

THE PEISCH POST

WELLESLEY 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 behalf of this district, 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. More details about the budget can be found on page 3.

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. My recommendations to the full committee were adopted this month and, I 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 joined with four other representatives to found 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 successfully authored and proposed a budget amendment that would allow for the next three year only, high school diplomas to be awarded to special education students who have met all district requirements, but have not successfully taken the MCAS test. The amendment overwhelmingly passed the House by a vote of 117 to 37. The passage of the Peisch amendment marked the first time the Legislature voted to create an exemption to the MCAS graduation requirement.

Peisch filed the budget amendment after learning about the disparity between special education students and those in standard education programs on the MCAS exams. 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 believes that the DOE needs more time to develop alternative assessments for these students. The amendment was changed in the Senate, with Peisch's input and consent, in order to increase its support. The new proposal allows students with special needs to appeal to the Department of Education for a competency certification if they have failed the test. Current law prevents many students with disabilities from qualifying for an appeal.

Peisch's proposal was praised by legislators, educators, and others for addressing issues of equity and fairness for students with disabilities, while maintaining high graduation standards. Although the amendment was in the final version of the FY04 budget, it was vetoed by the Governor. Peisch met with Education Officials throughout the summer to draft alternative language. In September the Education Committee reported out favorably the new language and the House is expected to debate the new legislation this fall. Rep. Peisch continues to advocate for this legislation on behalf of the thousands of children across the state with disabilities.

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 costs 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's educational needs, and in the event of under funding, Rep. Peisch will continue to work on behalf of special needs student, to provide supplemental funding to the program.

Peisch Founds Legislative Reform Group Advocates for Good Government

Representative Peisch along with Representatives Cory Atkins of Concord, Mark Carron of Southbridge, Michael Festa of Melrose, and David Linsky of Natick 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.

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.

Wellesley Updates and Information

Wellesley Legislation

In an effort to fund the health insurance costs for Wellesley's municipal retirees, Rep. Peisch has filed legislation in conjunction with the Board of Selectman that will create a Post Employment Health Insurance Trust fund.

Approved by the Wellesley Town Meeting this spring, this legislation will authorize the town of Wellesley to create a trust fund to help cover the costs of retirees' health care coverage. The town will be allowed to pre-fund these costs, in much the same way that the town has full funded its pension liability.

The legislation was also sponsored by Senators Cynthia Creem and Cheryl Jacques, is now before the Joint Committee on Public Service for consideration.

Legislation was also filed by Rep. Peisch pertaining to the survivor allowance for the widow of a retired Wellesley firefighter.

Both pieces of legislation received a hearing before the Joint Committee on Public Service on October 30, 2003. Rep. Peisch testified in support of the proposals at the hearing. The legislation regarding the survivor allowances has been given a favorable report is now before the House Committee on Steering and Policy.

Route 16 Road and Bridge Project Update

Living just off Route 16, Rep. Peisch knows all too well the headache that the Route 16 project has created for Wellesley's residents. Filled with inconveniences and an eighteen month delay from its estimated completion date, most of Wellesley will probably be happy to hear that the end of the project is finally near. According to the most recent update from MassHighway, the project should be completed by the end of the year.

Since taking office in January, Rep. Peisch has been in frequent communication with MassHighway regarding the Route 16 project, the Woodlawn Avenue Bridge Project and the Route 9 overpass Project. Due to a large number of constituents asking about these projects, in June Rep. Peisch met with a group of concerned residents regarding the status of the project. Rep. Peisch arranged for Stephen O'Donnell, MassHighway District Director, to attend the meeting so that specific questions and issues could be addressed.

Following the June meeting a significant amount of work was completed on the Route 16 project and specific safety issues on Washington Street were addressed. Director O'Donnell has assured Rep. Peisch that the Woodlawn Bridge Project will also be complete by the end of this year.

Wellesley Grants Awarded

- Library** The Massachusetts Board of Library Commissioners awarded the Town of Wellesley a \$3.1 million general construction grant for the Wellesley Free Library on May 8. The grant contributed to the demolition of the old main building and its replacement as well as equipping and furnishing it.
- Fire Safety** The State Executive office of Public Safety issued the town of Wellesley a Student Awareness Fire Education (S.A.F.E.) program grant. The grant will be used to implement fire education programs throughout the town.
- Education** Wellesley High School received a \$5,400 grant from the Massachusetts Collaborative Education and Public Awareness Program to fund the development of three new earth science units.
- Environment** Wellesley was awarded a \$1,041 environmental grant from under the MassReLeaf Tree Planting Program. The program rewards communities who have committed to plant trees. Wellesley will use the grant for planting in Centennial Park.

**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.**



Wellesley Students Join Team Peisch

Every year the Massachusetts House of Representatives welcomes students from across the state as participants in the State House internship program. Since taking office in January, Rep. Peisch has hosted almost a dozen district students in her State House office.

“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.”

Going beyond their government classes, interns field calls from constituents, research legislation, and attend

legislative sessions and hearings. Students learn first hand about government and politics by working directly with Rep. Peisch and her staff.

Joanna Hoopes, a sophomore at BU who is currently interning in Rep. Peisch’s office commented, “The internship has given me a new perspective into the political process. I’m not fetching coffee or making copies all day long, I’m doing real work and contributing to Rep. Peisch’s efforts at the State House.”

The following Wellesley students have interned in Representative Peisch’s office throughout the course of the past year: Emma Erikson, Nate Guild, Meghan Hennessey, Johanna Hoopes, Patrick Maloney, Andrew McCauley and Jeremy Whyman .

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; or call 617-722-2080.

About Your Representative



Rep. Peisch at the World of Wellesley (WOW) and Wellesley Free Library partnership kickoff event. Rep. Peisch (center) is pictured with Senators Cynthia Creem and Cheryl Jacques, Congressman Barry Frank, Richard McGhee WOW Chairman of the Board of and Sajida Khudairi WOW President. Rep. Peisch introduced Congressman Frank at the Forum.

Alice Peisch was elected to the Massachusetts House of Representatives in November 2002 as the Representative for the 14th Norfolk District. Her district included the towns of Wellesley, Weston, and precinct ten in Natick

She previously served on the Wellesley School Committee for six years, three of which 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, the Wellesley Kiwanis Club 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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