



Dignity Votes 2022

A Dignity Alliance Massachusetts Initiative

Through the Dignity Votes 2022 initiative, Dignity Alliance Massachusetts has invited candidates for legislative office to respond to a set of questions drafted specifically for the office. Dignity Alliance Massachusetts is a state-wide coalition of aging and disability service and advocacy organizations and supporters dedicated to the systemic transformation of long-term services, support, and care to ensure the dignity of older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers.

Candidate Response – Jason Lewis (D) Candidate for State Senator (Incumbent) (Fifth Middlesex)

Question 1. Most Massachusetts residents know someone who has needed long-term services or care due to issues related to aging or disabilities or experienced it themselves.

Has anyone close to you needed nursing home care, congregate living arrangements, or home and community-based services, such as personal care assistants (PCAs)? What implications for public policy and regulatory enforcement do you draw from this experience?

Response to Q1: Yes. It can be very difficult and stressful to find the appropriate care and support for a loved one. Our current elder care "system" is underfunded and can be difficult to navigate. There are also very significant workforce challenges due to the difficult nature of the work, long hours, and low pay. The state legislature definitely needs to do more, both in terms of funding and policy, to improve elder and disability care and supports.

Question 2. One of the most important bills considered by the 192nd General Court, but not enacted, is House No. 4780 An Act relative to Nursing Home Quality and Accountability.

Given the pervasively occurring provision of substandard care and staffing shortages, not to mention the tragic impact of Covid-19 on nursing home residents and staff, would you support transformational reform of nursing homes along the lines of H. 4780 when a version is filed for consideration in the next legislative session? If yes, will you consider being a co-sponsor in the next legislative session?

Response to Q2: Yes.

Question 3. During the 2021-2022 session, the Legislature authorized the issuance of a bond in the amount of \$200 million to undertake the construction of "small house" homes for veterans in local communities throughout the Commonwealth (see <https://www.cfm.va.gov/til/Prototype/CLCPrototype.pdf> for a detailed description).

Will you encourage the Administration to implement this project within the next year and support additional funding to help the program operate and expand?

Response to Question 3: Yes.

Question 4. Most Massachusetts residents would prefer to "age in place" – in their homes or in their community.

Will you support increased funding for housing vouchers, home modification for greater accessibility, increased support for home care and technology, and similar initiatives to help older adults and people with disabilities remain independent and safe in their own homes rather than face placements in nursing homes?

Response to Question 4: Yes. I am a strong supporter of efforts to help older adults and people with disabilities remain in their own homes and communities and live independent lives as much as possible.

Question 5. Massachusetts requires nursing home staff to be up to date on all Covid-19 vaccines and boosters, yet not all nursing homes have achieved full compliance.

Will you support efforts to achieve full compliance by staff and encourage residents to receive all recommended vaccinations and boosters?

Response to Question 5: Yes.

Question 6. The ownership of nursing homes is increasingly under the control of out-of-state, investor groups. The organizational structure has been segmented into many components, often under common ownership, e.g., a real estate entity, management company, therapy services, and more. This makes it difficult to determine who is controlling major staffing, operational, and business decisions and who has responsibility and accountability. Consequently, it is critical to analyze how MassHealth funds are being used. Periodic, independent, comprehensive, and transparent public audits are necessary to assess how nursing homes operate and public funding is spent.

Will you advocate that the state auditor undertakes this type of audit as a priority?

Response to Question 6. Yes,

Question 7. Hundreds of millions of dollars of state and federal funds have been provided to Massachusetts nursing homes during the pandemic. There has been little to no analysis and accountability of the use of these funds. It is important to know if these expenditures were effective in order to direct future allocation decisions. It is equally essential to provide public assurance that the funding is used as intended.

Will you call for a comprehensive public audit of the use of pandemic-related spending as an early priority?

Response to Question 7. Yes.

Question 8. Nursing home residents often have their human rights limited and are not treated with respect and dignity. In fact, residential clients of the Department of Mental Health and the Department of Disability Services have more rights than residents in conventional nursing homes.

Will you support efforts, such as allowing nursing home residents to file suit under the consumer protection laws, to restore human rights to such residents?

Response to Question 8. Yes,

Question 9. The safety, well-being, and rights of persons with disabilities and older adults living in public as well as subsidized housing have had little or no protection. Issues include but are not limited to failure to protect victims from bullying and mobbing; failure to grant reasonable accommodations to disabled persons; and evictions leading to homelessness and emotional and physical trauma. Accountability is lacking.

Will you support legislation to strengthen laws and their enforcement to assure the safety and rights of people in these situations?

Response to Question 9. Yes,

Question 10. About one of four nursing home residents in Massachusetts is administered anti-psychotic medications, one of the highest nursing home anti-psychotic usage rates in the country. Massachusetts requires informed written consent of a patient or a patient's representative's representative prior to the administration of anti-psychotics and other psychotropics to nursing home residents. Additionally, about 10% of Massachusetts nursing home residents have a diagnosis of schizophrenia, many of recent determination. This is a rate ten times greater than that of the general population.

What can be done to reduce the usage of anti-psychotic medications as well as ensure meaningful compliance with existing requirements?

Response to Question 10. I would like to learn more about this issue, and ways that state government could help provide solutions while ensuring respect for patient privacy.

Question 11. *Is there anything you would like to add?*

Response to Question 11. If re-elected I will continue to be a strong supporter for well-funded human and social services, especially home and community-based services and supports for elders and people with disabilities.

Brief profile of Jason Lewis:

Jason Lewis was born in South Africa and came to the United States with his family when he was twelve years old. He graduated magna cum laude from Harvard College and earned a MBA degree from Harvard Business School. Prior to public service, he was involved with the start up of two successful software companies. He serves as the Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Education and the Assistant Vice Chair of the Senate Committee on Ways and Means.

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Dignity Alliance Massachusetts is a state-wide, grass-roots coalition of aging and disability service and advocacy organizations and supporters dedicated to systemic transformation to ensure the dignity of older adults, people with disabilities, and caregivers. We are committed to advancing new ways of providing long-term services, support, living options, and care while respecting choice and self-determination. Dignity Alliance works through education, legislation, regulatory reform, and legal strategies to realize this vision throughout the Commonwealth.