

OUR MISSION

The Massachusetts Public Interest Research Group (MASSPIRG) is an advocate for the public interest. When consumers are cheated or the voices of ordinary citizens are drowned out by special interest lobbyists, MASSPIRG speaks up and takes action. We uncover threats to public health and well-being and fight to end them, using the time-tested tools of investigative research, media exposés, grassroots organizing, advocacy and litigation. MASSPIRG's mission is to deliver persistent, result-oriented public interest activism that protects consumers, encourages a fair, sustainable economy, and fosters responsive, democratic government.

Each legislative session, we choose several bills that represent public interest reforms and we work with the chief sponsors and cosponsors to promote them. Below please find selected state priorities from our legislative agenda for the 2017-18 session.

Government Spending: Transparency and Accountability

Contact: Deirdre Cummings, Legislative Director, DCummings@MASSPIRG.org

Many of the largest corporations use accounting tricks to shift profits made in Massachusetts to their subsidiaries in offshore tax havens, where they pay little to no taxes. Government studies show that at least 82 of the largest 100 publicly traded U.S. companies maintain subsidiaries in known tax havens.

**Bill Titles: An Act Relative to Closing Off-shore Tax Haven Loopholes, HD 1382
An Act Closing A Certain Corporate Tax Haven Loophole, SD 1538**

Lead Bill Sponsors: Representative Josh Cutler and Senator Mark Montigny

The bill closes the offshore tax loophole by modifying the “water’s edge” tax provision which allows companies to avoid reporting income booked to a subsidiary in known tax havens. Massachusetts would recoup an estimated \$79 million a year in taxes now lost from offshore tax dodging. Montana and Oregon have already adopted this measure.

Massachusetts spends \$770 million on special business tax breaks for economic development. Most of these tax subsidies lack basic accountability measures to determine how successful the spending is.

**Bill Titles: An Act to Promote Efficiency and Transparency in Economic Development, SD359
and An Act Relative to Transparency of Economic Development, SD 350**

Lead Bill Sponsor: Senator James Eldridge

These bills promote efficiency, accountability and transparency by improving the tracking, reporting, budgeting and evaluation of state and local economic development tax breaks. Businesses are held accountable by requiring them to return public investment if they fail to deliver on their job creation or retention commitments (also known as “clawback”).

Increasing Recycling

Contact: Janet Domenitz, Executive Director, Janet.Domenitz@MASSPIRG.org

Our incinerators are spewing toxic pollution, and our landfills are overflowing and leaking. That's because we bury, burn or export more than half of our waste. But, of the waste that ends up in incinerators and landfills, most of it is recyclable, and a third of it is from excess packaging. MASSPIRG is fighting to get the Commonwealth on the path to a zero waste future and to ensure that state waste policy is dedicated to the principle of reduce, reuse, recycle.

Bill Title: An Act to Increase Container Recycling in the Commonwealth, SD 516 and HD 3596

Lead Bill Sponsors: Senator Cynthia Creem and Representative Marjorie Decker

This bill sets a deadline for increasing the recycling rates for non-deposit containers. Currently, 80% of containers with a nickel deposit are recycled, as compared to 23% of containers without a deposit. If the recycling rate of non-deposit containers does not reach 80% by the year 2022, as evaluated by the Department of Environmental Protection, deposits on other containers such as water and juices would go into effect.

Bill Title: An Act to Reduce Solid Waste, Increase Recycling and Generate Municipal Cost Savings, SD 198 and HD 1313

Lead Bill Sponsors: Senator Jason Lewis and Representative Jonathan Hecht

This bill puts Massachusetts on the path to zero waste by establishing annual waste reduction targets, improving waste ban enforcement, expanding and improving analyses and oversight of waste programs and establishes a Zero Waste Fund from a surcharge on waste disposal to improve diversion and other waste reduction efforts under the state's Solid Waste Master Plan.

Bill Title: An Act Reducing Plastic Bag Pollution, HD 2133 and SD 1104

Lead Bill Sponsors: Representative Lori Ehrlich and Senator James Eldridge

Plastic bags litter our environment, choke marine animals, and waste millions of gallons of petroleum, one of their main ingredients. This bill would make Massachusetts the second state in the nation to pass a statewide ban of single use plastic grocery bags, which clog our gutters and storm drains, litter on our sidewalks, and fly into the ocean to do damage to marine life. This legislation would encourage the use of durable, reusable grocery bags, following the lead of countries like Ireland, Germany and Italy, which have banned, taxed or otherwise curbed the use of plastic bags.

Improving Statewide Transportation

Contact: Deirdre Cummings, Legislative Director, dcummings@masspirg.org

The American Lung Association gave Massachusetts an "F" for air quality. Boston is the 7th worst in the nation for traffic congestion according to U.S. News & World Report. Our state's roads, bridges and mass transit infrastructure are all lagging. If we want a safe, modern and equitable transportation system that meets our needs, we need to take action to invest in, reform, and modernize our transportation systems.

Bill Title: Relative to Contract Assistance for Central Artery Debt of the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority, HD 3467

Lead Bill Sponsors: Representatives Sean Garballey and Christine Barber

In 1990, when work started on the Big Dig, the Commonwealth entered into an agreement to build Boston area public transportation projects to mitigate pollution caused by this highway expansion project—the biggest in history. Adequate funding has never been appropriated, and as the MBTA took on new construction, it was saddled with debt it never should have had to assume. This legislation requires the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to pay the debt service obligations of the MBTA.

Bill Title: Alternative Transportation Funding Sources Task Force and Pilot Study, SD 217 & HD 446

Lead Bill Sponsors: Senator Jason Lewis and Representative Tricia Farley-Bouvier

The legislation establishes a voluntary vehicle miles traveled (VMT) pilot program to identify alternatives and supplements to the gas tax, and directs MassDOT to apply for federal funding that is available to administer the pilot program.

Bill Title: Regional Transportation Ballot Initiatives SD 921 and HD 174

Lead Bill Sponsors: Senator Eric Lesser and Representative Christopher Walsh

This bill would enable a municipality, or a group of municipalities as a district, to raise additional local money for transportation projects or operations via ballot initiatives. A supplement to other transportation revenue, these funds would give voters a more direct role in the process and show a clearer correlation between revenue and investments. Tax surcharges could be imposed on sales, payroll, vehicle excise, or property. In states across the country, this is a common way to raise funds for transportation projects.

Lowering the Cost of Health Care

Contact: Deirdre Cummings, Legislative Director, DCummings@MASSPIRG.org

Massachusetts has the highest health care costs in the country. In 2016, the rising cost of prescription drugs are a significant part of overall health care spending. Mylan, a Rx drug manufacturer was called into congressional hearings for gouging consumers, after they jacked up the price of their life saving product, EpiPen, 400% for no legitimate reason. MASSPIRG is working to reduce health care costs and increase the quality and efficiency of care.

**Bill Titles: An Act to Promote Transparency and Cost Control of Pharmaceutical Drug Prices
SD 923 HD 992**

Lead Bill Sponsors: Senator Mark Montigny and Representative Jose Tosada

These bills will allow the Health Policy Commission, (HPC), and/or the Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA) to require pharmaceutical companies to disclose their costs, profits, and prices charged in other countries, as well as other information about expensive drugs and those that have had significant unexplained sharp increases in prices. This data will allow us to look under the hood to fully diagnose the problem of skyrocketing drug prices.

Reducing Toxic Chemicals

Contact: Janet Domenitz, Executive Director, Janet.domenitz@masspirg.org

Most chemicals are treated by our government regulators as if they are safe until proven otherwise. Approximately 80,000 chemicals are currently licensed for use, and yet the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that fewer than 10% of the industrial chemicals produced in the largest quantities (over one million pounds per year) have undergone even a limited set of tests to assess their health effects on humans. As part of the Alliance for a Healthy Tomorrow, a statewide coalition working for reforms, MASSPIRG understands that the world cannot be “risk-free.” But we also know that there are safer alternatives to many toxic technologies and products in use today.

**Bill Title: An Act Relating to Disclosure of Toxic Chemicals in Consumer Products,
SD 866 & HD 408**

Lead Bill Sponsors: Senator Ken Donnelly and Representative Jay Kaufman

This bill promotes transparency by requiring the Toxics Use Reduction Program to create a list of toxic chemicals in consumer products and requires manufacturers selling products containing identified toxic chemicals to disclose chemical usage to the state. Covered products include children’s items, cosmetics, and cleaning products.

Bill Title: An Act to Protect Massachusetts Pollinators, HD 2382

Lead Bill Sponsor: Representative Carolyn Dykema

In recognition of the significant drop in the populations of honeybees and other native pollinators in recent years and the growing scientific consensus around the harmful effects of neonicotinoid pesticides, this bill would introduce common-sense limitations on unlicensed use of neonics.

Bill Title: An Act to Protect Children and Families from Harmful Flame Retardants, SD 539 & HD 1258

Lead Bill Sponsor: Senator Cynthia Creem and Representative Marjorie Decker

Chemical fire retardants are common in consumer products including a variety of household items such as furniture, electronics, appliances and baby products. Scientists have found that exposure to toxic fire retardant chemicals at critical points in development can damage the reproductive system and cause deficits in motor skills, learning, memory and behavior. Some are carcinogenic. This bill bans the use of 11 toxic flame retardants in children's products and upholstered furniture.

Promoting Public Health & Safety

Contact: Deirdre Cummings, Legislative Director, DCummings@MASSPIRG.org

Lead is a potent neurotoxin that affects how our children develop, learn, and behave. Yet 44% of the 40,700 taps tested in Massachusetts public schools as of January 2017 tested positive for lead.

Bill Title: An Act Ensuring Safe Drinking Water at Schools and Early Childhood Programs, HD 3453 & SD 1985

Lead Bill Sponsors: Representative Lori Ehrlich and Senator Joan Lovely

This bill protects children's health by getting the lead out of the water at all schools and child care centers requiring; the removal of lead service lines, the largest single source of lead in water; the installation of NSF-certified filters on faucets or fountains; and the testing water at schools regularly. The bill requires the immediate shut-off of outlets with elevated levels of lead.

Nuclear power is unsafe, too expensive, and alternatives for safer, sustainable energy abound. The one remaining power station in Massachusetts, Pilgrim Nuclear Power station, is slated to close in 2019, yet many questions remain regarding consumer safety and accountability from the station's owners. These bills address those issues.

Bill Title: An Act Relative to Emergency Planning, HD 2823

Lead Bill Sponsor: Representative Sarah Peake

This bill requires the Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency to assess and report to the Governor and the Legislature on the present preparedness in Barnstable and Essex Counties for a radiological accident at Pilgrim Nuclear Power Station and Seabrook Nuclear Power Plant and any additional, appropriate steps required for such preparedness.

Bill Title: An Act Relative to the Prompt Decommissioning of Nuclear Power Stations HD 1345 & SD 1222

Lead Bill Sponsors: Representative Matthew Muratore and Senator Vinny deMacedo

Power station owners, not taxpayers, should pay to decommission their facilities. This bill establishes a Nuclear Power Station Post Closure Trust Fund. If a nuclear reactor is not fully decommissioned within five years of ceasing to produce electricity, owners will be assessed a \$25 million a year fee until the reactor is fully decommissioned.

Bill Title: An Act Relative to Radiological Emergency Response Funds, HD 59

Lead Bill Sponsors: Representatives Josh Cutler, Sarah Peake, and Timothy Whelan

This bill requires nuclear power stations to maintain offsite radiological emergency plans and procedures post closure until the spent fuel pool is emptied. It also prohibits monies from any Decommissioning Trust Fund to be used to satisfy this obligation.

Building a Better Democracy

Contact: Janet Domenitz, Executive Director, Janet.domenitz@masspirg.org

Our democracy relies on the public's engagement in the democratic process and on their voices being heard above those of special interests. Our state's electoral process is rapidly becoming outdated in an increasingly technological world, and our citizens deserve better.

Bill Title: An Act to Establish Election Day Registration, HD 2925 & SD 179

Lead Bill Sponsors: Representative Elizabeth Malia and Senator Cynthia Creem

This bill would increase voter participation by allowing citizens to register to vote on Election Day. This reform will increase voter participation, ensure that votes are counted, and extend this most fundamental of rights—the right to vote—to new constituencies.

Bill Title: An Act Automatically Registering Eligible Voters and Enhancing Safeguards Against Fraud, HD 2500 & SD 1791

Lead Bill Sponsors: Representative Peter Kocot and Senator Cynthia Creem

This automatic voter registration (AVR) bill shifts the burden to register to vote from the individual to the government. According to the Brennan Center for Justice AVR makes two transformative changes to voter registration. Eligible citizens who interact with government agencies are registered to vote unless they decline, and agencies transfer voter-registration information electronically to election officials. These two changes would create a seamless process that would be more convenient and less error-prone for voters, agency staff, and election officials. This reform has the potential to boost registration rates, clean up the rolls, save money, make voting more convenient, and reduce the potential for voter fraud.

Protecting Consumers

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Our economy works for everyone when consumers are equal players in the market place. But all too often consumers are sold inferior or unsafe products or services, lose millions of dollars in hidden and excessive fees, or have their private information shared or sold among corporations or stolen by crime rings here and abroad.

Bill Title: An Act Removing Fees for Security Freezes and Disclosures of Consumer Credit Reports, SD 374 & HD 1491

Lead Bill Sponsors: Senator Barbara L'Italien and Representative Jennifer Benson

New account identity theft can be prevented if a consumer's credit report is "frozen", as creditors will not open accounts without checking on consumers' credit reports. This bill prohibits consumer reporting agencies from charging fees to any consumer who elects to freeze, lift or remove a security freeze from a consumer report.

Bill Title: An Act Regulating the Use of Credit Reports by Employers SD 337 & HD 3483

Lead Bill Sponsors: Senator Michael Barrett and Representative Elizabeth Malia

Given that as many as 1 in 4 consumer credit reports contain significant errors this bill limits the use of credit reports in employment decisions.

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2017-2018 Legislative Agenda