

LETTERS

In fever to cut taxes, Mass. first should tackle crisis in human services

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Senior healthcare coordinator Emily Donahue, a registered nurse (left), went over hand washing with participant Marylou Watson at Advocates Day Services in Ashland in September 2021. PAT GREENHOUSE/GLOBE STAFF

Strained workforce is just what a rainy day fund is for

Budget-conscious taxpayers are advised to use tax returns to pay down debt and cover expenses, not splurge on nonessentials. Momentary gratification does not outweigh the benefits of sound investing. That same principle applies to the Commonwealth's enormous surplus ([“Tax relief gets trendy on Beacon Hill,”](#) Editorial, May 10).

While tax relief and reform are important, the state has unmet obligations to fulfill before it can seriously consider cuts. Among them is ensuring access to critical supports and services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities and mental health diagnoses and those experiencing homelessness or abuse.

If Massachusetts' rainy day fund is nearing an all-time high of \$6.55 billion, then we should recognize that the community mental health and human services workforce crisis is a rainy day. Staff vacancies at community-based providers are reducing access to services and negatively affecting outcomes for our vulnerable neighbors. Programs have closed, and thousands of individuals and families are already feeling the impact. The state must help providers retain and recruit competent, caring staff by making a \$581 million investment to help boost wages and ensure that direct care workers can earn a starting salary of \$20 an hour — a fair wage that they need to support their families.

The last thing Massachusetts needs is to provide relief for million-dollar estates while human services employees are forced to quit jobs they love for better-paying work.

Bruce Bird

President and CEO

Vinfen

Cambridge

These essential staff shouldn't have to keep struggling

While Massachusetts is “awash in revenue” and our state's rainy day fund has grown to a record-high level, one group of essential workers unnecessarily struggles in Massachusetts.

Community-based human services workers, with 185,000 jobs across the Commonwealth, have starting salaries of less than \$17 an hour and provide essential services to people with disabilities, those with mental health concerns, our state's elders and children, families experiencing homelessness, Massachusetts' veterans, and many others. Due to low rates of state reimbursement, essential direct care workers' salaries have stagnated while those in retail, food service, and health care settings have seen significant increases in recent years.

This salary disparity is an equity issue too. The human services workforce is 80 percent female. The sector is twice as likely to employ a person identifying as Black and 1.5 times as likely to employ people identifying as Latinx as are all other Massachusetts employers. Meanwhile, 1 in 8 human services workers lives at or below 150 percent of the federal poverty level.

Our elected officials are showing support for a tax cut; they would still, however, have money to fix this inequity. The question is: Do they have the will to fairly compensate these low-paid essential women and men to help them make it in Massachusetts?

Michael Weekes

President and CEO

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