



Poor People's United Fund

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Boston's Spare Change Community

Spring 2017

Sometimes, All We Need Is Just Plain Stubborn Hope.

Kip Tiernan

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

Kip loved Easter. She frequently said, "I could have opened Rosie's on Good Friday but Easter seemed a better day." It's a perfect time of year to take in the messages of Passover and Easter because they are all about HOPE. The following quote is so apropos to our situation today that it sounds like she wrote it yesterday.

"Face it. We have been mugged big time by our false prophets who are busy creating our realities and redefining our lives. But there are windows of opportunity. I can touch it. I can feel it. I can taste it and I couldn't get up in the morning if I didn't believe it. I also believe we care, that we do too give a damn. And I have this enormous faith in you and me that somehow we will make it through the night together. We need to once again have faith in ourselves, to believe that we can change things together."

And hope we must! We need to keep our wits about us and our strength up. We have a lot to do. We just need to stay alert and work together. Understandably, this is not easy. Some days the news- lots of it bad news- feels as if it's coming furiously from every direction. Where do we start? Which assaults on poor people do we address? Georgia and I decided it is best to focus on issues that have been central to PPUF for 37 years. Hunger and homelessness. We will do what we can regardless of the tweets flying through cyberspace. We have faced similar crises over many decades, presidents and administrations.

Our hope is that you will stay with us while we keep on keeping on working on hunger and homelessness.

The federal government is again considering converting one of its most successful and efficient programs into a block grant: Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP- food stamps) benefits go to 1 in 9 Massachusetts residents... 767,000 people! Our colleagues at Mass Law Reform say that "Nationwide, federal nutrition programs provide 19 of every 20 emergency meals- private charity could never address the full need for food." See Georgia's article for more detail. PPUF has been working with other organizations to let people know why this is a terrible idea. For one thing, in a block grant the monies go directly to the state. The state can then shift the federal funds to other purposes or they can make program cuts that federal law doesn't permit now. PPUF has also made a short video about this issue. You can view it at our website www.PPUF.org PPUF has also been working to eliminate shelter eligibility language that requires people to live in ***a place unfit for human habitation*** before being considered eligible for a shelter bed. Yes- you read that right! We have included an article written by Jim Stewart, Director of First Church Shelter in Cambridge on the effort to help people SEE homeless people as people, not just part of the urban landscape.

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Maybe you too are feeling overwhelmed –wanting to DO something yet not knowing where to begin. Pick a couple of issues to focus on. Join us in letting your federal representative know that the successful food stamp program should not be changed.

Let your state reps know that requiring people to live in *a place unfit for human habitation* is beyond cruel

And consider ways that you can to support our immigrant neighbors, as proposed in the article by Vicky Steinitz..

While trying to respond to the desperate needs of many of our sisters and brothers it's important also to hold those dear to you closer than ever and to have a few good chuckles once in a awhile.

In Struggle and Hope, Georgia, Margaret, Lynnette and Fran

Safe Communities Act

by Vicky Steinitz

SUPPORT THE SAFE COMMUNITIES ACT

Immigrant residents of Massachusetts are terrified by Pres. Trump's assault on their lives and liberties and ICE's stepped up efforts to detain and deport them. State action to reaffirm immigrants' constitutional rights and to protect against detention and deportation is more urgent than ever.

The Massachusetts Constitution ensures the safety of all people in our Commonwealth, including immigrants. The Safe Communities Act would protect us all by making sure our tax dollars are not used to enforce draconian federal immigration laws. This powerful new version of the Trust Act is sponsored by Senator Jamie Eldridge and Representative Juana Matias (HD.3052).

The Safe Communities Act is a broad civil rights bill which will not only end cooperation between local police departments and ICE but will also outlaw use of state data bases for the proposed Muslim registry, ensure basic Due Process Rights for people detained in state and local facilities for civil immigration violations, and prohibit local police from being deputized as ICE agents.

The House bill (HD 3052) has been co-sponsored by 86 legislators and endorsed by 82 organizations to date. The Senate version (S1305) has been co-sponsored by 51 as of March 10, 2017 and co-sponsors can still sign on. This is an exciting level of support, way beyond anything we've seen before. Sen. Eldridge and Rep. Matias are seeking expedited passage given the importance of having this legislation in place as rapidly as possible.

Unfortunately, Gov. Baker still refuses to support the bill and argues that he doesn't believe in state-wide "thou shalt" laws. This is absurd. We need to exert as much pressure as possible to make him see that he will face voter outrage for vetoing this critical bill. The House Speaker, DeLeo also has a "gut feeling" that this should be a local issue and he too needs to know this is unacceptable. While Senate President, Stanley Rosenberg, has supported immigrant rights legislation in the past, he has yet to announce where he stands on the Safe Communities Act.

What can you do? Call these key decision-makers, ideally over and over again

Gov. Charlie Baker, 617-725-4005

Speaker Robert DeLeo 617-722-2500

Pres. Stanley Rosenberg' 617-722-1500

Let them know that the Act's protections are not only for undocumented immigrants but for all Mass residents in these perilous times. Tell them their humanity demands they stand on the right side of history and support the Safe Communities Act.

HOMELESS BILL of RIGHTS

By Jim Stewart

Generally most people think that the biggest problems faced by our poor and homeless sisters and brothers is their “invisibility.” They often seem-even when seeking shelter or asking for assistance in public spaces-forgotten and neglected; considered just part of the “urban landscape” that we move through.

A story in the Boston Globe March 17 remind all of us that homeless people are lucky if they are treated as invisible. On March 16th homeless persons, who claim that they were assaulted by guards at North Station last year, sued former guard, Rene Norestant Jr., and the security company he worked for, Allied Universal. They claim that the company’s negligence led to the violence they experienced.



The suit contends that in four different instances in 2016, the victims, while standing in concourses and waiting areas at North Station and TD Garden, were forcibly removed and pushed by an Allied Universal employee. Norestant was allegedly involved in most of the cases.

Their suit also accuses Allied of negligence and reckless conduct “in failing to maintain the premises in a reasonable safe manner, failing to provide and maintain adequate security, failing to properly hire, train, supervise, manage, and control its employees.”

Public video footage documents much of the behavior alleged in the suit and MBTA Police arrested Norestant following inquiries by the Boston Globe and other media and community groups last December.

Unfortunately, the suit and the incidents that precipitated it demonstrate that even those who are entrusted with maintaining the security and safety of public spaces feel that our most vulnerable and excluded brothers and sisters are there to act out on if they feel so inclined.

These events make clear the necessity of the action being taken to ensure that the rights nearly all of us take for granted are recognized as applying to all citizens of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, even those experiencing homelessness.

The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless has been working with elected officials at the State House to promote passage of An act providing a Homeless Bill of Rights. The proposed bill establishes a definition of those experiencing homelessness and protects key rights of all residents, whether or not they are experiencing homelessness. The bill is similar to legislation passed in 2012 in Rhode Island as well as those passed in Connecticut and Illinois.

The proposed Bill of Rights would simply recognize those experiencing homelessness as having the same rights as all other resident of Massachusetts. The bill outlines those rights so as to prevent discrimination based on housing status. It recognizes the increased prevalence of homelessness in Massachusetts resulting from economic hardship, the insufficient availability of safe, affordable housing, and a weakened social safety net and makes it clear that “No person’s rights, privileges, or access to public services may be denied or abridged solely because he or she is experiencing homelessness.”

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The Danger of Block Grants

Georgia Mattison

In 1996, welfare provisions for poor families were changed to a block grant system, titled The Temporary Assistance Program for Needy Families TANF. This caused the benefit to all but disappear. Now the Republicans in Congress want to change the Supplemental Nutrition Action Program SNAP (Food Stamps) to the same block grant system).

How did the Massachusetts block grant cause the caseload to plummet from 120,000 TANF families in 1996 to fewer than 30,000 families today? When welfare changes were made in 1996, welfare became a benefit administered by state governments rather than by the federal government. Under the federal plan, considered an entitlement plan, the benefit expanded or decreased depending on the number of people eligible for it. If you were eligible, you received the benefit. Under the state block grants, each state receives a pre-determined amount, no matter how many people need welfare. And in addition, the block grants can be used in other ways than supporting those in poverty. The state is also allowed to make new rules for eligibility like time-limits, or as passed by the legislature in 2014, a documented job search before application. These changes mean that fewer families were eligible for the benefit and that they received less than they needed. It also meant that the state received less money each year for those in need, since the federal government allocated money for TANF based on last year's caseload. ... Fewer and fewer families received welfare, and now many families only have food stamps for their survival. If food stamps are also moved to a block grant system, many poor people will not be able to survive.

In other disheartening news, this year the Governor has proposed that rather than using the state's guidelines for determining the disabled eligible for TANF, that the state use eligibility for the Supplemental Security Insurance SSI. These guidelines are more stringent and eliminate those needing benefits for temporary injuries. It would mean that 4900 families would lose their benefits and 1400 would lose part of their benefits. Last year, Governor Baker proposed this change for both disabled parents and disabled children with Supplemental Security Income SSI. Nearly 8000 families would have lost all or part of their benefits. The Welfare Coalition worked with many sympathetic legislators to defeat this budget item. The Governor has brought it back in this year's budget. The Welfare Coalition is geared up to stop this again.

The cruelty of the Welfare Block grant has created a large group of families in Massachusetts that live at less than 50% of the poverty line. They live in terrible shelter situations with patchwork jobs, but they do receive Food Stamps and Medicaid. Congress is now also deliberating putting Medicaid into a block grant. We must all work to prevent these new attacks on poor people.

Lift the CAP on Kids Campaign



Lots of blue caps could be seen at the State House Human Service Committee hearing on March 31 2017. The group was supporting testimony about Lifting a CAP which does not allow children born while their Mom is on TANF to receive a welfare benefit of \$100. Massachusetts is among only a handful of states to have this rule.



HOMELESS BILL OF RIGHTS (CONTINUED)

Directly relevant to the experience of the four homeless people filing the law suit, the Homeless Bill of Rights would make it clear that homeless people have the right to move freely in public spaces, such as platforms and concourses of train stations, as well as the right to equal treatment by municipal agencies, freedom from discrimination in employment, the right to emergency medical care, the right to register to vote and to vote, freedom from disclosure of records, and the right to a reasonable expectation of privacy of property.

The Mass Coalition, their allies at the State House and others who support the bill have made it clear that the purpose of the Homeless Bill of Rights is to have the rights outlined be treated as “a statement of legislative intent, as a guide for state and municipal agencies.”

Because it is intended as a statement of intent, there is no cost associated with the bill. That has not stopped some opponents of the bill from raising the possibility of the Bill of Rights potentially exposing the state, municipalities or public entities to costs or penalties resulting from litigation appealing to the Bill of Rights.

Obviously, no responsible supporter of the proposed Homeless Bill of Rights-or any other legislative action for that matter-can ever predict or guarantee what will or will not happen if a piece of legislation is enacted.

It seems obvious that, absent assurances provided by the Homeless Bill of Rights, those of our sisters and brothers who lack housing remain at risk of the same kind of degrading and traumatizing treatment endured by those who filed suit against Rene Norestant Jr. and his employer on March 16th.

Let your State Representative and Senator (<http://www.wheredoivotema.com/bal/MyElectionInfo.aspx>) know that you expect them to lend their support to <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H695>. Tell them that you want them to help make sure that ALL citizens of the Commonwealth are treated with the same respect and dignity that we would expect for ourselves and those we care for. Make sure your Representative and Senator understand that the Homeless Bill of Rights does not create special benefits or services for homeless people but would merely ensure that no one is deprived of rights or privileges solely because they are experiencing homelessness.

(Jim Stewart is Director of First Church Shelter in Cambridge and has been a knowledgeable and passionate advocate for poor and homeless people for decades.)

In Memory of Renae Gray

4/19/51-1/24/17

Renae was a phenomenal woman. She helped lead innumerable organizations to success. Whether working as a Cambridge City Councilor, working on a program at the YW or facilitating a retreat for Community Works she never let tough questions go unasked. We are all better that she chose to show us what we needed to see. Renae was clear minded and full of love. We will miss the many gifts she brought to the building of stronger, more honest communities





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Date for Completion of Kip's Memorial Changed



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