

From: Eastern Mass OWL [info@massowl.org]

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To: Rachel Puopolo

Subject: News from Eastern Mass OWL



Eastern Mass Chapter Newsletter

The Voice of Midlife and Older Women

info@massowl.org

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Paid sick leave is critical to a decent work and family life. As this legislation gains momentum in Massachusetts, it is encouraging that federal policy like the Healthy Families Act of 2009 (H.R. 2460) continues to be discussed to help the 60 million American workers who have no paid sick leave.

Massachusetts Paid Sick Leave Update

Paid Sick Leave legislation ([Senate Bill 688](#) and [House Bill 1815](#)) is gaining momentum. The swine flu has been a wake-up call about the basic public health need for paid sick leave so that employees do not have to choose between spreading swine flu or risking loss of pay or job.

The State House action on May 14th was effective. Members of the Paid Sick Leave Coalition, wearing surgical masks, delivered "prescriptions" stating "Paid Sick Days: Part of the Prescription" to all legislators, the governor and his administration, urging their support for Paid Sick Leave. Three hundred Massachusetts MomsRising members sent emails to state legislators advocating for the bill. A call to all mayors with a letter from the Coalition was sent to the Mayors Association urging support for paid sick leave and asking that workers not be punished if they take days off due to flu.

The Coalition was present again at the State Democratic Convention on June 6, with prescriptions and masks raising delegates' awareness about the issue. The bill has been assigned to the Labor and Workforce Development Committee and hopefully there will be a hearing in the fall. Over the summer there are plans to do outreach to legislators. Grassroots efforts are being organized with Coalition members ACORN, SEIU 915, and 1199 SEIU in Springfield, the district of the committee chair, Rep. Cheryl Coakley-Rivera. If any OWL member has the opportunity to speak to a



legislator or write a letter to the editor in support of Paid Sick Days, please do so.

Joan Ditzion, Eastern Mass OWL liaison to the Paid Sick Leave Coalition

News from National OWL

OWL has been very active in Washington, DC this spring on behalf of all of us. Two activities have been most notable. First was the release of the 2009 Mother's Day Report, [Elder Abuse: A Women's Issue](#). Elder abuse is often a hidden problem that comes in many forms (physical, psychological, financial, etc.) and can happen in the community or in an institution, inflicted by a family member, caregiver or stranger. Our society's response to this problem is a judge of our humanity, for it happens most often to those who cannot defend themselves. OWL has highlighted this issue to bring attention to the role the federal government could play protecting those at risk. Passage of the [Elder Justice Act](#) is a first step.



A second important issue for OWL has been the fight for universal national health care. Each month OWL holds a national call-in to discuss the progress toward national health care and OWL's role in making it a reality. You should be getting an email announcing the call-in numbers, but if you haven't please go to the OWL website www.owl-national.org and sign up for action alerts and news. We need all of our members participating in this historic push for universal health care coverage, or we risk getting a program we don't like.

Ellen Bruce

Medication Abuse and Neglect

In the 2009 OWL Mother's Day Report, Donna Wagner describes elder abuse as a term "that encompasses a wide-reaching set of behaviors towards elders that are designed to diminish them and, in too many cases, physically harm them." An area of abuse that is often overlooked is neglect and self-neglect in the management of medications. With as many as 106,000 drug-related elder deaths per year, there is failure by health providers and elders themselves to recognize this serious problem and what might precipitate it. Age-related changes may impact drug metabolism, often reducing the amount of medication required for a therapeutic effect. The use of multiple physicians, multiple pharmacies, and the myriad of available over-the-counter drugs and herbals can easily result in drug interactions, overdoses, and other complications. Yet there are few safety nets in our healthcare system that might prevent or catch "medication mishaps."



Wagner states that "neglecting the potential adverse consequences of medication that is inappropriate, mismanaged, unneeded or overused can result in a life cut short or diminished dramatically in quality." She graphically describes the evolution of a medication-abuse situation through the case study of Martha, an 83-year-old woman, who deteriorated dramatically after being prescribed an anti-depressant (followed by a cascade of medication changes and additions). Fortunately, Martha had a positive outcome because of the intervention of concerned adult children. They sought professional help - a pharmacist's review of drugs for the signs and

symptoms that she was experiencing, and a geriatrician's expertise in diagnosing, prescribing, and monitoring.

Further in the report, Maura Conry, a pharmacist and social worker, recommends prevention strategies: Select a pharmacy with the same care used to select a primary-care physician, have all prescriptions recorded at that one site, have one physician be your "gatekeeper" for all medications, ask for as simple a regimen of medications as possible, and carry a list of all your medications and nonprescription items with you. Conry recommends a [senior care pharmacist review](http://www.seniorcarepharmacist.com/) at <http://www.seniorcarepharmacist.com/> She also recommends the development of a "pharmaceutical tool kit for women," education of allied health providers in the community to observe for medication mismanagement, and coordination of social service agencies and pharmacies. Consumer and provider information is vital to combat this critical issue.

Judith Conahan

Barney Frank Speaks to Massachusetts OWL

On May 12, 2009, U.S. Congressman Barney Frank spoke to OWL and other community members at the Brookline Senior Center. Rep. Frank is chair of the House Committee on Financial Services and the son of the late Elsie Frank, an esteemed elder advocate, family activist, president of the Mass. Association of Older Americans, and OWL member. After opening remarks by Betty Soldz, president of the Greater Boston chapter of OWL and Kay Maguire, program chair, Congressman Frank addressed more than 120 people about "How the Obama Administration Policies Affect Seniors in Massachusetts."



Representative Frank stressed the importance of Social Security and Medicare and the need to preserve them. He believes Social Security could be solvent until 2041 with relatively small adjustments. He spoke about the inefficiency of our health care system and the need for reform with a single-payer structure. If that is not possible in the near future, he believes having a public option is a second-best solution.

Among the steps that he feels are necessary to address the budget crisis are: (1) Restoration of taxes of those earning over \$200,000 (to the same level as they were during the Clinton administration); (2) Appropriate taxation of hedge funds; (3) Reduction in military costs; and (4) Space exploration done with robotics rather than with human beings. He emphasized that cutting medical care is the wrong approach. Congressman Frank feels that our economic recovery plan should help, but in speaking about what has led to this crisis, he stated that a major cause was inadequate regulation, adding that there is a need for rules that benefit and don't harm.

Frank spoke about other issues important to older adults, including the importance of planning for end of life, and he concluded with questions and answers covering housing, the war, and other issues of the economy. He spoke with wit and charm, and many in the audience voiced their appreciation for the opportunity to hear and learn about his work.

Kay Maguire, Tala Lipshutz

Lifelines for Elders Released

Lifelines for Elders Living on the Edge: How Elder Support Programs Compare to Living Costs by Laura Henze Russell was released on June 18, 2009 at the State House. This event was well attended and included opening comments by Senator Patricia Jehlen and Representative Alice Wolf, chairs of the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs, and by Ellie Shay-Delaney, interim secretary of Elder Affairs. The report examines the array of federal and state support programs for elders in Massachusetts. It asks how well the lifeline--the support programs that have been set up to help low- and modest-income elders meet basic needs when costs exceed incomes--works in today's economy. *Lifelines* was prepared for the Massachusetts Elder Economic Security Initiative Advisory Committee and the Massachusetts Association of Older Americans and funded by the Boston Foundation.



Also released was the Elder Economic Security Standard Index, updated to 2009. This index measures the income that Massachusetts seniors need to maintain independence and meet basic living expenses. It uses an income measure that reflects the actual expenses for basic needs of older adults, in contrast to the outdated and outmoded federal poverty level. It considers household size, geographic area, housing arrangements, and health status. It shows that many seniors who worked their entire lives are unable to achieve economic security. *Lifelines for Elders Living on the Edge* and the original *Elder Economic Security Standard* are available at the [University of Massachusetts Boston Gerontology Institute website](#).*

*For *Lifelines* click on "Report Released" at the bottom of the page.

Policy/Advocacy Committee Update

The Eastern Mass OWL policy/advocacy committee has met several times. Our primary focus, in keeping with OWL's mission, has been to select 2-3 current bills to support during a legislative session (in addition to the Paid Sick Leave bill). Kay Maguire, who represents Eastern Mass OWL at the Elder Caucus, has been very helpful in providing information. At this point the bill the committee is considering is

[S544: An Act Eliminating Age Discrimination in Mass Health](#). This bill would ensure that the income and asset criteria for individuals over age 65 shall be no stricter than the income, assets, and eligibility for disabled individuals under age 65.

The committee was also considering [H152: An Act Regarding Spouses as Caregivers](#). Currently the MassHealth program allows family members to be paid caregivers, but the family members do not include spouses. This bill would allow spouses to be paid. We learned it was voted down after a hearing but may be resubmitted at a later time.

Ellen Bruce, who has been very involved with education around the state pension system, has been attending the Pension Reform Committee meetings as state pension programs are being assessed. She will keep us posted about issues as they emerge.

The committee has also been discussing ways of supporting the National OWL agenda with regard to federal health care reform and the Elder Justice Act. As



reported above, the issue of elder abuse is the focus of the Mother's Day Report 2009, *Elder Abuse: A Women's Issue*.

We welcome any Eastern OWL members who want to join the committee.

Joan Ditizion

Calendar

Tuesday, September 8, 2009 - National OWL will hold a health care conference call at 2 p.m. for OWL members (planned for 1st Tuesday of every month). To join the call dial 1-270-696-1555 and follow the directions to enter the pass code 892633. To receive conference call reminders in addition to action alerts and online newsletters email: elamme@owl-national.org.



Thursday, September 17, 2009 - Eastern Mass OWL meeting, 12 Noon to 1 p.m., UMass Boston, Wheatley Bldg, 3rd floor, Room 99.

Thursday, September 24, 2009 - Massachusetts Association of Older Americans 40th Anniversary Program and Luncheon, with keynote speaker Ann F. Lewis, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m., Radisson Hotel, 200 Stewart Street, Boston. For further information call 617-426-0804.

Saturday, October 10, 2009 - Women-Speak: An Empowerment Conference for Women about Women - Mind, Body and Spirit. Bentley University, Waltham MA. For more information see: www.women-speak.com

Saturday, October 24, 2009 - Rep. Alice Wolf will speak at Brookline Senior Center, 93 Winchester Street, 1 p.m. Sponsored by Greater Boston OWL. For more information call 781-335-9104.

Don't Forget to Renew Your Membership

We value your participation as a member of Eastern Mass OWL and hope that you take the time to renew your membership for the year. If you have renewed, we thank you. Your membership dues allow us to advocate for the OWL agenda on state and national levels. They also provide you with state and national OWL information and on-line communication. Renewal dates are in January and July. If you are on the July schedule we hope you will renew today. A June 2nd "house" meeting in Marshfield brought together a gathering of 25 women (who were considering OWL membership) to hear Ellen Bruce give a brief history of OWL and talk about some of the issues and events that we have had.

To join or renew go to the [Eastern Mass OWL website](http://www.massowl.org), www.massowl.org. For questions email Edris Kelley, membership committee chair, at edris1@verizon.net

Letter to the Editor

As a member of the Eastern Massachusetts Mid-Life and Older Women's League (OWL), I was pleased to read an article featured in the Op/Ed page of the Globe (6/6/09) entitled "Let



Sick Workers Stay Home." Our organization has been very supportive regarding the bill that has been filed by Senator Patricia Jehlen and Representative Kay Kahn from Massachusetts. Their bill would allow workers up to seven days of Paid Sick Leave a year. The following Sunday you featured another op/ed article. This stated that Senator Kennedy and Connecticut Representative Rosa DeLaura filed a similiar bill in Congress. This gives us hope that employers will realize, in the long run, Paid Sick Leave is more cost effective than the costs of "presenteeism" -- workers coming to work sick. To quote Senator Kennedy, "Everyone is at risk when the people who serve our food, clean our offices, and care for our elderly can't take time off and get well." These bills should be supported and this public health issue should be mandated. Again, people going to work with the fear that no matter how sick they are, they really don't have a choice, puts "everyone at risk."

This letter was sent to the Globe by Edris Kelley, Eastern Mass OWL Membership Chair

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