

Creation of a commission on the history of state institutions for people with developmental, intellectual, and mental health disabilities in the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts has been a global leader in providing medical and educational opportunities for people with mental, developmental, and intellectual disabilities. But our successes conceal a more disturbing history. The small handful of state-run institutions that existed in the mid-1800s later became a vast network of asylums, state schools, and farm colonies.

By the 1970s, tens of thousands of disabled residents of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts were housed in at least 27 large institutions.



Pictured: Worcester State Hospital



Child inmates building an institution road.
A grave marker at a former institution.

Nearly all large state institutions are now closed, but they have left an unsettled legacy. **No state-led effort has ever been made to tell the story of these places.** Documents are scattered between state agencies. Former institutional residents have rarely been asked to share their stories. Descendants face a maze of agencies if they hope to learn what happened to their loved ones. Cemeteries with unmarked graves dot the landscape from Boston to Belchertown.

The devastation of the Covid-19 pandemic has shown us how institutions impact the lives of people with disabilities. The same is true of the former state institutions.

SD 2424 and HD3868 will take the first steps toward acknowledging the legacy of institutions in Massachusetts.

They will establish a disability-majority state commission of 18 people, with representation by state agencies and disability advocacy groups.

The commission will investigate and report on

- The status of former institutional residents living independently today
- The location of all documents from the former state institutions
- The availability of such records to former residents, descendants, and the general public
- The location of burials for all residents who died in the care of the Commonwealth
- The potential for unmarked graves at former state institutions

This Legislation is Supported by



DISABILITY LAW CENTER, INC.



For More Information, Contact Bill Sponsors Senator Mike Barrett & Representative Sean Garballey
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**People with disabilities ask you to take action today to support these bills.
Sign on as a co-sponsor and advocate strongly for their passage. #ourhistory**