

June 15, 2021

Dear Massachusetts Legislators,

I am writing to ask that you sign onto **S.1257 and H.2090**, which will create a commission on the history of state institutions for people with developmental, intellectual, and mental health disabilities in the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts has been a global leader in providing advanced medical and educational opportunities for people with mental, developmental, and intellectual disabilities. But our successes conceal a more disturbing history. The small handful of state-run institutions that existed in the mid-1800s became a vast network of asylums, state schools, and farm colonies.

By the 1970s, tens of thousands of disabled residents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts were housed in at least 27 large institutions. Many who entered, never left.

Nearly all large state institutions are now closed, but they have left an unsettled legacy. No state-led effort has ever been made to tell the story of these places. Documents are scattered between state agencies. Former institutional residents and employees have rarely been asked to share their stories. Descendants face a maze of agencies if they hope to learn what happened to their loved ones. Cemeteries with unmarked graves dot the landscape from Boston to Belchertown.

The devastation of the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us how institutions can impact the lives of people with disabilities. The same is true with the former state institutions. **S.1257 and H.2090 will take the first steps toward acknowledging and understanding that legacy.**

They will establish a disability-majority state commission of 18 people, with representation by state agencies and disability advocacy groups. The commission will investigate and report on:

- The status of former institutional residents living independently today
- The location of all documents from the former state institutions
- The availability of such records to former residents, descendants, and the general public
- The location of burials for all residents who died in the care of the Commonwealth
- The potential for unmarked graves at former state institutions

This first-of-its-kind commission will undoubtedly unearth difficult stories, but it is a positive act of healing and reckoning with a history that must be known, told, and understood by future generations.

Passage of these bills is a major legislative priority for two dozen major disability and historical advocacy groups including The Arc of Massachusetts, The Disability Policy

Consortium, The Lurie Institute For Disability Policy at Brandeis University, Mass Advocates Standing Strong, Massachusetts Association for Mental Health, Mass Families (MFOFC), and the Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee.

I hope you will take action today to support these bills.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Autism of Massachusetts	Waltham
Arc of Massachusetts	Waltham
Belchertown State School Friends Association	Belchertown
Belchertown Community Alliance	Belchertown
Belchertown Historic Commission	Belchertown
Brisa Builders Corporation	Belchertown
Boston Center for Independent Living	Boston
Center for Public Representation	Newton
Community Options of Belchertown	Belchertown
Disability Law Center	Boston
Disability Policy Consortium	Malden
Easterseals	Boston
Harvard Law School Project on Disability	Cambridge
Human Services Research Institute	Cambridge
The Lurie Institute for Disability Policy at Brandeis University	Waltham

Northeast Independent Living Program, Inc. Lawrence

Massachusetts Advocates Standing Strong Boston

Massachusetts Association for Mental Health Boston

MassACT

Mass Families Mattapoisett

Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee Boston

Metro Boston Recovery Learning Community Boston

Metrowest Center for Independent Living Framingham

Southeast Recovery Learning Community Fall River

Wildflower Alliance Western
Massachusetts

Wild Ivy Social Justice Project and
The Protection & Advocacy Council of the Disability Law Center Western
Massachusetts

Kate Anderson BSS Friends President Feeding Hills
JD Spanks Person with disabilities North Andover

Courtney Keating Belchertown State School Friends Association Vice President Palmer
John L Gray Historian Salem

Diane D. Anthony Human being interested in finally doing just a bit right by these
folks, and teacher, retired Northampton

Courtney Keating Belchertown State School Friends Association Vice President Palmer

Kris Kozuch	Advocate	Holyoke
Michael Harris	Photographer	Millbury
Jimi Burdick	Supporter of historical buildings	Pawtucket
Stephanie Maher	Support	Riverview
Mariah LaVache		Nashua
Chris McCarthy	Photographer	Randolph
Joel Silva	Mental health advocate / local history lover	Smithfield
Dave Snook	Advocate, Preservation, human rights	Billerica
Sarah Healy	Interested in historical buildings	Bel Air
Joshua Tamburro	History advocate	Forked River
Joshua Mollica	Personal interest in hospital preservation	Berlin
Shane Cambra	A historian of state hospitals	Fall River
Ashley Romano	Advocate for historical preservation	Plainville
Loren Stanard		Worcester
Gabrielle Romano	I appreciate the history of these beautiful institutions, they deserve preservation.	Seekonk
James Filanowicz	Citizen	Newington
Joseph S Zembrowski Jr	Preservationist	New Haven
Tommy Drivers	Photographer/Explorer	Leominster
Brandon Thomas		Lowell
Louis Inghilterra	Student of historic preservation	Fort Collins CO
Jacquelyne Nemeth	Historical Photographer	Cairo
William Aliou		Derby, CT
Peter Johns		New Haven, CT
Amber Thomas	Save history	Nashua
Brett Dexter	Photographer	Acton
Aex Elizabeth		Hudson
Rebecca Matthews	Save	Winsted

Jaqueline Pacheco	Photographer	Bristol
Meighan Belanger	Resident of MA	North Attleboro
Taylor Cioffi-Henry		Bethany
Margaret Richardson	hiker, explorer, history buff	Hopedale, MA
Holly Chalifoux		Moosup
Sher Miller	Lover of Architecture and History	Madison
Michael Puzo	Supporter	Auburn
Heather Millard	Student of architecture	Waterbury
Kayla	Social worker	Sutton
DeLisa Montalvo	Personal	Trainer
William Kane	Photographer that enjoys documenting history	Pelham
Mazie Dore		Providence
Jackie Campbell	Historical buff	Southwick
Dillan Odom-camirand	Signer	Greenville
Devon Kamps	Historic site photographer	Attleboro ma
Samuel Arcisz	Historical Enthusiast	Central Falls RI
David Bosquet	Visual and historical enthusiast	Milford
Lucous Brusard	Photographer	Milton
Sam Deloia	Urban Explorer / Photographer	Franklin
Erin Pemberton	Historian	Weymouth
Nicole Cronin	Helping a friend	Hartford
Chelsea DeFelice	I am passionate about raising awareness of this issue.	Holyoke
Luke Kinnes	Historian	Cumberland
Kellianne Barrera	Preserving history	Sayville
Vic Pacheco	History purposes	Fall River
Caitlyn Lumb	Supporter	Spencer

Robert Studivan	Explorer	Hudson
Gabriella Geremia	Passionate about getting answers and preserving history	Plainfield
Melissa Baern	Partner of a person with a physical disability	Littleton
Yoni Kadden	Teacher of Disability History (in a Waltham-based school)	Waltham
Sue Hacker	PT	Beverly
Courtney Apgar	Concerned citizen	Lexington
Jeanne McDermott	Mother of a child born with a disability	Lexington
Wendy Peverill-Conti	Disability parent and advocate	Medway
Jazz Dottin	Supporter	Cambridge
Tiana Ferguson	History	Spencer
Holly West	Retired Licensed Professional Counselor	Cleveland
Donna Blume	Worked at Belchertown and Hogan	Salem
Lynette McRae	Supporter	Lawrence
Kara Toomey	Disability activist	Natick
Lynette McRae	Supporter	Lawrence
julie kahn	citizen	Somerville
Rebecca Colao	parent, advocate	Waltham
Rachel Nathan	Parent of disabled kids	Belmont
Matthew LeFluer	Green Mountain Self-advocates and Special Olympics Vermont athlete!	Alburgh
Sara Kochanowski	Ms.	Boston
Charlotte Powley	Supporter	Waltham
Jeannette Gerry	Waltham resident and Waltham High School teacher	Waltham
Emma Morgan	Woman with disabilities	Greenfield
Kate Melchior	Community member	Waltham
Sarah Gulla	Concerned Citizen	Natick
Brianna Murphy	Historic photographer	Southbridge
Susan Wolland Bibbins	Citizen of Medford MA USA	Medford
Paula Taylor	Work history 1977-1994	Ayer
Catherine Carpenter	Legislative Advocate	Jamaica Plain

Jennifer O'Neill	Disability History & Advocacy	Norwood
Anna Caine	None	Newton
Diane Compton	Parent Advocate	Westmont
Maureen Biscardi	Mother of a severely autistic son who resides in a wonderful and caring residential program.	Woburn
Don OCallaghan	Former employee and life long Self Advocate	Littleton
Courtney Apgar	Concerned citizen	Lexington
Marie Baca	Citizen	Woburn
Jack Doherty	MA Resident	Belmont
Caroline McLaughlin	MA Resident	Belmont
Samuel Yamin	Concerned Citizen	Cambridge
Jane Mahon	Mental health advocate	Belmont
Elizabeth McLaughlin	Supporter and Mass Resident	Belmont
Jane Mahon	Mental health advocate	Belmont
Heather Ford	Ally	Westwood
Jeremy Singer	Parent of a son with Down syndrome	Arlington
David Bunker	Former Staff Psych. Belchertown State School	Worcester
Rita Colafella	PROGRESSIVE WATERTOWN	Watertown
Kerry Sheehan	Disabled advocate	Fitchburg
Keith Orlowski	Father to a wonderful son with Autism. These places should persevered not exploited for profit	Middleboro
Michelle Nario-Redmond	Professor of Psychology, Biomedical Humanities and Disability studies	Hiram
Karen Cobb	Advocate	Quincy
Roberta Villanti	Mother of a child with a disability	Beverly
Adam Rosenblatt	Associate Professor of the Practice in International Comparative Studies	Durham
Lorraine Dowcett		Waltham
Linda Steele	Disability law academic and lawyer	Warrawong, Australia
Bevin Croft	Behavioral Health Policy Researcher	Watertown
Leah Even Chorev	Massachusetts resident	Newton
Zachary Sherman	Gann Academy alum and student of disability history	Lexington
Pamela Jones	Concerned MA tax payer, voter	Waltham
Niko	Aspiring Social Worker	Northfield

Villani-Fragákis		
Alixé Bonardi	Concerned with making sure people with disabilities have rights respected: past, present, future.	Arlington
Miso Kwak	Policy Analyst at the Human Services Research Institute (I also identify as a disabled person)	Cambridge
Leslie Sherman	Concerned Citizen	Lexington
David Hughes	Work in Disability Research and Policy	Winchester
Caroline McLaughlin	MA Resident	Belmont
Sandra Campbell	Photographer	Fitzwilliam
Cheryl Sartori	Policy Analyst	Wakefield
Evan Rockefeller	Occupational Therapist, TILL, Inc.	Belmont
Catherine James	Ms	Woodstock
Crystal Howcroft	Program Supervisor in a Day Habilitation	North Adams
Valerie Bradley	Worked on deinstitutionalization issues for more than 50 years	Cambridge
Michele Clopper Clopper	Advocate who believes disability belongs with Social justice & equity	Reading
Samuel Guttell	Student	Brookline
Jeffrey Petrucelly	Pro Bono Retired Attorney, former counsel to the men who were institutionalized and experimented on with radioactive isotopes at the Fernald State School	Boston
Jeanette Even	Citizen of Mass	Newton
Lynn Waskelis	Concerned citizen, parent of disabled adult child	Jamaica Plain
Hezzy Smith	Director of Advocacy Initiatives, Harvard Law School Project on Disability	Watertown, MA
Monika Mitra	Director, Lurie Institute for Disability Policy	Newton
Colin K	Executive Director, Disability Policy Consortium	Malden
Danna Mauch, PhD	President and CEO, Massachusetts Association for Mental Health	Boston MA
Kristin Battis	Behavioral Health Research Analyst	Jamaica Plain
Teresita Camacho Gonsalves	Senior Research Specialist	Randolph
Cole Merlo	Concerned historian/preservationist	Millis
Danna Mauch	President and CEO, MAMH	Boston
Erin Garrett	Research Assistant in Behavioral health and concerned citizen	Duxbury
Rachael Gerber	Behavioral health services policy	Arlington

Alex Liazos	Former 17-year member, Watertown Disability Commission	Waltham
Sophie Brill Weitz	Student	Bedford
Rachel Hayward	Professional	Waltham
Zach Rossetti	Associate Professor of Special Education	Brookline
Lauren Leone	Mental health counselor and art therapist	Somerville
June Sauvageau	CEO, Independent Living Center, Family Member of Fernald Resident	Leominster
Anna Graham	MA Resident / Preservationist	Brighton
Rebecca Manning	History Enthusiast	Lancaster
Carla De Lellis		Winchester
Mary Nitschke	Concerned citizen	Norfolk
Philip Schwarz	Parent of an autistic son	Gloucester
Sarah Koolsbergen	Supporter of the Rights and the History of All Disabled Persons in Massachusetts	Belmont
Karen Foley	Parent	Quincy
Christina Bosch	Doctoral Candidate in Special Education at Umass Amherst	Watertown
Jacqueline Murphy	Constituent Near Met State and Fernald	Belmont
Emma Quaraequio	Massachusetts Resident	Boston
Elizabeth Stubbs	EMT	Boston