

# COMMENTARY

SUNSHINE WEEK

## Importance of recognizing, fighting against fake



Peter Adams

We've become so accustomed to frequently and easily accessing information on demand - from more sources and in more forms than at any other time in history - that it's easy to forget how quickly our information landscape has evolved and what that evolution means for us as individuals, as news consumers and as participants in a democracy.

It can also be easy to forget how much the information we choose to read, watch and hear really matters. It's the basis for many of the decisions we make - for ourselves, for our families and for our civic society. It helps us determine the kind of lives we lead, the social and political structures we want to change or preserve, and the kind of world we inhabit. It is the very foundation of both personal empowerment and a robust democracy.

To be meaningfully engaged with the world around us, we must be informed. But what does that mean in an age of information

overload in which so much "content" isn't what it appears to be? How, in other words, can we know what to believe?

Here's a start:

- **Learn from encounters with misinformation.** Most people know they can't trust a lot of what they see online, but misinformation still thrives, especially on social media platforms. Why? Because it bypasses our rational minds by exploiting our deepest instincts and ideals. But we can learn to recognize some of the patterns of these exploits - stories that are too perfect; images - and now even video - that lend themselves to manipulation; headlines that evoke anger or fear; and claims about conspiracies or cover-ups that defy logic.

- **Tip:** Try adding a variety of fact-checking organizations to your social media feeds to help you keep up with the latest viral falsehoods and learn to recognize some of their patterns.

- **Maintain a skeptical outlook but avoid cynicism.** In working to avoid misinformation, we can over-compensate, adopting the outlook that nothing is credible because no source of information is perfect; or overlooking the role our own biases play in our perceptions of bias. Balancing open-mindedness with skepticism is essential to being informed and engaged.

Tip: When evaluating information, remember that trustworthy sources of information don't ask you to trust them, they use their work to show you why you should.

- **Sharpen our understanding of journalistic standards.** For decades, news organizations have done a poor job of explaining to the public exactly how they do their work. But recently, more of them have begun to explain the story behind their stories - how they verify what they report, and the challenges they encounter along the way - to help build trust with their audiences. Most national news organizations also devote regular coverage to media issues. Following that coverage can help refine our ability to recognize quality journalism. And when news organizations make mistakes, pay attention to how they react. Reputable news organizations will not only correct the error but also explain how it happened.

- **Tip:** Follow the work of media experts and journalism advocacy organizations, such as [www.poynter.org](http://www.poynter.org).

- **Engage with journalists, ask questions and share your needs.** One of the most powerful aspects of today's information ecosystem is the access it gives you to public figures, including journalists. Use that access to ask

### More Information

**Washington Post 'How to be a journalist' series:** [www.wapo.st/2G683pv](http://www.wapo.st/2G683pv)  
**Columbia Journalism Review journalism experts:** [bit.ly/2FF6WJg](http://bit.ly/2FF6WJg)  
**Using Google Reverse Image Search:** [bit.ly/2Fnjyb1](http://bit.ly/2Fnjyb1)  
**How to find fake Twitter accounts:** [bit.ly/2wNHsvJ](http://bit.ly/2wNHsvJ)  
**Neiman Lab report on visuals and memes:** [bit.ly/2zPkkQs](http://bit.ly/2zPkkQs)  
**The Verge story on creating fake audio and video:** [bit.ly/2Dbdlrw](http://bit.ly/2Dbdlrw)

questions about news coverage that has left you uncertain or uneasy; to share your ideas about better and more reporting on a topic; and to compliment work you find valuable.

Tip: Make a point of asking a reporter a follow-up question about a local news report.

- **Use fact-checking to clean up the information landscape.** Develop and apply fact-checking and digital forensics skills to call out misinformation - not only when you disagree with the information, but especially when it confirms your own biases. A simple internet search can disprove many falsehoods you encounter, but knowing how to do a reverse image search to spot phony photos, and how to recognize social media bots and fake (or "sockpuppet") accounts, can also help debunk bogus claims before they start to trend.

- **Tip:** Visual misinformation might be more common than

you think, and the tools to create it are getting better.

These skills and mindsets can go a long way toward safeguarding your own news consumption, and ensuring a more credible, engaged and accurate information landscape for everyone.

*Peter Adams, who is based in Chicago, is a senior vice president at The News Literacy Project in Washington, D.C., a nonpartisan, education nonprofit helping people sort fact from fiction. He's also the author of NLP's newsletter, The Sift, a weekly roundup of timely examples for discussion by students and concerned citizens. You can subscribe for free, including access to archives, at [www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/thesift](http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/thesift). (A version of this article originally was published in a GateHouse sister publication, The State Journal-Register in Springfield, Illinois.)*

## New & traditional ways to approach your elected officials



Tim Murray

"All politics is local." This famous quote by Thomas P. "Tip" O'Neill, the former Speaker of the United States House of Representatives and proud son of Massachusetts, is used so often that it often seems cliché. But its frequent usage underscores the profound truth that drives decisions made by those in government, whether it be at city or town hall, the statehouse or the United States Capitol, and even the White House. In this regard it is critical that citizens feel empowered, and in fact encouraged, to communicate with their elected and appointed officials utilizing both traditional and new, innovative means of communication.

The advent of social media has impacted every sector of society with both positive and negative consequences. The internet and the explosive expansion of the use of handheld devices and tablets have facilitated new means of communication and commerce. People now email and text much more frequently, reducing the utilization of landline telephones at home or work. This technology has lowered the cost of entry into sectors of the economy and created new, disruptive businesses such as Lyft, Uber, Airbnb and Venmo, a mobile payment service. Unfortunately, we have also seen some of these methods of communication and expression, such as Facebook and Twitter, used for nefarious purposes. Russian operatives, with support from the highest levels of the Russian government, have sought to undermine democratic governance in the 2016 presidential election as well as in multiple European elections.

While it is my hope that the U.S. government will deal forcefully with these menacing Russian interventions, I am still a believer that these new avenues of communications can have a positive effect in encouraging citizen engagement in our participatory democracy. I believe this based on examples during my time as a former elected official at both the municipal and state levels.

Issues impacting people and families in the neighborhoods where they live and work - the politics that is local - should set the agenda for those in government. It is critical that people living and working in neighborhoods communicate to government officials about the issues they see impacting them and their community - in effect serving as eyes and ears on behalf of good government.

For example, even the hardest-working district city councilor cannot be aware of every street in her district that needs a pothole filled after a tough winter like the

one we're experiencing. This is where a picture from a cellphone taken by a neighborhood resident and texted with the street name and address to the district councilor can assist local government in filling the pothole in a timely and efficient manner.

I have seen how neighborhood residents have used Facebook to create or support neighborhood crime watches and improvement efforts. This constructive feedback and conversation often helps guide local, state and federal elected officials on where and how to use resources. Resources that can help solve a problem or create a new amenity or opportunity that strengthens a neighborhood.

A tweet, email or Facebook post can now communicate this information in real time. However, traditional outreach to government leaders via a letter, or phone call can continue to make a real difference as well. There is no better example of this than the 10-year effort to eradicate the presence of the Asian long-horned beetle.

Leaders in government were alerted to this by a phone call from a concerned resident in Worcester's Greendale neighborhood who noticed that a beetle in her backyard tree looked like the Asian long-horned beetle. This phone call prompted a massive response by local and state governments and from Washington as well. Hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent to eradicate the beetle and reforest the neighborhoods impacted through active involvement of residents, as well as local, state and federal officials.

To bring positive change to your neighborhood, make your voice heard. Please know that your input on issues that some might dismiss are usually listened to and can help make a difference. It could be resurfacing a street currently full of potholes. It could help guide the state on where to build a new school or playground. It could lead to a police foot beat or the establishment of a rail trail. Change can sometimes be slow, but constructive and sustained communication with our elected and appointed officials through both new and traditional means of communication has and will continue to make a difference at the local level. In my experience I've found that most people are respectful and professional in these interactions with officials, even if in disagreement. It goes a long way not just in expeditiously resolving matters at hand, but in establishing relationships for the future.

Responsible elected officials at the local, state and federal levels welcome and want that type of engagement and communication. It's local and, yes, it's to some extent political. But it works, and helps make our cities and towns work better.

*Timothy P. Murray, of Worcester, a former lieutenant governor of Massachusetts and prior to that the mayor of Worcester, is president and CEO of the Worcester Regional Chamber of Commerce.*

## How public records requests helped teens, but still so much to do



Justin Silverman

When Boston Latin Academy students Mabel Gondres and Shayne Clinton began researching ways to fund a new community rec center in Hyde Park, they turned to the state's public records law. With the help of the Hyde Square Task Force, these teenage sleuths used the law to request information about a long-forgotten 1993 mandate that required the owners of TD Garden to hold fundraisers every year to benefit the city's recreation department.

"We sent letters to the TD Garden and the state. For weeks they just ignored us," Gondres explained. But then she and other volunteers began sending public records requests. "That is how we found out that TD Garden had not held one fundraiser and they had not raised one penny for 24 years," she said.

The amount owed to the city? \$14 million. Gondres and Clinton shared their story last month during the New England First Amendment Coalition's annual awards luncheon in Boston. Along with fellow honorees Jane Mayer of The New Yorker and Todd Wallack of The Boston Globe, these two students provided a prelude to Sunshine Week and a reminder of why government transparency is so valuable to our communities.

Sunshine Week, a national campaign every March to celebrate the public's right to know, is an opportunity to assess local freedom of information laws, such as the Massachusetts public records statute. These laws intend to shine a light, or "sunshine," on the work of government and to help citizens better understand what their elected officials are doing on their behalf.

In Massachusetts, the work of Gondres and Clinton stands out as a public records success story.

But unfortunately such stories are rare. Despite recent changes to the public records law, there is still too much secrecy in the commonwealth.

After more than four decades without any major changes to the public records statute, the Massachusetts Legislature in 2016 reformed the law. The changes are both good (an attorney fee provision) and bad (longer response times). The most egregious part of the new law, however, is what didn't change. Massachusetts continues to be the only state in the country where the Legislature, judiciary and governor's office all claim to be exempt from the public records law. In other words, it took the state Legislature 43 years to pass meaningful public records reform and despite these changes most records are still kept secret.

This secrecy is a dangerous proposition. In 2014, for example, reporters in Virginia used the state's public records law to uncover more than \$177,000 in gifts and loans given to their

then-governor in exchange for promoting a dietary supplement company. The League of Women Voters in 2015 used Florida's public records law to obtain emails of state legislators showing that these representatives unconstitutionally remapped voting districts to benefit their own political party. If either of these scenarios were to play out in Massachusetts, our public records law would be of no help.

Major legislative reforms take many years to occur and there seems to be little political appetite for another one anytime soon. So what can be done?

First, we need to take advantage of the new attorney fee provision. This provision encourages attorneys to file lawsuits - litigation that would not otherwise occur - in hope of recouping legal fees and to push back against agencies that have up until now withheld records without consequence. As Wallack, of The Boston Globe, said during the luncheon, "Filing a lawsuit remains one of the best ways to hold agencies accountable and change the culture, change decades of tradition where agencies didn't have to release records because nothing bad would happen." The New England First Amendment Coalition now has a referral program that can connect record requesters with good cases to attorneys willing to represent them pro bono.

Second, we need to let our representatives know that the public records law still needs fixing. Along with the changes in 2016, the state created a commission to study how the statute could apply to the Legislature, judiciary and governor. The commission is led by state Rep. Jennifer Benson, D-Lunenburg, and Sen. Walter Timilty, D-Milton. We need to share our stories with them and demand the law be expanded. It doesn't matter what additional changes we make to our current law - if it continues to exclude the most influential offices of state government, transparency will remain elusive.

Lastly, we need to remember that the public records law is not the exclusive purview of journalists and attorneys. It is a nonpartisan tool that can be used by all of us to make sure our tax dollars are well spent and our interests represented. It is a law that can be used by all citizens, even high school students like Gondres and Clinton.

The two students are continuing their campaign and are now submitting additional public record requests to learn more about the state's relationship with TD Garden. Owners of the stadium paid only \$1.65 million of the money the students say is owed. Still, using the public records law is an empowering experience they said. Clinton captured the spirit of Sunshine Week best:

"If we do our research and keep to the facts," he said, "we can expose even some of the most powerful people in the country."

*Justin Silverman of Wayland, an attorney focusing on media law, is executive director of the New England First Amendment Coalition, which is based in Westboro and is a nonprofit organization that advocates for the First Amendment, including the public's right to know about its government.*

# OPINION

## OUR VIEW

# Sunshine Week: It's about your right to know

American democracy, at its core, has a purity of purpose endowed by its originators. Going back to our Declaration of Independence, in which the founders threw over the divine right of kings, there is embedded in this national birth certificate the core of our revolutionary concept that governments derived “their just powers from the consent of the governed.” It’s what made us, as Abraham Lincoln would so eloquently sum up, a “government of the people, by the people, for the people.”

That means you. Our democracy exists because of you, through you and for you. Perhaps not perfect but from the beginning of our constitutional system of governance it carried the aspirational message of seeking a more perfect union, one that derives its “just powers” from you. But our “consent” is only as informed to the degree that the functions of our democracy are open, as in accessible and transparent, to all of us.

That, in a nutshell, is at the heart of Sunshine Week, which begins with

*This isn't only about the media's ability to keep you informed, but how open the workings of government are for you directly as individuals. ... In the absence of government openness and your ability to participate in and benefit from knowledgeable debate, trust in government is a risky business, especially in an era in which accusations of "fake news" - both real and imagined - pervade our national discussion.*

today’s start of daylight saving time and its extra hour of sunlight, when we assess the degree of openness of our government’s policymaking and operations through what are known as its “sunshine laws.” It’s important to note, however, that this isn’t only about the media’s ability to keep you informed but also how open the workings of government are for you directly as individuals.

Our rights of access as “the press,” while honed through

centuries of experience, are no greater than your rights to the same information. And while our function as an institution is to observe and report and analyze, your individual and collective rights are far greater – to act, to influence, to effect change, to democratically select who will govern us. In the absence of government openness and your ability to participate in and benefit from knowledgeable debate, trust in government is a risky business, especially in an era in which accusations of “fake news” – both real and imagined – pervade our national discussion. We do get the government we collectively deserve, which is why your ability to know and to understand the functioning of your government and your leaders at all levels – local, state and national – is so crucial to our democracy. It’s why the First Amendment to the Constitution enshrines not only the freedom of religion and of speech to all, but also of the press and to your right to peacefully assemble and to petition the government for a redress of grievances. There are no exceptions or qualifications among those words.

Which is why today we’re devoting the entirety of our opinion pages to a guide to your democracy, information for you to use in enabling greater engagement with your elected representatives.

We’ve assembled contact information for your elected leadership at all levels of government; tools you can use in engaging your government and leaders; and with perspectives on how to detect the rising tide of fake news, ways for approaching and communicating with your elected leaders, and the importance and state of our commonwealth’s openness to you. What you see on today’s opinion pages is part of a collaborative effort this week by the Telegram & Gazette and our sister GateHouse Media publications across Massachusetts, both in print and online.

Last year’s revision of the state’s public records access law, the first significant update in nearly 45 years, at least addressed what was part of our stigma in having one of the worst public records laws in America. And that was just what was on the books. The implementation of even those laws, we had found, was spotty at best. Requests for information that you have the right to access was routinely ignored or pushed aside or even greeted with hostility, and where access to records could come with outrageous fees for information that in other states was free or available for a nominal fee. You could go to court and prove that your government illegally withheld public records from you, but you were prohibited from collecting legal fees, something that 47 other states allowed – and something that last year’s update fortunately now allows.

But much work remains. The secretary of state’s “A Guide to the Massachusetts Public Records Law” is 40 pages long, not counting an extensive appendix. Remarkably, 19 of those 40 pages are filled with the 21 broad categories of exceptions to the public records law. Even worse, just one of those 21 broad categories includes – in the appendix – 62 statutory exemptions from the law. It’s mind-boggling. We are the only state in the union in which all three branches of government – the governor, the Legislature and the judiciary – each claim to be exempt from the open records law. That’s right, the Legislature that approved last year’s reforms, the governor who signed them into law and the judiciary whose members are the ultimate enforcers are all in effect saying, “Do what I tell you, and I’ll do what I want in secret.”

It’s more important than ever that you have access to the “facts” of how your government makes its decisions and how it functions. The point of Sunshine Week is to monitor, inform and hopefully spur action to assure your rights – as the governed – to those facts.

## SUNSHINE WEEK

# Contact your elected officials

### FEDERAL OFFICES

Visit [www.govtrack.us/congress/members/MA](http://www.govtrack.us/congress/members/MA) for a list of your representatives in the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives, including maps you can zoom in for all the state’s congressional districts.

**President**  
**Donald J. Trump**  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20500  
(202) 456-1111  
[www.whitehouse.gov/contact/](http://www.whitehouse.gov/contact/)

**U.S. Senator**  
**Elizabeth A. Warren, D-Massachusetts**  
2 Russell Courtyard, Washington, DC 20510  
(202) 224-4543  
[www.warren.senate.gov/](http://www.warren.senate.gov/)  
Email:Elizabeth@

**Edward J. Markey, D-Massachusetts**  
255 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510  
(202) 224-2742  
[www.markey.senate.gov/contact](http://www.markey.senate.gov/contact)

**Second Congressional Representative**  
**James P. McGovern, D-Worcester**  
12 East Worcester St., Suite 1, Worcester, MA 01604  
(508) 831-7356  
24 Church St., Room 27, Leominster, MA 01453  
(978) 466-3552

438 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515  
(202) 225-6101  
website: [mcgovern.house.gov/contact/](http://mcgovern.house.gov/contact/)

**Third Congressional Representative**  
**Nicola D. "Nicki" Tsongas, D- Lowell**  
150 Main St., Center for Professional Studies, Fitchburg, MA 01420  
(978) 469-0101  
1714 Longworth House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515  
(202) 225-3411  
website: [tsongas.house.gov/e-mail-nicki/](http://tsongas.house.gov/e-mail-nicki/)

**First Congressional Representative**  
**Richard E. Neal, D-Springfield**  
300 State St., Suite 200, Springfield,

MA 01105  
(413) 785-0325  
341 Cannon House Office Building, Washington, DC 20515  
(202) 225-5601  
website: [neal.house.gov/contact/email](http://neal.house.gov/contact/email)

### COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS

**Governor**  
**Charles D. Baker Jr. & Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito**  
24 Beacon St., Office of the Governor, Room 280, Boston, MA 02133  
(617) 725-4005  
Former site, still active: [www.mass.gov/governor/constituent-services/contact-governor-office/](http://www.mass.gov/governor/constituent-services/contact-governor-office/)  
New site: [www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-the-governor](http://www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-the-governor)

**Attorney General**  
**Maura T. Healey**  
10 Mechanic St., Suite 301, Worcester, MA 01608  
(508) 792-7600  
consumer complaints: [www.mass.gov/get-consumer-support](http://www.mass.gov/get-consumer-support)  
general email: [ago@state.ma.us](mailto:ago@state.ma.us)

**Secretary of the Commonwealth**  
**William F. Galvin**  
1 Ashburton Place, 17th Floor, Boston, MA 02108  
(617) 727-7030  
[www.sec.state.ma.us/seccon.htm](http://www.sec.state.ma.us/seccon.htm)

**Treasure and Receiver-General**  
**Deborah Goldberg**  
24 Beacon St., State House, Room 227, Boston, MA 02133  
(617) 367-6900  
[www.mass.gov/forms/ask-the-treasury](http://www.mass.gov/forms/ask-the-treasury)

**State Auditor**  
**Suzanne M. Bump**  
24 Beacon St., State House, Room 230, Boston, MA 02133  
(617) 727-2075  
[www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-state-auditor-suzanne-m-bump](http://www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-state-auditor-suzanne-m-bump)

**Worcester County Sheriff**  
**Lewis G. Evangelidis**  
5 Paul X. Tivnan Drive, West Boylston, MA 01583  
(508) 854-1800  
website: [worcestercountysheriff.com/contact/](http://worcestercountysheriff.com/contact/)

### LOCAL GOVERNMENT Resources/websites

**Ashburnham**  
(978) 827-4100  
[ashburnham-ma.gov](http://ashburnham-ma.gov)

**Athol**  
(978) 249-4551  
[athol-ma.gov](http://athol-ma.gov)

**Auburn**  
(508) 832-7701  
[auburnguide.com](http://auburnguide.com)

**Barre**  
(978) 355-2504  
[townofbarre.com](http://townofbarre.com)

**Berlin**  
(978) 838-2931  
[townofberlin.com](http://townofberlin.com)

**Blackstone**  
(508) 883-1500  
[townofblackstone.org](http://townofblackstone.org)

**Bolton**  
(978) 779-2297  
[townofbolton.com](http://townofbolton.com)

**Boylston**  
(508) 869-2234  
[boylston-ma.gov](http://boylston-ma.gov)

**Brookfield**  
(508) 867-2930  
[brookfieldma.us](http://brookfieldma.us)

**Charlton**  
(508) 248-2200  
[townofcharlton.net](http://townofcharlton.net)

**Clinton**  
(978) 365-4119  
[clintonma.gov](http://clintonma.gov)

**Douglas**  
(508) 476-4000  
[douglasma.org](http://douglasma.org)

**Dudley**  
(508) 949-8000  
[dudleyma.gov](http://dudleyma.gov)

**East Brookfield**  
(508) 867-6769  
[eastbrookfieldma.us](http://eastbrookfieldma.us)

**City of Fitchburg**  
(978) 829-1800  
[ci.fitchburg.ma.us](http://ci.fitchburg.ma.us)

**Mayor Stephen L. DiNatale**  
(978) 829-1801

**City of Gardner**  
(978) 632-1900  
[gardner-ma.gov](http://gardner-ma.gov)

**Mayor Mark J. Hawke**  
(978) 630-1490

**Lunenburg**  
(978) 582-4130  
[lunenburgma.gov](http://lunenburgma.gov)

**Hardwick**  
(413) 477-6197  
[townofhardwick.com](http://townofhardwick.com)

**Harvard**  
(978) 456-4100  
[harvard.ma.us](http://harvard.ma.us)

**Holden**  
(508) 210-5500  
[holdenma.gov](http://holdenma.gov)

**Hopedale**  
(508) 634-2203  
[hopedale-ma.gov](http://hopedale-ma.gov)

**Hubbardston**  
(978) 928-1400  
[hubbardstonma.us](http://hubbardstonma.us)

**Lancaster**  
(978) 365-3326  
[ci.lancaster.ma.us](http://ci.lancaster.ma.us)

**Leicester**  
(508) 892-7011  
[leicesterma.org](http://leicesterma.org)

**City of Leominster**  
(978) 534-7500  
[leominster-ma.gov](http://leominster-ma.gov)

**Mayor Dean J. Mazzarella**  
(978) 534-7500

**Lunenburg**  
(978) 582-4130  
[lunenburgma.gov](http://lunenburgma.gov)

**Mendon**  
(508) 473-1085  
[mendonma.gov](http://mendonma.gov)

**Milford**  
(508) 634-2307  
[milfordma.gov](http://milfordma.gov)

**Millbury**  
(508) 865-9110  
[millbury-ma.org](http://millbury-ma.org)

**Worcester County District Attorney**  
**Joseph D. Early Jr.**  
225 Main St., Room G-301, Worcester, MA 01608  
(508) 755-8601  
website: [worcesterda.com/contact/](http://worcesterda.com/contact/)  
email: [info@worcesterda.org](mailto:info@worcesterda.org)

### MASSACHUSETTS LEGISLATURE

#### Office numbers, email addresses

**First Worcester Senate District**  
**Harriette L. Chandler D-Worcester**  
(617) 722-1544  
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**Second Worcester Senate District**  
**Michael O. Moore D-Millbury**  
(617) 722-1485  
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**Worcester, Hampden, Hampshire and Middlesex Senate District**  
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**Worcester and Middlesex Senate District**  
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**Worcester and Norfolk Senate District**  
**Ryan C. Fattman R-Webster**  
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**Middlesex and Worcester Senate District**  
**James B. Eldridge D-Acton**  
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**Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester Senate District**  
**Stanley C. Rosenber D-Amherst**  
(617) 722-1532  
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**First Worcester House District**  
**Kimberly N. Ferguson R-Holden**  
(617) 722-2263  
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**Third Worcester House District**  
**Stephan Hay D-Fitchburg**  
(617) 722-2637  
[Stephan.Hay@mahouse.gov](mailto:Stephan.Hay@mahouse.gov)

**Fourth Worcester House District**  
**Natalie Higgins D-Leominster**  
(617) 722-2060  
[Natalie.Higgins@mahouse.gov](mailto:Natalie.Higgins@mahouse.gov)

**Fifth Worcester House District**  
**Donald R. Berthiaume Jr. R-Spencer**  
(617) 722-2090  
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**Sixth Worcester House District**  
**Peter J. Durant R-Spencer**  
(617) 722-2060  
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[templeton1.org](http://templeton1.org)

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**West Boylston**  
(774) 261-4010  
[westboylston-ma.gov](http://westboylston-ma.gov)

**West Brookfield**  
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[wbrookfield.com](http://wbrookfield.com)

**Westboro**  
(508) 366-3020  
[town.westborough.ma.us](http://town.westborough.ma.us)

**Westminster**  
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[westminster-ma.gov](http://westminster-ma.gov)

**Winchendon**  
(978) 297-2766  
[townofwinchendon.com](http://townofwinchendon.com)

# Tools to becoming a more engaged citizen

Want to be a more informed and engaged citizen? Here are suggested websites:

**US Congress:** Members of Congress and tracking legislation, [www.congress.gov](http://www.congress.gov). Watch live and video of the Senate, [www.senate.gov/floor/index.htm](http://www.senate.gov/floor/index.htm) and the House, at [www.houselive.gov](http://www.houselive.gov)

**Federal Election Commission:** Campaign financing in federal elections, including how much campaigns are raising and spending, and who’s contributing, [www.fec.gov](http://www.fec.gov)

**Massachusetts Office of Campaign & Political Finance:** Campaign financing in state and local elections, how much campaigns are raising and spending, and who’s contributing, [www.ocpf.us](http://www.ocpf.us)

**Federal Courts:** Case and docket information for Federal district and appellate, and bankruptcy courts, [www.pacer.gov](http://www.pacer.gov)

**Massachusetts Courts:** Information on many cases, including dispositions and judgments, is available by name, type, case number and ticket/citation numbers (although not yet on District Court or Boston Municipal court criminal matters), [www.mass-courts.org](http://www.mass-courts.org). (A list of types of cases is at [www.mass.gov/service-details/types-of-public-electronic-case-access-information-online](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/types-of-public-electronic-case-access-information-online).) View oral arguments before state Supreme Judicial Court, in person or live online, [www.mass.gov/service-details/supreme-judicial-court-oral-arguments](http://www.mass.gov/service-details/supreme-judicial-court-oral-arguments); stream at [www.suffolk.edu/sjc/](http://www.suffolk.edu/sjc/). Calendar and case information for state Appeals and Supreme courts, with links to briefs, [http://ma-appellatecourts.org/search\\_calendar.php](http://ma-appellatecourts.org/search_calendar.php), and dockets, <http://ma-appellatecourts.org/index.php>. Supreme Judicial

Court decisions, at [www.mass.gov/appellate-opinion-portal](http://www.mass.gov/appellate-opinion-portal)

**Massachusetts Legislature:** Information on state Senate and House members, legislation, hearings, laws, and the state Constitution, [www.malegislature.gov](http://www.malegislature.gov). Also, the website [masslegislature.tv](http://masslegislature.tv) offers video of formal sessions and some "important" hearings, although may not render very well.

**Who's my state senator? Who's my state representative?** A handy form if you want to know, including for Congress, [www.malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator](http://www.malegislature.gov/Search/FindMyLegislator)

**Secretary of Commonwealth:** Information including checking if you're registered to vote, where to vote, open records information, information on corporations and much more, [www.sec.state.ma.us](http://www.sec.state.ma.us)

**Massachusetts Government:** Listings and information on state offices and agencies, including state courts, [www.mass.gov/state-a-to-z](http://www.mass.gov/state-a-to-z)

**Ballotpedia:** Information, including newsletters to sign up for, on the political system, elections, candidates and issues, [www.ballotpedia.org/Massachusetts](http://www.ballotpedia.org/Massachusetts)

**News Literacy Project:** Tools, tips and resources on sorting fact from fiction, [www.thenewsliteracyproject.org](http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org)

**Politifact:** Fact-checking website at [www.politifact.com](http://www.politifact.com)

**Snopes:** Fact-checking website at