

## Bill Would Fund Climate Science Education

By Colin Harmer

On Feb. 16, Massachusetts state Rep. Mindy Domb filed bill HD3596, “An Act Concerning Climate Science Education.”

The bill would establish a trust fund for climate science education in Massachusetts. While this does not mean that schools would instantly benefit from the passing of this bill, it means that there would be a safe place, being the Climate Science Education Trust Fund, for donors to directly support climate science education in Massachusetts. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) will oversee how the funds are distributed.

Domb said, “DESE will have to create an application … and that will be the place where they’ll say, what do you need? Why do you think you should get priority?”

Rather than a set of rules DESE has to follow, what the bill outlines is criteria for how DESE can proceed in the disbursement of funds, for example, the bill says DESE “may prioritize … public schools or school districts with high concentrations of economically-disadvantaged students; those public schools or school districts who serve students from environmental justice populations.”

Domb said environmental justice populations are “the targets of environmental disasters, and disparity, and environmental racism.”

Massachusetts follows an adaptation of the Next Generation Science Standards, a set of benchmarks that are meant to ensure proper science education (including climate science) in kindergarten through 12th grade across the U.S. (although it is up to each state to accept the standards). It is not possible for all of the schools within Massachusetts to properly meet those standards without funding. If passed, the bill would, support curriculum development, professional training for educators and costs tied to climate education in public schools.

University of Massachusetts Amherst student Cameron Shorey, an environmental science major, emphasized the disparities in climate science education. He said that when he attended public school in Andover, there was insufficient climate science education. He said, “I’d say there’s a lack thereof. There were more like physical science, biological science, chemistry.” He added that what he learned was limited to “the super basic, like earth is getting warmer, a lot of carbon in the air. I never really learned anything beyond those two super vague things in high school.”

He said the material in his college courses was “very new information.”

Billy Spitzer, executive director of the Hitchcock Center for the Environment, which provides climate education programs to children and families, emphasized the lack of thorough climate science education. He said, “I think it gets complicated because the utilities, the gas companies are like, ‘Oh, we need more pipelines.’ But it’s like really not consistent with what the state is trying to do.”

Spitzer said, “One of the things that I think is really important is that young people are not only learning about climate, but what they can do about climate change.”

Shorey said he hopes the bill “open the eyes of students who like maybe want to show concern/help but don’t have the knowledge to understand what’s even happening.”

Domb said, “I know this bill is not going to make it all better. But I really believe that when people are active on something and they have hope, and skills and knowledge, they can make it better.”