



IN SUPPORT OF H1360 An Act relative to preventing discrimination against persons with disabilities in the provision of health care

Joint Committee on Health Care Financing, June 18, 2025

Dignity Alliance Massachusetts, a non-profit, all-volunteer, statewide coalition advocating for older adults, people with disabilities, and their caregivers, is pleased to have the opportunity to provide testimony in support of legislation to prevent discrimination against persons with disabilities in the provision of health care, H1360.

A recent (2022) study by Northwestern University's Medical School, in cooperation with Harvard Medical School and the University of Massachusetts of national practices published in *Health Affairs* reports that physicians may be choosing to deny care to people with disabilities, and some use discretionary excuses to strategically discharge them from their practice. That such practices are occurring more than 30 years after the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), that people with disabilities report having a difficult time accessing health care and often find that doctors' offices refuse to accommodate them, is unconscionable!

The study was conducted using focus groups with physicians drawn from a national database. Physicians who participated in these groups expressed bias toward people with disabilities, and a substantial number of participants reported that they make strategic choices to deny care to people with disabilities, the study found. This includes making statements such as "I am not taking new patients," "I do not take your insurance," or telling the patients they need specialized care and therefore, "I am not the doctor for you."

"Our body of work suggests that physician bias and discriminatory attitudes may contribute to the health disparities that people with disabilities experience," said corresponding study author Tara Lagu, MD, MPH, director of the Institute for Public Health and Medicine's Center for Health Services and Outcomes Research at Feinberg and a professor of Medicine in the Division

of Hospital Medicine and of Medical Social Sciences. “We need to address the attitudes and behavior that perpetuate the unequal access experienced by our most vulnerable patients.”

Additionally, physicians in the study described a lack of knowledge about how to provide accommodations for people with disabilities, and some expressed adversarial attitudes toward the ADA, saying the legislation “works against physicians.”¹

Another study, “Barriers to the access of people with disabilities to health services: a scoping review,” published by the National Library of Medicine, concluded that “it was evident that people with disabilities face several barriers when trying to access the health services they need and that users and health professionals have distinct and complementary views on difficulties.”²

The Urban Institute found (2023) that 4 in 10 adults with disabilities experienced unfair treatment in health care settings, at work, or when applying for benefits.³ The study reported, “Experiences of unfair treatment in these settings can reinforce health and economic disparities by limiting access to employment opportunities and services that are essential for meeting basic needs. Efforts to improve the health and well-being of people with disabilities will, therefore, require addressing unequal treatment and ableism—a set of biases and institutional practices rooted in the belief that people with disabilities are inferior.”

Here, in Massachusetts, where we routinely cite our health care as among the best in the nation, we must not permit discrimination against people with disabilities when they try to access this “world-class” medical care. H.1360 if passed and effectively enforced by our Board of Registration in Medicine, the Attorney General, and other state agencies, we will have advanced the rights of those with disabilities in our Commonwealth!

Your former House colleague, Jim Brett, currently President of the New England Council, has spoken poignantly about the issue of discrimination in health care against people with disabilities.

“It inspires me to remember that there are an awful lot of people like my brother who have no one advocating for them; many are sitting at home. They don’t have somebody helping them find some meaningful employment, helping them get access to dental care or healthcare.

“There is a major discrimination out there when it comes to people with disabilities; they’re not treated equally. So, for the last ten years, I’ve been working with dental schools, urging them to adopt at least one new course to diagnose and treat people with disabilities. It’s been a battle, but it’s something that I’m proud of and it has been accomplished. If they do go to a dentist, they may not have dental insurance, they may be on Mass Health, which doesn’t reimburse enough for the dental costs.

¹ [Widespread bias, discrimination directed toward people with disabilities who seek health care - Northwestern Now](#)

² [Barriers to the access of people with disabilities to health services: a scoping review - PMC](#)

³ [Four in Ten Adults with Disabilities Experienced Unfair Treatment in Health Care Settings, at Work, or When Applying for Public Benefits in 2022](#)

“Beyond that, there is major discrimination on how people with disabilities are treated in healthcare, transportation, housing.”

“The awareness is becoming more prevalent with the medical community. But we are going to spread it beyond the dental, spread it to all the hospitals. We will try to do what we did with the dental schools and create a new course on how to diagnose and treat disabled people. How do nurses and doctors and other primary care people treat people with disabilities? It’s a major problem. We’ve been working on healthcare disparity involving people with disabilities. And **we’re making progress, but we have a long way to go.**”⁴

Dignity Alliance strongly agrees, and respectfully urges the Committee to favorably report H1360 and to, then, guide it through to enactment. It’s the right thing to do!

Dignity Alliance looks forward to working with members of the Committee and Committee Staff to advance this important legislation. If you have any questions, please contact me at dickmoore1943@gmail.com or (617) 413 – 7734. Thank you for the opportunity to share our position relative to S.154/H.253.

Submitted by Richard T. Moore, Chair, Legislative Work Group, Dignity Alliance
Massachusetts.

Dignity Alliance Massachusetts is dedicated to transformative change to ensure the dignity of older adults, people with disabilities, and their caregivers. We are committed to advancing new ways of providing long-term services, support, living options, and care, while respecting choice and self-determination. Through education, legislation, regulatory reform, and legal strategies, this mission will become reality throughout the Commonwealth. As a non-profit, all-volunteer, grass-roots coalition of aging and disability service and advocacy organizations and supporters, Dignity Alliance Massachusetts works to secure fundamental change. For more information on the “Dignity Dozen +1” 2025-2026 Legislative package, contact Former Senator Richard T. Moore, Legislative Chair, at rmoores8743@charter.net or visit the Dignity Alliance web site. info@dignityAllianceMA.org

⁴ [Brotherly love gives impetus to Jim Brett’s work | Dorchester Reporter](#)