



Appendix to LWV-Needham Student Advocacy Guide Sample Letters to the Editor and Op-Eds

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Letters in Response to an Article

Boston Globe letters in response to David Scharfenberg's article [“Can Mayor Wu really make the T free?”](#) (Ideas, January 9, 2022)

Gateway Cities are ideal proving ground for free fares

David Scharfenberg's article [“Can Mayor Wu really make the T free?”](#) (Ideas, Jan. 9) highlighted the benefits and challenges of such a policy for the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority. However, the pioneering leadership of Gateway Cities such as Lawrence and Worcester suggests that midsize transit systems elsewhere in the state may be the true sweet spot for scaling up fare-free bus programs in Massachusetts.

At MassINC, we believe that the Commonwealth's Gateway Cities are the ideal places to implement zero-fare buses. First, these cities house a large share of the state's essential workers, low-income seniors, and communities of color — all core transit users.

Second, fares constitute, on average, only 13 percent of the annual budget for regional transit agencies (RTAs), according to data drawn from the Federal Transit Administration. In fiscal 2020, RTA fares represented less than \$35 million total statewide (compare this with \$545 million for the MBTA).

Third, [new polling](#) shows 71 percent support for making public buses free in low-income neighborhoods.

Finally, according to our research, free fares could transform public transportation outside metro Boston by making it easy to use, reducing delays, and increasing ridership by 25 to 40 percent. This is a path to creating more livable, multimodal, and affordable communities across the state.

Andre Leroux
Director, Gateway Hubs Project
Julie Harris
Research fellow
Massachusetts Institute for a New Commonwealth
Boston

Improving service would have greater impact than scrapping fares

Re [“Can Mayor Wu really make the T free?”](#) by David Scharfenberg (Ideas, Jan. 9): My answer to that question is: No, she can do better. Although free mass transit is a popular idea, the increase seen in ridership is minimal. I believe that a better way to increase ridership is to pressure the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority to improve service.

Basel, Switzerland, a city the size of Providence, has a tram system with more track routes than Boston. Trams wind through the streets with clocklike precision. Trams scheduled to arrive at a stop every 5 minutes will arrive every 5 minutes. Travel is expedited because fares are not collected on Basel's trams. Riders purchase tickets to their destination zone from vending

machines at tram stops and can freely transfer to other trams and buses to reach that zone. Roaming fare inspectors [enforce fare payments](#) and can assess fines for noncompliance.

The MBTA has been unable to accomplish the one thing that would greatly increase ridership: on-time performance. Clearly, we can do better. A free T may be appealing to voters, but improving T performance would be more popular with riders.

Barry Bergman
ADVERTISING
Newton

Fare-free system would answer climate concerns while prodding T to improve management

I have worked at the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority for more than a decade and, the last four years, served as president of the Office and Professional Employees International Union Local 453. I believe there are two major reasons why we should be moving toward a free-fare transportation system:

First, we are not even close to solving the climate change crisis. We depend too much on cars. In urban areas, we need to encourage the use of public transit in place of cars. Our goal has to be fare-free transit for the entire system, since the only way people will give up their car is if they know they can hop on and off everywhere a bus or train stops.

Second, we need to approach the way the MBTA is managed. Regrettably, we have learned to accept decades of mismanagement. An example is the new automated fare collection system that will cost taxpayers [nearly \\$1 billion, almost twice as much as the same system in New York City](#).

Most people think fare-free transportation is a pipe dream. Yet it could be our greatest weapon in the fight against climate change, and it would require the T to be strategically managed so that it can be as cost-efficient as possible.

Timothy W. Lasker
Charlestown

For working people, the money saved would mean a lot

All the debate around making the T free seems promising for this supporter of public transit, but let's not lose the forest for the trees. The measure ultimately would save riders a decent amount of money every month. For working people, that extra money saved can make a huge difference. That point alone should be reason enough to promote the idea. The analysts and data wonks involved in the discussion make great points and provide empirical insights, but helping countless riders save money is already a worthwhile benefit.

Paul Burgholzer
Needham

Letter Advocating for a Specific Bill

State faces collapse of its child-care system

Boston Globe, January 11, 2022

Thanks to Naomi Martin and Tiana Woodard for their article about struggling child-care providers ([“Child-care crisis ripples through communities,”](#) Page A1, Jan. 4). The child-care system in Massachusetts teeters on the brink of collapse, but it was not caused by COVID-19. Rather, the pandemic revealed the historic fragmentation and underinvestment in child care in the Commonwealth.

In December 2021, The Boston Foundation released [“When the Bough Breaks,”](#) which reported that the number of “seats” for young children has fallen by as much as 20 percent since the pandemic began — seats that may never return. Massachusetts has one of the most expensive child-care markets in the United States, with infant care costing as much as \$2,000 a month. Providers, many of whom are women of color, operate as small businesses working within razor-thin margins.

In short, we are facing a full-scale collapse of our child-care system. The Legislature must address this critical issue, taking advantage of federal recovery funds and a state budget surplus to build a more equitable system for young families and for providers, as laid out in the [Common Start bill](#). We can’t miss this one-time chance to build a system that really works.

Elizabeth Pauley, Associate vice president, Education to Career
The Boston Foundation, Boston

Letter to Local Paper on Local Issue

Letter: Does Natick care more about future of a dam than a school?

MetroWest Daily News, November 4, 2022

Do we care more about the future of a dam than the future of our children?

The South Natick Dam (1934) and Johnson Elementary (1949) are relics of a different era. One is a dam built solely for recreation. The other is a neighborhood school. Both are aging and may be removed/closed. Each bears an operating/liability cost, and financially we might be better off without them.

And yet our process for deciding on each is drastically different.

The dam is being researched by a 20-member advisory committee that includes representatives from major boards and impacted neighbors. Every meeting is open/recorded, and members are working with external experts to fully understand options. Ultimately, the committee will

develop a recommendation that includes a comprehensive plan for the site. The final decision has checks and balances involving the Select Board and Town Meeting.

The Johnson decision is not as transparent or complete. The School Committee will make the decision alone, after meeting mostly in retreat (off camera), and just 45 days after announcing the potential closure. They appear ready to vote without data on cost savings, future enrollment, or economic impacts. They don't even have a plan for closure — the building could sit vacant for years.

In short, the future of a piece of concrete is necessitating a year-long, data-centered and inclusive process. The future of a beloved school is being decided with none of the above.

Contact the Natick School Committee. Let's give schools the same dam attention.

John Armstrong
Natick

Letter to Local Paper Asking State Legislators to Support a State Bill

Support Death with Dignity Bill

Metrowest Daily News, January 3, 2022

I appreciate what our legislature has done this year to help the state recover from the impact of the pandemic. There's another piece of important legislation that I would like our legislature to pass, the Death with Dignity bill.

It would offer terminally ill people the option of medical aid in dying when their pain and suffering becomes intolerable. Similar laws have already been passed in 10 other states plus Washington D.C. Our bill currently has 66 House sponsors and 18 sponsors in the Senate.

Many doctors say that not all pain can be "managed" at the end of life. That's a euphemistic way of saying what many of us have observed: there is often excruciating pain involved. Someday, it will be considered barbaric to allow people to die that way.

Please contact your legislators (masslegislature.gov), especially Senate President Karen Spilka, and urge them to call the co-chairs of the Public Health Committee to pass the Death with Dignity bills H.2381 and S.1384 as soon as possible. That is the first important step toward the full Legislature passing it next year.

It would be a compassionate gift to the 70%-plus of citizens who have expressed their desire for the option of a peaceful, painless death.

Lisa Widawsky, Northborough

Op-Ed to Local Paper Supporting a bill

YOUR TURN: Right to vote a cornerstone of democracy

Cape Cod Times, January 6, 2022. Suzanne Brock, guest columnist

Around the Cape, the state and the country, people stood out in silent vigil or hosted online vigils in order to recall the horrific event that took place at our nation's Capitol building on Jan. 6, 2021.

What happened then was tragic; however, what is more tragic is that there has been little meaningful action by our elected officials both at the state and especially at the national level to collectively and adamantly assert that violence will not be tolerated and to secure equal, safe and unrestricted voting for all American citizens.

It appears that many of our legislators are quick with a sound bite, but when it comes to actually putting themselves on the line to stand up for the principles that our Democracy stands for, they are missing in action. Massachusetts legislators have yet to pass the VOTES Act. This is pretty amazing — and disappointing — given that Massachusetts appears to be progressive in so many other ways.

The larger failure is evident at the national level, as some legislators stood silent and others voiced their denial that the actions that took place on Jan. 6, 2021 posed a threat. Additionally, if our collective Congressional body was acting to “support and defend” the Constitution of the United States,” there would be a more unified voice with little argument about passing the Freedom to Vote Act and the John Lewis Voting Rights Act.

If these potential laws need adjusting, then our legislators should be working around the clock to come to a compromise agreement, bring them to a vote and get the job done. This is the way Congress is supposed to work. Instead, nothing is moving.

Some think that our legislators are no longer working for the good of the people, but only for the good of their re-election or their political influence. When keeping the job becomes more important than doing the job, American democracy becomes imperiled. It is incredible that some Congressional legislators, both in the House and Senate, regard themselves as so important that they need to control the process. It has become “my way or no way.” This behavior is unacceptable and unsustainable.

We all need to take some responsibility for the changes that have taken place within our country. Voters often choose candidates based on single issues that align with what they want. In order for a society to move forward, it may be important for voters to consider what is good for the majority. We all have needs and sometimes compromise is the way forward.

The ultimate responsibility for a competent government lies with the voters. If we do not exercise our vote and eliminate those who cannot or will not do their job, the status quo will

remain. Voting is the ultimate way to indicate approval or displeasure of the job being done. This is why the right to vote is so crucial for all citizens.

For those of you who wish to remember Jan. 6, 2021, please do so by reaching out to those in office. Let them hear once more that the right to vote for all is a cornerstone of democracy. Ask your state legislators to support Massachusetts' VOTES Act and your Congressional representatives to push for the two national voting rights bills.

Let them also know that if they are not willing to work for voting rights and open, fair and just elections, then they are not doing their jobs and we will hold them accountable. After all that, I think I will add to my vigil a re-reading of the U.S. Constitution and a Prayer for Peace.

Suzanne Brock is president of the League of Women Voters of the Cape Cod Area

Op-Ed in Commonwealth (state issues "magazine")

Lower the voting age, the planet depends on it

Bill would lower municipal voting age in Northampton

Commonwealth, January 15, 2022

Devastating wildfires, destructive hurricanes, extended droughts, and rising sea levels: These effects of climate change, feared by scientists for decades, are now reality for innumerable communities around the globe. Yet, despite these undisputable warnings from our planet, legislation to cut emissions consistently stalls in state and federal legislatures.

America's promise to remain dedicated to the Paris Climate Agreement is contingent on our leadership. Some people even question the legitimacy of climate change itself. Around the globe, we are failing to protect ourselves and our future. Those empowered to pass climate change legislation will not live to see its long term effects, and have no stake in the future we need them to protect. Young people understand this urgency. We know that without immediate action, we will be lucky if our futures resemble those of our parents.

Why do young people so fervently demand action on climate change? Because we know we will carry the burden of salvaging our world once the damage is already done.

For this reason, young people deserve the right to vote. Because young people are barred from the democratic process, we are denied the right to influence budget decisions, environmental regulations, and emissions policies, all of which will heavily affect our futures. But despite our disenfranchisement, young people are already highly engaged and motivated and have displayed extraordinary leadership in the face of existential challenges. We've taken action by participating in climate marches, writing letters to our representatives, and organizing for change.

In 2018, 16-year-old climate activist Greta Thunberg spoke in front of the United Nations, boldly calling out global leaders who have remained inactive in the face of the climate crisis. Thunberg's words empowered young people to take a bold stance in their communities.

Nationwide youth-led organizations such as the Sunrise Movement are working on a local level to make our communities more sustainable.

This national movement is demonstrated within our city of Northampton. In 2019, Northampton High School students turned out in droves for the 2019 School Strike for Climate, an international movement and day of action sparked by Thunberg. This past year, we testified at local school committee meetings in favor of electric buses instead of diesel-powered vehicles, and organized through the Northampton Youth Commission to pass the Plastic Reduction and Sustainability Ordinance through the City Council, setting new standards for polystyrene usage on local businesses. The bottom line is: young people in Northampton are informed of, and engaged in every facet of the political process – except for voting.

Some cities and towns across America have already taken steps to rectify this disparity, by lowering their municipal voting age to 16, empowering 16- and 17-year-old citizens to channel their knowledge and motivation into concrete democratic participation. Now, Northampton has its chance to join this historic moment. By passing state bill H.830, Northampton can become the first municipality in Massachusetts to allow 16- and 17-year-olds to vote for mayor, city council, and school committee, as well as local ballot initiatives.

The bill is sponsored by Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa and Sen. Jo Comerford, and unanimously supported by Northampton’s mayor, City Council, School Committee, and Charter Review Committee. H.830 had a hearing before the Massachusetts Joint Committee on Election Laws on June 23, 2021. At the hearing, city councilors, school committee members, the mayor of Northampton, a representative from the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts, Congressman Jim McGovern, a researcher from Tufts University, and many other community members all provided spoken or written testimony in support of H.830. Despite the strong support, H.830 has not yet been reported out of committee, which has until February 2 to make a decision on the future of the bill.

State legislative approval is the final remaining obstacle preventing Northampton’s 16- and 17s-year-olds from having a voice on the issues which directly affect our lives and futures. We, much like the millions of other young people across the country, have a major stake in the issues on the ballot. We are organized, engaged, and motivated to act to mitigate the existential threat of the climate emergency. We are ready to vote.

Dahlia Breslow, 17, and Lila Nields-Duffy, 15, are members of the Northampton Youth Commission, which is the official city body tasked with representing young people.