



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

MASSACHUSETTS BLACK AND LATINO LEGISLATIVE CAUCUS

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**The Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus Reflects on 2017
Successes**

Boston, February 2018: As the Legislature embarks on year two of the 190th legislative session, the Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus (MBLLC) proudly celebrates several victories from the prior year. These 2017 Caucus successes range from appointment, legislative and community victories.

“We had a busy year and have much to be proud of”, said MBLLC Chair, **Representative Frank Moran (D-Lawrence)**. *“Working together, our membership was able to accomplish many gains”*, he continued.

Appointment Successes

Last March, the MBLLC welcomed its new chair, **Representative Frank Moran (D-Lawrence)**, replacing **Representative Russell Holmes (D-Mattapan)**, who transitioned from Chair in early 2017. Representative Moran had been a member of the MBLLC since entering the House of Representatives in 2013 and previously served on the MBLLC Executive Board for the past two legislative terms. In addition to appointing a new Chair, the MBLLC also elected **Representative Aaron Vega** to serve as Treasurer (formerly Representative Moran) and **Representative Evandro Carvalho** as Clerk (formerly Representative Aaron Vega). **Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz** remained in her prior role of MBLLC Vice Chair.

In addition to the new executive board, the MBLLC celebrated a major victory in the naming of Representative Jeffrey Sanchez (D-Boston) as Chairman of the powerful House Committee on Ways and Means. Representative Sanchez’s appointment marks a first for a legislator of color. As HWM chair, Rep. Sanchez is now responsible for considering all matters related to state finances. Other Caucus appointments included **Senator Linda Dorcena Forry (D- Dorchester)** (now retired) as Senate Assistant Majority Whip, Representative Evandro Carvalho as Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Public Health (D-Dorchester); **Representative Frank Moran (D-Lawrence)** as Vice Chair of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, Utilities and Energy; and **Representative Aaron Vega (D-Holyoke)** as Vice Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities. In 2017, the MBLLC also welcomed its four newest members: **Representative Juana Matias (D-Lawrence)**, **Representative Chynah Tyler (D-Roxbury)**, **Representative Bud Williams (D-Springfield)**, and **Representative Andy Vargas (D-Haverhill)**. With the addition of the new members, the MBLLC membership grew from 13 to 14 members in 2017.

Legislative Successes

The MBLLC's major legislative victory came in the passage of **comprehensive criminal justice reform** bills in the House of Representatives and Senate. After years of advocacy dating back to 2012, the MBLLC was able to finally deliberate criminal justice reform on behalf of its constituency. *An Act implementing the joint recommendations of the Massachusetts criminal justice review* (H.4012) and *An act relative to criminal justice reform* (H.4043/S.2170) featured provisions from several MBLLC priority bills including *An Act Relative to the Expungement of Marijuana Arrests* (H.2785), *An Act to reduce the criminalization of poverty (Collateral Sanctions bill)* (S.777), and *An Act for justice reinvestment* (S.791). Victories in H.4012, H.4043, and S.2170 included CORI reform, expungement, pre-trial bail and fine time reform, diversion, law enforcement training on implicit biases, compassionate release, evidence-based programming, and data collection provisions. These bills are currently before Conference Committee where the Caucus continues its advocacy.

"Growing up in Boston, many of my childhood friends felt the impacts of an unjust criminal justice system," said **Representative Jeffrey Sánchez (D – Jamaica Plain)**. *"These two criminal justice bills focus on treating people as individuals, rather than the product of broad-based policies. Through a number of practical and progressive reforms, we have taken steps to improve the criminal justice system, so people can make the most of opportunities and end the cycle of incarceration,"* continued Representative Sánchez.

In addition to criminal justice reform, the MBLLC secured several policy wins in the newly-enacted **marijuana regulation legislation** entitled, *An Act to ensure safe access to marijuana* (H.3818/S.2097), now Chapter 55 of the Acts of 2017. This legislation sets regulatory framework for the new marijuana industry in Massachusetts and features Caucus amendments that promote inclusion of people of color and minority-owned businesses in cannabis-related industries and regulation. These provisions include the establishment of a study aimed to increase diversity in the new industry and the establishment of participation goals for communities of color, women, and veterans; and funding for restorative justice, jail diversion, workforce development, industry technical assistance, and other services for economically-disadvantaged persons.

The MBLLC's final legislative victory came with the passage of **bilingual education legislation** entitled, the *An Act for Language Opportunity for Our Kids includes key reforms in English language education and dual language learning* (S.262). Under the stewardship of MBLLC members Representative Jeffrey Sanchez (D-Jamaica Plain), Representative Frank Moran (D-Lawrence), and Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz (D-Jamaica Plain), the legislation improved supports to English language learners (ELLs) in public schools. Specifically, the statute provides flexibility to school districts to determine programs best suited to ELL students' needs.

"I've advocated for this bill for nearly fifteen years, and along the way a generation of kids has underperformed in school districts across the Commonwealth," said Representative Sánchez. *"With the passage of this bill, we can begin to turn things around and open doors for ELL students across Massachusetts,"* continued Representative Sánchez.

"I am thrilled to see this bill signed into law" said Senator Sonia Chang-Díaz. *"All children in our schools deserve to learn English, and now parents and educators will have the tools to serve each student's needs and make sure no child falls between the cracks. At a time when the voices of bigotry and xenophobia threaten our country's basic values, Massachusetts is taking a stand that*

we will do what's right for all children, including immigrant children, and that we'll put evidence and facts ahead of ideology” she continued.

Community Successes

Last year, one of the MBLLC’s earliest victories was the successful launch of the **Communities of Color (COC) Budget Listening Tour**. The Listening Tour served as an opportunity for residents to both learn about the FY18 State Budget process and provide input on MBLLC budget priorities and made stops in Chelsea, Randolph, and Worcester. In total, the Listening Tour welcomed over 150 attendees, in addition to several municipal and community partners.

Additionally, in an effort to increase diversity among the State House student population, the MBLLC collaborated with the Senate Office of Education and Civic Engagement to launch a pilot initiative entitled, **Civics Day on the Hill**. This initiative engages 8th-11th grade classrooms in a full-day legislative education program featuring guest speakers, classroom activities, a historic tour of the State House, and Senate or House of Representatives informal/formal observations. Most critical to the initiative is the opportunity for students to engage with members of the MBLLC and staffers of color who share their pathway to the State House. Last year, in partnership with Boston Public Schools (BPS), the MBLLC hosted five BPS classrooms.

In 2017, the MBLLC spent much of the year serving as the voice for displaced and disadvantaged. Specifically, in the weeks following the Category 5 Hurricane Maria that hit Puerto Rico, the MBLLC responded by urging the Baker Administration to support emergency assistance **relief efforts in Puerto Rico**. The Caucus advocated for the transport of personnel, supplies, and equipment to the Island. The Caucus also called on the Massachusetts congressional delegation to advocate for federal hurricane relief funding to the federal government. Additionally, the MBLLC urged the Baker Administration to support the reinstatement of **Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA)**. The Caucus was pleased to later see the Baker Administration’s statement of support to the Trump Administration on behalf of TPS.

Lastly, following the suspension of two students of color at **Mystic Valley Regional Charter School District**, the Caucus stepped in to share its concern regarding the school’s dress code policy and urged Mystic Valley to permanently modify its policy to a more culturally inclusive one. Finally, in response to the series of racially charged incidents at Fenway Park last year, the MBLLC spearheaded an ongoing dialogue on race with the **Boston Red Sox organization** which has helped with the launch of their “Take the Lead Against Racism” campaign.

Looking ahead, the MBLLC looks forward to continuing its record of successes. Specifically, the Caucus will be focused on advancing its 22 legislative priority bills, advocating for FY19 budget needs, expanding the Civics Day on the Hill initiative to additional classrooms, continuing its efforts to support displaced residents from Puerto Rico, and resuming our Communities of Color listening tours in the fall.

For more information on the Massachusetts Black and Latino Legislative Caucus, please visit:

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