Dear Sisters and Brothers,

The beat goes on. As Kip used to say, “We’ve learned to laugh because it hurts too much to cry.” In the midst of national chaos PPUF continues to keep a portion of Boston’s poor housed, fed and warm. Raising the issues of poverty is never easy. Poor people are always on the bottom of the who really counts list. Remember when the Long Island bridge was closed separating homeless women and men from the only safe place they knew and called home? It’s been five years since then! Though attempts were made to mitigate the impact, Boston shelters were hard pressed to adequately provide for this displaced population of over 700. So for five years the people who had shelter on Long Island have been largely left to fend for themselves. The growth in the number of homeless people is not specific to Boston. It’s happening all over the country. An estimated 700,000 youth under age 18 without a parent or guardian experience homelessness each year, according to the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. The New York Times reports that the New York City public schools have 177,000 homeless students.

It wasn’t turning the clocks back that made the world seem dark. We watched children being separated from their parents at our southern border. We learned that the White House withheld vital aid from an ally under attack by Russia for petty purposes. Long time allies have had to endure insults because the president seems to favor the company of despots. While the poor and middle classes struggle the super rich get tax brakes. The administration cuts to food stamps and environmental protection programs to pay them. It is so difficult to see all of this but it is equally difficult to witness the successful use of a campaign of dis-information to make it all go away. But you already know that.

What you may not be aware of is just how strong the push back is. Local and national organizations have been pushing back on every front, whether it’s advocating for poor people or immigrants. There are throngs of smart, skilled good hearted people working as hard as they can to lessen the harm being done to vulnerable people. In the next few pages we tell you some positive things happening!

One thing is clear to me. WE DO NOT GIVE UP! We pull up our socks and carry on. This newsletter highlights the efforts of local and national organizations that push ahead challenging every cruel thing that comes down the pike. Organizations and regular folks are working 24 hours per day, 7 days a week to try to prevent any more children from being separated from their parents as well as trying to prevent further cruelties from being heaped upon a population of people who want to come to the US to be safe. There are other organizations national and local who are passionate about trying to lighten the burdens poverty puts on their shoulders. Massachusetts Law Reform

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Institute, which keeps an eagle eye on rules and regulations that make the lives of poor people even harder, The Food Research and Action Center keeps an eye on threats to programs that reduce hunger.
So as we celebrate Christmas and Hanukkah we do so with a sense of hope. There are hundreds of folks who have stepped up and are bringing light to the season. Please Read on......

A note from Kip this season
“In the Advent season, it becomes painfully clear that there is no room at the Inn for a great many folks on the poverty level in this city. There is also the ‘new poor’, people who never before had to fight for their survival. The Poor People’s United Fund has very simple goals—simply to hang in there with other groups working with poor people—... raise funds so we can keep doing the work. As you know feeding the hungry, sheltering the homeless and setting at liberty those who are oppressed is an extraordinarily difficult gospel to witness and impossible politics to implement in today’s sad and sinful and frightened world—well Poor People’s United Fund gets by with a little help from our friends. We hope you will consider us, ...”

In Struggle and Hope, Georgia, Margaret, and Fran

Calls for Help
(from Margaret Rhodes, PPUF volunteer)
At PPUF, we are receiving more and more calls from people who are falling behind on rent and utilities, often the disabled and/ or elderly. The Globe reports that MA has the highest rate among states of single people over 65 “...whose income doesn’t cover living expenses such as food, housing, health care and transportation (Nov. 19, 2019.) 61.7% of MA seniors living alone cannot afford these basic necessities, according to the Gerontology Institute, U MA/Boston. Families also are struggling. As rents and utilities increase and Food Stamp allotments decrease, poor people are ever more squeezed. The people who call us are deeply grateful for any little help we can give them.

The Up to Deep Poverty Campaign
Years ago PPUF participated in an Up to Poverty campaign which resulted in a 10% increase in assistance to poor families. But since then (1988) there have been no increases. Therefore, poor families find themselves even further behind! Now imagine a campaign to get people up to deep poverty! Outrageous - but necessary so PPUF is joining other organizations to advocate for an increase in the TAFDC grant.

We all know prices have gone way up for all goods and services since 1988. The graph to the right illustrates some increases. Clearly a family cannot survive on the $593 per month. All household expenses are important but the ability to have an adequate supply of diapers for your baby’s health is essential. If a child has to wear a diaper too long serious infections can develop.

Starting in 2020 PPUF will be working to help Mom’s get access to an adequate supply of diapers.

Massachusetts TAFDC Grant Has not Increased Enough to Meet the Growing Cost of Basic Needs
The increase in cost for basic items since 1988 has outpaced the increase in cash assistance to families in poverty

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1988</th>
<th>2019</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Infant diapers</td>
<td>$9.80</td>
<td>$22.99</td>
<td>135%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toilet paper</td>
<td>$0.99</td>
<td>$3.49</td>
<td>253%</td>
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<td>Toothpaste</td>
<td>$1.49</td>
<td>$2.49</td>
<td>67%</td>
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<td>Laundry detergent</td>
<td>$2.14</td>
<td>$5.60</td>
<td>162%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Children’s pain relief</td>
<td>$0.79</td>
<td>$4.18</td>
<td>429%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Graph: Greater Boston Legal Services & Mass Law Reform Institute
Immigration Update III
by Vicky Steinitz

The endless stream of Trump administration attacks on immigrants continues. The targets of these cruel proposals are invariably among the most vulnerable: victims of domestic or gang violence applying for asylum, severely ill foreigners here for medical treatment, DACA children who have grown up in the United States and know no other home. At the same time though, efforts to halt these hateful moves and to accompany and advocate for our immigrant neighbors are growing in number and intensity. Here, I want to celebrate some of the recent immigrant rights victories and also to underline the importance of joining the struggle here in Massachusetts.

Widespread outrage against the Trump administrations’ termination of the medical deferred action program which allows severely ill foreigners to remain in the country while they receive treatment appears to have been successful in getting the policy change rescinded. The program has been reinstated although thus far no new requests have been processed. Similarly, public disgust with the proposed changes in the “public charge” criteria which would have denied green cards or visas to immigrants if they’ve used federal aid programs such as Medicaid, SNAP (food stamps) or housing assistance or if they did not have medical insurance was expressed in an extraordinary 260,000 public comments opposing the changes and twelve lawsuits in opposition.

Lawyers working with immigrant rights organizations have been doing an incredible job of immediately filing briefs against these egregious proposals, often the day after they are announced. Time after time, judges have ruled in their favor, issuing injunctions which prevent adoption of the new regulations. Important rulings include: a permanent injunction issued by a California judge upholding the Flores decision which limits the number of days children can be held in detention, thereby blocking the administration’s attempts to create an endless family detention system; and injunctions striking down the public charge and medical insurance criteria in five District Courts across the country.

The most exciting immigrant rights actor on the local scene is BIJAN, the Boston Immigration Justice Accompaniment Network. In addition to fundraising for bond and legal fees and accompanying detainees to court and ICE check-ins, BIJAN recently created a hotline where detainees can make free calls to their families and lawyers.

The recent decision by the Suffolk County Sheriff to sever his jail’s contract with ICE meets a longtime goal of immigrant rights activists. In some ways, it is a victory but it has led to new problems. 180 detainees have been scattered, the men to Plymouth, Franklin and Rhode Island county jails, the women to Batavia NY, 6 ½ hours west of Boston. It is harder now for detainees to keep in contact with their lawyers, for families to visit and for BIJAN to provide accompaniment. BIJAN’s hotline and bond programs are critical resources. To make a contribution, go to https://beyondbondboston.org/donate

Efforts to pass immigrant rights legislation in Massachusetts continue to be frustrating. The Work and Family Mobility Act which would allow qualified drivers to obtain standard drivers’ licenses did have a committee hearing in September and a hearing for the Safe Communities Act, which limits state cooperation with ICE and protects undocumented immigrants’ due process rights, has finally been scheduled. These bills have broad support but Governor Baker has said he will veto them and Speaker DeLeo has taken no steps to move them forward.

Also, let your state senator and representative know you support this legislation. An easy way to do this is thru the ACLU website https://action.aclu.org/send-message/ma-protect-immigrants.

Furious letters to the Governor and the Speaker would be good next steps. These are challenging times which call on us all to do everything we can to assist our vulnerable neighbors.
“To Advocate for the Poor is a Subversive Act”
By Georgia Mattison

Kip Tiernan captured the nature of the struggle with the above quote from Urban Meditations. When the Trump administration has tried to eliminate, cutback, intimidate, and abandon poor families eligible for Federal assistance programs, the assaults are brutal and unrelenting. This war on the poor has been met with fearsome pushback from national and local advocacy organizations. These national organizations include the Food Research and Action Center FRAC, the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, the Coalition for Human Needs, and the American Civil Liberties Union ACLU. Local groups include the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute MLRI, the Coalition For the Homeless, and the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition MIRA.

On October 12, 2019, a court injunction against the Trump administration’s Public Charge rule was handed down. Advocates had worked for a year to prevent this unjust and harmful rule which would have taken effect on October 15. This rule would have harmed immigrant families whose use of social services would have gravely affected their application for citizenship. A Public Charge test is used by immigration officials to decide whether a person is an undue burden on the government. Until the Trump rule change RETROACTIVELY counted SNAP, section 8 housing, Medicaid, and schools meals in the determination as to whether a citizenship application can go forward, the participation in these programs was never counted. Advocates were concerned because immigrants were dropping out of these programs in anticipation of this rule change, to the detriment of themselves and their families. The courts have stopped the rule for now.

Whenever the Federal government wants a fundamental change to a public program, they must publish the proposed rule and invite comments for 60 days. They must also calculate the effect of this proposed change on the people who receive these benefits.

National and local groups organized 110,000 comments to protest gut wrenching proposed SNAP (Food Stamp) cuts to 3.1 million low-income working families including the loss of school meals to 500,000 children. The comments came from the general public as well as from Governors, Mayors, legislators and our own Massachusetts DTA Commissioner. National and local advocates hosted webinars to educate and enable written comments, followed up to get folks over the finish line, reached out to media outlets, and celebrated this huge response.

Incredibly the proposed rule according to the October 17, 2019 New York Times has been reopened for two more weeks of comments because the Trump administration had concealed by almost 500,000 the true number of children affected by the proposed rule. The comment period was reopened because the administration didn’t publish the real impact. Congress protested after United States Department of Agriculture staff revealed anonymously to them that the true number was 982,000 children who would lose school meals. There is no guarantee that this Proposed rule will be defeated but the fight is definitely not over yet.

All hail to the subversives!
RANKED CHOICE VOTING

by Margaret Rhodes

Although the coming election has been dominated by news about the Presidential and Markey-Kennedy Primaries, we should pay attention to another issue as well. In September, a proposition for Ranked Choice Voting was certified by the State. If advocates obtain the necessary 80,000 plus signatures, we could be voting on the proposition in the 2020 election. This is an important proposition that could make our elections more democratic, with more diverse candidates, and a fairer process. The proposition enables voters to rank candidates for office in the order they prefer them. If no candidate in a particular election receives over 50% of the first-choice vote, then the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and the voters of that candidate have their votes moved to their second ranked choice. This procedure is continued until one candidate has over 50%. The proposition would apply to “primary and general elections for all Massachusetts statewide offices, state legislative offices, federal congressional offices, and certain other offices,” according to a summary by the AG’s office. If approved in 2020, it would be implemented starting in 2022.

 Ranked Choice Voting is not new. It is used in Maine races already and in Santa Fe and San Francisco. Basically, instead of just voting for one candidate, one can rank candidates in order of preference, though one can still vote for only one candidate if one wants. In this way, particularly in close elections, voters who have chosen less popular candidates as their first choice, still have a say in who gets elected, without as much fear of splitting the vote. Sometimes in highly contested elections, people are afraid to vote for their favorite candidate for fear that it will split the vote in a way that allows a third undesirable candidate to be elected. With ranked choice, if no candidate has over 50% in the first tabulation, then second choice votes may get counted. Ranked choice makes elections more democratic by ensuring that the winner in a crowded race will have greater support. For example, in one race recently, in a field of ten candidates, the winner had only 22% of the total vote (Democratic Primary, 3rd District Ma, 2019.) In that situation, if we had ranked choice voting, more voters would have had their votes count, by having their second ranked candidate added in. Perhaps the same person would win but would do so with a larger percentage or perhaps some other candidate would emerge as more acceptable to the majority of voters.

Opponents argue that it is confusing and that it would make candidates avoid hot topic issues. Advocates argue that it would make voting more democratic and can decrease negative campaigning as candidates would need to reach beyond their base. In places where it has been implemented, voters have not found it confusing.

The proposition still has a ways to go before it would appear on our ballots in 2020. At this point, advocates are still collecting signatures, after which the legislature has a chance to pass it. If they do not, more signatures can be gathered to ensure that it is on the 2020 ballot. Volunteers to help spread the word and gather signatures would be much appreciated. More information can be found at field@voterchoice2020.org.
The Season of Light

The winter season has us railing against the dark! Christmas and Chanukah satisfy a yearning for light and hope! The holidays help us push back at the darkness by having us put lights everywhere; our homes, in our windows, on trees, city streets. The contrast of light and darkness seems to make us more reflective. We think about the homeless little boy and his family who were told there was no room at the Inn and remember that many families are still hearing that.

A person that is a beacon of light for us and many other organizations around the Commonwealth is Rep. Jim McGovern. Representative Jim MC Govern has fought tirelessly for the people of Massachusetts. He is a powerful voice for low-income people, veterans, immigrants, and people living with disabilities. Last month, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute recognized Rep. McGovern with a Catalyst for Change Award. PPUF has long admired Rep. McGovern’s courageous work on behalf of poor people so we were thrilled to be present to see him receive this award. Thank you, Jim!

(Photograph shows Rep. McGovern left with Georgia Mattison at a recent conference on hunger.)

Merry Christmas! Happy Hanukkah!