


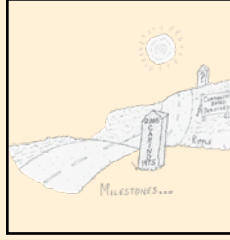
Sen. DiDomenico:  
Growing our human service  
workforce  
VIEW FROM THE HILL  
PAGE 6



St. Mary's Center takes  
a multifaceted approach  
to homelessness  
PROVIDER PROFILE  
PAGE 3



Reflecting on the first  
issue of *The Provider*  
EDITORIAL  
PAGE 4



# THE PROVIDER

Volume 46 — No. 4

The Newspaper of the Providers' Council

April 2025

## Providers' Council hosts webinars on its legislative priorities

The Providers' Council and the organization's grassroots advocacy initiative, The Caring Force, hosted webinars in March on its legislative agenda while the four bills filed on the Council's behalf by legislators were given bill numbers and referred to their initial committees.

For the first time in the Council's history, legislative webinars on the bills were offered both in English and Spanish to allow for more workers to engage with the priorities. These informative sessions provided valuable resources, highlighted key legislative goals and offered guidance on how members can actively advocate for human services workers. The presentations are available on The Caring Force's YouTube page in both English and Spanish.

The Council's legislative agenda looks to address critical challenges facing the human services workforce: pay fairness and the substantial burden of student loan debt among community-based human services workers. The two initiatives include:

*An Act Relative to a Livable Wage for Human Services Workers* (S.130|H.223), which seeks to close the pay gap between community-based human services employees and state workers in similar positions. Sponsored by Sen. Cindy Friedman and Rep. Mindy Domb, this legislation outlines a clear timeline to achieve pay equity, with a focus on improving recruitment and retention in a sector that employs over 160,000 individuals. By July 1, 2029, the bill aims to eliminate the wage disparity between human services workers at community-based organizations and their state-employed counterparts who perform similar duties.

*An Act Relative to a Loan Repayment Program for Human Services Workers* (S.119|H.283) addresses the growing financial challenges faced by human services workers burdened with student loan debt. Sponsored by Sen. Sal DiDomenico and Rep. Jeffrey Roy, the bill would provide financial relief to those

WEBINARS, see page 7

## The Caring Force is ready to rally in 2025: Upcoming events



The Caring Force is getting ready to rally in 2025, and is looking for speakers to share their stories at its rallies!

The Caring Force is gearing up for its first events of 2025. In addition to its annual State House Rally and Lobby Day — which will be held on Thursday, May 8 in the Great Hall and Grand Staircase — The Caring Force will once again host regional rallies across the state and support several legislative breakfasts. With numerous opportunities for advocacy, members will have abundant chances to show their support for the human services sector.

### BERKSHIRE LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST

The Caring Force proudly supported the Annual Berkshire Legislative Breakfast for Disability Advocacy, held on March 21 in Pittsfield.

The event was sponsored by Ad Lib, Arc of Massachusetts, Berkshire County Arc, Berkshire Family and Individual Resources (BFAIR), Brain Injury Association of Mas-

RALLIES, see page 7

## Council celebrates 50 Years of Impact: *The Provider* newspaper

The Providers' Council is turning 50 in 2025! The organization is thrilled to be Celebrating 50 Years of Impact with its members. In celebration of this milestone, *The Provider* will be running a series of articles throughout the year commemorating some of the Council's most important milestones in its first 50 years. This month, the Council wants to highlight the first edition of this newspaper, *The Provider*, which was published for the first time in 1978.

*The Provider* newspaper is the flagship publication for the Providers' Council. Today, it has a combined hard copy and electronic circulation estimated at over 3,000, and the newspaper is the most widely read — and respected — publication of its kind in the state.

The pages of *The Provider* deliver timely updates on the latest trends and develop-



The *Provider* newspaper was first printed in 1978 as a newsletter for members to keep them updated on state affairs.

PROVIDER, see page 7

## Donovan offers attendees the "Burnout Blueprint"

An expert on burnout outlined several key buckets of risk factors during a Providers' Council webinar in March designed to educate human services workers about excessive stress and some strategies for working through it.

Cait Donovan, host of "Fried: The Burnout Podcast," international keynote speaker and author of *The Bouncebackability Factor*, focused on the key contributors to burnout and how to recognize them. During her webinar — *The Burnout Blueprint: Unraveling the Web of Stress for Lasting Resilience* — Donovan explained that burnout often results from a combination of factors, and identifying these triggers is essential for prevention.

"A lot of times we don't know that we're getting stuck in a stress cycle, we don't know we're in a chronic stress phase and we don't know this because we are taught to not understand what our bodies are telling us," Donovan explained. "This is a cultural thing, but it happens all over the world, but this is not just a you-thing. You didn't just decide not to listen to your body, you were taught to not listen to your body. So, you can get tangled up in this and not know that this is happening."

Throughout the session, Donovan discussed how work, family, personal traits, health, environment and culture can sometimes lead to burnout. These areas of life can intertwine to create the perfect storm, she added.

Donovan wrapped up the webinar by offering practical advice on how to manage these risk factors. She recommended addressing each factor individually, tailoring solutions to personal needs and acknowledging that some risk factors may be unavoidable. In these cases, she stressed the importance of accepting them and focusing on moving forward. She also highlighted that everyone's experience with burnout is unique, and so are the solutions.

"I have never met two people that need exactly the same steps to get out of [burnout]," said Donovan.

For more information on the Council's upcoming trainings, please contact Nina Lamarre at [nlamarre@providers.org](mailto:nlamarre@providers.org).



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## Bridgewell appoints Leanna Fleming as Chief Financial Officer



Leanna Fleming

At the end of February, **Bridgewell** announced the appointment of Leanna Fleming as Chief Financial Officer.

Fleming will oversee all aspects of Bridgewell's budget and finance department. She will provide leadership and direction to fiscal operations to shape, support and promote the agency's mission, growth and long-term financial viability. Previously, Fleming served as CFO of a Lawrence-based health and human services agency for over five years.

"Leanna's career spans human services and other nonprofit sectors, and her strategic insights and operational acumen have contributed to the growth and stability of the organizations she has served," said Bridgewell President and CEO Christopher Tuttle. "We are thrilled to welcome Leanna to the team and are confident that her experience will be invaluable as we continue to grow and advance our mission."

## FamilyAid receives \$90,000 grant from Rockland Trust

On March 11, **FamilyAid** received a \$90,000 grant from Rockland Trust Charitable Foundation to help families throughout Massachusetts find and maintain housing. The grant will enable FamilyAid to provide education and support to nearly 4,500 children and parents.

"We are incredibly grateful to Rockland Trust Charitable Foundation for their continued partnership and this generous grant, which will provide critical resources to sustain and expand our work," said FamilyAid President & CEO Larry Seaman. "This support will ensure families facing homelessness have the stability and opportunities they need to get back on their feet quickly."

## Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services awarded \$50,000 Safety Net Grant from The Boston Foundation

On March 12, **Somerville-Cambridge Elder Services** announced it has received a \$50,000 Safety Net Grant from The Boston Foundation to support general operations and agency programs.

Funds for this grant come from The Boston Foundation's Permanent Fund, an endowment built to help the Greater Boston community thrive. Each year, The Boston Foundation distributes more than \$15 million in discretionary grants and other resources from the fund, which are largely awarded through a competitive process open to nonprofits serving the foundation's catchment area.

## YMCA of Greater Boston adds four to its board

The **YMCA of Greater Boston (YGB)** has announced the appointment of four local leaders to its General Board of Directors: Reverend Willie Bodrick II, Amy Lynch, Doug Smith and Adam Volwiler.

Bodrick is the Senior Pastor of the historic Twelfth Baptist Church in Roxbury and currently serves as the Roxbury Y Advisory Board Chair. Additionally, Bodrick serves as the President and CEO of The American City Coalition (TACC). Lynch is the President of Comcast's Northeast Division and is the senior executive responsible for all operations across 15 states, from Maine through Virginia and the District of Columbia.

Smith is the Executive Managing Director at Citizens Private Bank. He previously served as Senior Managing Director at the company, showcasing his expertise in banking, wealth management, and strategic oversight before accepting his current role in March 2024. Volwiler is the Co-Managing Partner of Chestnut Partners. Since joining Chestnut Partners in 2009, Adam has advised clients on numerous investment banking assignments, including M&A, corporate partnerships,

## Caring Force supports Annual Berkshire Legislative Breakfast for Disability Advocacy



On March 21, The Caring Force proudly supported the Annual Berkshire Legislative Breakfast for Disability Advocacy, held in Pittsfield.

The event brought together key leaders, including a representative from Congressman Richard Neal's office, state Sen. Paul Mark, state Reps. Tricia Farley-Bowier and Leigh Davis and Pittsfield Mayor Peter Marchetti

and capital formation transactions.

## BFAIR promotes Katrina Cardillo to Senior Director of Marketing and PR

On March 15, **BFAIR** announced the promotion of Katrina Cardillo to Senior Director of Marketing and PR. Previously, Cardillo served as the Director of Marketing and PR at the organization.

In her new role, Cardillo will continue to lead marketing and PR initiatives while also playing an important role in advancing BFAIR's fundraising activities. Cardillo brings a wealth of experience in

marketing, management, and community engagement to her expanded responsibilities. Since joining BFAIR, Cardillo has been instrumental in amplifying the organization's mission to support individuals with developmental disabilities, acquired brain injuries, and autism. Her innovative strategies and leadership have significantly contributed to brand awareness and community outreach.



Katrina Cardillo



# Driving great futures.

Proud Partner of Providers' Council

For more information, contact:

Aaron Duguay | 781-608-2834 | [Aaron.R.Duguay@efleets.com](mailto:Aaron.R.Duguay@efleets.com)



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# PROVIDER PROFILES

## ST. MARY'S CENTER FOR WOMEN AND CHILDREN

90 Cushing Ave. • DORCHESTER, MA 02125 • 617.436.8600 • STMARYSCENTERMA.ORG

### About the Agency

St. Mary's Center for Women and Children (SMC) is a multi-service nonprofit organization serving women, children and families experiencing homelessness and deep poverty in Dorchester and East Boston.

Founded in 1993, SMC began as a program for pregnant and parenting teens but quickly expanded to address the complex issues affecting families experiencing homelessness. Today, SMC provides a series of residential programs complimented by wraparound services across the housing continuum, addressing the root causes of family homelessness and supporting pathways out of poverty for 500 women, children and families experiencing homelessness each year.

Through four key pillars of support, SMC meets families where they are and aims to break down barriers on the road to long-term stability and self-sufficiency.

SMC is proud to partner with government agencies aimed at supporting families experiencing homelessness, including the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) and the City of Boston Mayor's Office of Housing.

Philanthropic support from corporations, foundations and individual donors fills critical funding gaps not covered through public contracts and enables SMC to provide wraparound supportive services that meet each family's unique needs.

### Pillars of support: St. Mary's Center takes a multifaceted approach to homelessness

With the understanding that shelter is not enough to erase the devastation of cyclical poverty and homelessness, SMC's team of highly skilled professionals provide an integrated model of care to address the root causes of family homelessness and meet each family's unique needs through residential programs and wraparound support services. Through four key pillars, SMC provides the supports needed to propel families towards their personal goals and a sustainable future.

#### STABLE PERMANENT HOUSING

Within SMC's residential programs, women and children are provided with a safe place to live and access to basic necessities. The agency operates two Adult Family Shelter programs in Dorchester and East Boston, supporting 63 families at a time. A Young Parenting Living Program (YPLP) provides comprehensive services for 15 pregnant and parenting young mothers between the ages of 13-22 and their children. When rent-ready, YPLP families can move to SMC's on-site transitional housing program which can accommodate 12 families in apartment-style units. While at SMC and after their exit through 36-month stabilization services, SMC staff assist residents with housing search, navigating housing resources and additional barriers that led to and perpetuate homelessness.

#### LIFE SKILLS

Through a family-centered approach, SMC provides comprehensive supports that build critical life skills and promote family independence and stability. These life skills fall into four categories: financial stability, parenting skills, personal growth and wellbeing.

#### BEHAVIORAL HEALTH AND FAMILY MEDICINE



SMC aims to break down barriers on the road to long-term stability for its families.

To support families' mental and emotional wellbeing, SMC provides embedded behavioral health care services across all programs through a full-time clinical team. Members of the clinical department work collaboratively to develop family support plans to improve outcomes on their paths to long-term stability. To support families' physical health needs, SMC also offers comprehensive family healthcare services through on-site partner, Boston Healthcare for the Homeless Program.

#### EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT SUPPORT

SMC provides residents with access to education and workforce development programming with the goal of equipping mothers with resources and support to further their educational goals, develop skills and explore career pathways. The agency offers workshops to residents on-site, as well as a scholarship program to provide financial assistance, supporting residents' career and educational journeys.

### Executive Leadership

Alexis Steel has served as President of SMC since September 2020, after joining the agency in 2018 as Senior Vice President of Operations and Compliance. A passionate advocate for women and children, she proudly



Alexis Steel

serves on the Steering Committee and now as Treasurer on the Board of the National Women's Shelter Network, a growing network of over 390 shelters nationwide with the shared vision of eradicating homelessness for women and children.

Under Steel's leadership, in 2020 SMC launched a Strategic Plan, guiding the agency's vision to provide an integrated model of care addressing the root causes of family homelessness. Grounded in evidence-based best practice, SMC has a proven model of success in long-term stability for young families building protective factors to increase economic mobility and establish two generations of stable futures. This success has laid the critical foundation for SMC's transformative next step: establishing a comprehensive ecosystem expanding SMC's model into Permanent Supportive Housing.

Throughout her career, Steel has worked with women and children through global health initiatives. Prior to SMC, Steel oversaw global operations for the Consortium for Affordable Medical Technologies. She previously oversaw grants for federal and private foundations for Mass General Brigham.

## SALUTING THE CARING FORCE

### Over three decades of dedication: Shelby Balukonis

Since 1990, Shelby Balukonis has worked at Partners in Child Development's (PCD) Early Intervention program. Early Intervention provides guidance for parents and caregivers to support the development of infants and toddlers from zero to three years old who are not reaching their expected milestones or are at risk of developmental delays. PCD has been providing these services in the Merrimack Valley for over 45 years and has recently expanded into the Greater Lowell area. Shelby has held a variety of roles including team leader, site manager for their Lawrence office and clinical lead for the social workers. Currently, Shelby is the Intake Lead at the Lawrence office transitioning to the new Lowell office.

"With her extensive years of experience in providing early intervention services to children and families in the Merrimack Valley, I'm thrilled to have Shelby support our expansion into the Greater Lowell area. Her passion for providing culturally responsive care and her deep understanding of diverse communities will continue to help every child reach their full potential and empower families for years to come," says Cheryl Bruk, Division Director for Early Intervention.

"Shelby's commitment and compassion for the children and families she has served are truly unmatched. Her dedication, experience and passion will undoubtedly make a significant impact on the community, and I can't think of a better person to help lead this effort," says Leslie Siciliano, Program Director for PCD



Shelby Balukonis has worked at PCD's Early Intervention program for several decades.

Greater Lowell Area.

Her daily role includes overseeing all referrals coming into the program and managing the larger intake team. She enjoys staying engaged with families receiving services and continuing with direct service work. She is now excited to be bringing her skills to children and families in the Greater Lowell community.

"One of the reasons that I love working in Early Intervention is the versatility of the job," says Shelby. "It is always changing based on the children's and families' needs. I consider it a privilege to be able to work with families in their own homes and appreciate the uniqueness of each family."

### Jody Dupont: Answering the call to care at Seven Hills

Seven Hills Community Services (SHCS) provides residential options for adults with developmental disabilities, including the Individual Supports option. The quality of staffing is critical to the success of this option and the people supported. An example of this stellar quality beams from direct support professional/case manager, Jody Dupont.

Jody began her career at Seven Hills in August 2019, and her trajectory has been soaring ever since. Not missing a beat from day one, Jody is focused on one goal: "I want my clients to be happy and fulfilled at the end of each day." Jody supports three clients daily, with a priority on fulfilling responsibilities. "When we finish our chores, we reward ourselves with fun!" she says. "Fun" includes entertainment, dining out and visiting family and friends. Jody's spirit never needs rekindling. She has energy to spare and spends it exploring new opportunities for exciting adventures.

Jody consistently exemplifies the Seven Hills core values of respect and kindness, integrity, teamwork, innovation and service to others. She shows unwavering respect for her clients to feel heard, valued and supported. As a colleague, Jody is honest, trustworthy and dependable. Her collaborative spirit is a cornerstone of the program's success. She works seamlessly with her team, sharing insights and fostering a positive workplace. Above all, Jody strives to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities.



Jody Dupont exemplifies the core values of Seven Hills.

Jennifa Nolan-Jackman, assistant vice president of SHCS, underscores the positive effect Jody has on everyone she encounters. "Jody's kindness and hard work make a real difference every day. She is a true champion and a positive influence for the people she supports and her colleagues!"

On January 16, 2025, Jody received the SHCS 2024 Employee of the Year award at the annual Seven Hills event. It was an honor to shine the spotlight on a staff member who is always answering the call to care with her signature light shining brightly on the abilities of us all.



**William Yelenak**  
President / Publisher

## Past and Present: Reflecting on the first issue of *The Provider* newspaper

When I was in grade school, I didn't imagine that later in life I'd be working in management at a human services membership association. After my fleeting dreams of being a professional athlete were dashed and the thought of running for President of the United States was quashed, I turned my attention to something a little more obtainable: Going to college to be a newspaper reporter.

So off I went to Boston University's College of Communication where four years later I'd graduate with a bachelor's degree in print journalism. I had been the editor of *The Daily Free Press*, the student newspaper, and I had a real love for newspapers, writing and the industry overall.

And then life happens. After graduating, I worked as a newspaper reporter for two years at the *Record-Journal* in Meriden, Conn., but soon moved back to Boston to work on a political campaign. During that time, I answered a questionnaire from the Providers' Council and after the campaign ended, I applied for a part-time communications job with the Council. I guess that took!

As our board and staff work to honor the Council's legacy this year and we invite members to join us in Celebrating 50 Years of Impact, we've been running an ongoing series here in *The Provider* about the Council's history, which has enabled us to take a few trips down memory lane (with more still to come!) You'll see on the front page this month a story about the origins of the newspaper; I couldn't help myself and really dug into a few of the first copies we have, and it was a fascinating time capsule into names, issues and details that captured the attention of those leaders in this sector nearly 50 years ago.

But even as the names of programs, state departments and those people involved have changed, the issues remain strikingly the same today as they were 50 years ago. And I was proud to see the response from the Providers' Council — which was then the Massachusetts Council of Human Services Providers, Inc. and still 30 years away from using the shortened name! — was just as comprehensive as it is today, still meeting the needs of its members.

The first issues contained updates on the new Executive Office of Human Services contract written by Robert Cowden — someone who would go on to be a longtime Providers' Council attorney and who was with the organization from its very start. Another writer discussed the beginning of the Department of Children and Families — then the Department of Social Services — which began with a law passed on the last day of the Legislature's session in 1978 (sounds familiar!)

In going through the old newspapers — which were more in a newsletter format than the typical newspaper you hold in your hands today — I was struck by how many things the Council

made priorities in 1978 that we continue to focus on to this day.

**Filling jobs in the human services workforce:** The Providers' Council today has our Jobs with Heart board where it's free for members to post their open positions — the website generated nearly 900,000 job exposures in 2024 for members who posted more than 2,000 jobs that year. But even back in 1978, a Council article titled "Filling a vacant position?" offered to help members with their workforce needs. "Resumes are accepted from job seekers and held on file for six months. Any agency trying to fill a vacant position is welcome to review our resume file. ... We are also interested in receiving notices of vacant positions from you so that they would be available to the job seeker."

**Convenings:** Since it's very beginning, the Council has been bringing members together — perhaps in no greater numbers than at our Annual Convention & Expo, where up to 1,200 friends of the sector have attended at the Marriott Copley Place Hotel in recent years. Those first newspapers were no different and discussed holding a "1979 Convention" that the board of directors was planning. "Since the days of its incorporation, the Council has sought improvements in the Massachusetts system for purchasing community-based care by a way of a collaborative effort with state agencies," it read. "Save the date ... to discuss a possible convention and call Gerry Wright at the Council office now for more details." Gerry, of course, still calls members annually to this day encouraging them to come and bring their staff to the Annual Convention & Expo.

**Advocating with members at public hearings:** Yet another page in one of those first newspapers notifies members about the time, date and location of a public hearing to review new regulations promulgated by the Executive Office of Administration and Finance — something striking similar to how the Providers' Council today helps our members prepare for Chapter 257 hearings at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services. Just last year alone, the Council attended more than a dozen hearings, helping members advocate for rate increases for programs and better wages for direct care workers, nurses, clinicians and others.

We were amazed to see the earliest copies of *The Provider* preserved nearly 50 years later, and as you read this, we're pleased to note that we'll be adding them to our website for all to download — making these original copies of what would become our flagship newspaper available online for the first time. We hope you'll take a quick look at some of the earliest news we captured from our human services sector, comparing it to ways we're still serving membership today. On behalf of all of us at the Providers' Council, we look forward to accompanying you as we continue on through the next 50 years of our shared history.



*EDITOR NOTE: The Council is appreciative to our longtime cartoonist Michael Ripple, who drew his last cartoon for us in 2021. We'll share some of Michael's "greatest hits" this year, as well as highlighting artwork from members' program participants.*

**Want to highlight the artwork of your program participants?**  
Contact Maureen at [mlynch@providers.org](mailto:mlynch@providers.org) for more information.



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## Empowering individuals with iPads, enhancing independence

By Sophia Macrina

Tempus Unlimited has collaborated with Easterseals to distribute iPads aimed at enhancing independence for individuals within our Adult Foster Care and Supported Living Programs. Easterseals, like Tempus Unlimited, is dedicated to providing programs and services to people with disabilities. Their mission is to ensure that children and adults living with disabilities have equal opportunities to live, learn, work and play. Our shared commitment to empowering individuals with the tools, resources and support they need to thrive has allowed this partnership to be a significant success.

After receiving funding from MassAbility, Easterseals actively sought out agencies to partner with. With the help of Louise Colbourne, Director of Assistive Technology, Tempus Unlimited effectively referred 39 individuals for telehealth devices, helping to bridge the gap to essential healthcare services with access to vital technology.

Members of the Adult Foster Care Program as well as consumers in the Supported Living Program can use these devices to set up appointments, conduct research and easily access needed information in their health portal. This factor offers an immense amount of support to someone who may face challenges traveling due to mobility issues or health conditions and needs to get in contact with a doctor or caregiver in a timely manner. These telehealth devices offer a convenient way to stay connected, eliminating the need for in-person appointments and supporting the maintenance of a consistent routine, an essential factor for those who require frequent attention.

One family member in our Adult Foster Care Program shared, “Our iPad allows Donte to access his telehealth appointments and keeps all of his information organized in one place. He is able to communicate with people and stay entertained by listening to his favorite music. It makes life easier.”

Another member, Stephen, also highlighted the importance of the iPads, adding “The iPads are a huge help with medical appointments, therapies, coping mechanisms, etc. Thank you very much to Easterseals for the program and Tempus for helping with information and distribution.” Both Donte’s and Stephen’s experiences help illustrate how these devices create a cohesive and well-coordinated environment at home.

Not only do the iPads simplify daily tasks but also enhance members’ and consumers’ independence. Through discussion with Louise, she shed light on the success



Donte, an adult foster care member at Tempus Unlimited uses his new iPad.

of the iPads within Easterseals, with one individual named Betty reporting, “I am bed-bound most of the time, which makes it very difficult to get to appointments, I have to rely on other people to get to my home, get me out of bed and get me rides to appointments, it takes up a whole day. Now I can easily meet with my doctors on this iPad on my own terms without having to check with anyone else. This has given me great freedom.” In times of isolation, having a tool to feel connected to the world is incredibly important. Though these are small devices, they have made a big impact on an individual’s quality of life.

This technology has proven to be a powerful and transformative resource for those who rely on it. By providing iPads to those in need, this collaboration has not only enhanced the daily lives of recipients but also empowered them to gain more independence. These devices have opened new doors to health-related communication, education and social connection, allowing them to engage in previously difficult ways. The shared interest and dedication to providing equal opportunities and resources to children and adults living with disabilities makes achieving this goal of independence much more special. Tempus Unlimited is exceedingly grateful for this partnership with Easterseals and continues to provide community-based programs enhancing independence while positively impacting the lives of those we serve.

Sophia Macrina is a Public Relations Specialist at Tempus Unlimited.

## Taking the opportunity to educate your community on developmental disabilities

By Kathleen Pruett

As we observe Developmental Disability Awareness Month each March, it is prudent to reflect on the significance of increasing understanding and acceptance of individuals with developmental disabilities. Developmental Disability Awareness Month is more than just a time for awareness; it is an opportunity to educate, advocate and promote inclusivity within our communities.

Developmental disabilities affect millions of individuals and their families, yet stigma and misunderstanding persist, even today. Raising awareness isn’t just important, it’s imperative. Developmental disabilities can affect physical, learning, language and behavior skills. This broad spectrum includes, but is not limited to, autism spectrum disorders, Down syndrome, cerebral palsy and intellectual disabilities. Each of these can pose unique challenges and opportunities, not only for the individual, but also for their families, educators and the community, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure that individuals with developmental disabilities are not sidelined but instead fully included in all aspects of society.

The significance of Developmental Disability Awareness Month is rooted in its ability to foster understanding. Education is the key to eliminating misconceptions. Many myths surround developmental disabilities, often leading to stereotypes and discrimination, and promoting accurate information can help shift perceptions and continue to change the narrative from one of limitations to one of possibilities.

Developmental Disability Awareness Month serves as a powerful reminder of the valuable advocacy efforts in place today as well as those that still need to be pursued. While tremendous strides have been made in the realms of healthcare access, inclusive education and employment opportunities, the reality is that still to this day too many individuals with developmental disabilities continue to face barriers in their daily lives and that local, national and international awareness campaigns, and community programs are essential to ensuring equity for all.

Advocacy during Developmental Disability Awareness Month calls upon each of us to continue to engage, educate, support and empower individuals with developmental disabilities. In addition to advocacy, this month provides a space where individuals, families and providers can unify and connect with ongoing advocacy efforts. Developmental Disability Awareness

Month amplifies the voices of individuals, families and providers by providing a platform to share experiences, challenges and triumphs. When we unite, we foster a sense of community that is vital for support and resources.

Engaging in local events, whether by taking part in workshops, awareness walks or community outreach programs, strengthens our collective efforts to highlight the importance of inclusion for individuals with developmental disabilities. Continual encouragement for businesses, schools and organizations to engage by educating their employees, fostering inclusive environments and promoting policies that support diversity is vital. It creates the opportunity for meaningful impact and encourages others to genuinely see the value of inclusive practices, thus changing workplace and educational cultures for the better as a whole.

In this ever-evolving society, it’s important to recognize that each and every one of us has a role in creating an inclusive community. Educators must adapt their teaching methods and frameworks to ensure all students can succeed, while businesses can embrace diverse hiring practices that include those with disabilities. Humanity’s strength lies in its diversity and recognizing and celebrating this diversity leads to innovative solutions and prosperous experiences for everyone.

As we embrace Developmental Disability Awareness Month, we make and ask this pledge — not just to raise awareness for 31 days, but to incorporate these values into our daily lives. We must work toward a societal norm where individuals with developmental disabilities are not viewed through a lens of limitation or disability, but through one of ability and potential.

Developmental Disability Awareness Month is a vital observance to promoting understanding, advocacy and community. We all benefit when every member of society has the opportunity to participate fully and meaningfully. As we continue to transform awareness into action, and appreciation into advocacy, ensuring that individuals with developmental disabilities can thrive, contribute and be respected members of our communities, may we all take this opportunity to engage, educate ourselves and others, and work toward a future where inclusivity is not only encouraged but honored, celebrated and ingrained in our daily lives.

Kathleen Pruett is the Director of Development at Opportunity Works, Inc.

## Developmental Disability Awareness Month is a chance for systematic change

By Abigail Parrilla

As the CEO of The Price Center in Newton, Massachusetts, I can’t stress enough the importance of Developmental Disability Awareness Month. Serving individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD), including autism. Empowering, encouraging and caring for individuals with special gifts, needs and abilities for almost 50 years, The Price Center is a life-changing service agency that offers a range of extraordinary programs. The Price Center’s programs serve many people across a range of abilities and reflect our commitment to maximize each individual’s self-confidence and self-advocacy along with their physical, emotional and intellectual capabilities. I see firsthand the value of fostering an inclusive and supportive community.

This month is an opportunity to celebrate the strengths and contributions of those we serve while raising awareness about the challenges they face. Developmental Disability Awareness Month is not just a

calendar event, it’s a catalyst for systemic change. For nonprofit leaders in the IDD and autism space, this month provides a strategic opportunity to elevate advocacy, deepen community engagement and transform internal practices. In Massachusetts, a state known for its progressive stance on disability rights, this is the moment to lead by example and drive meaningful impact.

For nonprofit CEOs in Massachusetts’ IDD and autism community, Developmental Disability Awareness Month is a springboard for lasting change. It offers an opportunity to affirm your organization’s commitment to inclusivity, empower those you serve and drive advocacy efforts that resonate well beyond a single month.

The American Community Survey (ACS) sheds light on disability demographics in Massachusetts and underscores the need for ongoing disability awareness initiatives. Recent ACS estimates indicate that roughly 13% of Massachusetts residents report having a disability. This figure reflects a substantial portion of the state’s

population and emphasizes why disability awareness remains a critical area of focus. Among older adults (65+), the prevalence is notably higher, often exceeding 35%. This trend highlights the intersection between aging and disability, underlining the need for tailored services and public policies that address the needs of seniors. In contrast, younger age groups show lower prevalence rates, although early identification of developmental disabilities (such as autism) remains a key priority. Data consistently show that employment rates for individuals with disabilities are significantly lower than those without. In Massachusetts, competitive employment figures for working-age adults with disabilities typically range between 20–30%, which points to persistent barriers in the workforce and the importance of robust inclusion strategies.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITY AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY

We can all help create a more inclusive society by promoting understanding, advoca-

ting for equal opportunities and fostering environments where individuals of all abilities are welcomed and valued. Whether through education, inclusive hiring practices or simply listening to and amplifying the voices of those with disabilities, each of us plays a role in building a more equitable future.

At The Price Center, embracing Developmental Disability Awareness Month as a way of life means integrating the principles of inclusion, respect and advocacy into every facet of the organization. This approach is more than dedicating one month to awareness, it’s about weaving these values into daily practices and long-term strategies.

Here’s how this philosophy can be reflected in action:

#### 1. Everyday inclusivity

Accessible environments: Ensure all facilities, digital platforms and events are designed with accessibility in mind.

PRICE CENTER, see page 7

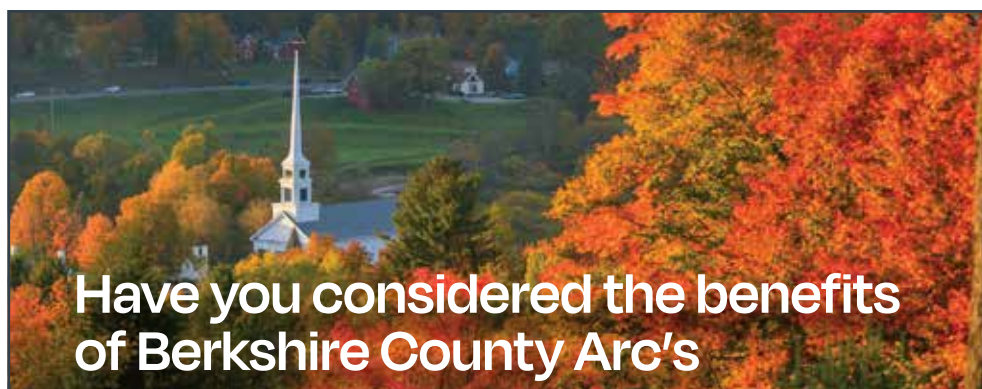
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## A VIEW FROM THE HILL

A commentary from a legislator on human services



### Growing our human service workforce and addressing inequities requires real investment

By Sen. Sal DiDomenico

Human service professionals are the face of our society's safety net for families and individuals in need throughout Massachusetts. We all have had to lean on this workforce or know someone in our lives who has relied on human service workers. Whether someone is having a difficult time getting their child all the resources they need, dealing with a substance abuse disorder, seeking mental health care, struggling in school or needing housing assistance, human service workers are always there for us.

As an elected official and member of state government, I believe it is our responsibility to support human service professionals and ensure they are respected for their critical work. I am proud to sponsor S.119, *An Act establishing a loan repayment program for human services workers*, which aims to take a huge step forward in lifting up these professionals and their families. This legislation would provide eligible human service professionals for up to \$6,000 to repay their qualified education loans if they have an associate degree, up to \$20,000 if they have a bachelor's degree and up to \$30,000 if they have a master's degree.

I have heard from many constituents working in this industry who were required to attain some level of higher education or training and are now struggling to pay back the loans they needed to pay for that schooling. As jobs across this sector are setting higher education requirements for job applicants, public and private universities throughout our state and the country are raising these costs year after year. It is hypocritical and self-defeating if we thank human service workers for their service in one breath and then refuse to ease their financial burden in the next.

Working professionals in this field are not paid enough for the work they do, especially given the high cost of living in our state. This reality makes it difficult for nonprofit organizations and government agencies looking to fill positions and retain employees for long periods of time. Workers who aren't making enough money and are saddled with debt are forced to make impossible financial decisions and can then suffer from food insecurity, unstable housing situations, lack of access to adequate health care and so much more.

These challenges have contributed to a growing workforce shortage, and a weakening safety net, highlighting a growing equity issue. A University of Massachusetts study found that human services employment has dropped significantly in recent years which has led to a workforce crisis in this sector and a lack of public service availability for residents of the Commonwealth. The report also detailed that women and people of color are heavily represented in this workforce — especially in the lowest paid positions — and more than one in six human service workers are low income.

By passing this bill, we could greatly benefit workers (particularly women and people of color), organizations looking to hire and our society at large. I will continue fighting for this legislation until it is signed into law so that Massachusetts can grow its human services workforce and become a leader in addressing our longstanding workforce inequities.

Sen. Sal DiDomenico represents the Middlesex and Suffolk District in the Massachusetts State Senate.



Sen. Sal DiDomenico

This opinions expressed in a View from the Hill and Viewpoints from Across the State are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the Providers' Council or its members.



Jeffrey L. Hirsch



Kathleen Berney



Richard S. Loftus

### HRW invites you to join them for Labor & Employment Update Seminar

Join Hirsch Roberts Weinstein LLP for an update on labor and unemployment law, focusing on legislation changes under the new administration.

Attorneys Hirsch, Berney and Loftus will discuss changes that affect employers, including recent updates in the world of labor law and developments from the NLRB, as well as recent developments and anticipated changes to federal agencies, including the Department of Labor, EEOC and OSHA.

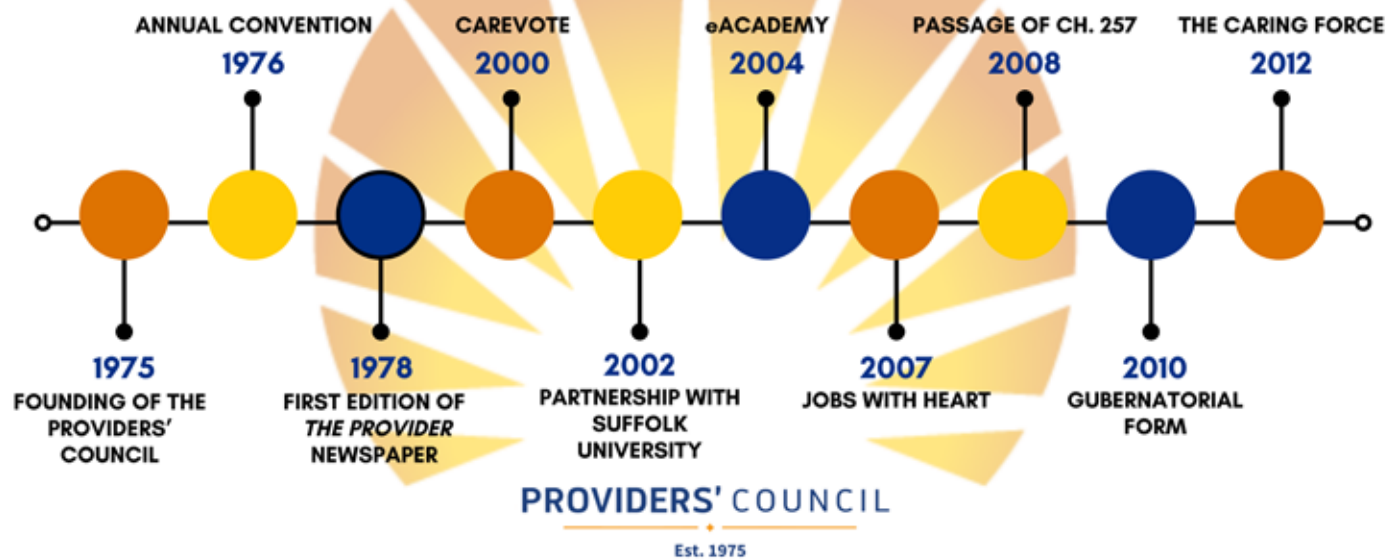


Interested in joining this session? Contact

[nlamarre@providers.org](mailto:nlamarre@providers.org)

# PROVIDER: Council's newspaper opens the path to communication with members

## 50 Years of Impact



The first issue of *The Provider* was six pages and featured an interview with Secretary Gordon Chase, the EOHS Secretary.

Continued from Page 1

ments in the human services industry. Each issue covers news on public policy and educational programs in the human services sector alongside expert commentaries from industry leaders. Readers will also find a thought-provoking column from a legislator or elected official, in-depth profiles of members and employees, and the latest personnel announcements and agency news.

In 1978, the Council began sending bulletins to its members to keep them informed about public policy and organizational changes. Recognizing the need for a more comprehensive communication tool, the Council decided to launch a newsletter “to disseminate timely information concerning community-based human services issues,” as stated in a memo to members on September 15, 1978. The first issue of *The Provider* was published on October 15, 1978.

The inaugural issue of *The Provider* was six pages and featured an interview with Secretary Gordon Chase, the EOHS Secretary at the time. It also included a review of a subcommittee hearing on children’s welfare and a calendar of upcoming events



This is the front page of the first issue of *The Provider*, a six-page typed memo on policy and sector events.

within the sector.

In addition to written content, *The Provid-*

er also showcased cartoons from the Providers’ Council’s longtime director of operations and cartoonist Michael Ripple, who drew political cartoons for the newspaper. The newspaper began to feature Ripple’s cartoons in 1984 even before his career as a Council staff person began. In 1996, Ripple joined the Council, where he continued to draw cartoons for the paper until his retirement in 2021.

While the design and the contents of *The Provider* have changed over the years, the mission of the paper has remained the same.

“The success of this newsletter is dependent upon how well it meets your needs,” Susan von Magnus, administrative assistant and first coordinator for *The Provider*, wrote in her letter to members in 1978. The strength of the paper, like the Council it represents, thrives on the dedication and determination of its members.

As the Council enters the next chapter in its history, *The Provider* will continue to be a trusted source of information for its members. For more information on *The Provider* newspaper, please contact Maureen Lynch, editor of *The Provider*, at [mlynch@providers.org](mailto:mlynch@providers.org).

# RALLIES: Caring Force gears up for another year of advocacy

Continued from Page 1

sachusetts, Brien Center, the City of Pittsfield Commission on Disabilities, Community Access to the Arts, Department of Developmental Services, George B. Crane Memorial Center, Hearthway, High Spirit Community Farm, Leander House, MassAbility, UCP of Western Mass and Soldier On. The event brought together key leaders, including representatives from Congressman Richard Neal’s office, state Sen. Paul Mark, state Reps. Tricia Farley-Bouvier and Leigh Davis and Pittsfield Mayor Peter Marchetti.

## SOUTH OF BOSTON RALLY

The first Caring Force Regional Rally will be held South of Boston on April 11 at the Clarion Hotel in Taunton. The event is sponsored by BAMSI, Justice Resource Institute, New England Village, The Arc of Plymouth and Upper Cape Cod and Road to Responsibility.

## CENTRAL MA LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST

The Caring Force will support the Central MA Legislative Breakfast hosted by Providers of Central MA on May 2 at Holy Cross in Worcester. The event will feature Senate Ways & Means Chairman Michael J. Rodrigues. The breakfast is sponsored by ADDP, Advocates, CENTRO, Center of Hope Foundation, Community Resources for Justice, Justice Resource Institute, Kennedy-Donovan Center, LUK, Inc., Open Sky Community Services, Pernet Family Health Services, Seven Hills Foundation, The Arc of Massachusetts, The Arc of Opportunity, Thrive Support & Advocacy and Venture Community Services.

## 13TH ANNUAL STATE HOUSE RALLY AND LOBBY DAY

The Caring Force will return to the State House on Thursday, May 8 for its 13th Annual State House Rally and Lobby Day. This year, the event will expand to have seating in the Grand Staircase in addition to the Great Hall. The annual rally offers Caring Force members the opportunity to meet directly with their legislators and celebrate the human services sector.

## METROWEST LEGISLATIVE BREAKFAST

The Caring Force will support the MetroWest Legislative Breakfast on May 9 at Nevin’s Hall in the City of Framingham’s Memorial Building. This event is sponsored by the MetroWest Human Services Advocacy Coalition, including the South Middlesex Opportunity Council (SMOC), Advocates, Justice Resource Institute and Wayside Youth & Family Support Network.

## SOUTH COAST RALLY

The Caring Force will host the South Coast Regional Rally in the fall of 2025. The event will also be sponsored by Bristol Aging and Wellness, Justice Resource Institute, Kennedy-Donovan Center, Immigrants Assistance Center and People Inc. For up-to-date information, please visit [thecaringforce.org](http://thecaringforce.org).

## WESTERN MA RALLY

The Caring Force will host the Western MA Regional Rally on September 19 at Westfield State University. The event is also sponsored by 18 Degrees, BFAIR, Gándara Center, Justice Resource Institute, MHA and Viability.

In addition, The Caring Force plans to host regional rallies in Merrimack Valley and Metro Boston. Information on these events will be updated on the Caring Force website as it is available. Members can also purchase Caring Force t-shirts at [tinyurl.com/OrderTCFShirts](http://tinyurl.com/OrderTCFShirts).

For more information about upcoming events, please contact Isabella A. Lee at [ilee@providers.org](mailto:ilee@providers.org).

# WEBINARS: Resources on the Caring Force’s legislative agenda are live

Continued from Page 1

who dedicate themselves to supporting thousands of individuals across the Commonwealth. Eligible workers, who must be employed full-time and have worked in the field for at least 12 consecutive months, could receive up to \$6,000 for an associate degree, \$20,000 for a bachelor’s degree and \$30,000 for a master’s degree to assist with repaying their student loans.

Bills have been assigned bill numbers and assigned to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities for their initial hearing and consideration. The joint committee is chaired by Sen. Robyn Kennedy and Rep. Jay Livingstone.

These legislative efforts are crucial in addressing the workforce crisis in the human services sector, improving financial stability for workers and ensuring the sustainability of essential services for residents across Massachusetts.

To strengthen support for these critical bills, The Caring Force Rally will return to the State House on Thursday, May 8, uniting human services workers, individuals served and advocates from across Massachusetts. They will rally for livable wages and student loan relief, emphasizing the urgent need for these legislative initiatives.

# PRICE CENTER: Advocate for developmental disability awareness

Continued from Page 5

**Inclusive communication:** Use respectful language and person-centered narratives that acknowledge and celebrate diverse abilities.

## 2. Continuous education and empowerment

**Staff training:** Offer ongoing professional development on disability rights, best practices and inclusive strategies.

**Community learning:** Organize regular workshops, panels or guest speaker sessions featuring voices from the disability community.

## 3. Celebrating achievements and stories

**Highlighting success:** Share success stories of individuals with disabilities, emphasizing how their contributions enrich the community.

**Cultural celebrations:** Mark key dates and events beyond the traditional month to continually honor disability pride and achievements.

## 4. Advocacy and community engagement

**Policy influence:** Use the platform to advocate for policies and practices that support equity and accessibility on a broader scale.

**Collaborative partnerships:** Work with local organizations, community leaders and self-advocates to build networks that drive meaningful change.

## 5. Reflective and evolving practices

**Feedback loops:** Regularly solicit feedback from community members and staff

to ensure practices remain relevant and effective.

**Adapting and growing:** Stay committed to reviewing and evolving internal policies and outreach initiatives in light of new insights and community needs.

By making disability awareness a year-round commitment, The Price Center not only enhances the quality of its services but also sets a powerful example for other organizations. This holistic approach builds a more inclusive society where every individual’s dignity and potential are recognized and celebrated!

I challenge everyone — every day — to join me in creating a more inclusive society. What will you do with this challenge?

Here are a few ways to start:

**Educate yourself and others** — Learn about the experiences of people with disabilities and share that knowledge to break down misconceptions.

**Advocate for accessibility and inclusion** — Support policies and practices that ensure equal opportunities for all.

**Engage with and support disability organizations** — Volunteer, donate or partner with organizations like The Price Center to make a direct impact.

**Practice inclusion in daily life** — Create spaces where everyone feels welcomed — whether at work, in your community or in social settings.

Together, we can make a difference — one action at a time.

*Abigail Parrilla is the President and CEO of The Price Center*

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS • APRIL 2025

**What:** 2025 ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP AND BUSINESS MEETING & 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION  
**When:** Wednesday, April 16  
**Time:** 3:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.  
**Presenters:** Providers' Council Board of Directors & Staff  
**Where:** Top of the Tower, Worcester, MA  
**Cost:** \$150 for Members; \$250 for Non-Members; \$50 for Retirees

**What:** Success as a New Supervisor — Spring 2025  
**When:** Tuesday, April 1 to Monday, April 7  
**Time:** 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.  
**Presenter:** Jim Ognibene, M.Ed  
 Session I: Providers' Council Training Center, Session II: Online via Zoom  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** \$200 for Members; \$400 for Non-Members

**What:** Free, Members-Only Webinar: Disability-Inclusive Language — Words and Why They Matter  
**When:** Tuesday, April 1  
**Time:** 2 p.m. to 3 p.m.  
**Presenter:** Emily Muller, Disability Rights Advocate  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** Free; Event for Council Provider Members only

**What:** Certificate in Supervision Series — Spring 2025  
**When:** Wednesdays, April 2, 9, 23, 30, May 7 and 14  
**Time:** 9 a.m. to 12:30 p.m.  
**Presenters:** Jim Ognibene, Visioneer Consulting (Session I & II), Comma Williams, Comma Williams Enterprises (Sessions III & IV) and Ginny Maglio, Optimum Development (Session V & VI)  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** \$700 for Members; \$1,200 for Non-Members

**What:** Free Webinar: Let's Illuminate Human Services — Understanding the Solar Upgrading Nonprofits (SUN) Program  
**When:** Tuesday, April 8  
**Time:** 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.  
**Presenters:** Madeleine Barr, Rachel Gentile and Sanne Wright, Resonant Energy  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** Free; Event for Council Provider Members only

**What:** Provider Member Webinar: Health Inequities in the Autistic Population — A Path Toward Optimization  
**When:** Tuesday, April 8  
**Time:** 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.  
**Presenter:** Mary P. Donahue, PhD — Certified Autism Spectrum Disorder Clinical Specialist, Mindful Paths Psychological Services, Maine  
**Where:** Online via Conversations for Caring Platform  
**Cost:** \$25 for Members

**What:** Free Lawyers Clearinghouse Training: CORI — What Nonprofits Need to Know to Help Their Clients  
**When:** Wednesday, April 9  
**Time:** 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.  
**Presenter:** Crispin Birnbaum, Access to Justice Fellow  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** Free for Provider Members and Non-Members

**What:** Info Session: Certificate in Nonprofit Human Services Management  
**When:** Thursday, April 10; Tuesday, April 17, 29  
**Time:** 2 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.; 12 p.m. to 12:30pm  
**Presenters:** Rae'Niqua Victorine and Brendan Burke, Suffolk University; Nina Lamarre, Providers' Council  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** Free; Event for Council Provider Members only

**What:** Preparing for the Unplanned: Succession Planning for Human Service Boards  
**When:** Wednesday, April 10  
**Time:** 3 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
**Presenter:** David Harris, Interim Executive Solutions  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** \$50 for Members; \$125 for Non-Members

**What:** The 3 E's of Employee Engagement  
**When:** Tuesday, April 22  
**Time:** 9 a.m. to 10:30 a.m.  
**Presenter:** Deb Calvert, People First Productivity Solutions  
**Where:** Online via Zoom  
**Cost:** \$50 for Members; \$125 for Non-Members

*Pre-registration for these events is required unless otherwise noted. Please visit [providers.org/events](https://providers.org/events) to learn more and register for the event you wish to attend.*

Questions? Call 508.598.9800 or email Nina Lamarre at [nlamarre@providers.org](mailto:nlamarre@providers.org)

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- **Spread the Word:** Talk to friends, family, and colleagues about the vital role of human services in our community and invite them to see you speak!

**SPEAKING IS A ONE TIME COMMITMENT.**

[www.thecaringforce.org](https://www.thecaringforce.org)  
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