in late May, we are facing the fallout from a leaked opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, the U.S. Supreme Court case that is expected to overturn

Roe v. Wade and strip millions across the United States of their right to safe and legal abortion. Hostile state legislatures have jumped into action, introducing more than 500 anti-abortion bills in 41 states so far this year. And every day, we are met with fresh assaults on the LGBTQ+ community's rights and access to care. Even the "unprecedented times" of the past six years couldn't prepare me for the heartbreak and outrage I feel in this moment.

Our commitment to you? **We won't back down.** Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts (PPLM) is setting an example for the rest of the country in promoting health equity through our strategic initiatives (page 1), work that becomes increasingly important as disparities in access to abortion deepen across

the United States. The Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts (PPAF) is improving peoples' lives inside and outside exam rooms through a visionary legislative agenda (page 3). And PPAF is bringing the fight for abortion access to communities across the Commonwealth, as evidenced by our work combatting the threat of crisis pregnancy centers (page 2). We won't back down from our goal to make reproductive freedom a reality for everyone in Massachusetts, whatever may come next.

I hope that you, like me, can find hope in the work described in the pages of this *Advocate*. Today and every day, I am inspired by our patients, staff, providers, and advocates. As a physician, I am called to care. As the leader of this organization, I am called to act. We will not back down—no matter what. Thank you for standing with Planned Parenthood.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Childs-Roshak, MD
President and CEO

advocate perspectives: The Dangers of Crisis Pregnancy Centers

This summer, the U.S. Supreme Court is expected to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 decision which ensured the right to abortion. Even in Massachusetts, where legislators passed the ROE Act in 2020 and embedded the right to abortion in the state's constitution, barriers to access still exist.

Many patients are vulnerable to the threat posed by crisis pregnancy centers (CPCs), which lure them in with the promise of free or low-cost care and then feed them biased and false information about abortion and contraception. These centers are run by people opposed to abortion and set out specifically to mislead and deter patients from having abortions or using

birth control. For example, they suggest that abortion is unsafe, or that it leads to mental health problems, infertility, or cancer. Currently, there are three times more CPCs than abortion providers in Massachusetts.

The city of Somerville recently took proactive action on this issue and passed an ordinance requiring that health centers intending to perform a pregnancy-related service cannot publicly engage in false and deceptive advertising or disseminate misinformation or disinformation regarding that care. Councilor Kristen Strezo, At-Large Somerville City Councilor and the lead sponsor of the ordinance, says that this move will "[ensure] that



PPLM's Worcester Health Center, with the misleading advertising and signage of a crisis pregnancy center in the background.

my constituents have the dignity to make their own medical decisions based on accurate health care information." The Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts (PPAF) will continue to work with local leaders across the Commonwealth on taking similar action in their own communities.

Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund: Action on Beacon Hill

In 2021, the Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts (PPAF) rolled out *Solidarity in Action*, the broadest, most intersectional legislative agenda in PPAF's history. The agenda supports 13 groundbreaking bills that confront oppression and aims to reduce dangerous inequities in health care access. The agenda includes: improving access to affordable pregnancy-related care and abortion; setting a basic standard for sex education; expanding access to HIV prevention for young adults; investing in high-quality childcare; and ensuring voting, civil, and immigrant rights. (For detailed descriptions of the bills, please go to pplmvotes.org).

The agenda is gaining momentum on several fronts:

- **PPAF's push for *An Act Relative to Medicaid Coverage for Doula Services*** will provide Medicaid coverage for doula services for pregnant persons, surrogates, foster parents, and adoptive parents, making doula care more accessible and affordable, and furthering the goals of racial equity and reproductive and birthing justice by helping to reduce maternal mortality.
- **PPAF is championing *An Act to Require Public Universities to Provide Medication Abortion*** through their student health centers. Twelve public universities have embraced this effort to improve access to abortion for young people, especially students in remote locations, students of color, students with low incomes, and LGBTQ+ students.



PPAF President Jennifer Childs-Roshak, MD, speaking at a press conference outside the Massachusetts State House following the U.S. Supreme Court's leaked draft opinion in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* in May.

- ***Passage of the Work and Family Mobility Act in the House and Senate***, which will enable undocumented people to obtain Massachusetts drivers' licenses so they can safely and legally travel to health care appointments and workplaces and be active in their communities without fear of arrest.
- ***An Act Relative to Telehealth and Digital Equity for Patients*** is gaining support among key legislators. The bill will expand access to telehealth, thereby reducing barriers to care like time, transportation, childcare, and privacy concerns.

Overall, *Solidarity in Action* is benefiting from past election victories stemming from PPAF's endorsements and voter mobilization campaigns. As of 2020,

33 supporters in the Massachusetts Senate and 111 in the House represent the largest pro-reproductive rights majorities in recent history. In the upcoming gubernatorial and legislative elections, PPAF will continue to promote leaders who are active health equity and reproductive rights and justice champions. Dr. Nate Horwitz-Willis, PPAF's executive director and PPLM's executive vice president for external affairs, emphasizes the big picture: "All our work for *Solidarity in Action* has positioned us to address a post-*Roe v. Wade* world. Everything we're pursuing at the state level will ensure PPLM's role as a national leader in championing health equity and access for sexual and reproductive health care."

we won't back down

Stand with Planned Parenthood Today



Make a contribution to PPLM. Visit pplm.org/donate or mail a check made out to "PPLM" to PPLM, Attn: Development, 1055 Commonwealth Ave, Boston, MA 02215.



Take action with the Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts (PPAF) to protect and expand access to abortion and sexual and reproductive health care through advocacy, organizing, and policy-based solutions. Visit pplmvotes.org/volunteer to get involved and pplmvotes.org/donate to make a donation.



Help people find abortion care. Go to abortionfinder.org to find a provider in your area.



Support the National Network of Abortion Funds. Help people seeking abortions access and afford care at abortionfunds.org.



Sign up to volunteer for PPLM. Visit pplm.org/volunteer.



Join the Young Friends of PPLM, PPLM's philanthropic group for people ages 21-35. Visit pplm.org/youngfriends to learn more and sign up.



Recommend PPLM to friends seeking high-quality and affordable sexual and reproductive health care in Massachusetts.



Share your story. Personal stories about why access to abortion and other reproductive health care matters can show lawmakers, the media, other supporters, and the general public what we are fighting for—and why we will never back down. Contact advocacy@pplm.org to share your story.



Follow PPLM and PPAF on social media for updates on our work and more ways to get involved.

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