DIGNITY PERSPECTIVES

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QUOTE OF THE WEEK

"Every person deserves the opportunity to live with dignity, independence and agency in the community they call home," said Governor Maura Healey. "That's exactly what the Community Living Initiative is about. By working across state government and alongside advocates, providers and families, we're helping more older adults and people with disabilities access the support they need to live where they want to live. We're proud of the progress we've made in just one year, and we're committed to building on it."

FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Dignity Perspectives, a publication of Dignity Alliance Massachusetts. The publication's mission is to advance thoughtful discussion on aging, disability, and long-term services and supports while promoting policies that maximize independence, dignity, and community living.

Dignity Perspectives complements, not replaces, the existing Dignity Digest. The Digest is an objective news source; Dignity Perspectives is where we publish opinion, analysis, advocacy statements, and our official positions.

Unless otherwise noted, the views expressed in a bylined piece are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the Dignity Alliance Massachusetts.

LEAD ESSAY

Massachusetts Must Count Quality, Not Just Nursing Home Beds

The Commonwealth must stop confusing capacity with quality—and promises with enforcement.

By Richard T. Moore

Massachusetts nursing home policy needs a reality check. A licensed bed is not proof of quality care. A regulation is not proof of enforcement. And a promise to protect residents is not the same as protecting them.

A September 2026 Boston Globe Spotlight investigation raised troubling questions about nursing home ownership, staffing expenditures, and state oversight. At one RegalCare facility in Taunton, spending on nursing services fell by approximately $530,000 in 2025, while rent paid to a related real estate company rose to $522,000.

The Boston Globe reported that DPH had not denied a nursing home acquisition application or revoked a nursing home license in at least seven years. That record demands a public explanation.

Massachusetts has kept the Personal Needs Allowance for MassHealth nursing home residents at $72.80 a month since 2007–2008. The Commonwealth should raise the allowance to $100 a month effective January 1, 2027, and index it to annual Social Security cost-of-living adjustments.

The measure of success is not how many beds Massachusetts preserves. It is whether people receive safe, adequately staffed, financially sustainable, and dignified care — and whether the Commonwealth has the courage to enforce its own standards.

ESSAY

The Opportunity We Should Embrace: Why Community Living Deserves Our Support

By the Editors

Advocates often become known for what they oppose: inadequate oversight, neglect, unnecessary institutionalization, bureaucratic barriers. Those fights matter. But advocacy also means recognizing when government moves in the right direction — and the Healey-Driscoll administration's Community Living Initiative deserves that recognition.

The initiative, born from the Marsters v. Healey settlement, rests on Olmstead v. L.C., the 1999 Supreme Court decision affirming disabled people's right to services in the most integrated setting. That right is now under federal assault; Massachusetts must become the backstop.

The first year shows what progress looks like: Community Transition Liaison teams made over 17,000 nursing-facility visits statewide, and 728 residents completed transitions through that program alone. Combined with other efforts, 391 people who'd lived in a facility over 60 days moved back to homes of their choosing — a start, but only a fraction of the administration's goal of transitioning 2,400 people over eight years.

The initiative should become the Commonwealth's commitment, not just the governor's program. With Washington in retreat, it is Massachusetts's obligation.

COMMUNITY VOICES & COMMENTARY

Who Should Have Warned the Governor? What Will Healey Do Now?
By Margaret Morganroth Gullette

The Boston Globe's Spotlight team raked its brilliant searchlight over only one of the greedy bad actors in the nursing-facility industry, RegalCare, and only one agency that should have prevented its evil-doing, the Department of Public Health.

For the past seven years, under governors of two different parties, DPH has permitted more out-of-state, private-equity operators to quietly seize nearly one in five nursing facilities in Massachusetts.

Who should have brought the bad news to Governor Healey? The Undersecretary for MassHealth, the Secretary of Aging and Independence, and DPH Commissioner Robert Goldstein all knew, or should have known, how bad the situation had become.

This drastic crisis ought to serve as an impetus for Governor Healey to do more to protect at-risk seniors. Only the state can save our most vulnerable elders.

Margaret Morganroth Gullette is the author of American Eldercide: How It Happened, How to Prevent It, and a Scholar at the Women's Studies Research Center, Brandeis.

He Lacks a Plaque, Not Privilege
While a millionaire's legacy gets the spotlight, nursing-home residents must preserve their dignity on $72.80 a month.

By James A. Lomastro, PhD

Roger Clemens has been “shunned” by the Baseball Hall of Fame. But Clemens remains wealthy, celebrated, politically connected, and surrounded by fans. He lacks a plaque, not privilege.

Meanwhile, a MassHealth resident in a Massachusetts nursing or rest home is permitted to retain just $72.80 a month as a personal-needs allowance — about $2.40 a day for clothing, haircuts, toiletries, and the small choices that preserve a person's dignity.

If we are going to devote sustained attention to what powerful people believe they are owed, we should devote at least as much to what vulnerable people actually need.

SPOTLIGHT — INVESTIGATIVE

Document Found — DPH Releases Report, Finally

By Wynn Gerhard

The Department of Public Health is sharing the final Study and Report on the Need and Feasibility of Qualified Professional Guardians, legislatively mandated by Chapter 197 of the Acts of 2024.

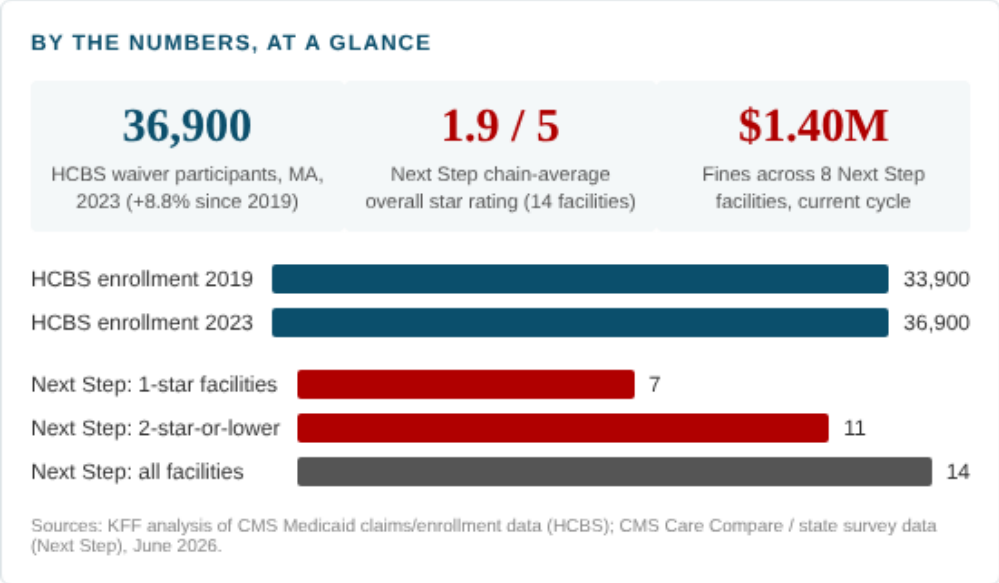
BY THE NUMBERS — RESEARCH

Home- and Community-Based Services Waiver

Massachusetts HCBS waiver enrollment grew from approximately 33,900 in 2019 to approximately 36,900 in 2023 (+8.8%), with roughly 116,700 Medicaid beneficiaries using any form of home-care/HCBS services statewide across 10 waivers.

Next Step Profile — Executive Summary

All 14 Next Step Healthcare facilities (Chain ID 371) carry a chain-average overall rating of 1.9. Seven facilities are rated 1-star overall; 11 are rated 2-star or lower. Records report 181 current-cycle health deficiencies, 16 complaint deficiencies, 22 penalties, and $1,402,313 in fines across eight facilities.



EDITORIAL BOARD POSITION

PNA Needs to Be Expanded

By Richard T. Moore

Senator Bernie Sanders' proposed Social Security expansion aims to boost annual benefits by approximately $2,400 — but the plan fails to benefit Medicaid-covered nursing home residents due to the structural mechanics of the Personal Needs Allowance, set at a federal floor of $30 per month since 1987. Without statutory reform to increase and index the PNA, low-income institutionalized seniors remain excluded from meaningful financial relief.

LEGISLATIVE WATCH — SEPTEMBER 2026

Watching Beacon Hill. Watching Capitol Hill. Building the Agenda for 2027–2028.

As the Massachusetts legislative session moves toward its conclusion, several important bills are now before conference committees. Dignity Alliance Massachusetts is watching for provisions affecting community living, long-term care, Medicaid, caregiver support, and consumer protections.

On the federal side, five issues anchor the Dignity Alliance agenda for the next Congress: PNA modernization, nursing home staffing standards, home- and community-based services, essential caregiver protections, and Senator Warren's work on corporate abuse in health care.

The Legislative Work Group meets every other Thursday at 3:30 p.m. to build the 2027–2028 Massachusetts legislative agenda.

VOICES — LIVED EXPERIENCE

A first-person reflection on addiction and recovery, submitted by a community contributor.

Miss Heroin,
I never thought anything would hurt this much
Losing interest in everything but you
Man this is rough
You made me believe you were the cure to my every kind of pain
You left me hooked with nothing to gain
You were my sanity in my hour of depression
As you seduced me and made me your slave
Your cravings would nearly drive me insane!
I would try to say goodbye but you would kick me down back to the ground
The vomit, the cramps, the withdrawal pains
The cold chills and hot showers
Were only cured by your nasty brown grains

You took control of me right into your arms
Slowly consuming me into something I swore never to be
Addiction consuming every aspect of life
Can't seem to grasp even a single task
You made it impossible to get through one day without you
With your continual day to day struggle just to feel normal
Before I knew it, everyone I loved saw the side of me that you took over
Everytime they questioned I did what you taught me to do.
Lie.
I wanted to let go and get you out of my way
But so frightened to tell someone imagining what they will say,
The once free-spirited little girl is now nothing but a junkie
You once gave me comfort and protection
Made me feel contentment
Then continued to grab me closer making me lie and steal, as you're more expensive than gold
Your powerful disease made me so cold
Well honey I have a family I hold so dear
And you my friend will never take that away
I silently cry out for help as I am now done dancing with the devil
Oh heroin I will not let you win
It's time to put you six feet in the ground
It was a struggle but a worthwhile fight
Because now I am in control and you are out of my life
My mom and my sister are my inspiration
The reasons I won't let you back into my life
Addiction is more powerful than some understand
I'm so thankful for my higher power
My family and I will have forever to be together
I buried you for good this time
We'll never meet again
Thank you for the lessons, sorry you didn't win!

By Dominique (Nikki) Cecelia Cheney

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