



# Public Health H A P P E N I N G S

Winter Edition, 2005

## MPHA Takes on the Soda & Junk Food Industries

On October 5, the State House steps were jammed with students and other supporters, waving signs protesting the sale of junk food and soda in schools. Raquel, a 15-year old participant in a diabetes prevention program, stepped to the microphone and spoke to a gaggle of reporters about her uphill battle to eat well.

MPHA is supersizing its campaign to get soda and junk food out of schools. Nearly 10 percent of Massachusetts high school students are obese or overweight, leading to a higher risk of diabetes, asthma, and other health problems. MPHA is spearheading advocacy for H. 4452, "An Act to Promote Proper School Nutrition," legislation that replaces soda with healthier drinks and establishes healthy standards for snacks in schools. In Connecticut, the soda industry successfully pressured the governor to veto similar legislation. MPHA is working hard to prevent this from happening in Massachusetts, with a comprehensive



Rep. Peter Koutoujian led the crowd in a chant before the group filed into Gardner Auditorium for the public hearing.

campaign incorporating grassroots organizing, coalition-building, media, and advocacy. MPHA has won support for the bill from over 100 organizations and public officials. These range from the Boston Teachers Union to the Worcester City Council to Springfield's Brightwood Health Center.

We've generated dozens of newspaper articles and letters to the editor. The *Boston Globe* has editorialized in favor of the bill twice, and the *Salem News, Metrowest Daily*

*News*, and several local weeklies have also come out in support of the bill.

In October, we staged several highly successful events prior to the bill's public hearing. An educational forum at the State House attracted over 50 legislators and staff. And we organized media events in Worcester, Springfield, and Boston.

Our efforts have resulted in growing support on Beacon Hill for the bill. The Public Health Committee gave it a favorable recommendation, sending the bill to its next step in the long legislative process, the Health Care Financing Committee.

*Please contact Roberta Friedman, MPHA's Director of Education, if you would like to help move the bill forward:*

(617) 524-6696, x103  
rfriedman@mphaweb.org

## Harold Cox to be Honored by APHA



Harold Cox, MPHA past Board President, is being honored with one of the American Public Health Association's highest honors. At the APHA Annual Meeting, on December 11 in Philadelphia, Harold will be presented with the Milton & Ruth Roemer Prize for Creative Local Public Health Work.

The award is granted to an innovative local health officer who has overcome opposition and mobilized popular support to protect public health. Harold has more than 25 years of professional experience in direct services, administration, and advocacy in a variety of public health settings. At the height of the AIDS epidemic in this country, he served as the Director of Client Services for the AIDS Action Committee of Massachusetts. He has been the

Chief Health Officer for the City of Cambridge since 1996.

Geoff Wilkinson, MPHA's Executive Director, nominated Harold for the Roemer award, citing three areas where he has overcome adversity: AIDS prevention and treatment, banning workplace smoking, and developing a regional structure for coordination of public health resources and interventions in Massachusetts. During his tenure, the Cambridge Public Health Department has won numerous awards for its early smoke-free workplace campaign, domestic violence prevention program, literacy campaign, and walking programs.

"I have long admired and appreciated Harold's creativity, savvy, and determination," says Wilkinson. "He is a visionary and a leader who fosters new ideas and makes them reality."

## MPHA Members Ready to Create Change in 2006

MPHA's annual meeting on November 1 helped lay the groundwork for the organization's work next year. Over 150 people from across the Common-



**Dr. Stephanie Bailey**

wealth came for a day of speeches, workshops, and networking. They left informed, inspired, and ready to agitate, organize, and advocate for change in 2006.

The meeting was filled with many

highlights. A rousing "call to action" was delivered by Dr. Stephanie Bailey, Director of Health for the Metro Nashville Public Health Department. Workshops covered crucial public health areas, including boosting the public health budget and preventing childhood obesity. Longtime board member Art Mazer received the Helen Meltzer Award and the



**Art Mazer**

MA School Nurse Organization received the Front Lines Award.

The day concluded with a discussion with Deval Patrick, the only gubernatorial candidate to take the opportunity to address the meeting. The hour-long conversation allowed Patrick and the audience to cover a gamut of topics, from bilingual education to health care reform.



**Deval Patrick**

## A Victory for the Pharmacy Access Bill!

A bill to prevent to AIDS and hepatitis C has moved a giant step forward on Beacon Hill.

More than one-third of people with HIV/AIDS in Massachusetts have a needle-related infection – through their own needle use or that of their sexual partner. Moreover, needle sharing is the primary way of contracting hepatitis C. Unfortunately, Massachusetts is one of only three states in the nation that prohibits sales of needles without a prescription.

The Pharmacy Access Bill (H. 4176) will allow people age 18 and older to buy a needle from a pharmacist without a prescription. An educational insert about treatment, disposal, and disease prevention will accompany every purchase.

On November 14, the bill won overwhelming approval by the House, 115 to 37. Next stop: the Senate.

To get involved in supporting the Pharmacy Access Bill, please contact Eric Weltman, MPHA's Deputy Director of Advocacy and Policy:

(617) 524-6696, ext. 111;  
Eweltman@mphaweb.org

## COMMUNITY HEALTH WORKER BILL ADVANCES ON TWO FRONTS

As the legislature debates health reform, MPHA is working with the Massachusetts Community Health Worker Network (MACHW) to ensure recognition of the essential role of community health workers.

MPHA assisted MACHW in crafting legislation, filed by Representative Fox, to determine how community health workers (CHWs) could be better utilized to increase access to health care. The bill received a boost this fall when it was given a "thumbs up" by the Public Health Committee. The bill is now in the Health Care Financing Committee.

House Speaker DiMasi gave the bill another huge boost by including it in his health care reform package. The Senate also included proposals regarding CHWs in its health care reform bill, including a provision establishing CHW representation on the Commonwealth's Public Health Council. The bills are currently being reconciled by a joint House-Senate Committee, and MPHA and MACHW are working to ensure a strong voice for CHWs in the final legislation.

For more information, contact Lisa Renee Siciliano, MACHW's Executive Director:

LRSiciliano@aol.com

## BOARD MEMBERS IN ACTION

MPHA board members have stepped up to the plate, testifying at a spate of recent State House hearings:

- **Vivien Morris**, chair of our Food & Nutrition section, spoke at both the media event and hearing in support of H. 4452 (see "MPHA Takes on the Soda and Junk Food Industries").
- **Myron Allukian**, chair of our Oral Health section, spoke before a joint hearing of the Public Health and Children & Families in support of H. 2633 and S. 122, legislation authorizing community water fluoridation for all Massachusetts communities with a public water supply that serves more than 5,000 residents.
- **Frank Singleton**, member-at-large, testified before the Public Health Committee about strategies to improve the state's capacity to respond to pandemic flu.

## Notes from the West

MPHA continues to grow in strength and numbers in western Massachusetts. This commitment has been brought to bear in recent advocacy and public education efforts, as well as attendance at MPHA's annual meeting.

Regional members have been active in supporting H. 4452, our bill to get junk food and soda out of schools. In October, MPHA staged a media event at Holyoke City Hall in support of the bill, featuring Bill O'Brien, Food Service Director for the Holyoke school system and Nikki Burkett, Minority Outreach Coordinator for the American Health Association. Burkett also traveled to Boston for a media event and public hearing in support of H.4452.

In November, MPHA also co-sponsored a well-attended public forum on childhood obesity held at Shriners Hospital.

The regional committee has chosen to focus on the vital issue of minority health disparities, drafting a detailed letter with recommendations for the legislature's health disparities commission. Committee members also played a vital role in sponsoring a public forum on oral health held at Mercy Hospital.

MPHA has continued its regional partnership with Western MassCOSH on environmental health legislation. Constituent meetings with seven legislators have been held regarding bills to ban mercury, use healthy cleaning products, and phase out dangerous toxic chemicals.

In all this work, our regional organizer, AJ Juarez, has been supported, helped, and galvanized by a dedicated crew of volunteers, many of who trekked out to Shrewsbury for MPHA's annual meeting:

- Helen Caulton Harris, Director, Springfield Dept. of Health/Human Services
- Jeff Harness, Western MA Center for Healthy Communities
- Mary Ford, Franklin County Health Ctr.
- Tamari Cox, Spanish American Union
- Brenda Evans and Linda Franklin, both regional committee members and with the Pioneer Valley AHEC

AJ has also been ably assisted by Carmel Kelly, an intern from the University of Massachusetts. She has done heavy lifting for the nutrition bill and a project to refurbish an elementary school greenhouse.

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MPHA is pleased to introduce Sara Kanevsky, our new organizer for central Massachusetts. Sara hails from Missouri, where she was most recently a political organizer for

a community-labor coalition. She has experience working with municipal leaders and state legislators, volunteer activists and coalitions. Sara has lobbied for Planned Parenthood, organized for the AFL-CIO, and been an emergency response team member for AmeriCorps, where she was a wild land firefighter and an organizer of respite centers in New York City after September 11<sup>th</sup>.

In her spare time, Sara also biked 4,500 miles across the country to raise funds and awareness for leukemia research, in honor of a friend who had the disease.

We are thrilled to have her energy, enthusiasm and focus to help build MPHA in Central MA. Welcome Sara!

## Taking Action in Central Massachusetts

MPHA's central Massachusetts committee scored strong publicity for our school nutrition bill at a September 28 media event in Worcester. It was the first collaborative effort with Sara Kanevsky, our new community organizer. The event was soon followed by two important endorsements of the bill, by the Worcester City Council and the school committee, thanks to the leadership of MPHA members, including Dr. Leonard Morse, the city's health commissioner, Dr. Jan Yost, President and CEO of the Health Foundation of Central Massachusetts, and Joe O'Brien, a school committee member, as well as students, nurses, and others who testified, made phone calls, and wrote letters.

In November, the regional committee convened its first meeting with Sara, and decided to collaborate on several local issues: boosting the prominence of public health in a Worcester civic engagement initiative and working with Worcester Interfaith and Holy Cross student interns to establish a school nutrition education project with Worcester Accelerated Learning Laboratories students.

In addition, the regional committee is planning continued work with the Regional Environmental Coalition on promoting environmental health legislation, including strengthening ties between labor and environmental groups.

The regional committee is working to build our base of activists participating in our school nutrition and environmental health campaigns.

*Please contact Sara Kanevsky at (508) 414-0976 or [sara.kanevsky@gmail.com](mailto:sara.kanevsky@gmail.com), to get involved by writing letters to legislators, making phone calls and attending meetings with legislators in Central Massachusetts.*

# THANK YOU

In November, three people retired from the MPHA Board of Directors:

**Thomas Conklin, MD**

**Judith Gorbach, EdM, MPH**

**Ali Noorani, MPH**



**Judith Gorbach, at the annual meeting, retired after serving on the board since 1977.**

On behalf of the MPHA board, staff & membership we thank you for your commitment to MPHA and public health.

Thank you also to **Harold Cox** for his valuable contributions as MPHA Board President. Harold turned over the reins to our new Board President, **Judith Kurland**, at the annual meeting.

# MPHAMembership

MPHA won important victories in 2005. We are helping Massachusetts residents lead healthier, safer lives. Your support, your voice, and your membership were critical to these victories. Please help MPHA build on this success in 2006- **tell your friends and colleagues about MPHA membership.**

Membership applications are available at <http://www.mphaweb.org/join.html> or by contacting Kara Keenan, Membership Coordinator, at [kkeenan@mphaweb.org](mailto:kkeenan@mphaweb.org) Or (617) 524-6696 x113

# SAVE the DATE

APRIL 27, 2006

Please join us for

***Our Health, Our Future***  
**MPHA Annual Celebration & Award Dinner**

honoring

# JOHN O'BRIEN

**CEO & President, UMass Medical Center**

Location and ticket information will soon follow. Please contact Kara Keenan for sponsorship information: (617) 524-6696 x113 or [kkeenan@mphaweb.org](mailto:kkeenan@mphaweb.org)

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