

## 2023 ANNUAL REPORT



# MASSPIRG

ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

**YOUR SUPPORT MADE IT POSSIBLE**



## DEAR MEMBER

*As a consumer advocate, MASSPIRG can help people save a dollar or avoid a scam. But people have come to expect so much more from PIRG's unique brand of consumer action.*

*After all, in today's economy, the best deal may be the one that measures value in terms of quality, not quantity. Healthcare that prioritizes wellness, for example, over the most costly treatments. Or products that last, and can be repaired, repurposed and recycled, sparing us (and the planet) the costs of waste.*

*In this report, you'll find PIRG staff and members taking action and winning results to reduce wasteful plastic packaging, expand the right to repair, and more.*

*We're grateful that so many people like you support PIRG's advocacy and action. Thank you.*



Janet Domenitz  
Executive Director

## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

**“PIRG keeps me informed. A variety of topics are covered from individual changes I can make to larger government issues that I can at least sign letters of concern. I greatly appreciate PIRG for fighting for a safer, healthier world.”**

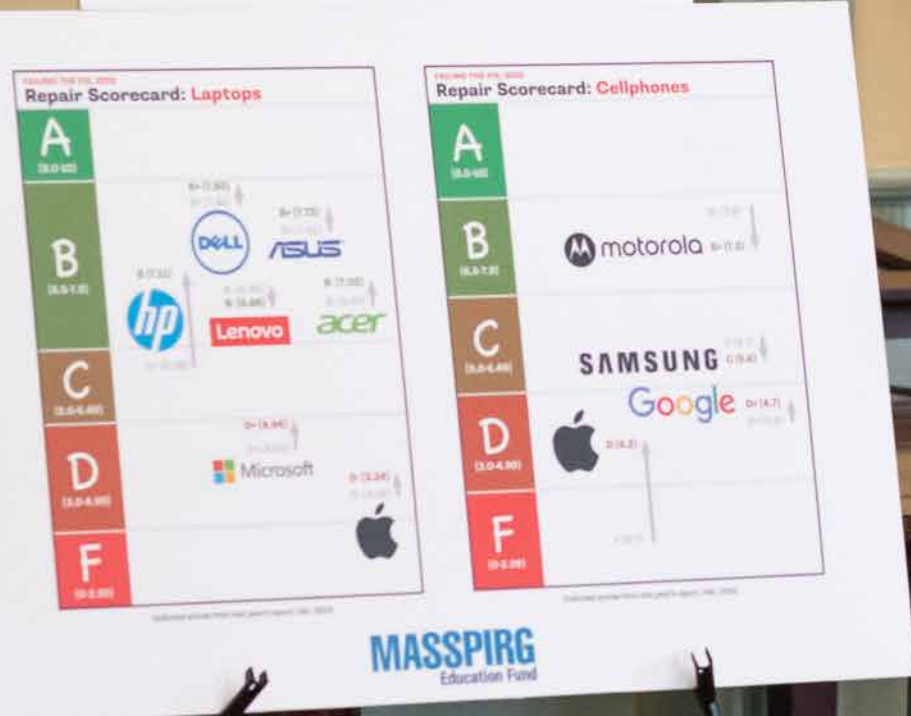
Helen M., Member



ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST  
**RIGHT TO REPAIR**

# MASSPIRG

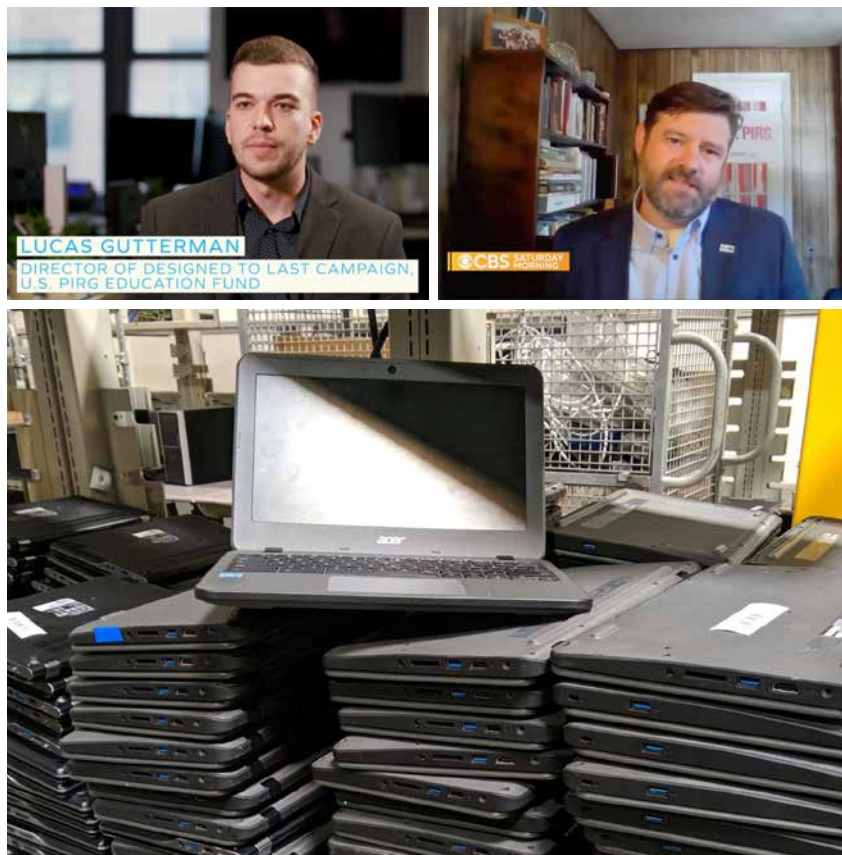
[www.MASSPIRG.org](http://www.MASSPIRG.org)



# Victory: Google agreed to extend the life of Chromebooks

Things aren't made to last anymore, resulting in more waste and more cost to consumers. In 2023, PIRG's Right to Repair program helped secure a commitment from Google to keep working electronics out of the waste stream.

Three years after the pandemic pushed schools to provide students with Google Chromebooks, many schools were struggling to replace laptops that had "expired." Our federation of state PIRGs and a coalition of nonprofits, parents and teachers called on Google to extend the lifespan of these devices, and in September, Google announced it would extend the automatic update "expiration date" to 10 years for all Chromebook models released since 2021.



Photos: (Left) MASSPIRG's Janet Domenitz releases our "Failing the Fix" scorecard. (Above, clockwise) PIRG's Lucas Gutterman speaks with ABC News about our Chromebooks campaign; PIRG Right to Repair Campaign Senior Director Nathan Proctor on CBS; PIRG called on Google for longer-lasting Chromebooks in schools. Credits: (Left) Liam Louis, ElleVignette Photography. (Above, clockwise) ABC, CBS, Peter Mui.



ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

# BEYOND PLASTIC



# Waste reduced: MASSPIRG championed better bottle bill

MASSPIRG helped pass the state's first Bottle Bill back in 1982, which established a five-cent deposit on carbonated drinks that could be recovered at designated bottle return centers. Despite the policy's success, recycling rates have declined in Massachusetts in recent years.

Now, more than 40 years later, MASSPIRG is working to strengthen this effective recycling tool by advocating for necessary updates—namely an increase to the deposit and an expansion of the redeemable bottle types. More than 6,000 supporters like you signed a MASSPIRG petition in support of the Better Bottle Bill, helping us demonstrate widespread support for the bill to our state legislature.



Photos: (Left) MASSPIRG canvassers rally to move beyond plastic. (Above, clockwise) MASSPIRG canvassers deliver signed petitions to the State House; Executive Director Janet Domenitz testifies to the state legislature on reducing plastic; Sen. Ed Markey stops by to brief our canvass team in the summer. Credits: (Left) Leise Jones Photography. (Above, clockwise) Staff, Staff, Staff.



ACTION IN THE PUBLIC INTEREST

# CONSUMER PROTECTION





# Kids protected: We alerted the public to unsafe toys and more

We all need a little help to stay safe in today's marketplace. In 2023, PIRG's consumer watchdog team alerted the public to dangerous products aimed at kids—and called for changes to keep kids safe.

Our national research partners' 38th annual "Trouble in Toyland" report warned parents of unsafe toys such as water beads, which can expand in a child's airway or stomach if swallowed. We also took on new technology, such as the Meta Quest virtual reality headset, which can expose children to inappropriate content, health risks and data privacy threats. We urged Meta to stop marketing the headsets to kids under 18.



Photos: (Left) MASSPIRG's Deirdre Cummings at a press conference releasing the findings of our 38th annual Trouble in Toyland report. (Above, clockwise) PIRG's Teresa Murray speaks with KAEF about unsafe toys; popular toy water beads; a child plays with a VR headset. Credits: (Left) Tim O'Connor. (Above, clockwise) KAEF, Tony Hisgett via Flickr, CC BY 2.0 DEED, creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/, flic.kr/p/aSpj9z, bbernard via Shutterstock.

# BAN<sup>TOXIC</sup> PFAS



Kong Lor

In February, REI Co-op announced it would require its suppliers to eliminate all per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, from outdoor gear sold by the retail chain by 2026. The win came after thousands of PIRG supporters like you signed a petition to the outdoor retailer, urging it to make its products PFAS-free.

# HIGH<sup>VALUE</sup> HEALTH CARE



Ways and Means Committee Republicans via YouTube

In February, PIRG filed comments with the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, urging it to improve its process to allow generic drugs to reach pharmacy shelves. And in March, PIRG's Patricia Kelmar testified before a House committee to advocate for reining in the high cost of prescription drugs.

# PIRG <sup>WATCHDOG</sup> CONSUMER



Boston 25 News

In December, MASSPIRG's Deirdre Cummings testified before the office of the Attorney General in support of regulations on hidden "junk fees"—undisclosed fees and taxes associated with new purchases and renewals. This advocacy builds on MASSPIRG's legacy of championing transparency in advertising.



## PIRG CONSUMER WATCHDOG



CBS News

In July, PIRG warned that two-thirds of phone companies had not yet adopted robocall-fighting technology, as required by law. Scam calls are a huge problem—consumers defrauded over the phone lost a median of \$1,400 in 2022. PIRG called on the Federal Communications Commission to crack down on illegal robocalls.

## CLEAN AIR MASSACHUSETTS

CLEANER, QUIETER LAWN CARE



Roman023\_photography via Shutterstock

In October, PIRG released a report warning that gasoline-powered lawn equipment is dirtier than you might expect—for example, using a commercial gas-powered leaf blower for one hour emits as much smog-forming pollution as 15 cars. Our advocates shined a spotlight on cleaner, quieter electric alternatives.

## TRANSFORM TRANSPORTATION



Massachusetts Office Of Travel & Tourism via Flickr, CC BY-ND 2.0 DEED

In April, MASSPIRG convened a panel of transit advocates, experts and riders to discuss strategies for building interconnected regional transit systems to make it easier to travel around Massachusetts without a personal vehicle. MASSPIRG has long been an advocate for public transit that reduces pollution, increases safety and facilitates efficient travel.

## 50 YEARS OF ACTION & RESULTS

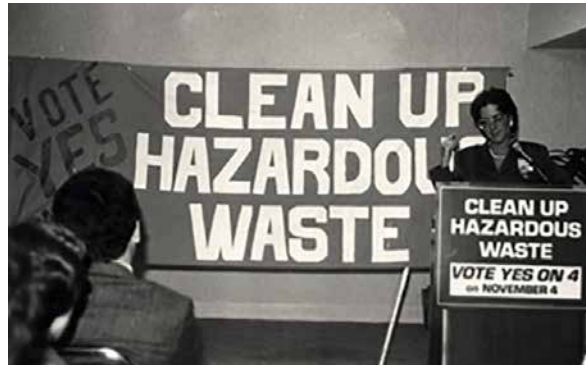
**MASSPIRG** is part of a federation of independent, state-based, citizen funded Public Interest Research Groups. Together, we have a long legacy of victories in the public interest—including state and local wins that have provided blueprints for action nationwide.

### 1980: MASSPIRG grows its student and citizen organizations

Under the leadership of Doug Phelps, who became MASSPIRG's executive director in 1979, Program Director Mindy Lubber and Organizing Director Susan Birmingham, MASSPIRG revitalized its college campus chapters and started a door-to-door citizen outreach canvass.

### 1982: MASSPIRG saves the Bottle Bill

After winning a 9-year campaign to pass the Bottle Bill, MASSPIRG faced a new challenge: an industry attempt to repeal it. More than 8,000 citizen volunteers got to work, ultimately helping to defeat the repeal with a convincing 59% of the vote.



### 1986: Voters pass the Hazardous Waste Cleanup Initiative

State voters approve the Hazardous Waste Cleanup Initiative, crafted by MASSPIRG's Bill Ryan, with a record 74% yes vote. The initiative is an ambitious plan to clean up thousands of hazardous waste sites.

### 1989: MASSPIRG wins law to reduce toxics

MASSPIRG authors and wins the passage of the Toxics Use Reduction Act, requiring industries to publicly disclose their use of toxic chemicals for the first time and plan for future reductions.

### 1998: MASSPIRG wins reduction of pesticides in schools

MASSPIRG helps win a series of laws to reduce the use of pesticides linked to cancer and other serious health problems in public schools throughout the 1990s and early 2000s.

### 2001: Massachusetts cleans up the 'Filthy Five'

After setting out to rein in the pollution from the five dirtiest power plants in the state, MASSPIRG helps get Massachusetts to finalize the first-ever state-imposed limits on power plant emissions of mercury and carbon dioxide.



Photos: (Above, left to right) MASSPIRG's Mindy Lubber and Doug Phelps promote the Massachusetts Bottle Bill in 1981; MASSPIRG's Mindy Lubber speaks to the press about the MASSPIRG-backed 1986 hazardous waste cleanup ballot initiative; MASSPIRG activists demonstrate opposition to Massachusetts's 'Filthy Five' power plants' pollution. Credits: Staff, Staff, Staff.





**Five decades ago, groups of college students began** investigating problems from shady business practices to illegal pollution. They called themselves PIRG—Public Interest Research Groups. MASSPIRG and the PIRG network are celebrating 50 years of action for a change.



## 2004: MASSPIRG wins ban on indoor smoking

The Smoke-Free Workplace Law passes and smoking is banned from all workplaces, including bars and restaurants. PIRGs in Rhode Island, Texas, Colorado, Maryland and Wisconsin soon follow suit with similar bans.

## 2009: MASSPIRG helps increase public transportation funding

MASSPIRG prompts the state Legislature to increase funds for public transportation by \$160 million to prevent fare increases and service cuts for the country's oldest public transit system.

## 2010: PIRG helps create CFPB

PIRG co-founds a coalition that, alongside U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren, wins the creation of the federal Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). Since opening its doors in 2011, the CFPB has helped return \$16 billion in relief for consumers.

## 2012: Massachusetts passes sweeping health cost control bill

Massachusetts passes MASSPIRG-backed health care reforms as part of a larger package to save \$200 billion over the next 15 years by linking health care cost increases to the growth of the state's economy.



## 2020: MASSPIRG expands voting access during pandemic

MASSPIRG and allies win universal vote-by-mail, expanded early voting, an online portal for voters to track the progress of their absentee ballots, public health safeguards at polling places, and other measures.

## 2021: Massachusetts bans toxic flame retardants

MASSPIRG and our coalition partners help win a ban on toxic flame retardants in furniture and other products, protecting children and firefighters from these hazardous chemicals.

Photos: (Above, left to right) MASSPIRG Legislative Director Deirdre Cummings speaks in front of the State House for the signing of the indoor smoking ban; MASSPIRG's Deirdre Cummings met with CFPB Director Richard Cordray in June 2017; MASSPIRG's Janet Domenitz (at podium) alongside firefighters and state Rep. Marjorie Decker.  
Credits: Staff, Caley McGuane, Staff.



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## **YOUR CONSUMER ADVOCATES**

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Executive Director

**Deirdre Cummings**  
Legislative Director

**Jeanne Foy**  
Director, Consumer Action Center

**Lucas Gutterman**  
Director, Designed to Last Campaign

**Patricia Kelmar**  
Senior Director, Health Care Campaigns

**Ed Mierzwinski**  
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**Teresa Murray**  
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**Nathan Proctor**  
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to Repair

**Jenny Douglass**  
Director, Membership Services

**Emily Reid**  
National Canvass Director

**Amy Floyd**  
Senior Director, Grants

To see a full staff list and learn more about our campaigns, visit us online at [masspirg.org/about/team](https://masspirg.org/about/team).