

May 2023

Dear Honorable Members of the Massachusetts State Legislature:

We the undersigned respectfully request your support of **Massachusetts S.1108/H.1705**, sponsored by Senator Rebecca Rausch and Representative Tram Nguyen. If passed, S.2669 will protect residents from the harmful effects of discrimination based on body size by making height and weight protected identities alongside race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and others. The Americans with Disabilities Act currently protects those whose weight contributes to physical or mental disability and/or those who have an underlying medical condition, however **this is insufficient**, as it does not protect the vast majority of individuals from weight discrimination.

Weight discrimination is a pervasive issue in the United States and can be described as blatant prejudice, mistreatment, and inequality that result from negative beliefs held about people in larger bodies.<sup>1</sup> Discrimination can come from landlords, lenders, employers, and service providers;<sup>2,3</sup> interpersonal harassment from loved ones;<sup>4</sup> and structural exclusion when public spaces are built to be inaccessible to larger bodies.<sup>5</sup> Alarming, all of these types of body size discrimination are completely legal in Massachusetts, leaving our residents vulnerable to the detrimental effects of weight stigma on physical and mental health.

Extensive research documents the harms and injustices of weight discrimination:

- There are **no laws or regulations** protecting Massachusetts residents from discrimination based on body size, while other personal attributes are protected by law. The **legal loophole for size discrimination** perpetuates weight stigma and bias.
- As much as **42% of people in larger bodies have experienced weight discrimination**, where higher weight is met with more pervasive discrimination.<sup>2</sup>
- The experience of weight stigma and discrimination are profound **mental health stressors for people of all sizes**, including: depression, anxiety, negative body image, psychological distress, social isolation, and eating disorder symptoms.<sup>6-8</sup>
- Among people with binge eating disorder, internalized weight bias and discrimination were associated with worse impairment of physical and mental health in a study of treatment seeking adults.<sup>9</sup>
- The experience of weight stigma has been linked with **heart disease, high blood pressure, inflammation, binge eating, avoidance of exercise, and delay of healthcare seeking**.<sup>1,6-8,10,11</sup>
- A 2016 study revealed that **hypothetical job candidates in larger bodies are rated more negatively** and less suitable for employment, compared to smaller bodied individuals, despite comparable resumes.<sup>12</sup>
- Weight discrimination **has a greater impact on women**<sup>3</sup>, such that a higher percentage of women experience weight discrimination, compared to men.

- The physical and mental health harms of weight discrimination may compound the physical and mental harms of racism and other forms of discrimination, which highlights the **intersectionality** of this issue.<sup>13</sup>
- **Latina women** are more likely to adopt disordered eating behaviors to cope with weight stigma (compared to White women), and **Black men** are more likely to engage in over eating to cope with weight stigma (compared to White men).<sup>14</sup>
- **Women in larger bodies receive lower wages** for comparable work. A one-point higher BMI results in 1.83% lower hourly wages,<sup>15</sup> which means for an average-sized woman in the US making \$50,000 per year, she would be penalized \$3,110 per year for every 20 pounds gained. That's a **\$139,950 loss over a 45-year career for just a 20-pound difference**.
- A 2012 study found that psychology graduate programs were less likely to admit students in larger bodies compared to those in smaller bodies, despite similar applications.<sup>16</sup>
- In a study of K-12 teachers' perceptions of students' academic ability and willingness to work hard, **teachers perceived students labeled overweight or obese more poorly** compared to thinner peers despite comparable objective tests of academic performance.<sup>17</sup>

We must take action now to protect the people of Massachusetts by **making discrimination on the basis of body size illegal**. This is an urgent public health threat that shows no signs of abating. There is considerable public support for anti-discrimination laws for body size: In 2015, **78% of Americans in a representative sample reported that they supported anti-discrimination laws for body size**.<sup>18</sup>

We must act now to protect the health and wellbeing of the countless Massachusetts residents who experience body size discrimination. **We, the undersigned, urge your support of MA S.1108/H.1705 to protect the people in Massachusetts from this social injustice.**

On behalf of the organizations and individuals listed below,



S. Bryn Austin, ScD, Director of STRIPED

Organizations:

# STRIPED

A PUBLIC HEALTH  
INCUBATOR

Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders



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

# STRIPED

A PUBLIC HEALTH  
INCUBATOR

Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders



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# Project HEAL



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# BE REAL.



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Johanna S. Kandel, Founder and Executive Director, The Alliance for Eating Disorders Awareness



# STRIPED

A PUBLIC HEALTH  
INCUBATOR

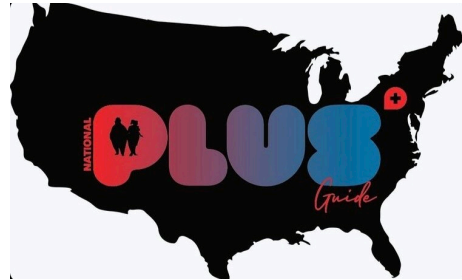
Strategic Training Initiative for the Prevention of Eating Disorders



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MORE TO  
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