

Solidarity in Action: The Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund's Legislative Agenda

The Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund of Massachusetts (PPAF), the political arm of Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts (PPLM), is working with coalition partners to advance an intersectional legislative agenda addressing urgent social and economic issues affecting PPLM patients and their communities.

PPAF's agenda follows the lead of the Reproductive Justice movement, which pursues advances to reproductive health and rights in the context of social justice. Leading reproductive justice organization SisterSong defines Reproductive Justice as "the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities." Through this lens, the movement confronts the ways in which racial, economic, and gender oppression affect reproductive health.

Mehreen Butt, PPAF's associate director of policy and government affairs, reports that PPAF is supporting a dozen bills that directly confront oppression and aim to reduce inequities in health care access and the health disparities they cause. Among them are bills that eliminate costly barriers to sexual and reproductive care, support families, and help all people feel safe and supported in their communities.

PPAF President Dr. Jennifer Childs-Roshak and Butt recently testified at several legislative hearings about the urgent need to ameliorate the current Black maternal health crisis. They emphasized that Black women are nearly two times as likely to die during pregnancy or within one year postpartum compared to white women, a statistic Dr. Childs-Roshak called both "shameful and preventable." PPAF supports bills that would eliminate insurance copays for the full spectrum of pregnancy-related care (including abortion, prenatal care, childbirth, and postpartum care); and require MassHealth and other insurance coverage for out-of-hospital care by midwives and by doulas. By reducing costs, people, particularly



PPAF supporters at the Boston Trans Resistance March in June.

people of color, have more avenues to access care and feel they are taken care of, listened to, and advocated for throughout their pregnancies.

In the civil rights area, PPAF is speaking up for An Act to Create Alternatives for Community Emergency Services (ACES), which would enable communities to send unarmed first responders to situations that do not require police presence; the VOTES Act, to ensure every person eligible to vote can vote in Massachusetts; and the Work and Family Mobility Act, allowing undocumented people to obtain a Massachusetts driver's license, ensuring everyone can safely and legally drive to work, care for themselves and their families, and be active members of their communities.

To see a complete list of PPAF's Solidarity in Action bills, and to find out how to get involved, visit bit.ly/ppaf-agenda-21

ceo's corner

Russ Mezikofsky



Dear Friends,

The old adage has never been more true: We are living through unprecedented times.

During the past 18 months, as PPLM has served patients amidst a global pandemic and COVID-19 has taken its toll on the communities we serve, we've addressed this crisis on the scale it calls for by launching innovative programs

and services. The pandemic also brought into focus a core aspect of our mission: that caring for our patients extends far beyond the exam rooms in our health centers. With abortion rights under attack in Texas, we're seeing firsthand how *Roe v. Wade* isn't enough to guarantee access to abortion. We have to look deeper. We must advocate for our patients' entire wellbeing and support their communities in order to support them leading healthy lives on their own terms.

When I testified before state legislators this summer, I saw firsthand that lawmakers are concerned about the ways in which systemic barriers impact people of color and people with low incomes. But concern is not enough. As the Commonwealth's leading sexual and reproductive health provider, PPLM, through PPAF, is uniquely positioned to advocate on behalf of patients in support of proactive policies that significantly improve access and reduce deadly disparities.

This *Advocate* delves into how PPLM is building momentum toward advancing health equity and racial justice across the Commonwealth (page 1), in the communities we serve (page 2, below), and internally at PPLM (page 3). And we can only do this with your help. Your extraordinary support—especially in this past year—makes our work possible. Thank you for answering our call with such generosity, and thank you for enabling us to move forward—no matter what.

Jennifer Childs-Roshak, MD
President and CEO

advocate spotlight: PPLM Ambassadors Bring Change to Worcester

PPLM's new Sexual Health Ambassadorship Program (SHAP) is a dynamic collective of Latinx and Hispanic leaders and community members in Worcester who educate and engage peers on sexual and reproductive health in ways that reduce stigma. PPLM supports SHAP participants with an intensive seven-month training, in which they learn about PPLM's services, sexual and reproductive health, STI prevention, contraception, and gender and sexual identity.

SHAP members also explore community building strategies that they put to work in a capstone project of their own design. When asked why they joined SHAP, ambassadors from the first cohort shared personal stories of confronting stigma—from encountering a racist doctor to facing obstacles as a teen trying to obtain basic information about sexuality. They went on to build an anti-stigma toolkit for their capstone project to reduce negative

perceptions around STIs and raise awareness of prevention methods. This resource will live on in practice and enhance SHAP over the long term.

Worcester residents are already seeing the benefits of honest discussion and active engagement with issues of sexual and reproductive health. The

Worcester School Committee recently voted to adopt a comprehensive, medically accurate, and age-appropriate sex education curriculum for the city's public schools. This victory was the result of multi-year efforts by PPLM/PPAF in

collaboration with community partners, including Worcester parents, teachers, faith leaders, health care providers, community organizations, and local advocates. Like the ongoing work of SHAP, this victory promises to reduce existing health care disparities and build a stronger and healthier city.



Listening and Being Heard: PPLM's Equity Journey



PPLM's Equity Action Plan (EAP), launched in 2018, is moving steadily toward its goal of supporting, serving, and collaborating with staff, patients, and community members who are Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC). As we confront systemic racism and oppression and work to become an anti-racist organization, PPLM is first looking inward, examining every aspect of its operation, from hiring and retention to services, partnerships, and leadership.

The EAP centers four objectives:

- diversifying the PPLM workforce to better reflect the communities we serve;
- fostering a welcoming, inclusive work environment;
- providing equitable and inclusive health care and programming to all patients and clients; and
- increasing collaboration and building connections with communities PPLM serves.

The EAP was developed and is implemented with input from PPLM's Equity and Inclusion Action Team (EIAT), an advisory group of nearly 20 staff members representing every department of the organization. EIAT examines diversity and inclusion policies and strategies to make sure they align with the EAP, and partners with PPLM leadership to make meaningful change. Meeting monthly, the EIAT provides a "safe, respectful space where people can both listen and be heard," says Shikshya R., an EIAT member since she joined PPLM in 2018. The EIAT shares information and perspectives with the PPLM staff to raise the



profile of recognition opportunities such as Pride and Black History Months, and shares resources about current events stemming from racial, class, and gender injustice.

A variety of other initiatives support the work and impact of the EAP, including affinity groups like the BIPOC Caucus and the White Accountability and Action Group. PPLM staff participate regularly in discussions on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion through the Resources on Race program. During the COVID-19 pandemic, PPLM shaped its pandemic response through an equity lens to ensure staff, patients, and communities could access the health care and support they needed. Says PPLM Vice President of Equity and Engagement Brenda Hernandez, "PPLM continues to commit to equity

work even when it is difficult, and to push beyond what has been done before."

Hernandez also cites the commitment of PPLM's Board of Directors as integral to the plan's progress and ultimate success. Expanding its prior focus on diversifying its recruitment practices, the 21-member board is committed to exploring such topics as the history and meaning of reproductive justice; medical racism; the impact of language and communication; and experiences of women of color in the workplace. A recent full-day workshop for the board focused on racism, implicit bias, and white supremacy and offered extensive resources for future learning and action.

faces & places



Top: PPAF and its supporters showed up in full force this June in support of the LGBTQ+ community. At the March and Vigil for Black Trans Lives's Pride-Fest, organized by Trans Resistance MA, PPAF connected with over 200 people, and highlighted legislative priorities from *Solidarity in Action* (page 1).

Bottom: PPLM and PPAF also tabled at the first-ever Chicopee PrideFest, sharing resources about PrEP and PEP, among Planned Parenthood's other services and programs.

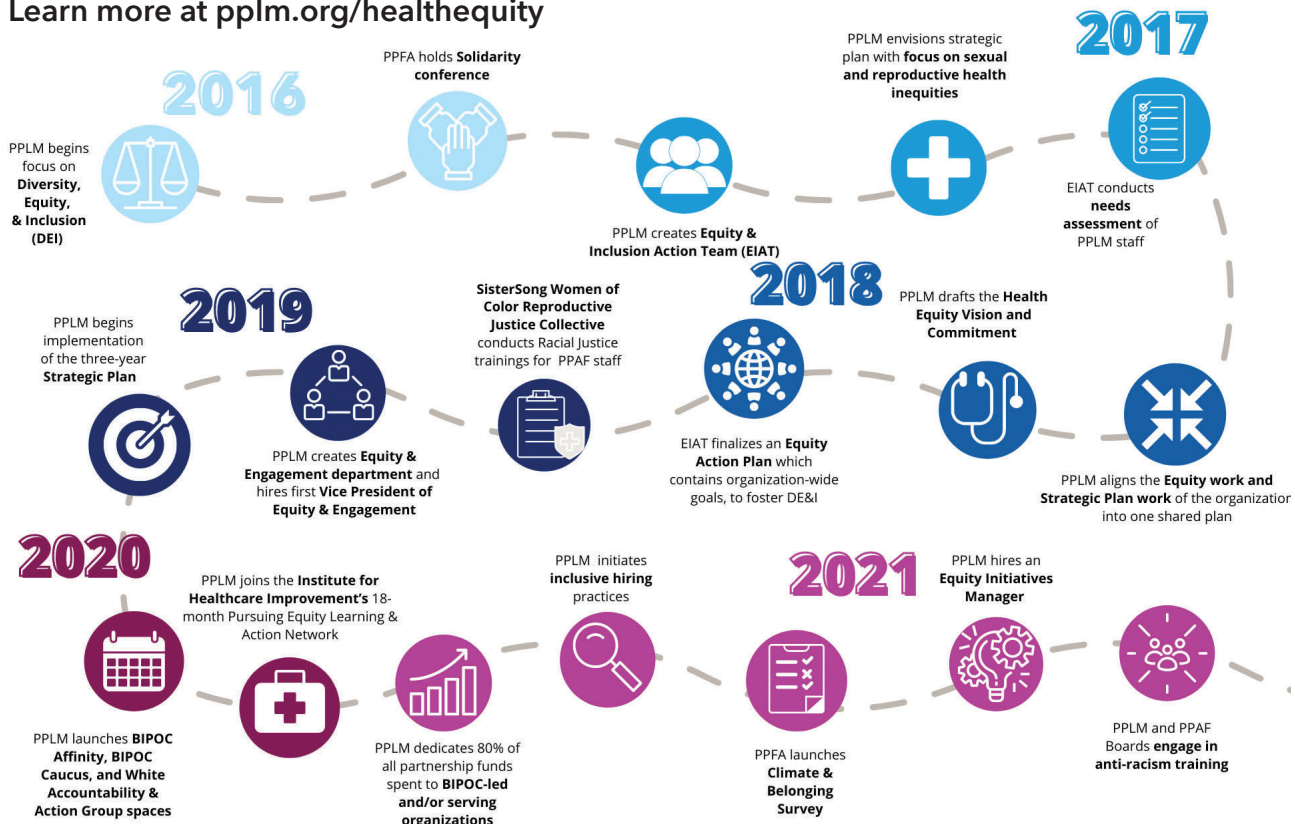


We miss you!

The PPLM team misses seeing you in person! We want to take a moment to thank you for standing by us, even when we can't all be together. We hope to be able to gather together safely this spring for Celebration of Choices, our annual PPAF gala. Please stay in touch until we can see you face-to-face again!

PPLM's Equity Journey Through Time

Learn more at pplm.org/healthequity



Please support PPLM today by visiting www.pplm.org/donate or emailing development@pplm.org.