



ORGANIZING MEETINGS WITH LEGISLATORS: Increasing State Funding for Youth Violence Prevention and Teen Jobs Programs

Actions within the Massachusetts Legislature over the next six months will decide the level of financial support our state will give to youth violence prevention programs and teen jobs programs. The single most important thing your organization can do is to organize a meeting with your state legislators and ask them to make funding for teen jobs programs one of their budget priorities.

BACKGROUND: FUNDING FOR OUR FUTURE

There are many reasons for the importance of youth programs and teen jobs. It is for positive opportunities for self-development and it is to prevent violence and self destructive actions such as violence and substance abuse that limit those opportunities.

Examples of youth programs that help build opportunities for leadership and growth, but face drastic cuts in state funding include the following:

YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION CUTS

- **The Shannon Anti-Gang Violence Program** funds programs for law enforcement, intervention and prevention programs dealing with gang violence and at-risk youth in 29 communities. Shannon grants were cut from \$13 million to \$6.5 million and then further with a 9C budget cut to \$4.5 million. [Budget Line Item #8100-0011 within the budget of the Executive Office of Public Safety (EOPS)]
- **The DPH Youth Violence Prevention Program** supports 28 coalitions implementing prevention programs to lessen youth violence and provide positive opportunities for youth development. The program was cut from \$3.5 million to \$2 million. [Budget Line Item #4590-1506 within the budget of the Department of Public Health/EOHHS]

TEEN JOBS CUTS

- **The YouthWorks Teen Jobs Program** pays the salaries of teen jobs in nonprofits and government. For example, Boston got \$1.8 million for this last summer; teens applied for jobs funded from this and city funds through the HOPE line process. YouthWorks funding has been cut from \$8 million to \$4 million. [Budget Line Item # 7002-0012 within the budget of the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development.]
- **School to Career Connecting Activities** funds the development of private sector placement jobs in businesses and hospitals. Public funding pays the staff costs of job development, teen recruitment, and teen employee support while employers pay the wages. In Boston, the Boston Private Industry Council (PIC) runs this program. Funding has been cut from \$4.1 million to \$2 million. [Budget Line Item #7027-0019 within the budget of the Department of Education.]

YOUTH SUPPORT CUTS

- **The Mentoring Program** supports 21 mentoring programs across the state. Its funding has fallen from \$395,000 to \$100,000. [Budget Line Item #7061-9634]
- **After School Out of School Time Program (ASOST)** supports 67 after school programs for elementary and secondary students at schools and teen centers. Its funding fell from \$5.5 million to \$2 million. [Budget Line Item #7061-9611]

BUILD URGENCY IN YOUR ORGANIZATION

Once a year, each state legislator gets to meet one-to-one with the second most powerful person in the House and Senate about their budget priorities. This is their meeting with either the chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, Representative Charles Murphy (D-Burlington), or with the chairman of the Senate Ways and Means Committee, Senator Stephen Panagiotakos (D-Lowell).

Your ask will be most effective if you make it *just before* these one-to-one meetings, which take place:

- **House of Representatives:** Mid-February – about March 10
- **Senate:** Mid-February to late March.

If you cannot get a meeting before the deadlines above, meetings with State Representatives up to late March and with State Senators up to late April are still valuable.

SET THE MEETING

Legislators attend meetings in their districts at all times of the day or night. However, requesting meetings in the evenings, on weekends, in the early morning before 10:00, or late afternoons, are least likely to conflict with their duties in the Legislature such as committee hearings, meetings, debates, and votes on legislation. The Legislature rarely meets on Fridays also.

Set a time and place that work for you but be flexible about rescheduling it.

TIPS FOR GETTING YOUR MEETING

- **Put your request in writing.** Suggest a specific time and place, but add that you would consider a different date if that makes it feasible for the legislator to attend.
- **Follow up with a call to the legislator's office.** Ask to speak to the staff person who does scheduling and/or the legislator's Chief of Staff to confirm receipt of request, and to confirm the meeting date, time, and location.
- **Be firm but flexible when dealing with excuses.** The aides to some legislators may try to put you off, saying that he or she is not available and that it would be easier if you would meet with an aide instead, or that you should come up to the State House for the meeting. You want to insist that you want a meeting with the legislator himself/herself and it be in your neighborhood, but you are willing to consider other dates and times to make this feasible.

PREPARE FOR YOUR MEETING

It is helpful to have two or more planning meetings to develop an agenda, decide who will speak on each agenda point, and role play and practice what you will say and how you will respond to questions/comments the legislator might make.

BUILD YOUR TEAM

There is power in numbers and legislators count votes. You get more respect from them if they see large numbers supporting you. Some folks who you may consider inviting include your board, staff, members, teen clients, parents of teen clients, and allied organizations who support your organization and/or this issue of funding for youth programs. You can also invite your daily and/or weekly newspapers to attend the meeting, if appropriate.

BUILD AN AGENDA

- **Welcome and Introductions:** Thank the legislator for coming. Explain that you are there to talk about your budget priorities, and introduce those in attendance from your organization and/or allies
- **Testimony: Programs.** Community leaders explain how their programs are valuable to the community at large. For example, teen jobs not only provide income for teens, they reduce neighborhood violence and provide opportunities for work experience, encouraging teens to go on to college or post high school training, building a stronger, smarter workforce.
- **Testimony: Revenue.** Include a revenue message (see below) to demonstrate understanding of budget implications of additional funding and the importance of financially supporting our communities.
- **Request.** Ask your Legislator to commit to making [youth program] funding one of the budget priorities he or she tells the House or Senate Ways and Means Chairman about they meet (see below).
- **Summary.** Communicate your next steps, and thank the Legislator for coming out to your community for your meeting. You can combine your meeting with a tour of your program, but only do so after your request has been made and you have done your best to get a commitment of support.

For additional guidance on legislative meeting preparation, please contact the Safe Teens/Safe Communities Coalition.

MAKE YOUR REQUEST

When you meet with your state representatives and your state senators, urge them to make funding for your targeted youth program(s) one of the budget priorities they tell the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee when they meet with them.

SAMPLE SCRIPT:

[Value & Problem] I know that you believe that all children in Massachusetts deserve the opportunity to build a better life for themselves. I am concerned that the cuts to teen job funding are putting not just youths, but the safety and vitality of our entire community at risk.

[Solution] We can only maintain this program – one that we have worked for decades to build – if it receives adequate funding.

[Request] I urge you to include teen jobs as one of your budget priorities when you speak to the House or Senate Ways and Means Chairman when you meet with him.

INCLUDE A REVENUE MESSAGE

The things that make Massachusetts a great place to live – including the youth programs that you are fighting to support – are things that we are not able to do as individuals. In order to build safe, healthy communities, we must all work together to support our state.

Decades of deliberate tax and budget decisions, along with the national economic downturn, have left our state with a \$2-3 billion budget deficit. Because states are not legally allowed to run deficits, state leadership must balance the budget using more cuts, tax increases, or a combination of the two options.

Last year, we saw big budget cuts across the board, but many cuts were reduced or avoided because they also raised the sales tax from 5% to 6.25%, bringing in over \$700 million each year in new tax revenue.

It is likely that your legislator will ask you how he or she can justify voting for an increase for teen jobs programs or even spare them from cuts in the face of a \$2-3 billion deficit. He or she may even ask you what programs should be cut instead of the one for which you are advocating.

Your request for additional funding will be stronger if you can say that your organization supports increasing state revenues to support all of our public structures, including your request. This may mean ending special tax cuts or loopholes like the film tax credit or the single sale factor corporate tax, and a broader tax increase if it was done fairly, like an income tax increase.

If you worked against the Question 1 referendum in 2008 that would have eliminated the state income tax, tell the legislator you did that. You can also say you will work against any referendum that might be on the ballot this fall to eliminate or lessen the sales tax.

FOLLOW UP

1. Send a thank you note to all legislators you meet with, indicating the commitments they made.
2. If the media didn't cover your meeting with your legislator, send a press release to your local daily and/or weekly paper about the meeting that was held. If they don't do an article on it, then send a Letter to the Editor about the importance of state funding for youth programs, and that you met with [named legislators], asking them to support this.

ASK FOR HELP

Please contact Lew Finfer at Massachusetts Communities Action Network (MCAN) and the Safe Teens/Safe Communities Coalition with questions or for help in organizing your meetings with legislators. (617) 822-1499 LewFinfer@gmail.com

If you have questions or want assistance on ways to involve teens in helping to organize and lead these meetings, contact Dan Gelbtuch of Dorchester Bay EDC's Youth Force at (617) 825-4200 x203 dgeltuch@dbedc.org

THE OVERALL STATE BUDGET PROCESS

Below is how the overall state budget process works. We may call on you to get some calls in to your legislators at points in this process, but again, organizing that one meeting with your legislators – in your community – is the most important step!!

1. January 27 - Governor's Budget Recommendations Released.

The Governor files his own budget recommendations on January 27 and they are referred to as House 1. We have held meetings with departments and secretariats under the Governor during the fall and early winter to ask him to fund the teen jobs programs in his budget. Whether or not he does this, the final decision lies with the Legislature.

2. House of Representatives Budget Process

- a. **January – February:** YOU hold meetings with your state representatives during January and February.
- b. **Mid-February – Mid-March:** State Representatives meet with the House Ways and Means Chairman on their budget priorities.
- c. **April 8 – 13:** The House Ways and Means Committee releases its budget proposal.
- d. **Friday, April 16:** Deadline for legislators to file amendments to restore funding cut in this proposal.
- e. **Week of April 26:** Debate and vote on House budget.

3. State Senate Budget Process

- a. **February – Mid-April:** YOU hold meetings with your state senators during January-March.
- b. **Late-February – Late March:** State Senators meet with the Senate Ways and Means Chairman on their budget priorities between.
- c. **May 18:** The Senate Ways and Means Committee releases its budget proposal.
- d. **May 21:** Deadline for legislators to file amendments to restore funding cut in this proposal.
- e. **Week of May 24:** Debate and vote on House budget during week of May 24.

4. June: House-Senate Conference Committee.

A committee of 3 senators and 3 representatives meets during June to negotiate on different budget amounts passed by the House and Senate. They can decide on the higher amount, the lower amount, or some amount in between.

5. Governor's Vetoes and Overrides.

The Governor gets the budget in later June and has 10 days to either sign or veto each individual budget line item.

6. Legislature's Overrides.

The Legislature can override the Governor's veto if they can get 2/3 vote in each branch to do so.