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**wbur**  
IMPACT REPORT



# 2021

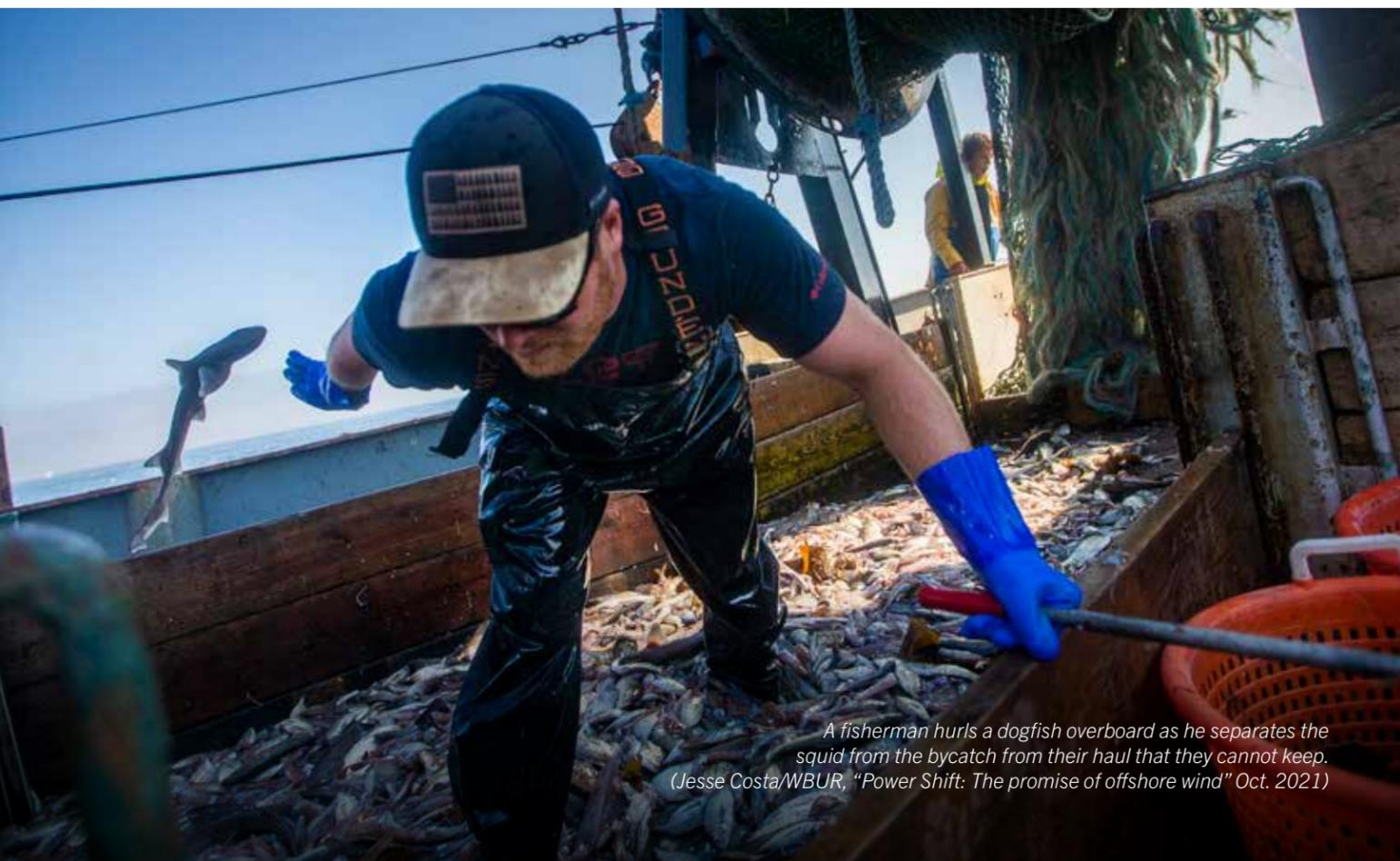
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IMPACT REPORT

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*Ducks wading in a puddle at the foot of the statue of John Singleton in Copley Sq. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*



*Students look at what they've dug up in the garden at the Greenwood School in Dorchester. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR, "Unexpected Lessons" May 2021)*



*A fisherman hurls a dogfish overboard as he separates the squid from the bycatch from their haul that they cannot keep. (Jesse Costa/WBUR, "Power Shift: The promise of offshore wind" Oct. 2021)*

## Introduction

Clear, reliable information is hard to come by these days, but the public is hungry for it. People are also hungry to reflect on what it means to live through such a challenging time – from the effects of the ongoing pandemic to political and social unrest, locally and nationally.

That's where WBUR comes in. Our journalism helps make sense of what's unfolding and what it means for people's lives. We are a trusted source of news and a forum for public discussion. And we serve as a touchstone that will always be there for you, even in difficult times.

With your support over the past year, WBUR mounted in-depth investigations, hosted on-air and in-person conversations, and produced revealing stories that broadened our understanding of the world, opening our eyes and ears.

We have held powerful people and institutions accountable for their missteps and transgressions.

We amplified voices that too often go unheard in our communities.

We engaged new audiences to participate in the democratic process.

And we told stories that provided comfort, connection and joy, at a time when those essential elements of our lives were often scarce.

Your contributions made this possible. And we are sharing this report to spotlight some of the ways that support allowed WBUR to serve our audience and our communities.



# COVERING OUR COMMUNITY



**This past year was tough on the Commonwealth. The ongoing pandemic and the effects of climate change tested local health and education systems and strained livelihoods and infrastructure.**

The arrival of COVID-19 vaccines provided essential protections from the worst effects of the fast-spreading virus. WBUR helped the community navigate the rollout of the vaccines with extensive coverage on every platform – from the initial testing, approval and distribution to arguments over vaccine requirements.

In addition to the on-air and online reporting, interactive maps and town-level data provided ways for listeners and readers to find relevant information for their area. A newsletter and audio “minicast” delivered daily updates. Health reporter Martha Bebinger regularly answered audience questions, while commentary from

*Cognoscenti* and live virtual town hall meetings through CitySpace at The Lavine Broadcast Center offered forums for discussion.

WBUR also partnered with Boston’s local Spanish-language daily, *El Planeta*, to translate and share vaccine reporting and information in Spanish.

“WBUR has become indispensable to communities across Massachusetts in the pandemic for live and local news, public health and safety updates, as well as deep reporting and thoughtful analysis,” Dan Mauzy, executive editor of news, said. “Our plan is to use every tool we have to get this vital, timely information to the public.”



*Opposite: Buttons and wrist bands were handed out to vaccine recipients at the Gillette Stadium COVID-19 Vaccination Site.*

*Clockwise from top: First responders sit in the waiting area after receiving the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine.*

*Governor Charlie Baker announces the end of the state of emergency.*

*WBUR CommonHealth reporter Angus Chen recorded Dr. Atul Gawande at the new vaccination site at the Reggie Lewis Center in Roxbury.*

*A Boston Medical Center employee wheels a cart containing Pfizer’s COVID-19 vaccine to the pharmacy. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*

By the end of 2021, the vaccines were approved for younger age groups – but not before COVID-19 disrupted another school year, complicating the lives of students, parents and educators. WBUR responded with two series that addressed and assessed the impact of this disruption on local families.

With support from the National Institute for Health Care Management Foundation, “Pandemic Generation” explored the mental health consequences of the pandemic for kids and young adults. WBUR

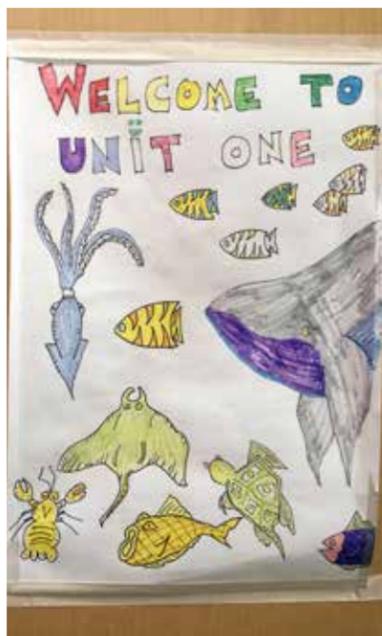
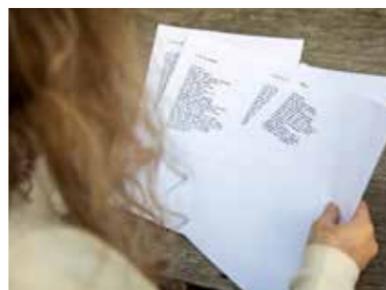
reported on alarming spikes in anxiety and depression in young people, including suicidal thoughts and attempts. Other stories in the weeklong series also gave young people a chance to describe their feelings of grief and anger, the magnifying effects of inequity and racism, and the ramifications of many months in isolation.

“Being a teen in the pandemic is like having your life preserved in amber,” wrote Josephine Almond, a 14-year-old who wrote one of several related essays for Cognoscenti. Other students expressed themselves through letters, poetry and artwork.

The reporting on these difficult issues relied heavily on individual stories, as well as conversations with parents, mental health workers and researchers. WBUR

also covered possible solutions, including one that focused on the positive effects that can emerge from a negative experience – what a psychologist from the University of Massachusetts, Boston, described as post-traumatic growth.

WBUR turned to solutions in “Unexpected Lessons” as well. This series focused on the surprising ways online classes affected students, parents and educators across Massachusetts during the



*Clockwise from top:  
A teen looks through her typed poems.  
(Robin Lubbock/WBUR)*

*A welcome sign on the door at Franciscan Children's  
in Brighton. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)*

*Sixth graders at the Clark Avenue Middle School head  
to lunch. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*

*Opposite: A health worker leads a mother and her child  
to an examination room at the Brockton Neighborhood  
Health Center. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*





many months of disrupted learning. In some cases that meant students with disabilities found easier ways to engage and access their classes. Another story described how outdoor play could be used as a teaching tool. The reporting explained how faculty and administrators had to adapt and consider new approaches to classroom discipline. And CitySpace provided a virtual forum for two public conversations with school leaders.

*Clockwise from top:  
The desks in a kindergarten class at Barbieri Elementary School in Framingham are spread out six feet apart to maintain social distancing. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*

*Students work on some raised beds behind the Greenwood School in Dorchester. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)*

*A student does his homework in his backyard using a magnifier to assist his vision. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)*



**As WBUR continues to cover the pandemic, the newsroom also maintains its focus on the dangers of climate change – especially what the pace of rising sea levels and coastal flooding mean for cities like Boston.** By 2030, sea levels are expected to be nine inches higher than they were in 2016.

In “Boston Under Water,” WBUR’s environment team examined the impending challenges and possible remedies, such as new modes of transportation and constructing berms and wetlands. Supplemented with dramatic photos, graphs and maps, the reporting in this series also asked questions about equity and effectiveness. Barbara Moran, WBUR senior producing editor, environment, moderated a conversation at CitySpace on Earth Day in April about the future of coastal life in the face of rising sea levels.

The search for new sources of energy is a critical component to the conversation about climate change. That’s why WBUR collaborated with Politico’s E&E News (Essential Energy & Environment



*An engineer sets up a 360 camera to survey the area around Hallet Street in Dorchester, hoping the pictures can help solve some of Boston’s stormwater issues. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*

*A police car navigates through floodwaters on Central Street. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)*





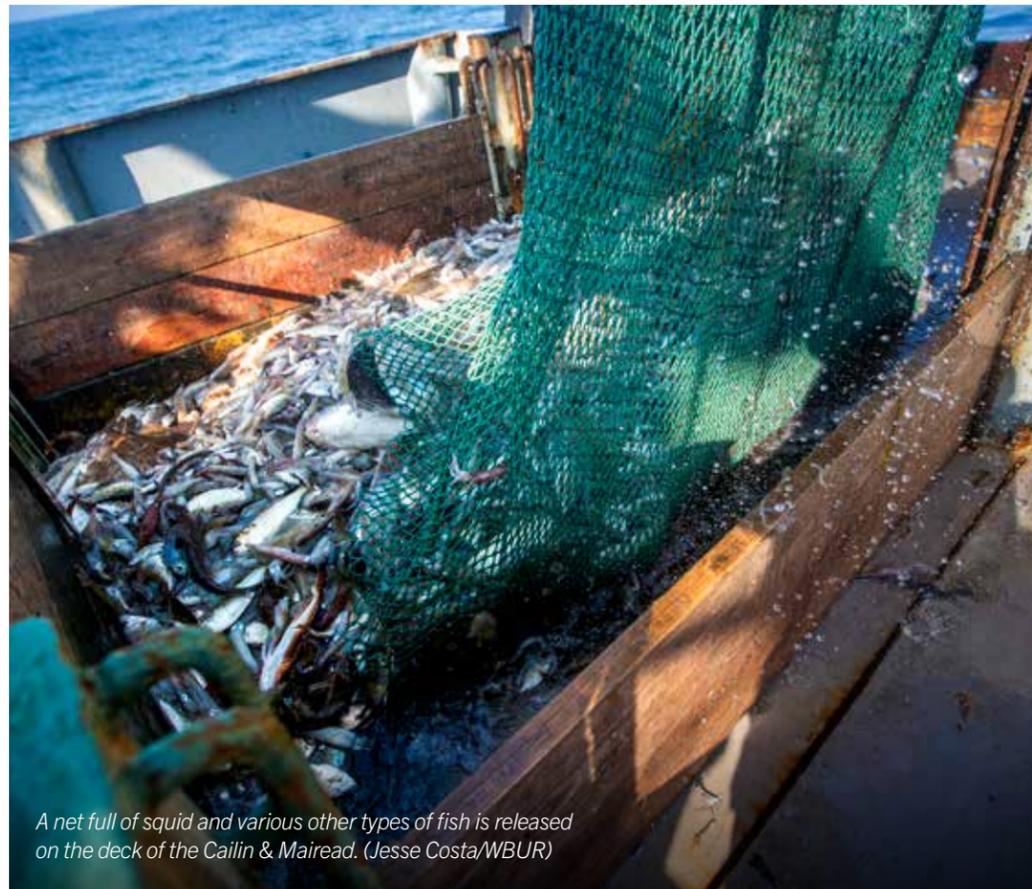
*Trainees practice the use of safety equipment as they climb ladders during the Working At Heights training course at the Massachusetts Maritime Academy. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)*

*As the Caitlin & Mairead makes it's way out of Lake Montauk into Gardners Bay, Dave Aripotch takes notes of the trip in a log book. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*



News) to produce “Power Shift: The Promise of Offshore Wind.” The reporting examined the promise of local jobs as well as the impact of the region’s fishing industry. And WBUR’s coverage scrutinized the role and responsibility of oil companies in the green energy sector.

Shining a light on issues of public concern is a core function of our journalism. With a mix of on-air reporting, digital storytelling, live conversations and compelling imagery and graphics, WBUR’s journalism brings the community together to understand complex problems while exploring ways to address them.



*A net full of squid and various other types of fish is released on the deck of the Caitlin & Mairead. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*



*The turbines of the Block Island Wind Farm. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*

## COMMUNITY VOICES

**“I wasn’t asking for a diagnosis or a prognosis, I just wanted to know where he was.”**

– Carmen Berry, who was searching for her son, Nelson Rodriguez, 57, after he was taken from the prison where he was incarcerated and hospitalized with COVID-19.



## This year's Boston mayoral election offered voters the most diverse field of candidates in the city's history.

That's one reason why WBUR partnered with local Spanish-language daily *El Planeta* to offer election news. This award-winning collaboration on political coverage began during the 2020 elections, building on an existing partnership. And it was just one of the ways WBUR set out to cover a local campaign year that seemed almost certain to end with the first woman of color elected to run the city.

Ultimately, the voters chose City Councilor Michelle Wu, the daughter of Taiwanese immigrants, to become Boston's first woman, first Asian American and first person of color elected to the city's highest office.

WBUR CitySpace hosted a sometimes contentious debate among the candidates in the September preliminary election. CitySpace was also the venue for town hall-style forums with each finalist candidate: Wu and her November challenger, fellow City Councilor Anissa Essaibi George. WBUR hosted an off-site final debate in collaboration with *The Boston Globe*, UMass Boston's McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies and WCVB-TV.

WBUR offered extensive reporting on the key issues in the race and explanations of the candidates' positions, including housing, policing, the racial wealth gap, free transit,

schools and climate change. There also were new vote-by-mail rules and other ballot issues to explain to voters. In addition, WBUR was part of a polling consortium that included the *Dorchester Reporter* and *The Boston Foundation*, with the survey research by MassINC Polling Group.

Wu took office two weeks after the election, ending a busy year of historic transitions – and continuous political reporting for WBUR's journalists.



*Opposite: Newly elected mayor of Boston Michelle Wu embraces her sons. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*

*Clockwise, from top: Anissa Essaibi George concedes the Boston mayoral election. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR); WBUR's Ally Jarmanning records while Essaibi George speaks during a campaign event in Mattapan. (Jesse Costa/WBUR); The entrance to the voting station at the Phineas Bates Elementary School in Roslindale. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)*





Five days before the Sept. 15 preliminary election that narrowed the field in Boston's mayoral race, five of the candidates faced one another in a live debate at CitySpace at The Lavine Broadcast Center – WBUR's space for community and cultural discussion. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

This year, WBUR CitySpace has been home to more than political conversations. After months of producing powerful online events, CitySpace reopened in 2021 for in-person, public conversations – many of which were linked directly to WBUR's journalism and live streamed for viewers at home.

The September preliminary mayoral debate was just one example. Other events included a conversation with world-renowned chef Jacques Pépin, a discussion about psychoactive plants with author Michael Pollen, and a celebration of WBUR's Car Talk with host Ray Magliozzi, and a return of WBUR's ARTery 25.



After more than 30 years on the air, WBUR and NPR's beloved show Car Talk ended its run on radio stations in September. WBUR CitySpace celebrated the show with a live event on Nov. 4, 2021. (Candice Springer for WBUR)

The 2021 ARTery 25 (Liz Linder for WBUR)





The significance of those societal changes echoed in another CitySpace conversation in December, when Misty Copeland, the first Black female principal dancer with the prestigious American Ballet Theatre, joined four other trailblazing ballerinas whose careers crystallized at the Dance Theatre of Harlem in the 1970s. This event was an installment of “Tell Me More!” – a monthly series at CitySpace that pairs fascinating leaders in their respective fields for conversations about their journeys, inspirations and life lessons.



*Misty Copeland in conversation with Sheila Rohan, Gayle McKinney Griffith, Lydia Abarca Mitchell and Karlya Shelton Benjamin – The Ballerinas Of The 152nd Street Black Ballet (Liz Linder)*



September’s ARTery 25 was a celebration of more than two dozen emerging artists of color who are influencing Boston’s cultural scene. The event was the culmination of a weeklong series from WBUR’s arts and culture team, with dynamic performances and presentations that showcased a wide range of talented creators, from dancers and DJs to designers. And the artists’ work often transcended traditional labels – mixed

media, multimedia, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary. The goal, as Managing Editor Maria Garcia told the audience, was “to celebrate expression in its many forms, to connect with each other.”

“Art shifts culture,” Garcia said. “And culture shifts public attitudes, which can shape policy in our society.”

*Clockwise from top: Red Shaydez, The 2021 ARTery 25 celebration, Maria Garcia (Liz Linder for WBUR)*



## COMMUNITY VOICES

**“I just feel like myself, and that’s it. I don’t feel that different from anybody else.”**

– Hallel, a 9-year-old non-binary child who identifies as a “boy-girl.” (Jesse Costa/WBUR)



# INVESTIGATIONS THAT DIG DEEP

## When WBUR's new investigations team demonstrated that the civil forfeiture law in Massachusetts was one of the weakest in the country, lawyers, civil rights advocates and state legislators took notice.



A woman speaks with her attorney outside of the Second District Courthouse of Southern Worcester County in Uxbridge. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

The story, published in collaboration with the investigative journalism newsroom ProPublica and supported by a grant from the prestigious Pulitzer Center, found that the district attorney's office in Worcester County was holding onto people's money – sometimes for decades. Under Massachusetts' civil forfeiture system, police can confiscate property they suspect is part of a drug crime and prosecutors could hold it indefinitely, even when criminal charges have been dismissed. Trying to get money back is so onerous, legal experts say it may violate due process

*Opposite: A civil forfeiture notice published in the Worcester Telegram & Gazette in 2016 from the Worcester County DA notifying more than 700 people to take legal action if they want to dispute the DA's claims to their money. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*

*Kim Loveall Price, right, and Joyce Hansberry, residence manager of the apartments, look through items from the "sharing shelves" at Ashwood Court. (Mike Seigel for WBUR)*

rights. In 2018, one in four civil forfeiture incidents in Worcester County had no accompanying drug conviction or criminal drug case. Instead, the district attorney's office stockpiled the money – and then later spent it on everything from the upkeep of tennis courts to a Zamboni.

In the days after WBUR aired its findings, several state lawmakers demanded action. And Attorney General Maura Healey's office announced it was reviewing legislative proposals related to the forfeiture law.

Another story by WBUR and ProPublica later revealed that the Boston Police Department quietly circumvented the city council's

usual budget review process by using civil forfeiture money to pay for a controversial surveillance technology that tracks the location and use of cell phones.

Stories like this are examples of WBUR's essential role as a public watchdog – journalism that holds public officials and other powerful institutions accountable for their actions. This kind of digging also requires follow-up reporting. That's what happened a week after WBUR reported on a legal battle between a local affordable housing organization and an out-of-state investment firm looking to extract profits from low-income properties funded by taxpayers.

Tenants' Development Corp. was one of the oldest groups of its kind in the nation – protecting the rights of renters, many of them families of color and seniors in Boston's South End. But, as





Left: Duxbury Fire captain N95 masks to a paramedic after he returns from a call. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)



Right: Charles Clark, of Tenants' Development Corp., walks past an apartment in the South End, one of the affordable housing properties managed by the nonprofit. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

WBUR reported, a Denver-based investment group was battling the non-profit for control of 36 properties – a tactic that the firm and others like it are accused of using to squeeze extra profits out of a federal program for low-income housing.

Public officials responded quickly. The state's Housing and Economic Development secretary said he was looking at the issue and would "try to build in some more safeguards." Boston's chief of housing called the investors' efforts "despicable" and was looking to Congress for help. And two lawmakers in Washington, House Ways and Means Chairman Richard Neal of Massachusetts and Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden of Oregon, said they were looking for ways to do so.

Right: Landlord She Ling Wang walks up to Robelio Gonzalez (left) after Gonzalez was briefly detained by ICE agents outside the Lynn apartment. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)

This kind of follow-up is not unique. In June, after a WBUR investigation reported on companies peddling masks and other COVID-19 protection gear at high prices, a Salem-based firm agreed to pay a \$3.5 million settlement over allegations that it failed to deliver more than 900,000 promised N95 medical masks to Massachusetts in 2020. The commonwealth attorney general's office investigated this problem following WBUR's coverage.

The attorney general also launched an investigation of a Lynn landlord after WBUR reported on unlawful evictions during the pandemic. In March, the commonwealth sued the landlord, alleging that he intimidated tenants and threatened to report them to immigration authorities so they would not complain about dangerous and unsanitary living conditions in their apartments.

To reach critical audiences, WBUR has partnered with El Planeta to translate and distribute relevant investigative reporting.



## COMMUNITY VOICES

**"I understand this cannot stay like that. I don't want to be here... I'm not asking for anything more than affordable housing. That's it. A place. They're telling me I'm on a five- or 10-year waiting list. That's unreasonable, unfair and it's not going to change anything for me."**

– Ron Geddes, 53, who spent months living in the tent encampment informally called "Mass and Cass" – at the intersection of Massachusetts Avenue and Melnea Cass Boulevard, close to Boston Medical Center, several addiction treatment programs, homeless shelters and other social service agencies. (Robin Lubbock/WBUR)





# A WIDER LENS

**In addition to world-class local programming, WBUR is also a major source of national news — extending our reach and impact far and wide.**

When the last U.S. troops departed from Afghanistan in August, *On Point* made sure that was not the end of the story. Host Meghna Chakrabarti and her colleagues devoted the following week's programs to a four-part series looking at how the 20-year war shaped the lives of the Afghan people and the 800,000 Americans who fought in the extended conflict there.

In one episode, U.S. veterans spoke about what the end of the war meant for them, and the experiences that they came home with. Other episodes focused on how the women of Afghanistan would fare under the newly installed Taliban government, as well as the concerns of the country's youth and journalists.

*On Point* has used the series format to add depth and context to issues in the news. In the show's "Prime Effect" series, *On Point* spent several months examining the reach and power of Amazon.

*On Point* is distributed across the country's public radio system, along with *Here and Now*, the midday news program WBUR co-produces with NPR.

*Left: An Afghan mother and child, part of a family which evacuated and resettled in Worcester. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*



*Here and Now* is well-known for its powerful interviews – from a woman from Queens, New York, sharing memories of her grandfather’s love of current pop music as part of the program’s recurring series “COVID-19 Remembrance,” to a conversation with Ursula Burns, the former Xerox CEO who was the first Black woman to head a Fortune 500 company.

In another *Here and Now* segment, three Muslim Americans described how the 2001 terrorist attacks affected their lives and professional choices over the 20 years since.

Local news in our region can also generate national headlines. That’s why NPR’s *Morning Edition* turned to WBUR’s Miriam Wasser for her reporting on jobs and labor in the emerging offshore wind power industry. And when Boston agreed to a \$1.3 million settlement after police mistook a Black man suffering a stroke for a drunk driver, *Weekend Edition Saturday* relied on reporting from WBUR’s Ally Jarmanning, who covered the case extensively as part of her focus on police accountability.

Left: Miriam Wasser in the field.  
(Jesse Costa/WBUR)



## Selena: How a Transcendent Singer Helped Others Find Their Voices

WBUR’s national impact also includes its podcasts. *Anything for Selena*, released in early 2021, is more than a biographic remembrance of Selena Quintanilla, the Mexican-American music sensation who was murdered over 25 years ago. The 2021 podcast delves into complex, intersecting discussions of politics, pop culture and identity that straddles genres and borders.

In this intimate journey, host Maria Garcia explores what Selena’s legacy shows us about belonging in America. For Garcia, Selena’s story was a mirror she used to reflect on her own personal history, inviting others to do so as well.

“There was this tension between these two parts of me,” Garcia told *The New York Times*, “and to see somebody who embodied both of those parts fully in the States and in Mexico, who traversed the two countries without code switching, who was the same person on both sides of the border – I’d never seen anything like that. It struck me at a young age and it stayed with me all of my life.”

Garcia was a managing editor at WBUR and had previously been the *The ARTery* senior editor of arts and culture. She was raised in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, and El Paso, Texas, and her personal stories and experiences as a queer Xicana and a first-generation immigrant ground the series. The series was produced in Spanish and English by WBUR’s iLab and Futuro Studios. CitySpace hosted a live taping of the final episode.

Media buzz and strong reviews helped propel interest in the series, which Apple recognized as “newcomer of the year” in its list of 2021’s best podcasts. Spotify recognized the podcast as well, while *Vulture*, *Time*, *Mother Jones* and other outlets published articles and interviews about the series and its themes, which ventured into topics ranging from the rise of Tejano music and the impact of Selena’s Spanglish to skin color and sexuality. *Boston Magazine* also recognized Garcia as its 2021 best podcaster.

## WBUR's journalism received tremendous recognition this year, winning more than a dozen and a half regional and national awards

### Recognitions for WBUR's "Dying on the Sheriff's Watch," a four-part investigative series by Christine Willmsen and Beth Healy:

« A **national Edward R. Murrow Award** for a large market news series from the Radio Television Digital News Association

« First place for investigative reporting from the **Public Media Journalism Association**, along with two second-place prizes for a news series and multimedia presentation

« Another first place for a news series from the **National Headliner Awards For Excellence In Radio Journalism**

« And third place for an investigative series from the **Awards For Excellence In Health Care Journalism**

### Additional awards and recognition for WBUR's work included:

« Another **national Edward R. Murrow Award** for a news documentary for "What the President Knew" – an *On Point* program hosted by Meghna Chakrabarti about how the White House has handled emerging threats – from 9/11 to COVID-19

« A **regional Edward R. Murrow Award** for innovation that went to "Mass. Election Prep" – a bilingual newsletter series produced in partnership with El Planeta that also was among the finalists for an award from the Online News Association

« Additional **regional Edward R. Murrow Awards**, including one for a hard news report on mounting COVID-19 cases in Chelsea; one for WBUR's reporting across digital platforms; and another for excellence in news writing

« Six additional **PMJA honors**, including four first place prizes – two for our coverage of the 2020 protests following the murder of George Floyd; one for an accountability story on delays in expanding the Boston Police Department's body camera policy; and another for the writing in a news feature about a snow day during the pandemic

« A second **National Headliner Award** in the category for radio coverage and projects about COVID-19 for our reporting on profiteering among the loosely regulated business of selling masks and other protective equipment

« **The Society of Professional Journalists' Sigma Delta Chi Award** for feature reporting in all radio market sizes for health care reporter Martha Bebinger's story on why some patients with COVID-19 remain in a prolonged or persistent coma after they come off a ventilator

« **Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly's award for Excellence in Legal Journalism** for senior correspondent and host Deborah Becker

« Recognition from **Apple, Spotify, Time** magazine and **Vulture** for Maria Garcia's "**Anything for Selena**," a series about the lasting impact of murdered Latina pop star Selena Quintanilla, as **one of 2021's best podcasts**. In addition, Spotify recognized the first installment of an "Endless Thread" series on memes as **one of the best podcast episodes of the year**.

« WBUR was also a finalist in the general excellence category for medium-sized newsrooms at the **2021 Online Journalism Awards**.

# HONORS FOR WBUR'S COMMITMENT TO EDITORIAL EXCELLENCE

## Your Impact

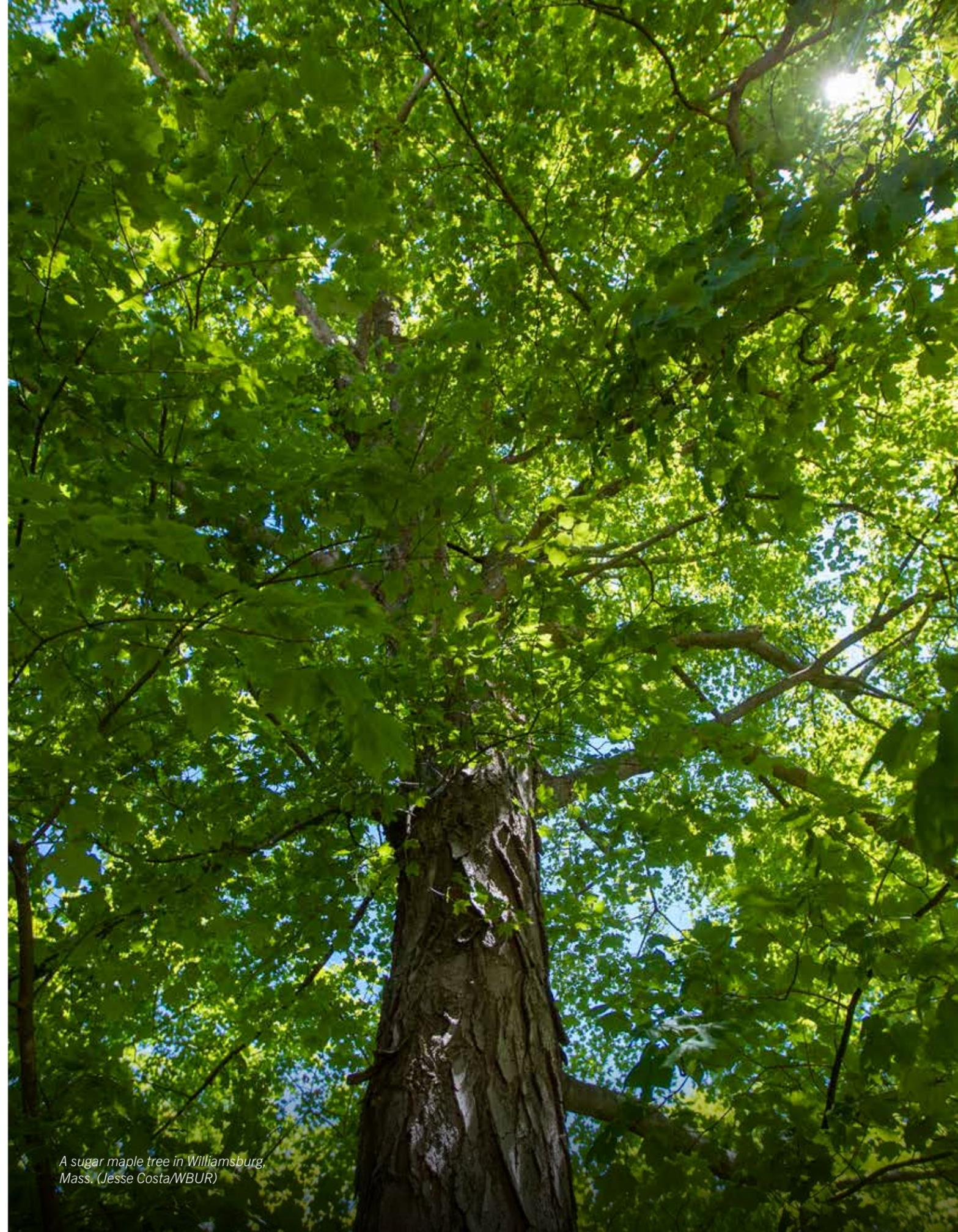
This report covers some of the meaningful journalism WBUR produced in 2021. It illustrates our daily commitment to provide the news, information and inspiration you depend on.

This important work is possible because of you. Member contributions provide the flow of funds that ensure our newsroom is consistent and enduring. Every gift has a major impact on the range of stories and conversations we share each day.

WBUR will always be a free public service, but our long-term sustainability isn't guaranteed. The pressure on local news organizations like ours is immense, as is the cost of supporting the kind of quality journalism and storytelling we produce. That's why we are increasingly dependent on your vital support.

Your contributions create a more informed public, and make Boston, the region and the country a better place. WBUR is journalism in the public interest, and public radio is one of the last great hopes for journalism and our democracy.

We are grateful for your long-term commitment to us, because we are committed to you.



*A sugar maple tree in Williamsburg, Mass. (Jesse Costa/WBUR)*

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