

the Advocate

Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts

autumn 2020



Russ Mezikofsky

Dear Friends,

Yes: we are living through extraordinary times.

Over the past months, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Planned Parenthood

League of Massachusetts (PPLM) has moved swiftly and strategically to change the ways we deliver care, educate our communities, and fight for reproductive freedom in Massachusetts. In this issue of the *Advocate*, we highlight some of the ways in which PPLM has adapted to best serve our patients during the pandemic (p. 3), while continuing to advocate for fully accessible abortion care for all—work made ever more urgent after the devastating

loss of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, a fierce defender and champion of our rights, freedoms, and health care (p. 2).

Our changed models of care and advocacy are driven by a deepened commitment to racial justice, for the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the racist inequities that pervade America's health care systems.

Systemic racism and discriminatory policies, rooted in Massachusetts and United States laws and institutions, create unacceptable barriers to care for people of color, young people, and people with low incomes.

Through our strategic plan, *Disrupting Disparities, Advancing Equity*, and with the pandemic acting as a catalyst, PPLM is leveraging our strength and expertise to make broad and lasting change. We are determined to address health care disparities head on; to deliver affordable, compassionate sexual and reproductive health care; to creatively educate young people and families; and to advocate for programs and policies that support

the health, well-being, and futures of all people—regardless of the threats we face nationally.

A key part of our work during these past months has been a rigorous internal diversity, equity, and inclusion process that will enable PPLM to become a more just organization, one that better reflects our patients and our communities. Our unyielding goal is to shift both norms and actions toward lasting equity. We are identifying and taking specific actions to dismantle structural racism wherever it exists internally—in our hiring, our training and professional development, our services, our partnerships, our financial support, and all other aspects of our operations. This critical work is ongoing, and I look forward to sharing more about our progress in future issues of the *Advocate*.

I am so grateful for your vital partnership as we work to improve and expand Planned Parenthood's delivery of care and to boldly address health care inequities.

Thank you for standing with PPLM.

In solidarity,

Jennifer Childs-Roshak, MD
President and CEO



"Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time."

– Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg



advocate spotlight: Abortion Access at the State House, in the Courts

As Massachusetts navigates the COVID-19 pandemic, the Planned Parenthood Advocacy Fund's (PPAF's) fight for equitable access to reproductive and sexual health care—including safe, legal abortion—has never been more urgent. After the death of Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and the immediate effort to elevate an abortion opponent to the bench, access to abortion is at stake nationwide. PPAF is ramping up its campaign to change state law and pass the ROE Act, which would remove barriers to abortion care that disproportionately affect people with low incomes, young people, people of color, and LGBTQ people—barriers that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

With less than three months left in this year's legislative session, PPAF and its coalition partners are keeping the pressure on the legislature to vote on the ROE Act. PPAF is mobilizing supporters through grassroots activity and public events, including a virtual rally with over 300 participants and speakers including Representative Ayanna Pressley and Attorney General Maura Healey held in July. Tricia Wajda, PPAF vice president of external affairs, sees the ROE Act as an imperative for Massachusetts to affirm its role as a national leader in protecting reproductive rights: "This is an urgent public health issue. We're putting all of PPLM's and PPAF's advocacy power behind the campaign to pass the ROE Act in 2020."

Outside the Commonwealth, two recent United States Supreme Court decisions have deep



Top: Supporters marching to the State House on Beacon Hill for a ROE Act Advocacy Day in November 2019. Left: Representative Ayanna Pressley speaking at PPAF's virtual ROE Act rally in July.

implications for the future of reproductive health care in our country, while the death of Justice Ginsburg opens up the looming possibility of a successor who would undo her life's work and strip away the rights for which she fought so hard. On June 29, the court struck down an anti-abortion restriction in Louisiana which unnecessarily required abortion providers to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals. While that decision was a welcome relief, the Court, just a week later, upheld two Trump administration rules allowing employers and universities to deny employees and students insurance coverage for contraception based on "religious or moral" objections.

Mehreen Butt, PPAF associate director of public policy and government relations, describes

the Louisiana decision as a limited victory. With 16 cases that could gut abortion access just one step away from a changing Supreme Court, this issue is already back, she says. Similarly, the Court's validation of the Trump rules will energize opponents of reproductive freedom to devise new restrictive laws. The effect, Butt warns, could deepen health disparities nationwide. To honor Judge Ginsburg's legacy of advocating for reproductive health and rights, she says, "PPAF is focusing on voter education and engagement, and we're partnering with leaders who understand that access to health care is an integral part of the movement for social and racial justice."

Stay on top of breaking news about reproductive health and rights by signing up for PPAF email alerts. Visit pplmvotes.org.

program spotlight

PPLM Meets People Where They Are

This spring PPLM met the COVID-19 crisis head on, implementing bold, timely responses to address the needs of patients and communities across the state. Seven months into the pandemic, these innovations continue to evolve as PPLM provides expert health care, educates young people and families, and advocates for programs and policies that protect reproductive health and rights.

PPLM has taken necessary precautions during this time to ensure patients are receiving the care they need by providing essential care via telehealth. Shifting to a largely remote model of patient care has reaped unexpected benefits,

says Molly N., a clinician at PPLM's Boston Health Center: "In many ways, telehealth is improving the health of those otherwise left out of the health care system." Telehealth can minimize the limitations of distance and scheduling conflicts, and ease confidentiality concerns. Molly

sees 20 to 25 patients daily, providing patients with contraception, STI testing and treatment, and HIV prevention care, and recommending in-clinic visits as appropriate.

About a third of the patients Molly cares for receive gender affirming hormone therapy (GAHT). "Since there are few GAHT providers in Massachusetts, and because there can be stigma and fear associated with GAHT," she says, "access to this therapy has been out of reach for many people—until now."

Technology also expanded the reach of PPLM's education programs. Parents and caregivers in particular find virtual learning a flexible way of accessing information on how to talk to their children about sexual and reproductive health. Parents who work during the day or have childcare responsibilities can join evening sessions; parents who live in other areas of the state can

attend programs broadcast from Boston. PPLM Parent Education Manager Ran Courant-Morgan says, "Virtual programs lend themselves to the kind of interactive, supportive, values-oriented content we want to deliver. We can literally meet people where they live."

In Worcester, the COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the need for the *Raíz* program, a national initiative to break down barriers to health care in the Latina/o/x community. With Black and Latina/o/x people disproportionately affected by COVID-19, *Raíz* Organizer Joshua Alba sees community members increasingly engaged in issues and policies central to their health.

Currently, *Raíz*' top priority is to implement comprehensive sex education in Worcester Public Schools. Alba explains, "We're examining how our lives—our identities, empowerment, and relationships—would have been different if we'd had early access to culturally appropriate, medically accurate sex education. Sex ed in schools is needed now."

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Planned Parenthood League of Massachusetts

¿CÓMO USO LA TELE SALUD?

Siga estos pasos y comienza a recibir atención médica sexual y reproductiva **cuando y donde lo necesites.**

- ☎ **Llame a PPLM para solicitar una cita de tele salud al 800-258-4448**
- 📄 **Visite pplm.org/telesalud y siga las instrucciones para registrarse en una cuenta del portal del paciente**
- 🏠 **Encuentre un lugar **privado y seguro** para su cita**
- 📶 **Conéctese a Wifi y esté disponible **15 minutos antes de su cita** para comenzar su registración**

"In many ways, telehealth is improving the health of those otherwise left out of the health care system."

– Molly N., Clinician at PPLM's Boston Health Center

familiar faces, virtual spaces



Artwork created by participants in the Raíz program's virtual Dinner and a Dream series, where supporters come together to put on paper their vision of a world with reproductive and sexual health equity.



United States Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

was not only a trailblazer who inspired millions of people to fight sexism and discrimination; she also made America a better place to work, to live, and to love. We will honor her legacy every day by caring for patients, educating communities, advocating for more just laws, and fighting for our freedoms. Justice Ginsburg would expect nothing less. May her memory be a movement.

Upcoming Events

PPLM Virtual President Society Conference,
Thursday, October 29, 11am-12pm

Cambridge Community Conversation,
Tuesday, December 1

For more information, please
contact events@pplm.org or
617.616.1661

Welcoming PPLM's Newest Board Members



From left to right: Chris Chanyasulkit, Ph.D.; Cara Hutchins; James Shultis; and Catherine West.

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