

STATE SENATOR GALE D. CANDARAS

FIRST HAMPDEN AND HAMPSHIRE DISTRICT

Belchertown—East Longmeadow—Granby—Hampden—Longmeadow—Ludlow—Springfield—Wilbraham

Bills to Aid Those Suffering from Mental Health and Substance Abuse Disorders Passed by Legislature, Signed by Governor

As the Senate Chairwoman of the legislative Joint Committee on Mental Health and Substance Abuse, Senator Gale Candaras has led the way in advancing policies that address disparities and bridge gaps in access to medical care.

One such piece of legislation was signed into law by Governor Deval Patrick in early April, and established a committee entitled “The Special Commission Relative to the Hidden Wounds of War on Massachusetts Service Members.” The Commission, on which Candaras serves, is investigating the mental

health effects of war on those returning from active duty, focusing on issues of homelessness and post-traumatic stress disorder.

The Commission will also study the possibility of establishing a mandatory mental health treatment program for National Guard members who engage in combat, a state military family leave policy for caregivers, and a statewide education training program to assist law enforcement, corrections officers and other first responders in recognizing the early warning signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.

In July, Candaras cosponsored legislation which will improve the early identification and treatment of children with mental illnesses. “An Act Relative to Children’s Mental Health” was signed by the Governor in August, and will accomplish its goals by reach-

ing children in familiar settings, such as pediatricians’ offices, early education programs and schools. Early diagnoses and treatment can help prevent extended suffering and the tragedies that often befall families of children who endure prolonged battles with mental health problems. The new law will increase pediatric screenings for mental illness, and requires the Department of Early Education and Care to provide behavioral health consultations for young children. It will also promote consultation services in schools to help parents, teachers and school administrators better identify mental health issues.

Another important piece of legislation for which Candaras advocated was “An Act Relative to Mental Health Parity.” The parity bill, which recently became law, will close a legal loophole by requiring health



Senator Candaras discusses teen depression during an educational forum she cosponsored at the Massachusetts State House this year.

insurers to cover treatment for any disease or disorder identified by the American Psychiatric Association, including post-traumatic stress disorder, eating disorders, and substance abuse.

The passage of these important measures made clear that the legislature is committed to increasing access to treatment, reducing stigmas associated with mental health and addiction disorders, and saving taxpayer dollars.

Human and Social Services Programs Receive Long-Awaited Boost

Members of the legislature and Patrick administration joined community advocates in August to witness Governor Deval Patrick sign into law a bill that will phase in long-overdue rate adjustments for human service providers. These providers contract with the state to deliver health and social services to the Commonwealth’s most vulnerable citizens, from the elderly and chronically ill to the physically and mentally impaired.

The bill, known as S. 65, was sponsored by Senator Gale Candaras, requires the Division of Health Care and Policy to establish a predictable and adequate rate-setting schedule that will help providers mitigate operating costs and retain employees. Direct caregivers provide some of the most critical services in the Commonwealth, and in approving Candaras’ bill, the legislature has made an important commitment to fostering

the development of a stable and adequately compensated workforce, which will continue to serve Massachusetts residents and families for years to come.

Senate President Therese Murray said the rate adjustment is critical to keeping community-based services in place and securing a significant employment base for the

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Volume 1, Issue 1
Summer/Fall 2008

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Bank Fee Waiver Legislation Becomes Law

MassHealth eligible seniors will save hundreds of dollars thanks to a new law sponsored by Senator Gale Candaras. The passage of "An Act Relative to Bank Fees" marked both a major legislative accomplishment for Candaras and much needed relief from burdensome fees for seniors.

Without any cost to the Commonwealth, the law will exempt seniors from being charged copying fees for bank account records when the information is being requested by an applicant for

MassHealth long-term care services.

Currently, MassHealth requires applicants to produce bank records going back three years. This can be quite costly. Generally the cost of obtaining monthly bank statements is \$5 per monthly statement, with an additional \$25 in the form of either a flat or hourly research fee.

However, due to a change in federal law, this retroactive record production will increase to 5 years by 2011,

costing seniors a minimum of \$300—nearly 20% of their Medicaid allowable assets.

Attorney Susan Levin of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys said, "Bank fees are a terrible burden on elders who apply for MassHealth nursing home care. Waiver of these fees is necessary to allow elders to comply with MassHealth requirements without suffering financial harm." The bill was signed by Governor Deval Patrick on June 4th and is now Chapter 125 of the Acts of 2008.



Senator Candaras visits Pine Point Senior Center with Director Yolanda Nahorniak.

Commission to Study Institutional Long-Term Care Proposed

A bill that would create a Special Commission on Institutional Long-Term Care was approved by the Senate in early July.

The legislation, filed by Senator Gale Candaras, would

establish a special commission to examine the Commonwealth's institutional long-term care system, and recommend a plan to provide a seamless transition to a continuum of long-term care services for elders and persons

with disabilities that recognizes the central and critical place of consumer choice and control in any long-term care setting.

The Commission will also evaluate options, and prepare policy recommendations regarding potential savings to the Commonwealth achieved by reducing the number of MassHealth licensed nursing home beds. It will develop recommendations as to the criteria to be used to determine which beds are de-

licensed; and consider programmatic or financial incentives to reduce the number of nursing home beds, convert said beds to sub-acute beds, or otherwise more efficiently utilize existing institutional long-term care facilities in the Commonwealth. The overall goal of the proposed legislation is to study Massachusetts' long-term care system with an eye towards keeping people in their homes when possible.

The bill awaits action in the House of Representatives.

Universal Broadband Established

Access to high-speed Internet service has remained elusive in parts of the Commonwealth, despite widespread availability in eastern Massachusetts. Some 32 communities in western Mass are without broadband services, and another 63 have only partial access.

In August, final approval was given to a bill that will mandate service to every community in the Commonwealth by 2010. The new law also created the Massachusetts Broadband Institute, to secure pri-

vate and federal investments for the development of broadband infrastructure in communities that lack access to service.

The fact that so many communities lack broadband service altogether runs contrary to the needs of schools, businesses and residents. In approving the broadband bill, the legislature acknowledged the necessity of providing opportunities for economic growth, and creating a level playing field across Massachusetts.

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Programs Receive Aid

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Commonwealth. "Human service providers are being forced to let employees go and cut back on services because of skyrocketing costs in utilities, insurance and other operating expenses," Murray said. "These rate adjustments come at a crucial time and will help stabilize this essential sector of our economy." Massachusetts

has a network of 1,100 community-based provider agencies, employing approximately 185,000 workers who deliver a wide-range of services to more than one million residents. State funding for the system has remained relatively stagnant during the last 20 years despite rapidly increasing operating costs and a growing population of people who require services.

Senior Center Updates

The First Hampden and Hampshire District boasts eleven vibrant and active senior centers. Janice Hassett, Senator Candaras' Constituent Services Liaison, visits each center monthly. She has met and chatted with seniors throughout the district, and shares the following:

The **East Longmeadow Senior Center** celebrated its 50th anniversary in June. Renovations at the Center began last year and are expected to continue until its scheduled completion in 2010.

We will miss **Granby Senior Center** Director Patricia Sicard, as well as her hard work and dedication. Dianne Barry will serve as interim director.

The **Wilbraham Senior Center** is proud to have Mary Ann Power as its new Social Service Coordinator.

Hampden Senior Center Director Rebecca Moriarty oversees a five-day per week lunch program and daily activities.

Ludlow Senior Center Director, Jody Ahearn transformed the facility there into a state-of-the-art center with a homey

ambience.

In September, the **Hungry Hill Senior Center** celebrated its 25th anniversary. Director Mary Troy is organizing a March celebration commemorating the 25th St. Patrick's Day at the Hope Center.

The **Pine Point Senior Center** flourishes with an active council, well-attended lunch program and enthusiastic membership.

Janice's monthly senior center visit schedule is as follows:

Belchertown: 11am-12pm, 2nd Tuesday.

E. Longmeadow: 11am-12pm, 3rd Thursday.

Granby: 9:45am-10:45am, 2nd Tuesday.

Hampden: 11am-12pm, 2nd Wednesday.

Hungry Hill: 11:30am-12:30pm, 4th Tuesday.

Longmeadow: 11am-12pm, 1st Monday.

Ludlow: 10am-11am, 1st Thursday.

Mayflower: 12pm-1pm, 3rd Wednesday.

Pine Point: 12pm-1pm, 4th Thursday.

Sixteen Acres: 12pm-1pm, 3rd Monday.

Wilbraham: 11am-12pm, 1st Thursday.



Governor Patrick formally signs Senator Candaras' landmark human services legislation into law during a ceremony at the State House in August.

Photo reprinted with permission from The Provider.

Commission Takes Aim at WMass Physician Shortage

One of the Commonwealth's greatest health care challenges is ensuring that an adequate number of physicians are on hand to meet the health care needs of our residents. This has become particularly challenging in the areas of obstetrics, gynecology and neurosurgery— areas where Western Massachusetts has a significant shortage. These shortages have in turn lead to accessibility concerns, with patients sometimes waiting months for an appointment with their doctor and newly insured people unable to find a physician at all.

In response to these concerns, Senator Gale Candaras filed legislation creating a special commission to investigate the accessibility and quality of doctors who specialize in those fields in the Commonwealth's four western counties.

Charged with reporting its results and recommendations

to the General Court, the Special Commission on Obstetric, Gynecological and Neurosurgical Care in Western Massachusetts is chaired by John Auerbach, Commissioner of the Department of Public Health. The Commission counts among its membership Candaras, members of the Patrick administration, medical community, and legislature.

The Commission convened a public hearing at Springfield's Western New England College in January, where commissioners heard from patients, providers and health care advocates detailing their personal stories and suggesting possible solutions to ease the current physician shortage. The Commission is currently compiling its report and recommendations for the legislature.

The importance of creating

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Senate Recognizes Longmeadow Resident

The Senate welcomed World Sport Stacking Association Champion Steven Purugganan, a guest of Senator Gale Candaras, to the State House in May. Steven, a 10 year old from Longmeadow, was joined by his family, including his brothers Brian and Andrew, who are also "stacking" enthusiasts. Candaras presented a joint resolution from the Senate and House of Representatives to Steven, congratulating him on his record setting accomplishments.

Sport stacking, an activity popularized in the 1980's, consists of stacking and unstacking a set of plastic cups in

a pre-determined pyramid formation with lightening speed.

Steven defeated more than 1,000 other contestants of all ages, and broke two of his own records at the World Championship of Sport Stacking, held last April in Colorado. He also reclaimed three individual world records for the U.S.A. from Team Germany during this year's competition.

The Purugganan family's visit to the State House came in advance of Steven's scheduled appearance on "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno."



The Purugganan family of Longmeadow joins Senator Candaras in the Senate chamber. World Sport Stacking Champion Steven Purugganan is pictured at far left.

Remedies to Doctor Shortage Considered

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incentives to draw and retain physicians to western Massachusetts will be highlighted in the report, as will the importance of keeping western Massachusetts' health care industry competitive with both eastern Massachusetts and other states.

Among the incentives the Commission is likely to suggest are loan repayment and forgiveness programs for phy-

sicians who agree to work in a given area for a specified period of time, recruitment programs that include job placement or additional education for physicians' partners or other family members, support for home purchase or rental costs, and signing bonuses.

It is Candaras' hope that upon review of the Commission's report, the legislature will act to implement its suggested policies.

Candaras Honored by Local, Statewide Organizations

Earlier this year, Senator Gale Candaras was named 2008 Democrat of the Year by the Longmeadow Democratic Town Committee. Candaras has enjoyed representing the people of Longmeadow since her election to the state senate in 2007, and gratefully accepted the honor.

More recently, The Massachusetts Council of Human Ser-

vice Providers, the Commonwealth's largest association of health and human service agencies, announced that Candaras had been named Legislator of the Year. Citing her work to implement long-overdue and much needed rate increases to human service providers, the Council will honor Candaras at their annual convention in Boston in December.

A Note from Gale

As we welcome autumn in the First Hampden and Hampshire District, I wanted to take a moment to introduce the inaugural issue of my newsletter.

In addition to updates relative to legislation and new laws, this publication highlights news, activities and events throughout the district and in the State House. Also included are a few notable achievements of some of the 150,000 residents of the eight communities I serve in the State Senate.

It has been my distinct honor to represent the people of western Massachusetts for the last twelve years, as we worked together to improve our com-



munity and advance our many shared goals. I look forward to our continued partnership, and hope that this newsletter will prove both interesting and useful.

Very truly yours,
Gale D. Candaras