MTA
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TODAY
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# New Leaders Share Their Vision for Our Union

## Meet MTA's New President and Vice President

DIGITAL EDITION | SUMMER 2026

PRIORITIES

# New Leaders for Our Union, Meet Matt Bach and Deb Gesualdo

In an interview for MTA Today, MTA President Matt Bach and Vice President Deb Gesualdo spoke about their priorities and the importance of educator autonomy.



Eric Haynes

MTA President Matt Bach and MTA Vice President Deb Gesualdo, who took office in July, spoke recently about what they heard from members while campaigning.

By: Scott McLennan and Maria Servellón

Published: August 14, 2026

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HEAR MATT AND DEB TALK ABOUT THEIR PRIORITIES FOR THE MTA ➤

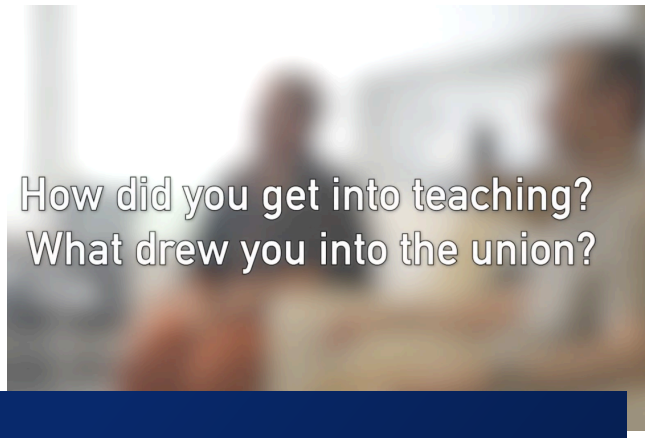
As they crossed the state in their campaign, MTA President Matt Bach and Vice President Deb Gesualdo were struck not just by the similarity of concerns expressed by members, regardless of where they worked or what they did, but also by their awareness of the source of threats to public education – and the need for the union to fight them.

“I was surprised by how conscious they were of the political and economic threats to public education,” Bach said. “They are aware of what matters and they are very protective of their students. They know there is a rising lack of respect for what they do coming from big tech and AI. They want to make sure that we are ahead of that curve.”

Gesualdo, likewise, noted that while the jobs may be very different among preK-12 and higher ed members, all kept raising similar points.

Ticking off what she heard while campaigning, Gesualdo said: “We need to push back against big tech and AI; funding; thriving wages. We need to protect students and colleagues from authoritarianism in the

workplace and in the government, and we need to fight the austerity narrative to ensure everyone has what they need to learn, grow and thrive."




NEW MTA LEADERSHIP

**How did you get into teaching?**

Hear how MTA President Matt Bach and MTA Vice President Deb Gesualdo got into teaching.

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Hear from MTA
Massachusetts Tea...

Watch on

Newly installed as the MTA's president and vice president, Bach and Gesualdo were elected by delegates at the 2026 Annual Meeting in May. Each took office in July, succeeding former President Max Page and Vice President Deb McCarthy.

While the MTA's priorities ultimately are shaped by members and through a democratic process, in an interview for MTA Today, the new statewide leaders emphasized the importance of fighting for autonomy and dignity in the workplace.

"What comes out of that autonomy is not just a love of the craft of teaching but also an enthusiasm that really rubs off on all the students," Bach said.

Bach and Gesualdo, both longtime local leaders, also shared their view that the MTA and its local associations play vital roles in protecting public education and workers' rights, as both are under attack nationally by billionaires and corporate interests bent on keeping power and wealth consolidated to the very few at the expense of the overall public good and democratic principles.

Prior to their election as MTA officers, Bach served on MTA's Executive Committee and Board of Directors and on various union committees. Gesualdo has served on the boards of directors for the NEA and MTA and was heavily involved in legislative work and political action.

Both most recently were presidents of preK-12 locals; Bach led the Andover Education Association, while Gesualdo was at the helm of the Malden Education Association.

It has been several years since both the MTA president and vice president came from the preK-12 ranks. But the new leaders have already built up familiarity with some of the bigger campaigns cutting across higher education locals. Bach pointed to the work higher ed locals across the UMass, state university and community college sectors did in shaping a campaign addressing the way the state creates financial parameters for bargaining contracts.

The establishment of free access to community college, thanks to funding from the Fair Share Amendment, has raised the issue of fair pay and staffing for faculty and staff represented by the Massachusetts Community College Council.

"We have to focus on making sure that the correct staffing matches the student enrollment and also that the staff is keeping up with other states' community colleges, in terms of compensation," Bach said.

Both Bach, a history teacher, and Gesualdo, a music educator, were presidents of local associations that voted to go on strike – Malden in 2022 and Andover in 2023. For Gesualdo, the experience showed her how deeply workers care for each other and how far they are willing to go to ensure everyone is being treated fairly and with respect.




WHERE ARE WE HEADING

**What is your assessment of the current environment?**

MTA's new leaders offer their assessment of the current public education environment.

WATCH

In Andover, Bach learned the depth of community support for public education as parents and students supported the educators in their contract fight and continued to monitor how decisions about Andover public schools were being made.

“I also learned it’s an experience of solidarity that is transformative,” Bach said. “Many of the people I worked with for 25 years were rejuvenated and reaffirmed by the experience.”

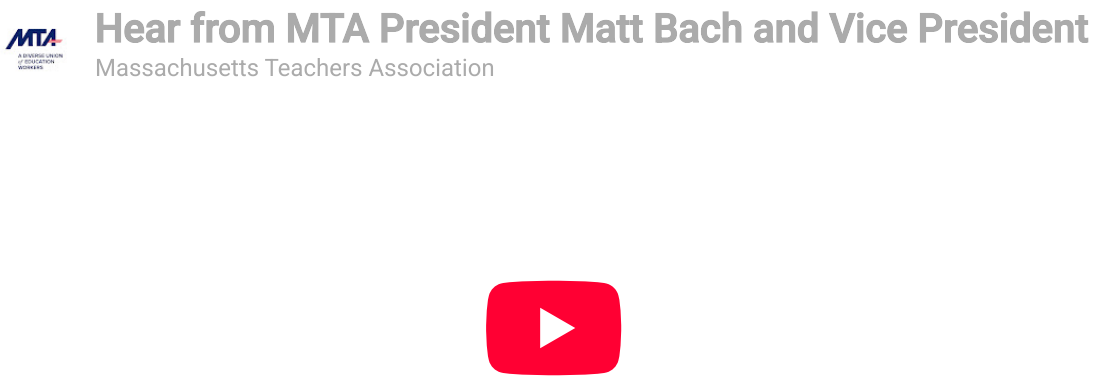
Bach and Gesualdo credited educators they had as inspirations.

Asked what advice they would give new educators today, Gesualdo said she would remind them of the incredible impact they have on students

and their communities, no matter their particular jobs as education workers. Bach said he'd tell them not to get discouraged as they navigate the profession's learning curve and to not let others turn them off from being part of their local unions.

"This is a great time to be part of something bigger than yourself by joining and participating in your union," he said.

## WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR PRIORITIES FOR THE MTA?




## More MTA Today Stories

ACTIVISM SPOTLIGHT

# ESP Day at Summer Conference, a Day for Solidarity Building

About 100 Education Support Professionals attended a day of solidarity building and collaboration.




Maria Servellon

ESPs from higher ed and preK-12 gathered at Summer Conference in 2026 for ESP Day.

By: Mary MacDonald and Maria Servellon

Published: August 14, 2026

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For the first time, Education Support Professionals had their own day of solidarity building and collaboration at the MTA Summer Conference. Held on a Sunday, because so many ESPs are forced by low wages to work additional jobs, the day encouraged members to reflect on their strengths and challenges as union members.


ESP LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

**Conferences & Leadership Trainings for MTA ESPs**

Take advantage of MTA-sponsored events, conferences and trainings offering targeted professional learning, skill-building, and opportunities to connect, grow and lead.

Learn more


About 100 ESPs were registered for the daylong programming, which included small- and large-group discussions, workshops, an affinity-wall exercise and several rounds of MTA history trivia.

# ESPs gather for a day of solidarity building

Massachusetts Teachers Association



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Held at UMass Amherst, the 2026 Summer Conference was free for ESPs to attend.

Marissa Fried, a member of the MTA ESP Committee, who participated in a panel discussion with several ESPs, said it was encouraging to see so many first-time attendees at a conference, and watch people collaborate across their classifications. ESPs are found throughout preK-12, as well as higher education, and make up about 20 percent of the MTA membership.

Despite their impact on education, ESPs often feel undervalued in their buildings, said Fried, a member of the Cambridge Education Association.

ESP Day at Summer Conference offered them respect by focusing on their needs and perspectives. “I hope other ESPs really gained a sense of solidarity, what brings us joy, what we’re working on,” Fried said. And hopefully, they know that if something happens in the future, “on the drop of a dime, other ESPs will be there to support them,” she said.

Diane Baez, a 10-year-plus veteran of Summer Conferences, said she got a lot out of the day. “It was nice to have something that was for us; making us feel recognized. We’re just as important as everyone else.”



Julia Brown, the chair of the contract action team for Unit B of the Concord Teachers Association, attended ESP Day.
Credit: Mary MacDonald

Baez, a member of the Holyoke Paraprofessionals Association, was among those jotting down thoughts on small notes and pressing them to poster boards, which posed questions, such as: “How would it change your life if you could make a living or thriving wage?”

Baez, who lives with several family members, said the stress of making a salary that doesn’t keep up with inflation is always present. “The only reason I stay is because I love my job. I love the kids.”

Julia Brown, the chair of the contract action team for Unit B of the Concord Teachers Association, was a first-time attendee. Brown enjoyed the ESP focus, but she also took part in a health and safety organizing session that day at Summer Conference because her unit is working on ways to improve personal safety.

“I’ve been looking for an outlet my whole life for how to help workers,” Brown said. “Unions, especially a strong one like the MTA, are a good path to uplift the working class.”

If you are an ESP and missed Summer Conference, additional regional programming is available this school year.

**The ESP Bill of Rights and Living Wage Organizing Lab**, a series of weekend-long training sessions focused on organizing skills and campaign planning strategies, begins in mid-October**.** **Registration is required before Sept. 18**.

**The Leadership Weekends program** is a four-weekend course focused on leadership and communication strategies, strengthening interpersonal skills and supporting emerging leaders. **The first sessions begin in mid-November. The application deadline is Sept. 30, 2026.**

## GET MORE FROM

MTA President Matt Bach joins a panel discussion on artificial intelligence with Shaleen Title, an adjunct law professor of AI, and Justin Reich, an MIT/Harvard

AWARDS

# UMass Student, Lawrence Education Advocate Receive MTA Human and Civil Rights Awards

Bendeshe Bonner received the Kathleen Roberts Creative Leadership Award and Marianela Rivera accepted the Louise Gaskins Lifetime Civil Rights Award in a July 27 ceremony at UMass Amherst.



Scott McLennan

> Award winners Marianela Rivera and Bendeshe Bonner flank former U.S. Rep. Jamaal Bowman. They are joined by family and MTA members and leaders at the Human and Civil Rights Awards.

By: Scott McLennan

Published: August 13, 2026

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A Kingston teen who founded an organization that funds education and community projects in Ethiopia and a greater Lawrence educator and community organizer who is active in the fight for equitable access to public education are the 2026 recipients of the Human and Civil Rights Awards, given annually by the Massachusetts Teachers Association.

Bendeshe Bonner received the Kathleen Roberts Creative Leadership Award and Marianela Rivera accepted the Louise Gaskins Lifetime Civil Rights Award in a July 27 ceremony at UMass Amherst. Former U.S. Representative Jamaal Bowman, a longtime public education advocate, was the keynote speaker at the event, organized by MTA members belonging to the union's Human Relations Committee.

The awards are named after two longtime MTA leaders who championed the fair and just treatment of all, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status.

Bonner earned the creative leadership award for his work with Bendeshe's Village, a foundation he and friends launched in 2021 when he was just 12 years old. Bonner was born in the Ethiopian village of Wondo Genet. Before turning 1, he was adopted by a Massachusetts family. Bonner visited his home village in 2021 and saw the tremendous needs of its children. That inspired him to create a foundation that would

support education and civics projects in Wondo Genet. So far, the village has been able to build a school, plant gardens and provide school supplies to children.



Mary Pat Dodge, a Kingston Teachers Association member, and Erica Prien, who were Bonner's teachers in the fourth grade, nominated him for the award. Bonner now attends UMass Amherst.

"Bendeshe and the foundation have volunteered their time, organized their community to make a place thousands of miles away a truly better place, through advocacy and providing the children of Wando Genet an education," Dodge wrote in her nomination letter. "Bendeshe has truly touched the lives of his friends and his Ethiopian village in so many ways and would be an excellent candidate for this award."

Bonner dedicated his award to his mother, saying her decision to adopt him changed his life.

“The older I get, the more I realize that’s all education is. It’s someone deciding you’re worth the investment,” Bonner said. “I want to pass along the opportunities I have received. That is creative leadership; when a door opens for you, you spend your life trying to build a few more doors for others.”

Rivera received the Louise Gaskins Lifetime Civil Rights Award for her longtime activism as a community organizer, educator and member of the Lawrence School Committee.




Dr. Marianela Rivera organizes families in her community to support public education, and with her work as an academic coach at UMass Lowell, she promotes education justice and culturally responsive teaching.

Isa Perez and Jen Meagher, both Andover educators, nominated Rivera for the award. They cited her work to expose the failings of the state takeover of public schools in Lawrence and to organize community

members during the Fund Our Future campaign that led to passage of the Student Opportunity Act — the first significant increase in state funding for education in decades.

Rivera's professional work at UMass Lowell to mentor students and support Education Support Professionals working toward a degree that would allow them to become licensed teachers also was noted in her nomination. Rivera, who earned a doctor of physical therapy degree, also co-founded HomePlace Collective, a nonprofit focused on training educators to design and adapt culturally responsive curriculum.

"All of the work I have done and will do is rooted in community," Rivera said.

The MTA will make donations to the award winners' organizations.

MTA President Matt Bach applauded Bonner and Rivera as inspirations at a time when the rights of so many are coming under attack.

"The work of our union is the work of human and civil rights, whether it's winning thriving wages for ESPs and adjunct faculty, demanding recognition of our right to withhold our labor, preserving academic freedom and free speech, and ensuring all students feel safe and welcome in our classrooms — union work is human rights work," Bach said.

MTA Vice President Deb Gesualdo spoke about how the struggles affecting MTA members and their communities are all connected.

"The fight for fully funded public education is connected to the fight for housing justice. The fight for living wages is connected to the fight for immigrant justice. The fight against privatization and austerity is

connected to the fight against racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia," she said.

Bowman celebrated the MTA's work to connect labor rights to human rights.

"Educators are ready to change the world. But again and again, they run up against systems designed to push them down and take away their power and voice," he said.

But even as the struggles for justice seem overwhelming at times, Bowman offered encouragement, hope, and this advice: "These fights that we take on are tough fights and we need to be there for each other."

To learn more about the Human and Civil Rights Awards, please visit **massteacher.org/hcr**.

## GET MORE FROM

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EDUCATION JUSTICE

# Educators Electrifying Everything Ready to Help Members

Members of the MTA's Climate Action Task Force have created Educators Electrifying Everything, whose coaches can share ideas about lowering energy bills and explain decarbonization options.



Coaches with Educators Electrifying Everything met with staff at East Somerville Elementary School in April 2026.

By: Susan Hoague

Published: August 14, 2026

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Educators, like others in busy careers, seem to have a never-ending list of things to do. Some things get done right away, some linger for a while before moving along, and others remain in the “I’ll get to it later” pile. That pile usually contains tasks that are not especially exciting, require focused attention and thought, and take time to complete.

Reducing our use of fossil fuels and electrifying our homes typically falls in that last category.

Fortunately, members of the MTA’s Climate Action Task Force have experienced firsthand that same "I’ll get to it later" thinking, but they also understand the urgency of climate action and the need to act now.

Faced with the reality of no end in sight for a cooler planet, the task force has created Educators Electrifying Everything.

If requested, EEE will come to your school for group meetings with educators to share ideas for lowering energy bills, explain discounts and incentives for decarbonization projects, introduce new technology, and show how grid modernization can save money. But that’s just the beginning.

EEE also will provide energy coaches to meet one-on-one with each educator at their convenience, in person, online, or over the phone. Each client and home is unique and so are the options. Coaches will answer your questions, discuss and help solve problems, offer options and, importantly, support planning ahead, because big change starts one step at a time. Let's get it done!

To learn more or have your school participate in the Educators Electrify Everything program, please email EEE Program Director Tom Ehbrecht at **tom.coach.eee@gmail.com**.

Susan Hoague, a retired member of the MTA, is a former school psychologist and a member of the MTA Climate Action Task Force.

For more information about the Climate Action Task Force, visit **massteacher.org/climate-action-task-force**.

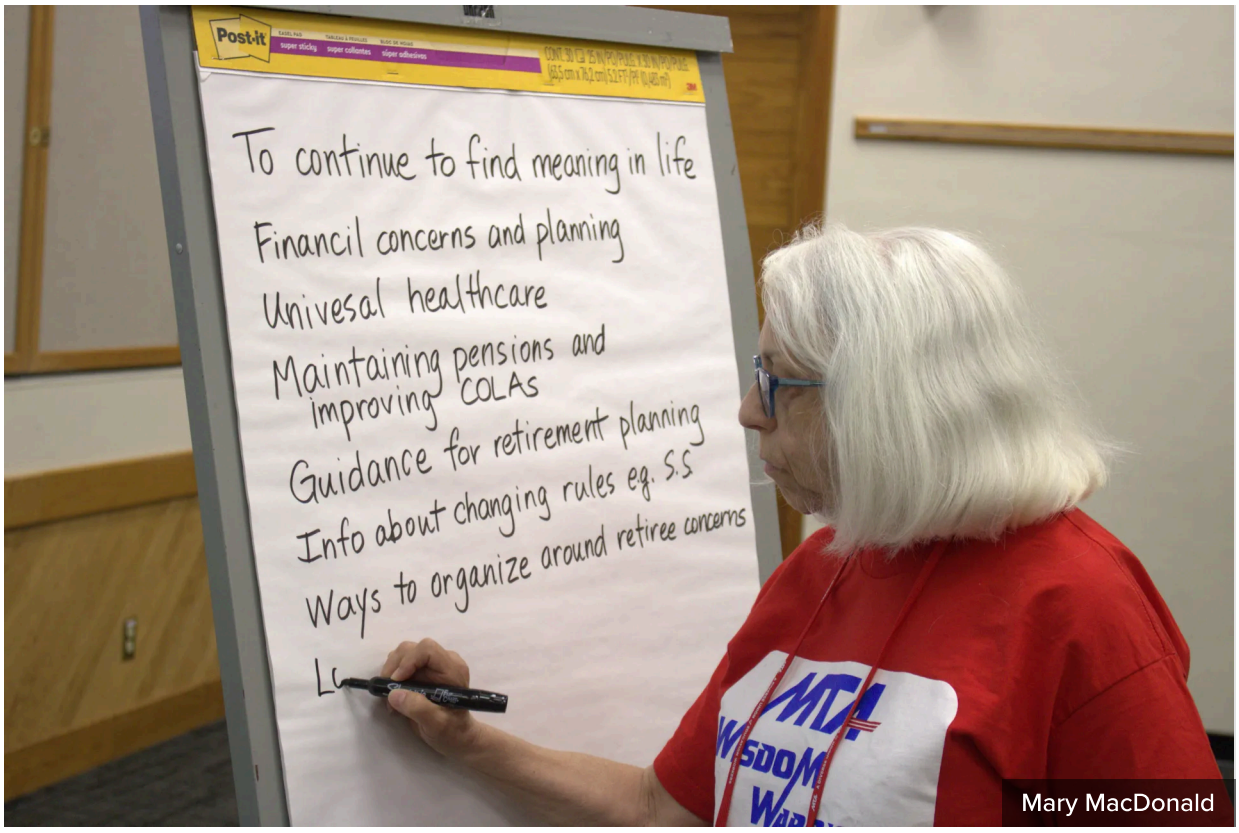
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RETIRED

# Retiring This Year? Join MTA Retired at No Cost

The free membership year is available for active members who retire through June 30, 2027.



Mary MacDonald

Amy Wolpin, a member of the MTA Retired Members Committee, took notes during an activity at Retiree Day at Summer Conference.

By: Mary MacDonald,

Published: August 13, 2026

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As an incentive for newly retiring members to remain active in their union, the first year of membership dues in MTA Retired will be free, under the operating budget approved in May.

Both MTA and NEA annual dues will be covered for a first year automatically, as long as members let their local president know when they retire. The free membership year is available for active members who retire through June 30, 2027.

The initiative is part of the $58.9 million operating budget approved by Annual Meeting delegates. It was a recommendation from the Retired Members Committee, which is working to increase retired membership in the coming years and keep recently retired members active in their union and profession.

Oftentimes, MTA members don't realize they need to rejoin the union as Retired members when they retire. Their MTA and NEA active dues and membership end once they retire.

Retired members receive outstanding publications from the NEA and MTA, they are eligible for members-only, money-saving programs through MTA Benefits, they are eligible to participate in MTA governance, and they may be eligible to receive legal services for issues related to health insurance and pension.

To learn more about retired programming and initiatives, visit massteacher.org/retired.

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NEWS STORIES

# An Update on Ballot Questions

In May, MTA delegates to Annual Meeting agreed to authorize the use of MTA resources for several ballot questions. What's the status of these and other questions?

By: Mary MacDonald

Published: August 14, 2026

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Delegates at the MTA Annual Meeting threw their support behind several initiatives that had been expected to reach the ballot in November. That included financial support, with delegates voting to authorize the use of MTA resources to advance two ballot questions and oppose two others.

Specifically, these were: $1 million to support a rent control ballot initiative; $2 million to fight passage of two tax-cut ballot initiatives; and $500,000 to retain gun-control protections.

Since that time, two of these proposals have been rejected by court rulings for inclusion on the Nov. 3 statewide ballot – the rent control initiative and one of the two tax-cut initiatives. The MTA remains opposed to the remaining tax-cut initiative – Question 5 – which would restrict state revenue. A third proposal, seeking to overturn gun protections, made it to the ballot as Question 9.

**Rent Control**

The state Supreme Judicial Court on June 24 rejected a ballot initiative that would have limited rent increases in most cases to no more than the inflation rate or 5 percent a year, whichever is lower. In its decision, the court cited as unconstitutional in a ballot question a proposed exemption for faith-owned properties. The ballot question was sought by the Keep Massachusetts Home campaign, a coalition of labor, housing, faith and community organizations working to pass rent stabilization measures and address the state's housing affordability crisis.

Annual Meeting delegates voted to provide funding and support for the campaign as housing affordability remains one of the top economic issues facing educators and working families across Massachusetts.

**Tax Cut Initiatives**

MTA delegates agreed to provide $2 million to oppose two tax-cut ballot initiatives, including one that would have removed $4.8 billion from the annual state budget, while benefiting wealthy individuals. That proposal, put forward by the Massachusetts High Technology Council, was struck down in mid-June by the state Supreme Judicial Court, which found its summary "materially misstates" the scope of the tax cuts. The decision followed a legal challenge funded by the MTA and others, which argued

successfully that the summary failed to disclose that the question would reduce capital gains taxes.

However, another tax-limiting proposal advanced by the same business council has made it to the ballot as Question 5. This question would make the state's so-called 62F revenue cap more draconian and lead to painful cuts to public programs, including education, healthcare and local aid. More information on its impact is available at ProtectMassachusettsFuture.com. The MTA is among a coalition opposing this ballot question.

**Gun Control**

In 2024, Massachusetts passed stronger gun safety measures, including reducing untraceable ghost guns. This year, a proposal that would rescind these commonsense protections has been approved for the ballot as Question 9. In May, the MTA Annual Meeting delegates voted to designate $500,000 to assist in measures to control the proliferation of guns. This would require voting YES on Question 9 to stop the repeal effort. More information about the campaign – Yes on 9 – is at www.yesforasafema.com/. The MTA has consistently taken stances to support the safety of educators and students through gun controls. In 2022, a large contingent of educators participated in the March For Our Lives rally in Boston.

**Expanding the Public Records Law & Legislative Stipends**

In addition to the initiatives MTA committed resources to support, the MTA endorsed an additional two questions without committing resources to them. One is Question 1, which would expand the public records law to cover the office of the governor and the Legislature. Both are currently exempt from the public records law.

The second is a proposal that would have changed how legislators receive stipends for specific assignments, but the state Attorney General's Office rejected it as unconstitutional in response to a Supreme Judicial Court ruling. The issue will not appear on the ballot.

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