



Support Massachusetts' human-service providers

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Every day, more than 185,000 dedicated individuals go to work to provide high-quality services to residents of the commonwealth who need assistance, many of them our friends and neighbors. The work these caregivers do helps to strengthen our society and builds caring communities in every city and town throughout Massachusetts.

The Mental Health Association of Greater Lowell is one of more than 1,000 non-profit organizations across Massachusetts that contracts with the state to provide essential services to some of our most vulnerable citizens. These services include diverse programs such as residential care, day treatment programs, vocational services, emergency services and substance-abuse counseling.

Many of these organizations are facing an uncertain future because of the state's business model that even the administration admits is dysfunctional. Rates paid to human-service providers for services have not changed since 1987, and agencies have not received even a simple cost-of-living adjustment. Escalating operating costs such as heat, rent, fuel and health care pose significant economic hardships for these organizations. Agencies are forced to make ends meet through reducing services, limiting fringe benefits and providing health plans with higher employee co-pays.

In 2007, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services released a report detailing the looming crisis facing the state's human-service providers. The report stated that 60 percent of providers have less than 30 days of cash on hand at the end of the fiscal year and half of all providers have liabilities in excess of their assets. Any businessperson would agree this puts these organizations in a perilous -- if not inoperable -- position.

The Legislature is considering Senate Bill 65, which would create an improved service-delivery system by modernizing a broken procurement system. Senate Bill 65, "The Campaign to Strengthen Human Services," would more appropriately reimburse human-service providers for the vital services they provide.

We all want the best care for our loved ones and neighbors, and we must ensure that it is provided for all of us when we require it. Gov. Patrick has publicly stated that he will sign the bill if it reaches his desk. We are determined to make that happen, and the Mental Health Association of Greater Lowell is happy to join with provider coalitions across the state to urge the prompt passage of this important measure.

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