

March 26, 2025

Representative Marjorie C. Decker, House Chair

Senator Bill Driscoll, Jr., Senate Chair

Joint Committee on Public Health

Dear Chair Decker and Chair Driscoll,

My name is Sean Cahill. I am Director of Health Policy Research at the Fenway Institute at Fenway Community Health Center in Boston. I also have academic appointments at Northeastern University and at Boston University School of Public Health.

Fenway Health provides care to everyone, but about half of our 33,000 patients are LGBTQ+. We have 6,000 transgender and nonbinary patients, 2300 HIV patients, and 3500 patients on PrEP for HIV prevention. Our research institute conducts research here in the U.S. and around the world on HIV prevention, sexual health, and disease prevention and care.

According to the Massachusetts Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System survey and the Mass. Youth Risk Behavior Survey, about 9% of adults in Massachusetts identify as LGBT or another sexual orientation, and about 23% of high school students and young adults identify as LGBT or are unsure of their identity. LGBT+ adults report higher rates of fair or poor health than straight, cisgender adults. LGBT+ adults and youth report higher rates of experiencing sexual violence, smoking and vaping tobacco products, and binge drinking than their straight, cisgender age peers. LGBT+ adults are nearly twice as likely to report not seeing a doctor in the past year due to cost.

Providing culturally responsive, affirming care to LGBTQ+ patients can improve their ability to access health care and support their health and well-being. This is why since 2011 the Fenway Institute has trained health centers, hospitals and private practices across the country in how to provide affirming, trauma-informed care.

Unfortunately, recent actions by the Trump Administration and Elon Musk threaten our ability to serve our patients and communities. In recent weeks the Fenway Institute has lost six research grants worth several million dollars. These include:

- HIV prevention research with cisgender women,
- smoking cessation intervention research with transgender people,
- a study of the effects of race and age discrimination in health care,
- and 4 adolescent HIV prevention and vaccine clinical trials (adolescents are about one fifth of new HIV infections each year).

We also face threats to our ability to provide gender affirming care from the President's anti-transgender executive orders. We are concerned about looming cuts to HIV and STI prevention and Medicaid. We ask the legislature to protect safety net care funding by passing An Act Prohibiting Discrimination Against 340B Drug Discount Program Participants (H.1107/S.819). We also ask you to require that commercial insurance reimbursement match the rates paid by MassHealth by passing An Act Relative to Rate Equity for Community Health Centers (H.1096/S.711). These bills would not cost the state a dime but would help our state's health centers, half of which are currently running deficits due to the structural problems that these bills would fix.

Because the Trump Administration is rolling back sexual orientation and gender identity data collection in health care, we ask the legislature to pass An Act Relative to LGBTQ+ Health Disparities (H.2501/S.1505), which would increase the collection of voluntary, confidential SOGI data to help in reducing health disparities. We also ask the legislature to create a Massachusetts LGBTQ+ Health Research and Education Fund to support critically needed research and education which is under assault by the Trump Administration.

Thank you for considering these requests. Please contact me at scahill@fenwayhealth.org with any questions.

Sincerely,

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