



Oct. 12, 2017

Dear Honorable Members of the Massachusetts State Legislature:

We are writing to respectfully request your support of **An Act making discrimination on the basis of height and weight unlawful (Massachusetts H. 952)**, which was introduced by Massachusetts Representative and Assistant Majority Leader Byron Rushing. This legislation would make it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of height and weight in compensation, in terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, housing or public accommodations. We hope that you will support this legislation and join us in addressing this critical public health issue.

Fighting weight discrimination is important for the prevention of eating disorders and is an issue of social justice. Research has found that weight and height discrimination is widespread and contributes to pervasive gender and pay inequity and negatively impacts health irrespective of a person's size. Being the victim of persistent weight discrimination also increases the risk that a person will develop depression, anxiety, and suicidality and become dependent on harmful substances, such as tobacco and alcohol. Despite these sobering findings, research also shows that weight discrimination is on the rise and victims have no legal protection from discriminatory practices in the workplace and in housing.

Currently Massachusetts law bans discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, and genetic information or ancestry. There are currently no federal laws protecting citizens against height and weight discrimination. Because height and weight continue to be absent from discrimination law, employers and service providers are able to lawfully discriminate against a person because of their stature or size.

Legislation is not only prudent but often imperative to eliminate social injustice. To address the societal problems of discrimination based on race and sexual orientation, legislation was required to overturn institutionalized bias and discriminatory practices. If weight and height discrimination were outlawed, not only would health and psychological benefits be



experienced by those targeted for discrimination, but also your constituents would be assured equity in the workplace, a fair chance at making a living, and the possibility of financing and home ownership irrespective of their appearance.

Research surveying 1000 American adults indicated substantial support for laws to prohibit weight discrimination in the workplace (65% of men, 81% of women), especially for legal measures that would prohibit employers from refusing to hire, terminating, or denying promotion based on a person's body weight. Furthermore this support has remained consistent since 2011. We encourage legislators to pursue anti-discrimination law as an evidence-based policy for ensuring equality across all body shapes and sizes. Please join us in our campaign to protect citizens in the Commonwealth by supporting HB952.

For any questions, please contact us at [striped@hsph.harvard.edu](mailto:striped@hsph.harvard.edu) or contact Caroline Sherrard, Legislative Director for Rep. Rushing, at [Caroline.Sherrard@mahouse.gov](mailto:Caroline.Sherrard@mahouse.gov).

Thank you for your support,

S. Bryn Austin, ScD, Director, Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders

Chevese Turner, Founder, President & CEO, Binge Eating Disorder Association

Beth Mayer, LICSW, Executive Director, Multi-Service Eating Disorders Association

---

Academy for Eating Disorders

American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery

Council on Size and Weight Discrimination

Eating Disorders Coalition

Little People of America

National Eating Disorders Association

Obesity Action Coalition

Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity

Size Diversity Committee, MGH Psychiatry Center for Diversity

The Obesity Society