DisABILITYissues

Providing people with disabilities, their families, friends, and advocates with relevant information that enables individuals to improve the quality of their life, health and employability options.

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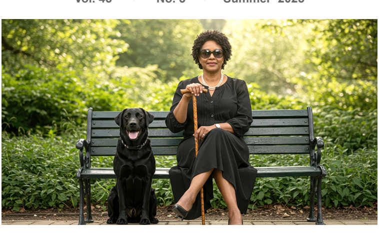

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From the Editor...

Dear Readers,

I'm delighted to share some exciting news: *Disability Issues* has another partner! Thanks to the generous financial support of the **Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB)**, we're able to bring you this summer issue. On behalf of the editorial board and our community of readers, I extend heartfelt gratitude to MCB for believing in the power of sharing real-life experiences and practical wisdom to enhance the lives of those impacted by disability.

In preparation for Disability Employment Awareness Month in October, our lead article highlights MCB's innovative employment services, designed to create visibility for talented job seekers in the blind and visually impaired community. It's an inspiring look at what's possible when innovative programs, preparation and opportunity come together.

But before we get to October, we find ourselves in early July and Disability Pride Month! It was 35 years ago, in Boston, that the first Disability Pride celebration took place, just months after the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was signed into law. Like other social justice movements, Disability Pride affirms our identity, breaks down stigmas, and celebrates our presence and power.

The Disability Pride Flag (Above) was designed by Ann Magill.

Disability activist, professor, and author Alex Green offers a moving reflection on the first Disability Pride celebration held in Boston. Over the 4th of July weekend, I read his post and was especially touched by a manifesto that was developed by members of the Disability Pride Coalition. It resonated with me as a powerful Declaration of Independence for the disability community. These statements ring as true today as they did 35 years ago.

A Manifesto for Disability Pride

- Disability is a natural part of the human experience.
- We take pride in ourselves as people with disabilities. As such, we object to unrealistic media portrayals of persons with disabilities, and the quality of life with a disability.
- All people, regardless of limitation, are entitled to the maximum quality of life. This includes food, shelter, clothing, health care, medication and adaptive equipment, transportation, communication, help with activities of daily living, recreation, companionship, and spiritual and personal development, including education and occupation.
- Every human being, regardless of limitation, has the right to self-determination.
- Each person has the right to maintain and express his/her dignity.
- We have a right to maintain our culture, without forced assimilation into the dominant culture.
- It is primarily the physical, attitudinal and institutional barriers within this society -- not our disabilities -- which limit us. As we work to eliminate these barriers, so must the non-disabled society here and around the world.
- We recognize and embrace the diversity among all people, including within the disability community.
- People with disabilities must be given information about, and the opportunity to express our sexuality. We must be granted full reproductive rights and free choice in matters of family planning, including access to information, and techniques -- contraception, fertility assistance, abortion and sterilization -- and be free from coercion or force in these matters.
- People with disabilities have a right to be free from physical, emotional and sexual abuse.
- People with disabilities have a right and duty to participate in the political process. This includes access to information, government activities and meetings, and polling places.

First published as "Pride Memories" by Amy Hasbrouck in Pride Platform.

This year, as a community, we are celebrating our Disability Pride on July 23 at the ADA 35 Boston event in honor of the 35th anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act. The event begins with a rally at 12pm at Boston City Hall Plaza, followed by a march and roll to The Embrace sculpture in the Boston Common.

Thanks to the ADA and decades of steadfast advocacy, we've made meaningful strides forward – and that's worth celebrating. But I also carry a deep concern that some of our hard-won rights are at risk of being unraveled, reminding us that progress is never guaranteed and must be fiercely protected. On July 23rd, let's come together as the vibrant community we are and make our voices heard. Disability rights are worth fighting for!

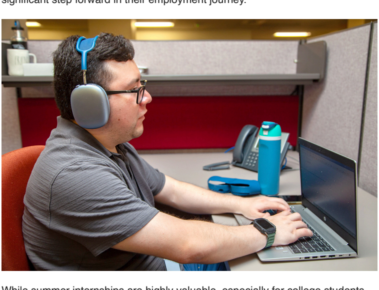
With Pride,
Marianne DiBlasi, Editor

Marianne DiBlasi has been the editor of "Disability Issues" since 2011. She was born with Spina Bifida and uses a combination of crutches and wheelchair to assist with mobility. Her background is in sales and marketing, program management, and disability inclusion training.

All Eyes on Employment with MCB
By Daniel Martin

The Employment Services (ES) unit at the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) is a small team with large ambitions for the future of employment opportunities in the state. Overseen by the Director of Programs and Services, Joey Buizon and staffed by Supervisor, Carol Cullins and Specialist, Daniel Martin, the ES unit organizes several programs designed to create awareness and visibility of qualified job seekers from the blind and visually impaired community. From recent high school graduates and college students to middle-aged adults seeking a career change or needing to transition after sudden vision loss, ES works to bring out the best in every candidate regardless of their goals.

Between 2003 and 2004 MCB launched its Summer Internship Program. This state-wide effort was designed to build critical work experience and independence skills for blind college students, as well as older adults. In collaboration with the Commission's Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, the ES unit works to screen numerous candidates, measuring their abilities and identifying opportunities to intern with businesses and organizations either to further their career path or simply gain practical work experience. MCB provides technical assistance and consultation for vision related accommodations to all employers who host someone, and a $1000 stipend to the interns. To receive the full amount, interns must complete a minimum number of work hours and attend multiple events, including a soft skills training, a virtual opening ceremony and the closing ceremony held at the Massachusetts State House. The soft skills training and opening ceremony provide a valuable judgement free zone for candidates to ask questions related to networking, proper interview practice, and the always challenging issue of disclosure. Blindness is a spectrum, and what may be an effective strategy for communicating one's abilities and needs may not be comfortable for others. Several guest speakers and past successful interns donate their time for candidates to pick their brains on best practices and expectations. The in-person closing ceremony is a highly anticipated event complete with more guest speakers, and additional awards for select interns who submit a response to a unique question based on challenges facing the blind workforce. Representatives from the partnering employers are invited to join the festivities to share their positive experiences and celebrate all interns for taking a significant step forward in their employment journey.



While summer internships are highly valuable, especially for college students, they are not always the best route for post education adults to build experience. In 2015, MCB moved to address this through a year-long program, then called Project Search and later renamed the Employment Now Initiative. In cooperation with dedicated job developers from the Polus Center and with access to space and opportunities to work graciously provided by the Massachusetts Eye and Ear Infirmary, a select cohort of job seekers is evaluated and placed in roles that leverage their abilities, from administrative, to communications, to housekeeping and beyond. Functioning similarly to an internship, the candidates build real world work experience, through keeping a schedule, regularly commuting to the MEEI site, and networking with staff. They also gain intense job development training from the Polus team, including resume craft, interview skills, and effective job search methods. They will regularly identify positions for which to apply for throughout this process, with the end goal being to land a job either outside or through expansion of their role at the hospital. Job seekers must be competent in their independence skills and highly motivated to meet the demands of participation. This ensures that candidates who are highly job ready but have encountered barriers to employment beyond their control are given the best chance for success, and the results have validated this model, resulting in additional cohorts being opened.

One of the most effective ways to show the personality behind a resume is through job fairs. MCB had been holding a traditional job fair every October in the mid 2000s with varying degrees of success. However, it became apparent that to serve this population effectively, things needed to be organized differently. In some ways the pandemic proved to be a blessing in disguise for retooling this model. The first shift from an in-person to virtual event came out of necessity, but it was already proving to be a change that enabled greater participation from candidates throughout the state. The second shift was a more innovative idea, a Virtual Reverse Job Fair, which would be held on Zoom over two sessions in late September and October, in recognition of *Disability Employment Awareness Month.* This event would place employer partners in the role of spectators, and each job seeker would deliver a 90-second to 2-minute elevator pitch. The ES unit, with assistance from employer partners donating their time, works closely with each job seeker to craft the most effective pitch to showcase their interests, experience and qualities. As these candidates have a diverse range of credentials and job targets, participants would not hear each other deliver their pitches to reduce performance anxiety from comparison. Employers would have access to all necessary information on the candidates to reference, and at the conclusion they could connect with them to discuss current or future job opportunities.

While these are among the most promoted and developed programs, they are not the extent of what MCB's Employment Services Unit focuses on year-round. There is continuous outreach to new employer partners through cold calls and in-services, spotlighting employers ready to hire, and job development work with the job seekers. With the job market always changing, the team is always seeking new ways to innovate. The strategies will change, but the goal of furthering independence and dignity in the blind community through employment remains the same.

Visit MCB's website for more information on programs and services, news & announcements, and upcoming programs.

In Daniel Martin's role as MCB's Employment Services Specialist, he meets with job seekers who are legally blind across northeastern Massachusetts and Greater Boston, learning about their background and employment goals, and identifying how MCB connections and resources can be leveraged for them to achieve those goals. Additionally, he expands MCB's growing roster of employer partners.

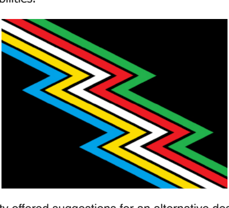
Photo: Left to Right - Carol Cullins, Daniel Martin and Chris - the guide dog!

Do You Know the Story Behind the Disability Pride Flag?
by Kim Charlson

Flags have been used for centuries as a way to raise awareness and are a symbol of solidarity, pride, and acceptance. The Disability Pride flag is no exception.

The original Disability Pride flag was created in 2019 by writer Ann Magill, who has cerebral palsy. She attended an event for the 20th anniversary of the ADA and was disappointed that it was confined to the basement and grounds of an independent living center — rather than as a big public celebration. The experience motivated her to work on creating a Disability Pride Flag.

Initially, the flag featured brightly colored zigzagging stripes over a black background. The zigzags represented how people with disabilities have to maneuver around all the barriers they face. However, when viewed on the smartphone or other type of device, the design prompted various symptoms in individuals with visually triggered disabilities.

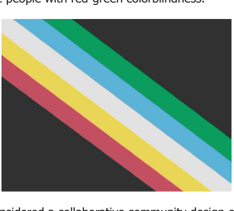


The community offered suggestions for an alternative design that would be more disability-friendly. Magill refined the visual elements with these suggestions in mind. The modified design has five diagonal stripes of different colors resting on a black background. The black field mourns the victims of violence and abuse against persons with disabilities. The diagonal stripes symbolize cutting across the barriers that separate the disabled from society.

The flag's five color stripes represent different types of disabilities:

- Red: Physical disabilities
- Gold: Neurodivergence
- White: Invisible and undiagnosed disabilities
- Blue: Psychiatric disabilities and
- Green: Sensory disabilities

The new design turned the zigzags into straightened stripes set at an angle and muted the colors. The stripes were also reordered to accommodate people with red-green colorblindness.



The flag is considered a collaborative community design effort as the new design truly represents a community that came together to solve a problem. Magill has waived her copyright and entered this flag into the public domain. People are free to use it for their awareness activities and display it with pride!

Kim Charlson is Executive Director of the Perkins Library, a division of international NGO Perkins School for the Blind. She was the first female president of the American Council of the Blind (2013-2019) and was selected by the Board of Trustees and leadership for the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) to receive the 2024 Migel Medal.

Love & Intimacy Corner

Expressing Gratitude, Then Watching It Bloom
by Ms. Love

My colleagues and I have spent years advocating at the State House for housing for people with disabilities. The process has its own rhythm: we connect with legislators we believe will support our cause, decide on what we will ask for that year, and then provide both written and oral testimony. Afterward, we wait to find out whether the bill passed or whether funding was included in the budget for the programs we care about.

Given today's chaotic political climate, you might think we'd be discouraged by how slow progress can be – if there's any progress at all. And yet, every year, whether there is progress or not, our advocacy group makes a point to visit the State House. We stop by the offices of legislators who have been involved with housing issues we care about. Sometimes we're there to thank them for their support; other times we acknowledge new strategies or goals they've introduced that align with our efforts during the legislative session. Whether we've achieved our goals or not, it has always been our practice to say thank you. It reminds me of a quote attributed to Sam Levenson:

"For attractive lips, speak words of kindness. For lovely eyes, seek out the good in people." ~ Sam Levenson

Recently, four of us went to the State House – not to launch a new advocacy campaign or map out a strategy, but simply to express gratitude for what already is. If we were just trying to be efficient, we could have divided up the thank-you notes, delivered them separately, and been in and out of the State House in no time. But maybe I've watched too many old reruns of *The Andy Griffith Show*, where Andy, Barney, Aunt Bea, and Opie sit together on the front porch, listening to Andy strum his guitar. Those scenes remind me that the best moments in life – the ones that really matter – are when we're simply together. And honestly, Andy and Barney were right: those are the moments we remember, and they're what we're most grateful for.

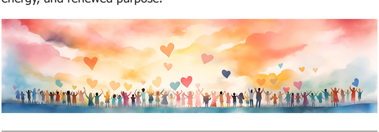
There we were, with a stack of thank-you notes, each one thoughtfully handwritten and signed by all of us, thanking legislators for supporting housing for people with disabilities. We had sorted them by each legislator's office location and walked in together to deliver the notes, along with a handout on the housing needs of people with disabilities. I like to think we made an impressive little team, showing up in unison at each office.

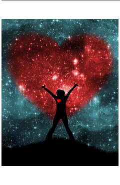
Most of the time, we spoke with receptionists or aides rather than the legislators themselves. In addition to the thank you note, we gave each office a handout about the housing needs of people with disabilities. What struck me most was how genuinely we were welcomed. Let's face it, legislators and their staff hear from a lot of people wanting something. But no one made us feel like an interruption. Most didn't just say thank you for the note card and return to their work. No, not at all. In fact, many were curious and engaged. Some didn't know about the legislator's work on housing and wanted to hear more. Others asked questions. Most thanked us for coming in. It was a beautiful surprise to experience: when we took the time to express our gratitude, it boomeranged right back at us as a thank you for visiting them.

As our nice little foursome made our way around the State House, we enjoyed being there together. At one point, we puzzled over an extremely narrow ramp that was clearly not wide enough for a wheelchair or walker. We imagined that it might have been used for deliveries. Later, we stared up at a mysterious metal staircase that seemed to lead nowhere. That's when an aide, from the office we had just visited, came out and saw us trying to take a group photo. It seems that our friendly demeanor left an impression on her and she offered to snap a photo of us as a memento of our day at the State House. That simple act, and the shared laughter that followed, was the cherry on top.

I left the State House that day with a big grin on my face. We went to express our gratitude to legislators and office staff for their support on housing for people with disabilities. But we came away feeling energized – not just by the thanks we gave, but by the reciprocal warmth, curiosity, and appreciation for the work we do.

Gratitude matters. When we give thanks, it blossoms into connection, energy, and renewed purpose.





The Love and Intimacy Corner welcomes questions and requests for topic areas from readers. Please send all comments, questions, and suggestions to Ms. Love at DI.LoveandIntimacy@gmail.com. Questions chosen to be featured in the Ms. Love column will appear under a pseudonym to protect privacy and may be edited.

Mental Health First Aid and the Plumber
By Sandy Alissa Novack

Though I am not certified in Physical First Aid and, therefore not able to respond to peoples' physical crises such as heart attacks, I recently had an opportunity to be trained in Mental Health First Aid. Just as a

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Gateway

Mental Health FIRST AID

Jenny Abea Nowak, MB, LICSW, ACTC/D-C is on the Board of Directors of the Disability Policy Consortium and volunteers with the Boston Center for Independent Living.

Mental Health FIRST AID is a registration mark of the National Council for Behavioral Health.

Friendly Visitor Program Seen From Both Sides

By Jean Burrows

After my husband died in 2001, I spent many years as a "friendly visitor" in Acton, and I loved it.

I met two incredible women who quickly became dear friends. Their photos are still on my refrigerator. Recently I have such fond memories walking together, playing Scrabble and doing crossword puzzles, sharing birthdays and holidays, celebrating Mother's Day, Easter, and listening to her jaw-dropping stories of her life. I learned so much about Boston and about Ireland. I was never sure if I was the one being helped because I felt so alive. I miss them very much. I was lucky to have been a friendly visitor.

Why among so many hard-to-spending medical situations, do I remember the friendly visitor with such fondness? I attribute that hot heart through it all to the friendly visitor. I was able to plan maintenance and lower coffee or stay or two-an-hour visitations. Sometimes I felt like I was the Friendly Visitor Public Relations Director, and I spoke about other people who this program could help. I was able to bring information about the program to the story. I gave him space to do that, and I think that alone is what he needed that day.

I am glad I took the opportunity to learn about Mental Health First Aid. It was a great reminder that there are many people around us who are in need of help. Many people have been hurt by people who are trained to the Red Cross aid, but we also need many people who are trained to the Mental Health First Aid because the human need and spirit are just as important as the physical body.

For more information about Mental Health First Aid and to find a course near you, visit www.mhfa.info.

Jean Burrows doubled as a New York City and Jean taught piano. She was a nursery school teacher, a volunteer with the Friendly Visitor program, the Acton Commission on Disability and Habitat Ireland. She is a caring companion for people with disabilities and seniors.

Beyond Barriers: A Hearty Journey Through the UK

Part One of Two

Feel free to read Part Two in the Spring 2015 issue

By Amanda Kurlinge, PharmD.

Clunking down the plane, a smile on my face, I breathed the overnight flight to the Heathrow airport with no jetlag. Where. Can you believe wheelchairs are offered in the airport to a person with MH? Wheelchairs are offered in the airport to a person with MH who had not much ability to walk. Now, my difficulty I actually had trouble walking for. My weakness legs and balance issues make it difficult to walk. Wheelchairs are offered in the airport to a person who without too much fear I attempted to walk. Scared – that's what moving with genetic ataxia is like). So, there I was limping across the airport with my cane, I was so tired, I was so dizzy, I was so tired that I probably even said a word in Swedish.

I was ready to break down my current assumptions of how different cultures assist impaired or disabled. Or not. Or the place looks off, I wrote in my journal. No matter how. I try to anticipate the unknown. I try to anticipate the unknown. I try to anticipate the unknown. Nothing. Not. There was an advantage to being from America. As they explained that I would receive the same care as a British citizen, I felt like I was a British citizen. Or at least, I felt as a companion. I thought "This is a British citizen." The practical acknowledgment of disability without pity or awkwardness felt refreshing. Because I felt like I was a British citizen. I remembered been until they my cousins moved to ensure that landlord convertible stable.

Photo: Amanda with her partner, Adam.

We picked up some groceries on the way to our Airbnb and, together, we whipped up a Bolognese. My little my strong arms, I chopped the carrots and mashed the potatoes, while Adam chopped the tomatoes and stirred the sauce. We ate, we drank, we laughed, we talked about our family. I planned to visit and we talked about our families and our household chores or we take turns. It doesn't matter that I have MS. We talked about our families and our household chores or compassionately supplied our families by his ready outstretched knee. I can thank him for challenging my patience. Because I felt like I was a British citizen. I felt like I was a British citizen to a British person ready to be able to assist my family or anything at any homes. We can't be required to seem single-way when there are multiple ways to be a British citizen.

The next day of our visiting, I decided I can turn my head and I felt ensnared in a beautiful sunny walk around the block in Surrey, UK, and I felt like I was a British citizen. I felt like I was a British citizen. So the so-beside and stretch of the Stilyard Green Lane. Woodlands and I've been volunteering with them for six years.

VOLUNTEARS

I've learned how much harder it is for a disabled person to gain their independence than it is for a person who is able-bodied. In my experience, I really needed a brand-defiant jumping into a long-term career. But I had to push through my mom's resistance and her many fears. I had to push through my own fears. I had to push through the doubts that people in Ireland or in other countries would not be friendly to me because I'm not able-bodied.

At the time, being emotionally drained was still very new to me, and I already had a lot to cope with. But I wanted to live my life fully, even if I was disabled. I wanted to be able to do what I could, and I wanted to be able to do it. I wanted to be able to do it. I wanted to be able to do it.

Vinfen's Gateway Arts to Open New Center for Artists with Disabilities

Vinfen's Gateway Arts announced that it will create New England's largest center for artists with disabilities in Brookline, with plans to open to the public in July 2025. The new facility will expand and make Gateway Arts' studios more accessible so the program can serve more artists with a wider range of disabilities, provide larger gallery space for exhibitions and public programs, and create new enterprise opportunities for its roster of nearly 100 artists.

The 51-year-old nonprofit recently signed a 10-year lease with an affiliate of Riverside Properties, RPI Station Street LLC, at 9-21 Station Street in Brookline for more than 9,000 rentable square feet of space. Together, Gateway and Riverside expect to invest at least $1 million to create eight new art studios, a community studio, gallery, store, and supporting workspaces. The new Gateway Arts will be located next to the Brookline Village MBTA Green Line Train Station and will help bolster an already vibrant cluster of artist studios, maker spaces, and arts organizations on that block.

The new Gateway Arts space will comprise of:

- **Gateway Arts Store**, which will offer a wide range of original works of art, hand-crafted jewelry, clothing, artist books, greeting cards, and other products. Artists receive at least half the proceeds from all sales.
- **Gateway Arts Gallery** will present a diverse array of changing exhibitions of painting, drawing, sculpture, textiles, artist books, photography, and video, created by artists from Gateway and beyond.
- **Multimedia Studio**, where up to eight artists will work with facilitators daily to create new works on canvas, paper, and other two-dimensional materials.
- **Community Studio**, the multimedia home of Gateway's Community Program.

Gateway's fourth floor will include:

- **Six Multimedia Studios** accommodating up to 48 artists where they will create new work in painting, drawing, collage, textiles, fabric, ceramics, and other media.
- Six flexible **office** spaces and a **Community Room**.

For more information, visit **Gateway Arts** or call 617-734-1577 for updates on the new facility.

9-21 Station Street, Brookline Village, by Patrick Shea, Gateway Artist. Colored pencil on paper.

The Eunice Shriver Kennedy Memorial Grounds

New Accessible Outdoor Playground in Waltham, MA

The Eunice Shriver Kennedy Memorial Grounds, dedicated to Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the founder of Special Olympics.
Photo credit: Waltham Recreation/Instagram

The grand opening of one of the country's largest playgrounds opened on Saturday May 17, 2025 in Waltham where the Walter E. Fernald School was located. The Eunice Shriver Kennedy Memorial Grounds are dedicated to Eunice Kennedy Shriver, the founder of Special Olympics. The new universal playground is designed to be accessible and inclusive for people of all ages and abilities. The playground is located at 200 Trapelo Road in Waltham, MA and is open daily from 10 am to 7 pm.

The memorial grounds are part of a larger revitalization project on the Fernald School property, which also includes plans for veteran housing and adult day care. The city of Waltham purchased the property in 2014 and has been working to repurpose it for community use.

Key features of the universal playground include:

- **Wheelchair Swing:** Designed for children in wheelchairs to enjoy swinging.
- **Adaptive Zipline:** A modified version of the zipline for children with varying mobility needs, along with a traditional zipline.
- **Ramps:** Ensuring access to different play areas for children with mobility challenges.
- **Inclusive Design Elements:** Other one-of-a-kind features that cater to diverse abilities.

We-Saw (Motion Play)
Photo credit: Waltham Recreation/Instagram

Other Features of the 200 Trapelo Road Park:

- **Seasonal Spray Park:** For fun during the summer months.
- **Mini Golf:** A fun activity for all ages.
- **Memorial Area:** Dedicated to the history of the Fernald School and the community.
- **Nature Area:** A space for exploration and appreciation of nature.
- **Fully Fenced and Gated:** Providing a safe and secure environment for children and parents.

ZipKrooz and ZipKrooz Assist (Motion Play)
Photo credit: Waltham Recreation/Instagram

Editorial Board (L-R): Sandy Alissa Novack, Raymond E. Glazier, Joan Burrows, Marianne DiBlasi, the late Mary Grimley Mason, missing: Marybeth Barker.

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Graphic Design:
Louise Martling, Eleventh Hour Design
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Kim Charlson

Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB) is pleased to provide financial support for this issue of *Disability Issues*, a free and independent newsletter. MCB has proudly been serving people who are legally blind since 1906. Their mission is to provide individualized training, education, and empowerment to people who are legally blind, and advocate for inclusive policies across the Commonwealth, with the goal of life-long independence and full community participation. Contact MCB by calling 617-727-5550 or learn more by visiting
www.mass.gov/orgs/massachusetts-commission-for-the-blind

The ***Disability Issues*** newsletter is a free and independent publication. It is published quarterly and shares current information about the world of disability, new initiatives, and other helpful information to the disability community in Massachusetts.

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