

June 26, 2023

Hon. Patricia D. Jehlen  
Joint Committee on Elder Affairs  
State House, Room 424  
Boston, MA, 02133

Hon. Thomas M. Stanley  
Joint Committee on Elder Affairs  
State House, Room 167  
Boston, MA, 02133

**(H.636 / S.365) An Act relative to LGBT and HIV positive seniors in the Commonwealth**

Dear Chair Jehlen, Chair Stanley, and members of the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs:

**Fenway Health and AIDS Action would like to go on record IN SUPPORT of (H.636 / S.365) An Act relative to LGBT and HIV positive seniors in the Commonwealth (cosponsored by Representatives Lewis and Peake and Senator Cyr). We urge you to report this bill favorably.** This bill would designate older LGBT people and older people living with HIV as populations of greatest social need under the Older Americans Act. Thank you to the chairs and to the legislative sponsors for your steadfast support of equality and equity in elder services.

Fenway Health is a federally-qualified health center and Ryan White Part C HIV clinic serving about 35,000 patients in four sites across Boston and Cambridge. Roughly half of our patients are LGBTQIA+, and over 5,000 are transgender and nonbinary. About 2,200 patients are people living with HIV, and about 3,000 patients are on PrEP for HIV prevention. The Fenway Institute is the research, training, and health policy division of Fenway Health. A major focus of our work is HIV and STI prevention and research. The LGBTQIA+ Aging Project, a program of the Fenway Institute, works toward equity, inclusion, and community for LGBTQIA+ older adults ensuring that they can age with the dignity and respect they deserve.

In my written testimony in support of the home care eligibility bill I provided a lot of information on the complex health care needs of older people living with HIV (PLWH), including relatively higher prevalence of comorbid conditions such as kidney disease, geriatric conditions such as frailty, behavioral health burden, psychosocial needs, and disability.<sup>1,2</sup> PLWH in the U.S. are almost twice as likely as the general population to have a disability.<sup>3</sup> Older people with HIV are nearly two and a half times more likely than older people who are not HIV-positive to experience cognitive decline.<sup>4</sup> Research shows that older PLWH in the U.S. are more likely to

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<sup>1</sup> American Academy of HIV Medicine (AAHIVM). *Recommended Treatment Strategies for Clinicians Managing Older Patients with HIV. Assessing Frailty and Functional Capacity: Managing the Care of Older Adults with HIV.* CME/CE credit available June 8, 2021 - June 7, 2022. <https://aahivm-education.org/hiv-age/contents>

<sup>2</sup> Chowdhury PP, Beer L, Shu F, Fagan J, Luke Shouse R. Disability among adults with diagnosed HIV in the United States, 2017. *AIDS Care.* 2021 Dec;33(12):1611-1615. doi: 10.1080/09540121.2020.1842318. Epub 2020 Nov 10. PMID: 33172311.

<sup>3</sup> Chowdhury PP, Beer L, Shu F, Fagan J, Luke Shouse R. Disability among adults with diagnosed HIV in the United States, 2017. *AIDS Care.* 2021 Dec;33(12):1611-1615. doi: 10.1080/09540121.2020.1842318. Epub 2020 Nov 10. PMID: 33172311.

<sup>4</sup> Deng L, Zhang X, Gao Y, Turner D, Qian F, Lu H, Vermund SH, Zhang Y, Qian HZ. Association of HIV infection and cognitive impairment in older adults: A meta-analysis. *Ageing Res Rev.* 2021 Jul;68:101310. doi: 10.1016/j.arr.2021.101310. Epub 2021 Feb 26. PMID: 33640473.

live alone and experience elevated rates of loneliness,<sup>5,6</sup> social isolation,<sup>7</sup> and lack of social support.<sup>8</sup> Older gay and bisexual men living with HIV are twice as likely to experience depression,<sup>9,10,11</sup> compared to heterosexual and HIV-negative counterparts. Depression is now a leading cause of morbidity and mortality among older people living with HIV, exceeding even that caused by HIV.<sup>12,13</sup>

I'd also like to present some data on older LGBT people in Massachusetts based on research we conducted with older adults across the Commonwealth in 2019 and 2020. We worked with colleagues at the Mass. Department of Public Health to analyze Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey data for older LGBT people. We also conducted 9 in-person and virtual listening sessions with LGBT older adults across Massachusetts. Among our key findings were these:

Key themes that came up in the listening sessions were:

- Strong anti-LGBT prejudice in rural Massachusetts, and from age peers across the Commonwealth
- Social isolation and lack of connection
- Mental health needs specific to social isolation
- The need for ongoing services and mental health care for LGBT widows and widowers, especially those on the Cape and in other rural areas
- The need for social activities that create a sense of community and belonging
- Transportation needs, especially in rural Massachusetts
- Anti-LGBT discrimination in assisted living
- Anti-gay harassment in businesses and health care facilities in the Berkshires
- The centrality of trauma in people's lives
- The need to address racism within the LGBT community

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<sup>5</sup> Karpiak S, Shippey A. *Research on Older Adults with HIV (ROAH)*. AIDS Community Research Initiative of America. (2006). [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280291375\\_Research\\_on\\_Older\\_Adults\\_with\\_HIV](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/280291375_Research_on_Older_Adults_with_HIV)

<sup>6</sup> Kim HJ, Fredriksen-Goldsen KI. Living Arrangement and Loneliness Among Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Older Adults. *Gerontologist*. 2016 Jun;56(3):548-58.

<sup>7</sup> Grov C, Golub SA, Parsons JT, Brennan M, Karpiak SE. Loneliness and HIV-related stigma explain depression among older HIV-positive adults. *AIDS Care*. 2010;22(5):630-639.

<sup>8</sup> Matsumoto, S., Yamaoka, K., Takahashi, K. *et al*. Social Support as a Key Protective Factor against Depression in HIV-Infected Patients: Report from large HIV clinics in Hanoi, Vietnam. *Sci Rep* 7, 15489 (2017).

<sup>9</sup> Turrini G, Chan SS, Klein PW, Cohen SM, Dempsey A, Hauck H, Cheever LW, Chappel AR. Assessing the health status and mortality of older people over 65 with HIV. *PLoS One*. 2020 Nov 5;15(11):e0241833.

<sup>10</sup> Nanni MG, Caruso R, Mitchell AJ, Meggiolaro E, Grassi L. Depression in HIV infected patients: a review. *Curr Psychiatry Rep*. 2015 Jan;17(1):530.

<sup>11</sup> Bromberg DJ, Paltiel AD, Busch SH, Pachankis JE. Has depression surpassed HIV as a burden to gay and bisexual men's health in the United States? A comparative modeling study. *Soc Psychiatry Psychiatr Epidemiol*. 2021 Feb;56(2):273-282. doi: 10.1007/s00127-020-01938-1. Epub 2020 Aug 12. PMID: 32785755; PMCID: PMC7870461.

<sup>12</sup> Nanni MG, Caruso R, Mitchell AJ, Meggiolaro E, Grassi L. Depression in HIV infected patients: a review. *Curr Psychiatry Rep*. 2015 Jan;17(1):530.

<sup>13</sup> Ogburn DF, Schoenbach VJ, Edmonds A, et al. Depression, ART Adherence, and Receipt of Case Management Services by Adults with HIV in North Carolina, Medical Monitoring Project, 2009-2013. *AIDS Behav*. 2019 Apr;23(4):1004-1015.

- A dearth of LGBT-competent and -affirming health care in rural Massachusetts
- Struggling to pay for health care
- Economic hardship in general
- The need for LGBT-friendly elder housing
- The need for targeted support groups and services
- The need for assistance with end-of-life planning
- The need for hardware (computers, tablets), internet access, and technical assistance to isolated, low-income LGBT elders so that they can access virtual support groups and other services

Key findings from the BRFSS data include the following statistically significant differences between LGBT people 50-75 and straight/cisgender people 50-75:

- LGBT elders reported higher rates of fair/poor overall health, and
- Were nearly twice as likely to report ever having been diagnosed with a depressive disorder,
- Were about as likely to be a veteran and to have children in the household,
- Were more likely to have four or more years of college education
- Were more likely to rent and less likely to own their home
- Were nearly three times as likely to report difficulty paying for housing or food in past year
- Were more likely to report serious difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Were near twice as likely to fall and be injured in a fall in the past year
- Reported four times the rate of suicidal thoughts in past year
- Reported three times the rate of lifetime sexual violence victimization

Also, lesbian and bisexual women were more likely to be obese and less likely to be of normal weight than heterosexual women in Massachusetts.<sup>14</sup> This report is available on our website and is cited in my comment.

Older LGBT people and older PLWH have unique needs and experiences, and may be in greater need of formal elder services. At the same time they may be less likely to access these services due to fear of experiencing stigma and discrimination in elder services, either by age peers or by service providers themselves. Designating them as populations of greatest social need under the Older Americans Act would encourage elder service providers to think more explicitly about how they are meeting the needs of these populations, and how they are ensuring that they can access affirming, culturally responsive services. Six other states have passed legislation designating LGBT older adults as a population of greatest social need under the OAA: California, Illinois, Vermont, New York, Pennsylvania, and Virginia. Four states—New York,

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<sup>14</sup> Cahill S (2020). *LGBT Aging 2025: Strategies for Achieving a Healthy and Thriving LGBT Older Adult Community in Massachusetts*. Boston: The Fenway Institute, LGBT Aging Project. <https://fenwayhealth.org/wp-content/uploads/LGBT-Aging-2025-Report-December-2020.pdf>

Illinois, California, and Vermont—and the District of Columbia have designated older PLWH as a population of greatest social need.

Clearly, older LGBT people and older PLWH could benefit from this designation in state law, and targeted, culturally responsive elder services. Please support and favorably report (H.636 / S.365) An Act relative to LGBT and HIV positive seniors in the Commonwealth.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sean Cahill. PhD  
Director, Health Policy Research  
The Fenway Institute