

2023 IMPACT REPORT

At MA Appleseed, we use powerful research and strategic advocacy to fight for equitable access to justice and opportunity.

Together, we are working towards a future where all Massachusetts families and youth can *exercise their legal rights, build pathways out of poverty and crisis, and thrive.*



Dear Friends,

As I look back on the past 12 months, there's only one thing I can say:

Thank you. We believe that a better, fairer future is possible and together, we've taken important strides forward — advancing policies in the State House, deepening our community organizing efforts, and keeping the pressure on to hold powerful institutions in Massachusetts accountable. And with so much momentum to celebrate, I'm excited to share our latest impact report!

Every year, I am moved and inspired by our entire community of support, and 2023 is no different. Thank you for joining us in the fight to secure justice and opportunity for all Bay Staters!

In solidarity and gratitude,

Deborah Silva
Executive Director



**Massachusetts
Appleseed**
Center for Law & Justice

KEY 2023 MOMENTS

Re-launching the Campaign to Expand Language Access

State agencies help families weather economic emergencies, care for their children, address health problems, stay housed, and more. But while nearly 1 in 10 Massachusetts residents are best served in a language other than English, our Commonwealth's services and information are overwhelmingly English-only, **effectively denying hundreds of thousands of families the ability to access crucial resources**. With our fellow leaders of the Mass Speaks Coalition, MA Appleseed held a press conference announcing the re-launch of our campaign to expand language access at state agencies!

"We saw clients return to their abusers or feel forced to stay with their abusers because it seemed safer than being homeless, without money, and isolated without resources due to language barriers."

– Dawn Sauma, Co-Executive Director of Asian Task Force Against Domestic Violence



Transforming Community-Based Research Into Policy Change

In 2022, MA Appleseed published *"I Just Want to Learn": Girls of Color and the School-to-Prison Pipeline in Massachusetts*, a community-led report that uplifts stories from girls of color about the impact of school discipline on their lives. *But it's not enough to publish research and let it sit on the shelf.* We worked with coalition allies and partners in the State House to draft and file five policy proposals based on this report's recommendations. **All five are currently under consideration by the Massachusetts legislature!**

Executive Order Affirms the Language Access Rights of Residents

Governor Healey signed Executive Order #615, **a great first step towards language justice that uplifts goals long expressed by language access advocates!** As co-leaders of the Mass Speaks Coalition, we're working to build on the strong foundation established by Governor Healey to ensure state agencies are accountable and equipped to meet the language needs of all residents.

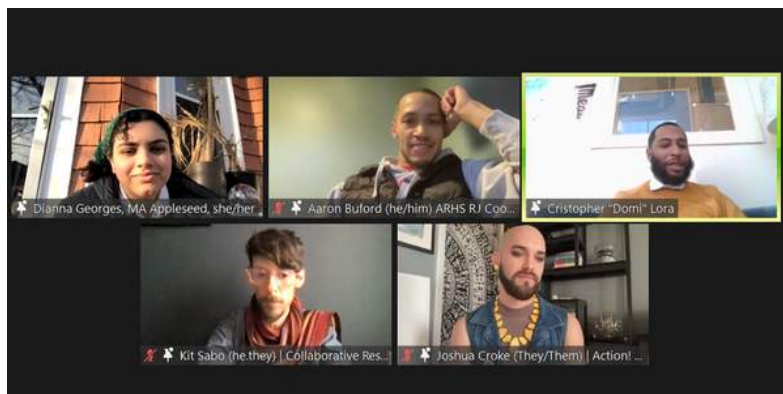
Celebrating the Best of Our Legal Community

It was a joy to gather together at Fenway Park on April 12th to celebrate and honor **Elaine Weddington Steward, Senior Vice President & Assistant General Counsel at FSG Boston** and the 2023 recipient of the Good Apple Award. A trailblazer throughout her historic career, a civic leader, a mentor to many, and a champion of diversity and inclusion, Elaine's extraordinary dedication to public service and social justice reminds us of the important role the legal community has in creating profound and positive change!

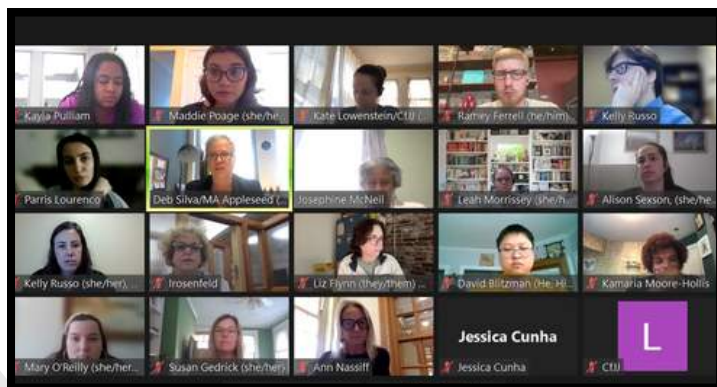


Cultivating a School-to-Possibility Pipeline

We partnered with Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, Action! by Design, and our fellow working group members to help organize The 2nd Summit on Disrupting & Eliminating the School-to-Prison Pipeline in Massachusetts, **attended by nearly 200 people!** MA Appleseed staff led a discussion about the barriers to implementing restorative justice policies and what keeps us feeling hopeful in this long-term work.

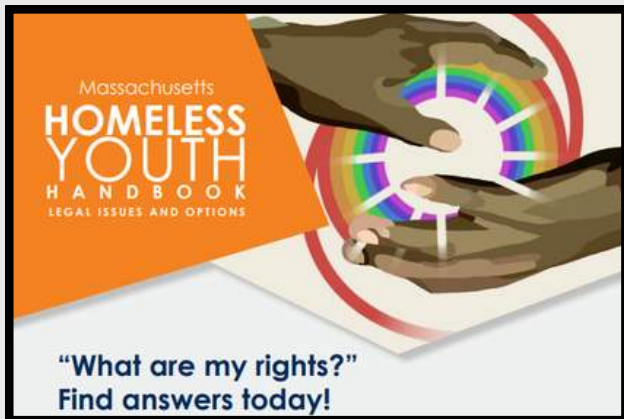


Kicking Off the Homeless Youth Legal Network



A statewide project initiated by the American Bar Association, the Massachusetts Homeless Youth Legal Network (MHYLN) was established to improve outcomes for youth experiencing homelessness by increasing legal services for this vulnerable population. **We're honored to lead this incredible group of attorneys, service providers, and advocates** and officially kicked things off in September!

BUILDING COMMUNITY



The Legal Education, Advocacy, and Protections (LEAP) Project

Legal barriers can prevent our most vulnerable young people from meeting their basic needs and trap them in cycles of harm. As part of our LEAP Project for Youth Experiencing Homelessness, MA Appleseed connects with youth-serving organizations and stakeholders and provides educational trainings on the Massachusetts Homeless Youth Handbook, our online know-your-rights resource.



MA Appleseed staff started off Pride Month at the Trans Resistance March & Festival, celebrating trans love, liberation, and joy! We spoke to participating organizations and activists about the many barriers queer youth face to achieving safety and stability, especially when it comes to housing. LGBTQ+ youth are 120% more likely to experience homelessness, and we're forging new partnerships and deepening our outreach to keep this population's unique needs at the forefront of this work.

Amplifying Community Experiences with Language Discrimination



Across initiatives, centering the voices and perspectives of those closest to the issues is essential to our work. With our fellow leaders of the Mass Speaks Coalition, we attended MIRA Coalition's 27th Annual Immigrants' Day at the State House to hear people's stories and share information about the fight to expand language access, with materials available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Simplified Chinese, Haitian Creole, and Vietnamese.

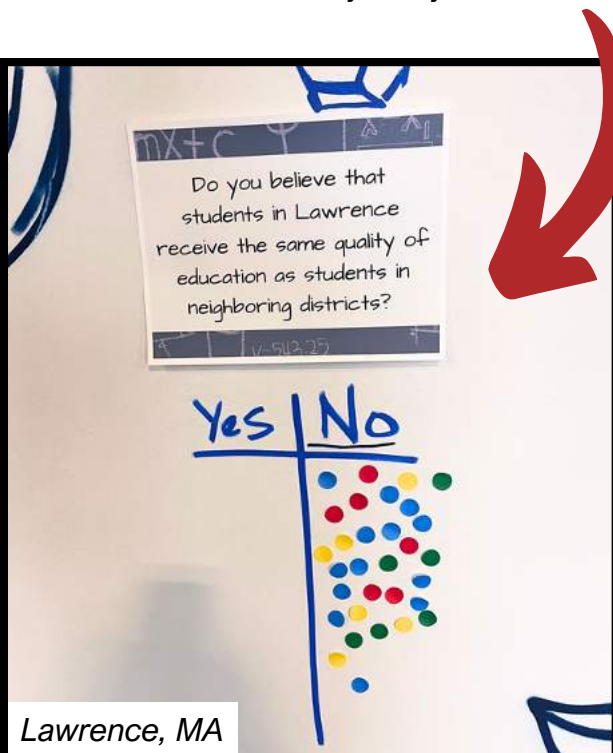
Growing Our Impact in Gateway Cities

The MA Appleseed team joined forces with Staff Attorney Tanya Mamootil from Community Legal Aid and headed out to Springfield to host a know-your-rights training on housing for members of the Springfield Youth Action Board.

A devastating poll on the walls of Elevated Thought, an art and social justice organization, which hosted the Family2Family Conference focused on educational advocacy and justice in Lawrence.



Springfield, MA



Lawrence, MA



Lowell, MA

Teaming up with Fortaleza, Inc. and the ACLU of Massachusetts, we hosted a Know Your Rights Conference for Lowell students and parents.



Hosting the Appleseed Network

We were thrilled to host the Appleseed Network's in-person annual meeting and **welcome representatives from our fellow Appleseed Centers across the United States and Mexico to Boston!**

Advocates, attorneys, organizers, and Board members joined us for several days of learning and connection. Together, we toured the Massachusetts State House, swapped insights and discussed advocacy strategies, cheered on the Red Sox at Fenway Park, and heard about the amazing work happening at some of the newest centers in Arkansas and Oklahoma.

We were especially thankful to our partners Leon Smith from Citizens for Juvenile Justice, Iman Hassan from Massachusetts Advocates for Children, and Rep. Joan Meschino, who presented on **our shared work to build supportive, equitable schools in Massachusetts where all students can thrive.**

The annual meeting is an opportunity to have fun, strengthen our bonds, and learn from one another in our pursuit of a just and fair future. The network continues to be a source of inspiration and a reminder of the power of collaboration.



RESEARCH & NARRATIVE CHANGE



Bridging the Civil Justice Gap

Every year, **more than 30 million Americans face life-changing civil legal problems without a lawyer**. The consequences are potentially serious as families can be unjustly evicted, lose custody of their children, become trapped in situations of domestic violence, or fall victim to predatory debt collection.

Court-based self-help centers are a lifeline for the most vulnerable litigants, helping people successfully navigate a complex system. MA Appleseed teamed up with the National Center for State Courts to conduct a nationwide survey of court-based self-help center programs and **published a new report that offers best practices** so centers can make targeted improvements to expand their impact even further.

Uplifting Language Access

Massachusetts' child welfare system has been under criticism from all sides, and one of the major stories that broke this year highlighted the experience of two Waltham parents. The couple endured a months-long DCF investigation even after no evidence of abuse was found, a horrific ordeal which included police arriving in the middle of the night to take their baby and terrified toddler away. Critically, the column highlights the serious harm caused by family separation. We responded with **our own letter to the editor**, calling attention to the way language barriers magnify this harm for immigrant and limited English proficient families.



"The crime in the city is out of control," said Larry Calderone, the president of the union that represents Boston Police members. "The behavior of the teenagers is out of control."

"This behavior is not kid behavior — it's criminal behavior," police Commissioner Michael Cox said during a Monday press conference.

schools? What about metal detectors?

25 NEWS
YOUR LOCAL STATION

LOCAL

Group of teens
terrorizing people in
Boston strikes again

Boston Herald

Editorial: Enough talk, put Boston Police back in schools

Rejecting Narratives that Criminalize and Condemn Students

Alongside our educational justice partners, MA Appleseed has been monitoring a surge in dangerous rhetoric and media coverage depicting young people as violent and out-of-control. The effect is widespread as communities face pressure to implement law enforcement responses to school discipline, such as police and metal detectors — fueling the school-to-prison pipeline.

Anyone who recalls the rise of mass incarceration in the 1990s knows: *We've been here before*. Decades of research have shown that increased policing and surveillance of students *doesn't* reduce school violence and *doesn't* improve school safety. This manufactured panic ignores the trauma many young people have endured and promotes harsh, punitive policies that disproportionately harm Black and brown students, as well as students with disabilities. **We must reject the failed, fear-mongering policies of the past** and demand genuine investment in restorative justice practices, mental health supports, counselors, and other proven strategies that *actually* create safer schools, effectively reduce student misconduct, and support student well-being.

Across the country, we're seeing states roll back racial justice efforts in schools, and Massachusetts is not immune. By advocating directly with policymakers and leaders in the media, debunking reductive narratives, and elevating counter messaging, MA Appleseed is working with partners to stop the criminalization of young people and defend the progress we've made.



POLICY ACCOMPLISHMENTS



**We're only part way
through the legislative session,
but there's already wins to celebrate!**

Language Access Legislation Comes One Step Closer to Becoming Law

Advocates, doctors, social workers, attorneys, and community members joined us in October to testify in support of the Language Access and Inclusion Act (S.1990/H.3084) and end language discrimination at state agencies. Just a few weeks later, **the Joint Committee on State Administration and Regulatory Oversight reported the bill out favorably!** It now moves to the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means for consideration, and we'll be working to get it across the finish line in 2024.

Commonsense Reform Supporting Vulnerable Youth Moves Forward

Legislation that would **ease the process for youth experiencing homelessness to obtain state ID passed the Senate unanimously over the summer!** This important measure would enable our most vulnerable young people to accomplish typical life tasks and access crucial services. We'll be supporting efforts led by the Mass. Coalition for the Homeless to finally get S.2251 through the House.

Powerful Testimony to Prevent Student Exclusion

We mobilized at the State House in support of two essential education bills. S.290/H.478 would **prevent the suspension or expulsion of students for dress code violations**, and S.289/H.453 would **ban the suspension or expulsion of Massachusetts' youngest children** — critical steps forward to ensure students can remain in class where they are available to learn.

New Campaign to Expand the Legal Rights of Unaccompanied Minors Experiencing Homelessness

Minors experience homelessness alone for a number of reasons, such as abuse or family conflict over sexual orientation and gender identity, but current law prevents them from consenting to the supportive services they need without a parent — even though seeking their parents' consent is often not an option. Without access to the services they need, underage youth are extremely vulnerable to victimization and violence. **We're leading the charge on new legislation (S.94/H.192) that would enable youth between the ages of 15 and 18 to provide consent for themselves, access vital supportive services, and meet their immediate survival needs.**



A Historic Win Against Childhood Hunger

As members of the Feed Kids Coalition led by Project Bread, we celebrated **the passage of School Meals for All into law which ensures every K-12 student in Massachusetts has access to free food at school.** This will transform the lives of an estimated 400,000 children around the Commonwealth, enabling students to focus on learning instead of worrying where their next meal will come from.



Photo Credit: Quentin Anderson

Coalitions, Partnerships, & People

The Mass Speaks Coalition

With Mass. Law Reform Institute, MIRA Coalition, and The Justice Center of Southeast MA, we're co-leading the Mass Speaks Coalition. Made up of dozens of legal aid, anti-poverty, and immigration rights allies, the coalition is pushing for policy that strengthens language access statewide.

70+ Endorsing Organizations



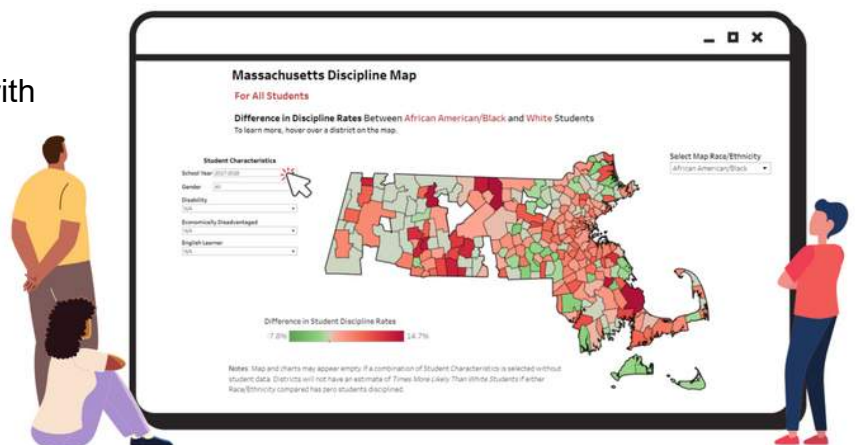
Chapter 222 School Discipline Coalition

As a longtime member of the Chapter 222 School Discipline Coalition, MA Appleseed works with partners to advocate for policy change that protects students in Massachusetts from unnecessary school pushout, with a focus on students of color and students with disabilities.



Improving Education Data Transparency with Edgeworth Economics

Our interactive data dashboard, created with pro bono partner Edgeworth Economics, breaks down school discipline data through an intersectional lens to examine how race, gender, English-language proficiency, poverty, and disability impact students' access to educational opportunity. Thanks to the amazing volunteers at Edgeworth, this tool now includes data up to the 2021-2022 school year! By enabling parents, students, and advocates to compare discipline rates across different communities, we can better identify disparities and discriminatory treatment in schools.



New members of the team!



Nadia Romanazzi

Community Engagement & Advocacy Coordinator

An experienced relationship-builder and recent graduate of Brandeis University, Nadia is leading efforts to amplify community voices, connect people with opportunities to take action, and build coalitions and partnerships in cities and towns across the Commonwealth. She brings past experience working with women and girls impacted by community harm in Boston, advocating for increased access to fertility treatment and insurance benefits, and supporting people seeking asylum in Sydney, Australia. Sharing her colleagues' love of the outdoors and cooking, Nadia is also an avid podcast listener.



Miriam Berro Krugman

Research and Policy Associate

Miriam joins us as a recent graduate of the Brandeis Heller School where she earned her Social Impact MBA and Master of Public Policy. Originally from California, she has lived in Massachusetts since attending Brandeis University to get her BA in Sociology. During her graduate degree program, she focused on racial, economic, and gender justice frameworks as they apply to pressing social policy issues. She brings experience from several research projects and internships, covering topics like reproductive justice in the US and Argentina, Black voter disenfranchisement and voting rights, and educator diversity. For fun, she enjoys reading, trying new recipes, live music, and spending time with friends outside.

Thank you to our amazing interns in 2023!

Katie Bekel



Elena Liu



Shlan Tekeste



Xander Weddall



Loris Dennis



Asia Foland



Maya Volaitis

BY THE NUMBERS

1,586

followers across social
media platforms



22

media mentions of
MA Appleseed and
our work



800+

community members and
stakeholders convened around
research, policy, and action



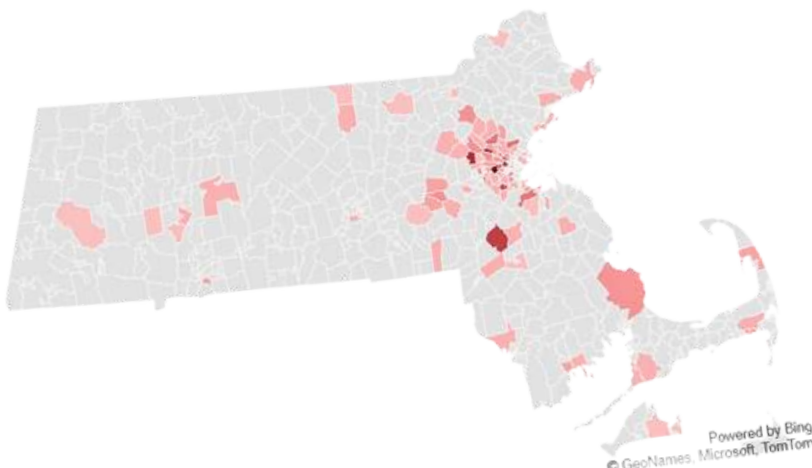
311

letters sent to legislators
urging action on
significant bills



36

community events,
trainings, and workshops



Statewide Outreach

Our advocacy campaigns,
outreach efforts, and educational
workshops engaged community
members from all corners of the
Commonwealth!

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