

*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**



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**