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What is the population of Massachusetts? Who is my state legislator? How do I register to vote? When are the clerk-typists exams given? When does daylight saving time begin? How many Indian reservations are there? It is extremely hot in our office during the summer, is the employer required to let us out when it gets to be 100 degrees? How do I apply for a Massachusetts state scholarship? I was in the hospital last month. Am I entitled to see my record? Is it proper procedure for the telephone company to charge me a security deposit? I am a cafeteria worker at the high school, am I entitled to the minimum wage? My son is away at school and his license is up for renewal? What shall I do?

Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth, Paul Guzzi, Secretary

# CITIZEN INFORMATION SERVICE THREE YEAR REPORT 1978

7810/331

# To the Citizens of Massachusetts

From the time I first entered state government, I have rejected the notion that a citizen needs to know somebody in politics in order to find out about public services. When I became State Secretary, I tried to remedy that situation by developing an information office to give all citizens equal access to their government.

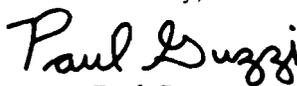
We anticipated a need for Citizen Information Service when its telephone lines were opened in May, 1975. The tremendous volume of calls received since that time has underscored the extent of that need. In May, 1978, CIS celebrated its third anniversary by recording its 150,000th call. During the past year alone, we received over 61,000 inquiries.

This annual report describes the expanded capacities of CIS in its third year of operation. A continuing goal for our service is to bring information about government matters directly to the citizen who is affected by them. We have done this through publications, public seminars and outreach to community groups.

The heightened pace of CIS's activity indicates that the general public and other government agencies are more aware of its presence. People understand that when they have a problem they can call CIS.

Citizens deserve that kind of service from this state government because they are the ones who support it.

Sincerely,

  
Paul Guzzi

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## Profile

**Who:** Citizen Information Service  
**What:** Information and referral service relating to state government, a division of the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth; Paul Guzzi, Secretary.  
**How:** Via metropolitan Boston telephone lines and toll free lines to all of Massachusetts.  
**When:** Established May 15, 1975  
**Purpose:** Provide access to state government to citizens throughout the state.  
**Daily Volume:** 250 - 300 calls.  
**Total Number of Inquiries:** 152,035  
**Total Number of Inquiries 3rd year:** 61,035  
**Source of Calls:** Toll free (outside Boston Area)  
WATS 33%  
Metro Boston 67%  
**Type of Calls:** Issues include consumer affairs, elderly concerns, employment, environment, health, housing, insurance, legal services, legislation, legislators, licenses, Secretary of State functions and taxes.  
**Other Services:** Mail Inquiries  
Bilingual Staff  
Publications  
Public Information Seminars,  
Weekly Newspaper Columns

## CIS Helps

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Help via the telephone is still the primary way that the Citizen Information Service (CIS) serves the Massachusetts public. While the case studies on the following pages illustrate the kinds of inquiries citizens made this year and how CIS responded, they cannot show the staff proficiency that these third-year responses represent. CIS has refined its service by continuous expansion of its knowledge base, its reference resources and liaison contacts. The staff keeps abreast of current legislation and events and organizes all its information so that it is immediately accessible.

The callers in these cases could count on more than a prompt, timely and informed response; the current level of CIS "know how" makes possible both more supportive and innovative responses. And this CIS competence often infects callers with the confidence they need to follow through on their own.

### In Need of A Nursing Home

A young woman was calling CIS, distraught and confused. She had taken her mother-in-law into her small home after finding the elderly woman undernourished and living in filth, the alcoholic father-in-law oblivious to his wife's need.

The older woman, confined to a wheelchair, could not be left unattended for very long. Yet, the daughter-in-law, who had a small child of her own, was unable to spend the time necessary to care for her relative.

Trying to deal with the situation herself, she found that her mother-in-law was no longer eligible for medicaid and therefore unable to afford desperately needed nursing home care. The young woman turned to CIS for assistance.

A Citizen Information Service staffer took down the facts, and sensing some error in the termination of medicaid funds, contacted a troubleshooter in the Department of Public Welfare. The Department realized the termination was unwarranted, reinstated the woman on medicaid, and had her placed on the top of an eligibility list for a nursing home.



### What To Do When A Layoff Comes

The company was closing a district office and laying off its staff. One of the employees turned to CIS to find out what help the state could provide. He was uncertain of his employment opportunities, nervous about meeting his financial obligations, and especially concerned about health insurance coverage for himself and his family.

Citizen Information Service informed him of the professional placement service run by the Massachusetts Division of Employment Security. CIS also told him that according to legislation passed in 1975, his company was obliged to extend group coverage to its former employee and his family for 39 weeks after the layoff. While the caller still had to pay the premiums, the cost of coverage was considerably less expensive than an individual plan would be. The company had not informed its employees of this law, the benefits of which would save hundreds of dollars during hard economic times.

## Helping A Future Musician

A letter from a worried grandmother arrived in the mail asking CIS to assist her blind grandchild in obtaining guitar lessons. Financial considerations prevented the family from providing the young person with this kind of training.

CIS's call to the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind ascertained that help might be available, but only if the person was registered with the Commission as being legally blind.

The grandmother's letter included no information on the name and address of the person needing help. Since the party had no telephone listing, a call was made to the city clerk who assisted CIS in finding the musically-minded youngster.

It turned out that the grandchild was registered and a visit was made by the Commission to his home. As a result of the cooperative effort, lessons will begin in the fall for this interested young person.

## A Costly Computer

A retired state worker from Worcester county received several notices from the Social Security Administration's direct payments' center informing her that her hospital benefits medicare coverage would be dropped. She had no idea why. Since medicare coverage for retired state employees is handled by the Group Insurance Commission, she sent copies of the correspondence there. The person who had handled her case was on a leave of absence, and the correspondence was misplaced. The retiree turned to CIS for help.

CIS called the Group Insurance Commission, and a member of its staff called the Social Security Data Center in Baltimore, Maryland. He found that her payments, which were handled by this state, were not being recorded properly in Baltimore. Consequently, the data center in Flushing, New York was receiving notice of non-payment. The situation had persisted for several months. CIS followed the situation, serving as a liaison between the woman and the governmental agencies, until the woman's coverage was reinstated.

## When Up To The Minute Information Is Needed

During last February's snow emergency, state offices were closed and CIS was unable to operate. But as soon as the ban on travel was lifted, Citizen Information Service acted as a clearinghouse through which the requests for assistance could be channeled. A list of all available resources was immediately compiled, including disaster aid centers, welfare offices, community action agencies, as well as information on transportation, towed cars, consumer complaints, food, fuel and loss of income. Information was kept up to date as to the status of unemployment benefits, responsibility for towing charges, which disaster offices remained open, etc. CIS staffers went to the Division of Employment Security the moment the forms for applying for unemployment compensation were available and to disaster aid centers to obtain copies of the materials and applications. Callers were referred to appropriate public and private agencies for help.

Conflicting information on unemployment benefits, the Governor's emergency powers, timetables for assistance, and much more was resolved by the CIS staff.



### Thoughts of Home

Massachusetts citizens serve in the armed forces around the world. Through the interests of their commanders and some help from CIS, these servicemen and women have received some reminders of what life is like on the homefront.

The Air Force Control and Warning Squadron, located at a remote radar site in Northern Alaska, requested a symbolic exhibit of Massachusetts to decorate the squad dining room. CIS arranged for a citation bearing the state seal commending the men's "service in the cause of peace on the frontiers of America."

A destroyer commander requested menu suggestions illustrative of the foods of Massachusetts for the Bay Staters in his crew. CIS offered a choice of foods with the identifiable label of Massachusetts. Boston baked beans highlighted the list along with the native turkey for which Massachusetts has been known since the days of the pilgrims. Cranberries seemed a fitting accompaniment as well as a dessert of apple pie made with Massachusetts "Macs," a leading export of the state. Not to be forgotten was the appetizer of clam chowder.

### What The Numbers Say

A recent caller to CIS inquired about the population figures and characteristics of a particular community in Massachusetts. The CIS staffer quickly found the figures in a report from the Census Division of the State Secretary's Office. The staff member then recommended that the person obtain a monograph of the community from the State Bookstore.

Information of this kind is frequently requested. The CIS staff now know every agency in the state that collects statistics as well as the kind and availability of these figures. In addition, CIS has identified many sources of federal statistics, the major ones being the Census Bureau, the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and the FBI.

Knowledge of basic informational resources is a fundamental dimension of CIS.

### A Lost Diploma

A woman called on behalf of her brother, an inmate of a state prison. A year before, he had passed a high school equivalency test, but he had never received his diploma. Afraid of creating a stir, he said nothing to the prison administration about his problem.

CIS called Adult Services in the Department of Education and within weeks, a proper certificate was mailed to the young man.

### A Bird in The Hand . . .

Prominently displayed in one of Massachusetts' many antique stores was an eagle, stuffed by a taxidermist a century ago. A visitor to the shop told the manager that the display or ownership of an eagle was against the law. The dealer, who had taken the eagle on consignment, was unaware of such a statute. Not knowing what to do, he called the Citizen Information Service.

CIS contacted both the Massachusetts Office of Environmental Affairs and the U.S. Department of Interior. The staff found that both federal and state law protected bald and golden eagles and prohibited their possession.

As the federal law was easier to apply, a staff member from the Interior Department offered to confiscate the bird and give it to an educational or scientific institution.

As a result, the eagle is now regally gracing the display window in a local museum.



## Total Calls By Issue Category May 1977 - May 1978

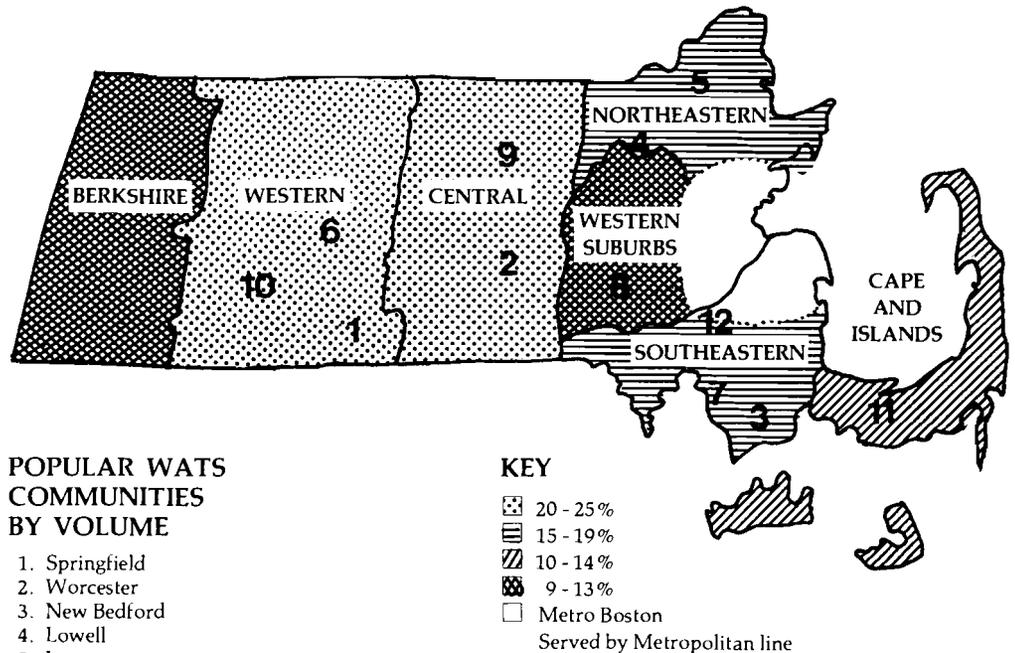
Citizen inquiries are recorded under one of thirty-five different subject areas. The most frequent questions relate to the functions of the State Secretary's office, taxes and consumer problems. This chart lists the categories and provides absolute figures and relative percentages for each issue.

ISSUE CATEGORY	NO.	%	ISSUE CATEGORY	NO.	%
Agriculture/Animals	268	0.44	Legislation/State Laws	2897	4.74
Business/Economic Development	1021	1.67	Legislature	2586	4.23
Children's Services	306	0.50	Licenses	2825	4.69
Civil Service	657	1.07	Local Govt.	1277	2.10
Community Groups	227	0.37	Public Safety	634	1.04
Consumer	4661	7.64	Recreation	483	4.83
County Govt/Courts	1136	1.86	Registry of Motor Vehicles	922	1.51
Education	1249	2.04	Retirement	267	0.43
Elderly Services	754	1.23	Rights and Records	762	1.25
Elections/Voting	1022	1.67	Secretary of State	7690	12.60
Employment	3038	4.98	State Govt.	3982	6.52
Environment/Energy	1304	2.13	Taxes	6640	10.88
Federal Govt.	2284	3.74	Transportation	721	1.18
Health/Medical	1752	2.87	Unemployment	213	0.34
Housing	2480	4.06	Utilities	745	1.22
Information Resources	2502	4.10	Welfare	881	1.44
Insurance	1845	3.02	Comments and Soundoffs	95	0.15
Legal Services/Lawyers	909	1.49	<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>61035</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Source Of WATS Calls By Area 5/77 - 5/78

Citizen Information Service offers Massachusetts residents the only toll-free line for general information on state government. Over one-third of the calls recorded at Citizen Information Service are received on the WATS line. People from every city and town in Massachusetts have called the service. The most populous communities are not always the source of the most calls.

This chart shows those communities whose residents most frequently call Citizen Information Service.



# The Telephone Response

Citizen Information Service staff often do more than answer a caller's particular inquiry. By establishing a dialogue with the caller, staff members frequently learn that the caller may need more information than the initial inquiry implied. Thus, CIS is able to provide information that may be more useful to the caller, and go beyond the scope of the initial question. In recommending a course of action, a staff member will often present alternatives.

The range of inquiry that CIS handles can be better understood when the cases discussed and the questions asked are categorized. Each call or request received by the Citizen Information Service is recorded in one of the following ways:

**Direct Information** — Responses to inquiries are made immediately, based either upon the experience of staff members or informational resources within the office.

**Immediate Referral** — Many inquiries require referral to a specific agency. CIS identifies the agency and where possible, the proper division or section within the agency so that the caller will not be shifted from one office to another.

**Checks and Call-Backs and In-Depth Research** — While accounting for less than 15% of the calls to CIS, these two categories require the most extensive staff work.

In situations where it is unclear as to which agency can best handle the situation, the CIS staff will do the research and then call back to provide the caller with the proper information.

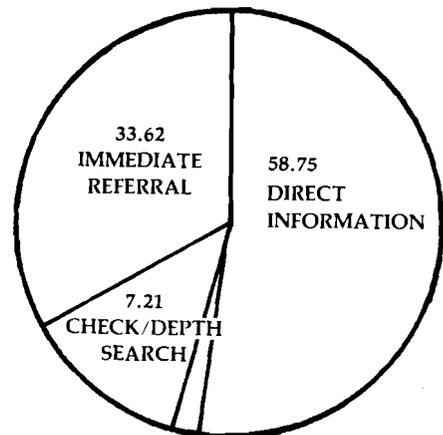


Some problems may require days to resolve. In such cases, the caller is kept abreast of the progress CIS is making on the case.

**No Help Available** — Less than 1% of the calls to CIS involve a problem which cannot be handled by some government agency or by CIS itself. In such cases, the caller may be venting his frustrations about a personal problem or job difficulty. Some callers contact CIS to register their disenchantment with government in general, or some policy in particular.

More than 80% of this year's calls have been handled immediately either with direct information or with an immediate referral. This has been possible because the office maintains extensive information resources and the staff is well-trained and kept informed of new developments.

AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF TYPES OF CALLS:



0.42 NO HELP AVAILABLE

## The CIS People and the CIS Approach

No matter how extensive the information available, or how well it is catalogued, the effectiveness of Citizen Information Service depends upon the quality of the staff members who are working there.

The staff of Citizen Information Service, augmented by volunteers and work-study students, perform a variety of duties to service all the inquiries that come into the office and to bring other important information to the public. In addition to the telephone inquiries, they answer correspondence, publish brochures, plan and conduct seminars, update information, write weekly newspaper articles which highlight areas of interest and publicize the CIS service, and train new staff.



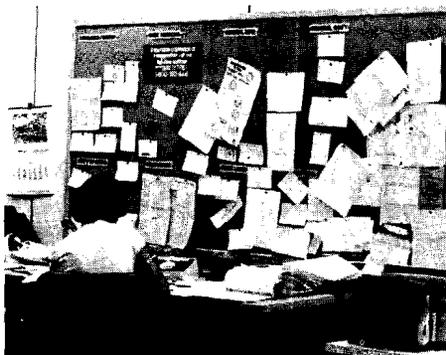
### Training

Training is considered an on-going part of the CIS job; training in relating to callers, in providing citizens with options to consider in resolving their problems, in coordinating information and presenting it clearly, and in anticipating trends and policy developments.

The volunteers and interns are trained by the CIS volunteer coordinator. Many colleges and universities in the area have CIS listed as an agency that will accept work-study interns and volunteers, and the Massachusetts Internship Office and the Voluntary Action Center provide referrals as well.

The staff is kept abreast of new and significant information about state government through regular briefing sessions conducted by specialists from various state agencies and other divisions in the State Secretary's office. In addition to providing information, these sessions also promote cooperation between the agencies and CIS.

Background reports on issues prepared by CIS staffers keep co-workers informed about the ramifications of various policy problems. These reports make rule changes and new legislation more understandable so that the staff can better inform the public.



### Resource Update

The reference resources, which are extensive and easily accessible, enable the staff to respond quickly and effectively to the public. The mainstay of CIS's informational resources is a directory which contains material on the many areas with which the staff deals each day. The directory is divided into sections for easy reference purposes and is periodically updated so that the information it contains is both accurate and complete. This year saw a major revision of the Health Section which includes information on every aspect of health from acupuncture to nutrition.

A small library and file folders on topics of every description round out CIS's informational resources.



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## Interagency Cooperation

Fundamental to the effectiveness of Citizen Information Service is the cooperation of other agencies within state government and other divisions within the Office of the State Secretary. The ability of these agencies to better serve the public has been augmented by the presence of CIS. As CIS has become a more accepted part of government, interagency cooperation has increased considerably.

For example, when the Metropolitan District Commission began fluoridating its water supplies, the Department of Public Health sought the help of CIS in explaining the new program to citizens who would be affected by the change. The department members briefed the staff on the benefits of fluoridated water. Together, these agencies publicized the program and explained its purpose to many Massachusetts citizens.

Frequently, CIS is asked about different functions being carried on in the Secretary of State's Office. During the height of the Lloyd Carr Commodity Options case, CIS received numerous calls from concerned investors. These inquiries were directed to the Securities Division where complaints were registered and questions answered.

During the month of April, 1978, the State Secretary, in cooperation with the Public Relations Society of America and other New England State Secretaries, conducted a six-state voter registration drive. Citizen Information Service served as an information and referral agency for those individuals and organizations involved in planning and implementing the drive in Massachusetts.

Elections prompt many calls to CIS. With access to an extensive array of election brochures, documents, and memos, CIS staffers can answer many inquiries. Those questions requiring further clarification are relayed to the Secretary's Elections Division.

Cooperation with other agencies has also been important to the publication of CIS's informational brochures and seminar series run throughout the state. These cooperative efforts have strengthened the operation of CIS and its ability to deliver information to the public.

## Publications

Publications enable CIS to bring pertinent information to the citizen. Topics of general interest are identified, and concise, easily understood brochures are written by CIS and made available free to the public. The brochures are updated periodically to reflect new statutory developments and to refine and broaden the material presented.

The first CIS brochure explained the automobile excise tax, a source of much confusion since the information was not available from one single department or level of government.

Many of the brochures are written and distributed with the help of other divisions of the Secretary of State, or with other agencies of state government. Two popular brochures which exemplify this cooperative effort are: "How To Be A Notary Public" written with help from the State Secretary's Commissions Division, and "Property Tax Exemptions for Older Citizens, Widows and Minors," published with the assistance of the Department of Corporations and Taxation.

A brochure on starting a new business in Massachusetts, issued in November of 1977, answers the many questions people have when planning a business in the Commonwealth and serves as a useful source of referral. While the Small Business Administration, a federal agency, publishes a variety of pamphlets and booklets on general business information, the CIS brochure focuses on state and local governmental requirements.

"The Citizens' Guide to State Services" has been an important publication of CIS. It lists the state agencies most often contacted by the public, the services they provide, and their addresses and telephone numbers. Work on a supplement which will provide additional information is near completion.

Plans are now underway for a cooperative effort with the Department of Public Health to write a brochure on the State Sanitary Code, a most important document for landlords, tenants and homeowners.

## Summing Up

### The Seminar Series

To supplement the brochures and to answer questions on subjects which were not the sole responsibility of a single governmental agency, CIS has sponsored a series of seminars on topics of current interest.

A concern on most people's minds is taxes, especially property taxes, and no group is more adversely affected by them than the elderly. Many senior citizens are eligible for exemptions, but the laws providing this relief are not always easy to understand.

To clarify and expand upon the CIS brochure on exemptions, CIS asked representatives from the Property Tax Bureau of the Massachusetts Department of Corporations and Taxation, local tax assessors and advocates for the elderly to address public forums in six cities across the Commonwealth. The seminars, held in Boston, Springfield, Lawrence, Framingham, New Bedford, and Hyannis, were well attended, lively and informative. The panel of experts not only explained the intricacies of the present law, but legislative proposals to amend it.

A second seminar series focused on starting a new business in Massachusetts. Seminars were held in Boston and Wellesley, and panelists included representatives from the Division of Insurance, the Department of Corporations and Taxation, the Corporations Division of the State Secretary's Office, and the Minimum Wage Division of the Department of Labor and Industries.

A third seminar addressed the problems which may arise from car ownership — buying, selling, repairing, and insuring. As with the other programs, the auto seminar brought together experts from different branches of government to discuss problems common to all car owners.

### Reaching The Spanish-Speaking

CIS has continued its efforts to reach the Spanish-speaking community by making Hispanics aware of various government services available to them.

A bilingual staff member responds to telephone calls from Spanish-speaking citizens and writes a weekly column in the Hispanic newspaper, *El Mundo*. She also works with the State Secretary's Elections Division to inform Hispanic voters of voting procedures and to urge them to register. In addition, she has translated several brochures which are now available to the Spanish-speaking community. A file of resource materials is being compiled which will include many of the Spanish language publications from federal, state and local government agencies.

The results of these efforts have been a growing awareness of CIS in the Hispanic community and a dramatic increase in the volume of calls made by Spanish-speaking citizens.



In May, 1978, the State Secretary's Citizen Information Service celebrated its third birthday. Responding to the need for more citizen access to state government and a growing public awareness of its existence, CIS has expanded the scope and quality of its services. While it fundamentally has remained a telephone referral service, it now provides important specialized programs which bring information to the citizen.

CIS can credit its effectiveness to a responsive, informed staff, flexible, imaginative approaches and a commitment to giving citizens access to their government. CIS' determination to continue its performance and the citizens' enthusiastic response to the service assure its continuing viability.

Citizen Information Service has become an important point of contact for those who need to deal with state government. Its goal is to bring state government closer to people by being close to the people it serves.



## Citizen Information Service Publications

The State House Is Now Just 30 Seconds Away From You  
(English and Spanish)

Information About Your Automobile Excise Tax

How to Obtain a Marriage License in Massachusetts

Property Tax Exemptions for Older Citizens, Widows and  
Minors

How to Be a Notary Public

What's in a Business Name

How to Organize a Non-Profit Corporation

How to Organize a Business Corporation

Government and Your New Business

Do You Want Information About Corporations in  
Massachusetts?

Citizens' Guide to State Services: A Selective Listing of  
Governmental Agencies

Your State Legislators