MSAC, Allies Respond to New RIDE Threats

Does the “A” in MBTA stand for Amnesia? This is what one might conclude based on recent discussions by the MBTA’s Fiscal and Management Control Board.

During the final weeks of 2015, the Board, which was put in place by Gov. Baker last summer, has been discussing options to save as much as $46 million from the 2017 fiscal year budget for The RIDE. Some of the options under consideration? Raising one-way fares to $4.20 (the maximum allowed under the Americans With Disabilities Act) and cutting out premium zone service entirely (premium trips are same day appointments or trips either to or from an address more than ¾ miles from a bus or subway stop - see map on page 4 for affected area). Over 8,000 seniors and disabled riders took more than 210,000 such trips last year.

Enacting these extreme measures would be a slap in the face to MA residents who rely on the service and MSAC members and allies who fought so hard to keep it affordable. Such cuts would also be discriminatory toward the most vulnerable.

MSAC members quickly mobilized in response to the MBTA’s attempt, led by Transportation Secretary Stephanie Pollack, to cut premium service. Thousands of seniors and people with disabilities depend on the RIDE to stay active in their communities and meet basic needs. Without it they would have no transportation alternatives. Nonetheless, Sec. Pollack recently claimed that The RIDE does not represent the MBTA’s “core business” and questioned whether the agency should provide paratransit service beyond what the ADA requires.

“The RIDE is a vital transportation service,” said Ann Stewart, 91. “It is a lifeline for seniors and disabled people. It connects people to doctors, grocery stores, jobs and the community.”

In October 2015 members rallied at the State House with allies against the broader state subsidizing $47 per ride, making it an expensive though absolutely vital service. The RIDE serves about 30,000 users who take 2.1 million trips per year, or 7,000 per day.

Forum Highlights Senior Healthcare Crisis

It has now been two years since MSAC officially launched its campaign to expand affordable healthcare for Massachusetts seniors. The end of 2015 saw multiple key stepping stones, including a high profile forum on senior healthcare, another committee hearing on filed legislation, and continued strategizing by the member steering committee (alongside renewed outreach efforts in our communities).

In October Mass Senior Action had an exciting opportunity to discuss our Bridge The Gap campaign with healthcare professionals and other key stakeholders at a forum on senior healthcare coverage, hosted by the Blue Cross Blue Shield Foundation. With her charismatic spark, MSAC healthcare steering committee member Edna Place of Boston underscored the urgency of the crisis and represented seniors facing burdensome out-of-pocket costs and who consequently go without the care they need.

“I stand before you today at the age of 82 as a proud member of the Massachusetts Senior Action Council,” said Edna. “Today it is my privilege to bring into this room some of the voices of seniors from across the Commonwealth who are behind the statistics you heard this morning. The senior healthcare gap in Massachusetts is real and affects thousands of us every day.”

The forum also highlighted recent research from Nancy Turnbull and Robert Blendon both of the Harvard School of Public Health, which indeed confirmed that (1) the web of healthcare plans is dense and confusing, (2) costs are increasing, (3) elders have less access to affordable coverage than their...
I WOULD LIKE TO MAKE AN ADDITIONAL, TAX EXEMPT CONTRIBUTION OF: $________

MEMBERSHIP--AFFILIATION FORM

☐ Enclosed are my annual dues:  ☐ $10 for 1 person.  ☐ $15 for a couple.
☐ Enclosed is my organization’s annual $50 affiliate dues.
☐ I am a union retiree. Name of Union and Local # __________________________

NAME(s) OF MEMBER(s) OR ORGANIZATION ___________________________________________________________________

ADDRESS _____________________________________________________________________________
APT. ___________________
CITY ___________________________________ST________ ZIP_____________
PHONE ________________________
EMAIL_____________________________________________________________ FAX___________________________

Make checks payable to MSAC, and mail to Mass Senior Action, 150 Mt. Vernon Street - 2nd Fl., Dorchester, MA 02125

CONTACT INFO
Main Office/Eastern MA
150 Mt. Vernon St. 2nd Fl.
Dorchester, MA 02125
617-284-1234

Bristol County, MA Chapter
P.O. Box 1443
Westport, MA 02790
508-993-2680

Western MA (Springfield)
P.O. Box 2233
Agawam, MA 01001
413-774-6406

CHAPTER MEETINGS

BOSTON CHAPTER
meets 2nd Thursday of the month
Meeting Time: Noon to 2:30 pm
Location: Charles St. AME Church
551 Warren St., Dorchester, MA

CAMBRIDGE CHAPTER
meets 3rd Friday of the month
Meeting Time: begins at 12:30 pm
Location: Cambridge Senior Center
806 Mass. Ave., Cambridge, MA

NORTH SHORE CHAPTER
meets 3rd Tuesday of the month
Meeting Time: begins at 10:30 am
Location Varies: 10 Church Street
St. Stephen’s, 25 Pleasant Street, or
St. Mary’s, 30 Pleasant Street

METRO NORTH CHAPTER
meets 4th Wednesday of the month
Meeting Time: starts at 1:30 pm
Location: Malden Senior Center
7 Washington St., Malden, MA

SPRINGFIELD CHAPTER
meets 4th Wednesday of the month
Meeting Time: starts at 1:00 pm
Location: Springfield Hobby Club
309 Chestnut St., Springfield, MA

BRISTOL COUNTY CHAPTER
meets 4th Thursday of the month
Meeting Time: 1 - 3 pm
Location: St. George Church Hall
12 Highland Ave., Westport, MA
MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

Hello to All,

I hope everyone enjoyed the holiday season and is buckling down for another winter. I know it can be hard for many. It sounds like there were some great holiday celebrations in all the chapters to round out 2015!

This past fall was incredibly busy, and December capped off a very productive year for MSAC. October feels like a long time ago, but that was when we came together to elect new leaders at our Convention. I am excited to be part of this new leadership team as we forge ahead with our campaigns. I had the chance to go to some very interesting workshops, and I hope you all look back on the day fondly.

In the last few months of 2015 we also had multiple events related to our healthcare campaign, including a bill hearing by the Committee on Elder Affairs, a forum with important stakeholders, and continued community outreach. We also formally partnered with the Pew Charitable Trust and other healthcare allies to support increasing access to dental care. Our members spoke passionately about the importance of the RIDE, and people listened. I was proud to hear Dot Macaione, who is 95, share her story about how she uses the RIDE to visit her daughter and stay active in her community. If the MBTA cuts premium service they will also be cutting Dot’s visits.

In December, some of our members were even willing to risk arrest to prevent any cuts. We successfully pressured the MBTA to back off, but Transportation Secretary Pollack is determined to cut premium service for The RIDE from their budget. This issue will remain very live in the coming weeks, so stay alert! There will likely be ongoing opportunities to take action as we try to get the Governor to intervene. I encourage you to read more about the situation on our front page story.

You may recall we had our hands full with local voter education and outreach efforts as well (see page 7). This work is so important because we educate voters and candidates about the issues, increase the turnout, and build political power in our communities. Turnout for municipal elections tends to be very low, but local elected officials have a lot of say in what happens in your community. This work will continue in 2016 as we prepare for a big Presidential election.

I expect the new year to be very busy, but that’s nothing new from me! Keep working together to unite the senior voice and build senior power. I am consistently proud to have such informed and engaged seniors by my side; our power truly is with you all, and your involvement is the key to our success. I look forward to a 2016 packed with senior action, and, as always, remember we do not take it, we take charge!

Barbara Mann

What is the cost of Your Health Care?

We want to hear from you!

Have you avoided needed health care procedures due to cost?

Are you struggling with high out-of-pocket expenses?

Are you concerned about the cost of eye or dental care?

Do you want to Bridge The Gap to Affordable Health Care?

Contact MSAC:

617-284-1234 or
cvillers@MassSeniorAction.org

North Shore members Kathy Paul and Rosa Bentley join Cambridge member John Ratliff at a Dec. 1st rally to deliver 157,000 signatures in support of Raise Up MA’s Constitutional Amendment campaign. If successful, the amendment would invest more than $1.5 billion in transportation, public schools and higher education by adding an additional 4% tax on income over $1 million dollars.
issue of transit privatization, which Governor Baker has favored. MSAC gathered for a second rally in November, this time at the Governor’s office, demanding that he intervene to stop any cuts to The RIDE.

“We have been down this road before. We remember what happened in 2012, and we cannot afford a disastrous policy U-turn,” declared Helene Azanow, a RIDE user and MSAC member in Lynn. “We understand that the RIDE is an expensive service to operate, and we are committed to working with the MBTA to promote solutions to lower the cost.”

MSAC has formally requested a meeting with the Governor to discuss policy solutions that do not involve cutting vital service areas.

“All we are asking is that they agree to work with us to find solutions that won’t cause such devastation for seniors and people with disabilities who depend on it,” said Helene.

“We have been down this road before. We remember what happened in 2012, and we cannot afford a disastrous policy U-turn.”

- Helene Azanow, Lynn

Since November MSAC has also attended and testified at every weekly meeting of the MBTA Board. Most recently, in December, members attended a Board meeting prepared for arrest. Some present had participated in the two rounds of civil disobedience that, in 2013, led to a fare rollback for The RIDE.

“We are willing to put our bodies and our freedom on the line in order to stop your reckless policies,” members declared during the public comment period of the meeting. “People with disabilities are worth just as much as everyone else!”

MSAC does not oppose other cost-saving measures under consideration by the Board, including state subsidies for taxis and ride-sharing services (like Uber) as well as training for RIDERs to use the bus or train with free or cheaper passes. These options can give RIDERs more flexibility while reducing costs for the MBTA without imposing fare hikes and service cuts. MSAC members made it abundantly clear that the MBTA should work with seniors and the disability community before considering any policy changes that would harm RIDERs.

The overall situation reflects the MBTA’s ongoing lack of public accountability. As many remember, in 2012 the MBTA more than doubled fares for the RIDE from $2 to $4 and $5. Many suffered, imprisoned in their homes, and cut back on groceries and medications. After consistent advocacy, education, and civil disobedience by MSAC members and their allies, in December 2013 the MBTA acknowledged the hardship, moved to reverse the fare increase, and developed a program for a means-tested fare system that concluded in December 2015, thereby restoring more equity to The RIDE. However, it is doubtful the MBTA will be proactive in scaling the pilot up to benefit more low-income RIDERs, especially in light of the fiscal control board’s recent discussions to raise fares and cut service.

MSAC and its allies in the disability advocacy community, including the Boston Center for Independent Living and MassADAPT, will need to be on guard. Things are moving very quickly, and the MBTA has been very reluctant to take the time to work with the public. Stay tuned for more information, contact the Governor, and be ready to take action! We will not stand back while they once again attack those who depend on the RIDE!!!
Tenants Organize, Make Gains with MSAC in Boston, Lynn

Earlier this year, Joanne Kilson thought her time as the Tenant’s Council President at the Louis Barrett House in Lynn was over. She did not want to interact with the people in her building, and she no longer wanted to plan celebrations or even host the weekly bingo game.

Joanne was tired of the residents coming to her with issues she did not have the power to fix. She was also tired of working with an owner who did not listen and appeared to just not care. But then she remembered a group who had helped her and her neighbors before and thought maybe that group could help them again.

In the Fall of 2014, Joanne Kilson attended a meeting in her building organized by the Mass Senior Action Council. Residents in her building, who are active MSAC members, planned the meeting when everyone in the building received a notice that their rent would increase from 30% of their income to over 55% due to their subsidy ending and much needed repairs to the building.

Mass Senior Action Council contacted MassHousing and local elected leaders to ask them to come to the building to hear how the proposed increase would be devastating to the people who live there. After hearing how the huge rent increase would impact the residents, MassHousing worked with owners to find a different subsidy. Every resident will now pay 30% of their income, saving some people over a hundred dollars per month. One resident was so excited they exclaimed, “My rent would have been nearly 60 percent of my monthly check. I would not have had money for my medicine or money to go to my doctor’s appointment. I can live with paying 30%, that is fair.”

Joanne said she could see how MSAC worked with the residents and made sure the people’s voice was heard. So when she was having trouble with management earlier this year, she contacted MSAC.

With the help of MSAC, Joanne and her board planned a building-wide meeting. At the meeting, residents shared how their maintenance requests were being ignored. “I told management about my bed bugs 4 times, and nothing was done. They said they would get to it,” voiced one resident. Another shouted, “I live by the laundry room. At least once a month the water from the washers backs up into my kitchen sink and overflows. The water ruined brand new dish towels and a toaster. Maintenance says the only thing they can do is snake the drain but I cannot live like this! Who has to make sure maintenance snakes the washing machine drains, and who will pay to replace my ruined stuff?!?”

MSAC started monthly meetings and trainings with the elected tenant task force, including voter engagement information. Longtime MSAC member Ray Gagnon explained to his neighbors, residents in her building, who are active MSAC members, MSAC met with BHA leadership out basic items like chairs and working officer budget, too. Officers were with out basic items like chairs and working phones. MSAC met with BHA leadership to discuss what could be done to improve the living conditions in these buildings.

It was decided that BHA would work with MSAC to see if the city could help fill the gaps from federal budget cuts to fix the most prominent problems, such as broken door locks, cameras, and equipment for the security officers.

While the funding search was in the works, MSAC jumped into action setting up a July meeting with BHA officials and planned a meeting with all of the security officers and task force leaders. Residents did not have an understanding of the security officer duties or their limits. “Task Force members yell at us for asking for their family member’s name, but it is our job to record anyone coming in the building that does not live here,” a Security Officer at the Round House building in Roxbury shared at the officer’s meeting.

At the meeting, the officers collectively created a list of items they needed to do their jobs. Uniforms, desk, and working phones were at the top of the list.

MLK residents stand with Security Officers and commit to work together to improve their building’s safety

“Candidates do not know who you vote for, but they do know if you vote. Everyone complained about the snow piling up around our building last winter. If you vote, the city council will make sure your street is taken care of. We have to start voting or we will continue to be ignored.”

The leaders and residents found out what is covered in their lease, how the local and state housing code affected their complaints, and how to “grieve” an issue covered by the lease or the housing code. Now, the management team is working with the Task Force and tenants. The entire building has been treated for infestation, the task force now has input on the procedures and improvements to the building, and Joanne is planning the monthly activities, including bingo for the residents.

Joanne told the residents at the monthly meeting, “We need to thank MSAC for helping us understand our rights. No one explained how to work with management to get things done in the building. Now we have a new subsidy to repair our apartments, and we have the tools to represent the tenants.”

MSAC members are now taking those same tools to Boston Housing Authority Residents. Members from several BHA buildings contacted MSAC to share their frustrations with the lack of attention to their buildings, mainly with custodial and safety issues.

Members found that due to federal cuts, building managers were stretched to several buildings, which left very little time to oversee the daily operations like basic housekeeping and garbage disposal.

The lack of funding cut into the security officer budget, too. Officers were without basic items like chairs and working phones. MSAC met with BHA leadership to discuss what could be done to improve the living conditions in these buildings.

Tenants continued on page 12.
Healthcare continued from page 1.

younger counterparts, and (4) a significant proportion of low-income seniors feel they are unable to afford the care they need.

Our campaign gained additional urgency as healthcare costs continue escalate despite the fact that there will be no cost of living adjustment for Social Security in 2016. Fortunately, Congress took action to prevent steep and unprecedented increases by spreading the cost of the increased premium over time and holding down the cost of the deductible. Starting January 1st, the Part B premium will remain the same for most people with Medicare, amounting to $104.90 per month. For beneficiaries who are not held harmless and protected from premium increases, the standard Part B premium will be $118.80. These beneficiaries will also pay a $3 surcharge, bringing their total monthly cost to $121.80. The Part B deductible will be $166 for all people with Medicare, up from $147.

So, while most Medicare beneficiaries will be held harmless this year from increases in the Part B premium, everyone will face an increase in the Part B deductible from $147 to $166, and many will face significant increases for their Medicare supplement plans. Medicare supplement plans help to mitigate the high and unpredictable out-of-pocket costs of Medicare. We have already begun to hear from many that their Medigap, Medicare Advantage and Medicare Part D plans will have increases despite the fact that people’s incomes are not going up. Half of all people with Medicare live on annual incomes of $24,150 or less and cannot afford stark increases in their monthly health expenses.

MSAC is continuing its strategic outreach to educate key decision-makers about the healthcare cliff and our proposed legislative solution. Together we can Bridge The Gap to affordable healthcare for seniors!

**Dental Care Coalition Pushes For More Affordable Care**

Most seniors are well aware of the growing need for affordable oral healthcare. For decades, oral health disparities have persisted, with the burden of dental disease is highest with low-income residents, racial and ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, seniors, and those living in rural areas and inner cities. Many struggle to access dental care because they lack any dental coverage or they cannot find a dentist who accepts public insurance. Poor oral health can lead to pain, the unfortunate loss of teeth, and can also compromise one’s overall health.

“When I had MassHealth I was able to access regular dental care,” says Kathleen French, 80, of Newburyport. “But it required me to travel into Boston because there were limited providers that would accept my MassHealth.”

When Kathleen’s Social Security Income was adjusted she lost MassHealth and with it her dental coverage. Soon after her gum disease progressed, and she began losing her teeth to infection, eventually jeopardizing her health to the point that she had to go to the hospital.

“They removed my remaining 17 teeth in one visit and sent me on my way,” remembers Kathleen. “I do not want to describe to you the painful recovery I endured. And here I am nearly 4 years later without teeth and unable to afford dentures. I strongly believe that if I had continued to receive the regular dental care I had under Masshealth I would not have had to lose my teeth or at very least would have delayed their removal.”

North Seacoast member Kathleen French shares her story at the State House.

Recently, MSAC’s State Board voted to join the Dental Care for Massachusetts Coalition, a group of healthcare providers, nonprofits, and foundations. The coalition is currently supporting legislation that would authorize a new group of dental professionals in Massachusetts, increasing dental access for vulnerable populations and making care more affordable.

Massachusetts needs more providers who can deliver cost-effective dental care to those who most need it, especially in settings beyond the traditional dental office. The new legislation would authorize Dental Hygiene Practitioners (DHPs) in Massachusetts, thereby increasing dental access for vulnerable populations and making care more affordable.

Unlike the medical team, which includes a variety of practitioners, the current dental workforce is limited to dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants. Dental Hygiene Practitioners are dental hygienists who complete additional training in order to deliver routine but critically necessary care— such as filling cavities, placing temporary crowns, and extracting teeth. These providers work under the general supervision of a dentist and have the opportunity to bring care closer to patients in places like schools, assisted living centers, mobile dental clinics and community health centers. They can even work in existing dental offices to help dentists serve more low-income patients. This strategy expands access to care and allows the dental team to offer screening and preventive care from an off-site location.

MSAC believes this is a very important first step in improving senior access to the dental services that have been lacking here in Massachusetts. It is also very closely tied to our Bridge The Gap campaign as part of an overall effort to improve comprehensive, affordable healthcare coverage for seniors.

Contact MSAC if you have faced challenges accessing dental care and want to be part of this growing campaign. For more information, check out: http://www.dentalcareformass.org.
Warren Bill Would Boost Social Security

Legislation would help counter zero cost-of-living adjustment in Social Security benefits millions of Americans face

Published on Thursday, November 05, 2015 by Common Dreams

Andrea Germanos

Senators Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass.) and Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) introduced legislation last month that would provide tens of millions of Americans with an emergency payment while tackling a corporate loophole that boosts CEO pay.

The legislation, the SAVE Benefits Act, is in response to the blow dealt roughly 65 million Americans last month when the Social Security Administration announced that there would be no annual cost-of-living increase for 2016.

It would provide an emergency payment of about $580—that’s equal to 3.9 percent of the average annual Social Security benefit—which could help some 70 million seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, and others meet critical needs, a statement from the senators explains.

The 3.9 percent isn’t a random figure—that’s the increase in CEO compensation for the top 350 U.S. firms last year. The average salary of those CEOs was $16.3 million.

“This discrepancy [between increased CEO compensation and lack of raise for Social Security beneficiaries] isn't an accident. It's the result of choices made by Congress,” a fact sheet for the Act states.

The legislation would fund the emergency payments by closing a tax loophole that allows publicly traded companies to deduct so-called performance-based executive pay. Extra funds would be used to strengthen the Social Security and Disability trust funds. A 2013 report from advocacy group Public Citizen found that the loophole for just the 20 highest paid CEOs had cost taxpayers as much as $235 million in lost tax revenue.

“If we do nothing, on January 1st, more than 70 million seniors, veterans, and other Americans won’t get an extra dime in much-needed Social Security and other benefits. And while Congress sits on its hands and pretends that there’s nothing we can do, taxpayers will keep right on subsidizing billions of dollars’ worth of bonuses for highly paid CEOs,” Warren stated. “Giving seniors a little help with their Social Security and stitching up corporate tax write-offs isn’t just about economics; it’s about our values.”

Sanders called the lack of a cost-of-living adjustment “unacceptable.”

“At a time when senior poverty is going up and more than two-thirds of the elderly population rely on Social Security for more than half of their income, our job must be to expand, not cut, Social Security,” Sanders said in a press statement.

“At the very least, we must do everything we can to make sure that every senior citizen and disabled veteran in this country receives a fair cost-of-living adjustment to keep up with the skyrocketing cost of prescription drugs and health care.”

MSAC Members Get Out The Vote on Multiple Fronts

This past fall brought another season of elections, this time on the municipal level, and again MSAC was busy reaching out to as many voters as possible, especially in Boston, Malden, and Lynn to Get Out The Vote (GOTV).

The mission is simple: Your Vote Counts. This is especially true on the local level, where turnout tends to be especially low and elections can hinge on a handful of votes. It is well known that elected officials pay attention to which areas of their districts turn out the most. And it is no coincidence that buildings with big turnout are usually the first to get their sidewalks repaired. During the most recent election cycle MSAC members and staff conducted extensive door-to-door outreach and workshops and also organized three separate candidates forums to educate voters.

However, there are many challenges to increasing voter turnout among seniors. Language barriers, medical conditions, limits on mobility, and a lack of knowledge of the political process all prohibit seniors from collectively deciding who will represent their communities. MSAC helped address these barriers through hundreds of voter contacts: calling people on the phone, knocking on doors, holding voter education workshops in senior housing, helping people register to vote or fill out absentee ballot applications, and so on.

On the primary and general election days, Metro North members and volunteers helped make reminder calls and drove voters to the poll. Members took active leadership to organize 15 outreachs at senior buildings in Malden and inviting their neighbors to come along. Occasionally city councilor candidates could attend and answer questions from residents who listened attentively, absentee ballots in hand. In October the chapter organized and sponsored a forum for city councilor at-large candidates which was attended by more than 150 community members.

“There is a great need for voters to get to know the candidates before voting and have a better understanding for the ballot questions” said George Bayers, a resident at 630 Salem Street and President of the Metro North Chapter. MSAC used voter outreach activities at buildings like 630 Salem to also introduce residents to Raise Up’s petition for a constitutional amendment and collect signatures.

GOTV continued on page 12.
On October 30th the second floor of 150 Mt. Vernon Street was once again full of blue shirts (and for the first time, sweatpants too!) as members gathered for MSAC’s 2015 Biennial Convention.

The atmosphere was filled with excitement as members swore in new Statewide Officers and cheered in support as they read our vision statements aloud. Along with our new leadership we reaffirmed our commitment to continue our fight to strengthen Social Security and Medicare, preserve affordable housing and transportation and to strengthen and amplify the senior voice in all of our communities.

We welcomed Massachusetts Secretary of Elder Affairs Alice Bonner as our guest keynote speaker. Sec. Bonner pledged that her office held the same goals as MSAC and stated that her office’s mission is “to guarantee that elders and people with disabilities have access to their needed resources.” To thank her for her commitment to meeting the needs of elders we presented her with an honorary MSAC membership and blue shirt!

The day continued with a wide variety of workshops covering topics such as tenant rights, organizing methods and tools, and economic and historical information on our various issues. A special activity was held during our lunch break where we created placards emphasizing reasons why we must “Bridge the Gap” in the supplement programs for Medicare (See opposite page).

If you did not get to participate in this activity, please contact your local organizer. The photos are an important way to tell the all-too-common stories of how seniors are often forced to choose between buying their medications and paying their rent or between healthcare and food.

The day was a perfect opportunity for MSAC members to come together to re-affirm the many reasons why we, as the only grassroots organization of seniors in the state, must continue our united political activities and continue Taking Charge!
Why Are You Working to Bridge The Gap?

During Convention members grabbed signs and markers to share why they got involved in MSAC’s campaign to expand affordable healthcare for seniors:
On October 28 at the State House, the Committee on Veterans and Federal Affairs held a hearing on the We the People Act for a constitutional amendment to stem the tide of Supreme Court decisions that are turning the US into an oligarchy for corporations and billionaires. MSAC joined We the People Massachusetts and other grassroots supporters of the bill — so many supporters the hearing had to be moved to an auditorium! And so many citizens testified, including panels of Harvard Law professors, businesspeople, and veterans, that the hearing ran over four hours.

The We the People Act petitions Congress to propose a constitutional amendment to make it clear that: (1) The rights in the Constitution are the rights of “natural persons”, and (2) Money is not protected speech, so Congress and the states can regulate political finance.

If Congress does not propose this amendment within six months, the We the People Act calls on Congress to convene an amendment convention so we can join with other states and propose the 28th Amendment ourselves. This demonstration of state resolve is a key part of the bill, necessary in light of Congress’s failure to act despite overwhelming public support for overturn of Citizens United.

Among those who testified was MSAC’s TillyRuth Teixeira of the South End, an activist since she worked against South African apartheid decades ago. As Tilly said, “The Supreme Court in Citizens United said that corporations had the right to free speech guaranteed by the First Amendment. Justice Stevens dissented and logically noted that the framers ‘had little trouble distinguishing corporations from human beings, and when they constitutionalized the right to free speech in the First Amendment, it was the free speech of individual Americans that they had in mind.’” Thank you, Tilly!

We the people are being outshouted by corporations and Super-PACs and by mega-donors, a few hundred of whom spend more than millions of other citizens, yet the Supreme Court invalidates election laws on a theory that money is protected speech. And election finance is not the only playing field that needs to be leveled: Corporations claim “rights” under the 1st, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th and 14th Amendments to push their agendas contrary to the public interest in health, safety, and the environment. This amendment addresses all of those issues.

We in MSAC can make a difference. The We the People Act has many supporters in the Massachusetts Legislature, but it needs more. Call or write your State Representative and State Senator. Ask them to support the We the People Act. If they do support it, ask them to contact sponsors Sen. Jamie Eldridge and Rep. Corey Atkins and ask how they can help ensure the bill’s passage. Then thank them in a letter to the editor of your local paper.

For additional info about the bill and how to take action to fix our democracy, see www.WeThePeopleMass.org.

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The Massachusetts Alliance of Retired Americans (MassARA), the Massachusetts chapter of the 4 million member Alliance of Retired Americans (ARA), just celebrated its first anniversary in the fall of 2015. The national ARA works closely with labor unions and is supported by many national unions which encourage their members to join the national and state ARAs and, in some cases, pay for the retired members to join the ARA. Like its parent organization, MassARA focuses on advocacy at the federal level in three broad areas of work: Economic Security, Retirement Security, and Health Security. Social Security and are always key parts of the work of ARA chapters.

Besides working to defend and expand Social Security, MassARA also works to end the unfair exclusion of Massachusetts public sector workers from receiving the Social Security benefits which they have earned by their labor. Since our state has elected not to join Social Security and instead funds the state pension plan, a punitive law bars retirees who receive state benefits from getting the full benefits they may have earned in other parts of their working lives and from receiving full spousal benefits. MassARA joined MSAC to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Medicare on August 6 this year. In the field of Economic Security, the MassARA is currently joining with any other Mass. Groups to oppose the Trans Pacific Partnership, a new trade agreement which threatens jobs, important safety, health and environmental regulations, and even democracy itself.

In one of its first acts of state advocacy, MassARA took a strong position supporting MSAC’s Bridge the Gap Campaign. Carlos Visinho, MassARA president, pointed out how Bridge the Gap legislation impacted the Economic, Retirement and Health Security of Massachusetts seniors. Many members of MassARA are also MSAC members and our basic goals clearly overlap with MassARA primarily focused on federal advocacy and MSAC on state work. The two groups share a lot of history as well and some MSAC leaders were among those who helped found the ARA nationally. We look forward to working together as two groups of “seasoned” activists working for our basic rights.

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MSAC salutes Massachusetts Alliance of Retired Americans on its First Anniversary
I was born and raised in Alabama and came to Boston in 1964 after graduating from high school. I’ve lived in Lynn since 1996. I retired in 2010 after working for the State of Massachusetts for 30 years. After I retired I started going to the senior center in Lynn, and that’s where I first heard about MSAC.

I decided to join as a member after going to hearings at the Transportation Building in downtown Boston and at the State House. Attending events like those really opened my eyes to the great work being done with the elderly, and low-income and poor people. I decided that I wanted to be part of this organization that worked with people in need.

During my second year of membership I decided to become a lifetime member. I have been attending State Board meetings for more than a year now, and I ran for State Treasurer because I would like to be of help in any way I can, and use my bookkeeping and accounting experience.

Being a member of MSAC, I have met a lot of interesting people and learned a lot about the needs of the people and the procedures that it takes in order to get these needs met. I have always been interested in and been involved with organizations like MSAC, but I was too busy working and taking care of my family. Now that I don’t have these responsibilities anymore I plan to be involved as much as possible.

I am not a person of many words but I am definitely a doer.

Rosa Bentley
North Shore Chapter

Above: Rosa records responses from health-care campaign postcards at the office.

“Yes We Can”
A Story by Boston Chapter Member Lillian O’Neal

For years I worked, often overtime, and raised children to become adults. I am 76, raised 10 children, and now I have retired. I don’t have to rush and I am no longer on a schedule. I make my own time, my own schedule, my time to relax. But now I sort of have a new schedule. I get up when I want to. I eat when I want to and watch television all day. I knew what was on, soap operas, and I knew who did what, when, and even when to change the channel. This became boring. I looked for something which could change my mind, where I could voice my opinion, where I could fight for my rights.

I was talking to my best friend, and she suggested that I come with her to a meeting...so I did. When I walked in I saw blue shirts and smiles and a warm greeting, just like an extended family. The blue shirt said Mass Senior Action, a phrase I would learn to know. There were seniors with canes and crutches standing up for their rights. They say actions speak louder than words.

So I sat down and listened. Could this be what I was looking for?

At the meeting I learned their next plan of action. I learned how they moved into power with words. How fake bums and hospital gowns said something. How a group of many can do so much. That if something needs to be changed, it won’t be if people sit at home watching television or doing nothing.

I learned I could help, that I could become the voice for those who can’t speak or help themselves. I too got the fever to get up and shout, to raise my voice, to carry a sign, to challenge others. “YES I CAN...YES I CAN.”

I am now a lifetime member, doing what I can do so that seniors will not have cuts to benefits and much-needed things like The RIDE. For those who have to make sacrifices to get by, for those who live day to day and try to figure out what to pay for, how to stretch a budget which has already been stretched enough.

MSAC needs more voices. “STEP UP,” let us hear you ROAR.

Above: Somerville Cambridge Elder Services awards MSAC’s Cambridge Chapter with the Sousa Award for Advocacy, for its efforts to stand up and speak out for the rights, needs, and abilities of elders. Right: Metro North members Debbie Small and Marcia Manong get the word out about MSAC in the community.
This collective effort led to significant jump in voter turnout in Malden, especially from the Chinese community, many of whom are first-time voters. Mrs. Le, a first-time voter at 120 Mountain Ave, was delighted that MSAC came to explain why it was so important to vote. It is a concept still new to many Asian voters - people have rights to exercise their free will to elect a person who will represent their interests. In many of their native countries, exercising their political voice in any way that differs from the position of their formal leaders could result in prosecution. And that is why some have fled their countries to come to the United States.

"We can’t wait for MSAC to come back for more workshops," said Mrs. Siu at 195 Pleasant Street, who was very surprised their ward city councilor won the election by just 38 votes. “Every vote does matter,” said Siu at the residence’s Christmas party on Dec 3rd.

MSAC also reached many first-time voters in Boston. Not only did MSAC assist with new voter registrations and absentee ballots, but members and organizers also used the opportunity to discuss with residents concerns about housing-related issues. At one of the GOTV workshops in Boston, MSAC invited some of the Boston Housing Authority leadership to join residents and voters to discuss these issues and to work toward finding a solution.

“Our task force invited the city council at-large candidates to our building one week before the election," said St. Botolph Task Force President Brian Kennedy. "Residents told the candidates our sidewalk had been broken since the Spring after the snow melted and how hard it was for those with walkers and wheelchairs to navigate around the broken cement. Within two days of our forum, the sidewalk was completely replaced. City Councilor Flaherty made sure the sidewalk was fixed before we went to vote on Tuesday. He knows we have a large voter turnout and wanted to make sure we knew he listened to our complaint."

This outreach culminated with a Boston city councilors’ debate, which was well attended by a diverse group of more than 50 seniors and community members. The North Shore Chapter also sprung into action and organized a candidates’ debate which saw a spectacular turnout.

The next round of primaries is right around the corner, this time for the presidential and state office campaigns, in spring 2016. Voters will soon see the blue-shirted senior team back in action!

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but the ultimate priority was better communication with management when an incident is reported and scheduled training.

MSAC presented the list to BHA and requested the official list of duties for the security officers to share with the BHA residents so everyone could be on the same page.

In October, BHA paid for all the officers to attend their first training in three years. At the training, it was announced Boston Mayor Walsh would provide BHA with the much needed funds to improve safety in the buildings and provide the officers with the proper equipment. An officer who works at the Hampton House thanked MSAC, “Thank you for bringing us all together. We have needed the uniforms and the equipment for so long. Now we will be able to do our job properly.”

Holgate Building task force leader Duke E. said, “I was never told what the duties of the security officers were. I blamed them for things they had no control over. I am glad we met with them. Now we can work together to make sure the building is safe.”

These are small but important victories for tenants, and there is still much work to do. MSAC is now meeting with BHA task force to explain tenants rights to the residents, train task force leaders, and most importantly build a relationship between the security officers, the managers, and the residents. Our success so far demonstrates the power of working together to improve communities.

If you would like to know about your rights as a tenant, contact MSAC.