

# THE PEISCH POST

## NATICK EDITION

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## A Message From Your Representative



Dear Friends,

It has been an honor and a privilege to have served as your Representative in the General Court since January of this year. I would like to take this opportunity to inform you of what I have been doing on your behalf and of what issues I expect to be dealing with in the coming months.

The better part of the first seven months of the session was devoted to addressing the FY'03 budget shortfall and developing the FY'04 budget. The budget process this year was particularly challenging due to the precipitous drop in state revenues that the Commonwealth has experienced over the last two fiscal years. Nonetheless, for the first time in recent memory, the Legislature delivered a budget to the Governor well in advance of the beginning of the fiscal year. Although the budget as finally enacted cut many very worthy programs, it did preserve the Prescription Advantage Program and increased funding to local districts for Special Education. As we go to press, many of my colleagues and I are working to restore some of the more egregious cuts through a Supplemental Budget.

As a member of the Committee on Election Laws, I was appointed to chair a subcommittee on legislation to reform the Commonwealth's absentee ballot laws. I will be making my recommendations to the full committee later this month and expect to see the recommended legislation reach the floor for a vote this fall. As a member of the Judiciary Committee, during the next few months I expect to be considering the reforms to the Court system recommended by the Visiting Committee chaired by Boston College President Emeritus Monan.

In order to better serve you, I have joined with Rep. David Linsky of Natick and three other representatives to form the House Democratic Council (HDC). It is our hope that the HDC will provide a forum for House members to educate ourselves on the issues of the day, to share our resources by working together on issues of mutual concern and to openly debate the merits of the more complex matters before us.

I encourage you to contact me in person, by telephone, letter or e-mail to let me know your reaction to the issues covered in this newsletter, and what other issues are of particular concern to you. I welcome any and all feedback.

I thank you for sending me to the State House and I look forward to continuing to work on your behalf.

Sincerely,

*Alice Hanlon Peisch*

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# *Peisch Leads Fight for Special Education*

## **Peisch Makes Maiden Speech**

In the Massachusetts House of Representatives when a new member makes her first speech on the floor of the House Chamber it is a significant occasion. All House Members are summoned to the House Chamber to listen and pay appropriate attention to a member's "maiden speech."

It is a tradition that dates back over 200 years. However, no one in the House Chamber on the night of May 6, 2003 could have predicted the response that the maiden speech given by the Representative from Wellesley would receive.

Representative Peisch knew when she took office that she wanted her first speech on the House floor to be on a subject of great importance to her. When she learned about the difficulties facing special education students taking the MCAS, the subject of her speech became obvious.

"I wanted my maiden speech to be on a subject that I felt strongly about," said Representative Peisch. "I advocated for special education students as a school committee member and I continue to do so as a legislator. I could not think of a more appropriate subject for my first speech."

When the Representative's amendment, overwhelmingly passed the House, she managed to pass the first MCAS exemption since the implementation of the test.

The *Boston Globe*, *Boston Herald*, and other major newspapers across the state carried this story the next morning. One long time State House observer commented that he, "can't recall another maiden speech that received this much attention." In the following days Rep. Peisch appeared on NECN and was interviewed by *Education Weekly*, a national publication, on her proposal.

"The amount of attention being paid to my maiden speech is a little overwhelming," said Rep. Peisch. "But I am thrilled that the special education testing gap with respect to the MCAS is now receiving so much attention."

Rep. Peisch has been congratulated and thanked by groups across the state for her efforts on behalf of SPED students.

Special education students have a new ally in the Massachusetts State House, Representative Alice Peisch. Peisch authored a new law that was enacted in November which will provide students with special needs greater access to the MCAS appeal system. SPED students may now apply to the Department of Education for a competency certification if they have failed the test, regardless of the score received. Current law prevents many students with disabilities from filing such an appeal because of the requirement that a minimum score of 216 be achieved.

The new law was developed by Peisch and education officials over the course of the summer after a similar amendment authored by Peisch during the FY04 budget debate was vetoed by the Governor. Peisch's budget amendment would have allowed high school diplomas to be awarded to those special education students who had met all district requirements, but had failed to achieve MCAS competency. The amendment overwhelmingly passed the House and was approved with changes in the Senate. The passage of Peisch's original amendment raised awareness across the state about the performance gap between special education students and regular education students on the MCAS test.

Peisch, who has been the lead advocate for changing the MCAS appeals provision, said "Many SPED students that have met the district requirements currently cannot access the appeals process. The new requirements address the issues of equity and fairness while maintaining high standards for graduation by giving more students the opportunity to demonstrate that they meet the competency requirement."

Peisch started advocating for changes in the MCAS after learning about the disparity in results between SPED students and those with regular education programs. According to the March 2003 MCAS Progress Report only 69% of students with disabilities achieved MCAS competency determinations, compared with 94% of regular education students.

Peisch's efforts on behalf of students with disabilities has been praised by legislators, educators, and others for addressing issues of equity and fairness for students with disabilities, while maintaining high graduation standards.

## **Special Education Circuit Breaker Funded**

Representative Peisch is pleased to announce that a new special education circuit breaker law has been funded. This funding will provide additional reimbursements to cities and towns for special education placements. For FY04 \$121.6 million was approved for this program, nearly doubling last year's state special education appropriation of \$70,575,00.

Although the SPED circuit breaker was the only account to receive a dramatic increase from FY03, the actual cost of this program for FY04 has yet to be determined. Rep. Peisch has already contacted the Governor and the House Way and Means Committee to advocate for sufficient funding for the circuit breaker. Rep. Peisch believes that the Commonwealth has an obligation to provide the necessary funds to meet all student' educational needs, and in the event of under funding, Rep. Peisch will continue to work on behalf of special needs students to provide supplemental funding to the program.

## *Peisch Founds Legislative Reform Group Advocates for Good Government*

Representative Peisch along with Representatives David Linsky of Natick , Cory Atkins of Concord, Mark Carron of Southbridge and Michael Festa of Melrose founded the House Democratic Council (HDC), a group committed to reforming the policy process on Beacon Hill. HDC members pool their resources so that access to staff support, and policy expertise is not limited to those in leadership positions. The primary goal of the HDC is to ensure that the concerns of the Representatives' constituents are better addressed. To that end, Rep. Peisch is working with her HDC colleagues on legislation relating to controlling the costs of prescription drugs, providing relief to municipalities, and sentencing reform.

### **Prescription Advantage Preserved!**

The Prescription Advantage Plan is an insurance plan that offers unlimited prescription drug coverage to MA residents age 65 and older. Prescription Advantage is unlike other insurance plans, as it has an annual spending limit. Once a member has reached his/her spending limit, the plan will cover the drug costs for the remainder of the year.

The popular program was eliminated by the Governor, but restored by the House during the budget debate. The restoration of the Prescription Advantage Plan is a substantial victory in the effort to maintain responsible health care programs in the Commonwealth.

This August, seniors were able to enroll in the Prescription Advantage Program for the first time in almost a year.

### ***\$13M Restored to Legal Services***

Legal assistance funding was in jeopardy when \$13 million was vetoed by the Governor from the FY04 budget. Representative Peisch, who is a strong supporter of legal assistance, worked with her colleagues to bring this veto to the House floor.

The veto of funding for the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation was overwhelmingly overridden, ensuring that that legal services will be available to the approximately 125,000 residents that utilize its services every year and the 18 local offices will remain open. The Battered Women's Legal Assistance Project and the Disability Benefits Project that service victims of domestic violence and the disabled respectively, will also be maintained through this funding.

### ***Kindergarten Grants Saved!***

Natick and many other communities across the state, were in jeopardy of losing their grants for full day kindergarten because of a veto by Governor Romney. Representative Peisch, who has advocated for education funding since taking office in January, worked with Representative Linsky and their colleagues to bring this veto to the House floor.

The veto of kindergarten grants was overwhelmingly overridden, ensuring that Natick will receive its full grant of \$345,000. This funding will allow Natick to continue to provide full day kindergarten.

**Every month Representative Peisch  
holds office hours in Wellesley, Weston, and Natick.**

**Office Hours provide an opportunity for  
constituents to meet directly with Rep. Peisch.  
No appointment is necessary!**

**Check your local paper to find out when the next  
office hours are or call 617-722-2080.**

## ***Local Aid Restored to Natick !***

The Legislature restored state funding to Natick after it was vetoed by Governor Romney.

Rep. Peisch, along with the other members of the Natick delegation, voted to override the veto of \$23 million in additional assistance that was cut by the Governor. If the veto had been sustained, Natick would have lost \$116,000 in local aid.



Representative Peisch speaking with Congressman Ed Markey and Representative David Linksy at Natick Days

## ***TOUGHER DRUNK DRIVING LAW PASSED Federal Funding Preserved!***

This summer Massachusetts put the “per se law” into effect. The new law strengthens the state’s drunk driving statute, making a .08 or higher blood-alcohol content irrefutable proof in court that a driver was under the influence of alcohol.

The law also increased the fine for driving under the influence from \$150 to \$250 and increased the length of a license suspension for drivers refusing to take a breathalyzer test to encourage drivers to submit to the test. The enactment of this legislation will preserve the federal highway funding assistance of \$2 million this year.

“The preservation of federal aid is important, as is the increased public safety that will result from this legislation,” said Peisch.

## ***Natick Student Joins Team Peisch***

Rebecca Soule of Natick was one of several college students who forsook a relaxing summer on the beach to work in Rep. Peisch’s office at the State House this summer. Every year the Massachusetts House of Representatives welcomes students from across the state as participants in the State House internship program. “The internship program is an integral part of my office,” said Peisch. “Student interns allow me to respond more efficiently and expeditiously to constituent concerns. The students participate in all facets of office life and learn about the legislative process while gaining invaluable professional experience.”

Over the course of the summer Rebecca shadowed Rep. Peisch, fielded concerns from constituents, researched legislation and attended seminars given by a variety of elected officials. Rebecca, who is the daughter of Patrice and Gus Soule, is a 2001 graduate of the Rivers School in Weston. She is currently a junior at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester where she is majoring in Political Science. Rebecca is also planning on spending a semester in Washington D.C. this upcoming spring.

## ***About Your Representative***

Alice Peisch was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in November 2002 as the Representative for the 14th Norfolk District. She previously served on the Wellesley School Committee for six years, four of which she served as chair. Prior to being elected State Representative, Peisch held the position of Wellesley Town Clerk from 2000 – 2003.

Rep. Peisch currently serves on the Board of the Wellesley Education Foundation and the Newton Wellesley Hospital Board of Overseers. She is a graduate of Smith College and Suffolk University Law School. Rep. Peisch lives in Wellesley with her husband and three children.

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Representative Peisch (left) listening to testimony at a Judiciary Committee Public Hearing in the Gardner Auditorium at the State House.

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Representative Peisch is always looking for district students to intern in her State House Office in Boston. The legislative intern position is designed for college students interested in government, politics, and activism. Intern responsibilities will include but not be limited to constituent services, tracking legislation, policy research, writing correspondences, and database management. Interns will have the opportunity to attend Formal Legislative Sessions, committee hearings, as well as gain first hand legislative experience at the state level.

Interested students should send a resume to Representative Alice Peisch, State House, Room 26, Boston, MA 02133; email [Rep.AlicePeisch@hou.state.ma.us](mailto:Rep.AlicePeisch@hou.state.ma.us); or call 617-722-2080.

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Representative Alice Peisch marching in Natick's Annual Fourth of July Parade

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