

Assisted Outpatient Treatment Policy Poll

A survey of registered voters in Massachusetts

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Survey Background

- These results are based on a Massachusetts statewide survey of 500 registered voters.
- The survey was conducted July 18-23, 2023 via live telephone interviewers and text to web surveys using the state voter file as a sample source.
- Data weighted to known and estimated population parameters by race, age, gender, education, geography, and party registration for voters statewide.
- The margin of error for the entire sample is +/- 4.8 percentage points, inclusive of the design effect.
- This project was sponsored by Assisted Outpatient Treatment Now.

Key Findings

- Support for the proposed AOT policy is strong, with majorities across demographic and partisan groupings expressing support for the concept.
- About two thirds maintain support throughout the entire survey, even after positive and negative messaging batteries. This suggests a level of stability at this early stage with relatively few changing their mind based on initial back and forth.
- In terms of demographics, there are fairly small gaps on gender and party. As of now, the proposed AOT policy is not broadly partisan, though Republicans are a little less likely to offer their support.

Key Findings

- The top performing positive messages focus on community treatment, people who are mentally ill being unaware of their disorder, and continuity of care.
- The top negative and top positive messages both have to do with capacity in the system itself. If AOT *does* become a contentious issue, this could be a key topic where AOT proponents will need to ensure the proposal is seen as helping with capacity challenges rather than exacerbating them.
- Most do not see the AOT proposal as a civil rights violation. However, civil rights concerns do appear to be weakening support among some groups.

Broad support for AOT concept

- On the first ask of whether voters favor the proposal, 75% at least “somewhat favor” AOT. Little movement in either direction with messaging.

Broad support for proposed AOT policy throughout the survey

% support / oppose AOT law initially, before, after messaging

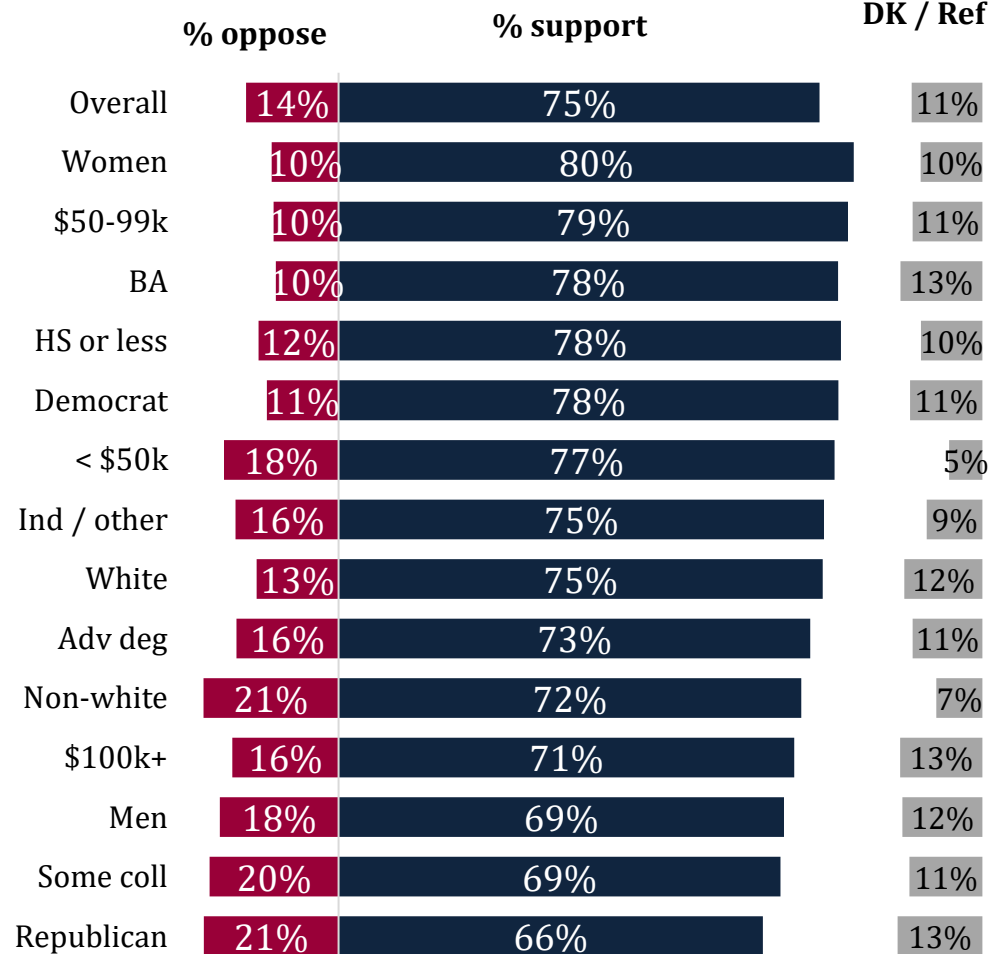
	Initial ask	After positive msg	After negative msg
Strongly favor	42%	41%	35%
Somewhat favor	32%	36%	35%
Somewhat oppose	6%	8%	11%
Strongly oppose	8%	8%	11%
Total favor	75%	77%	71%
Total oppose	14%	16%	22%
Don't know / refused	11%	6%	7%

Shape of support – initial ballot

- Majorities support the proposed AOT law across demographic groups
- There is a small gender gap, with 80% of women and 69% of men expressing support.
- This is not a partisan issue at this point, with majorities of both Democrats and Republicans supporting the proposal. Republicans are somewhat weaker in their support.

Majority support across demographic groups

% support / oppose AOT law initially by demographic



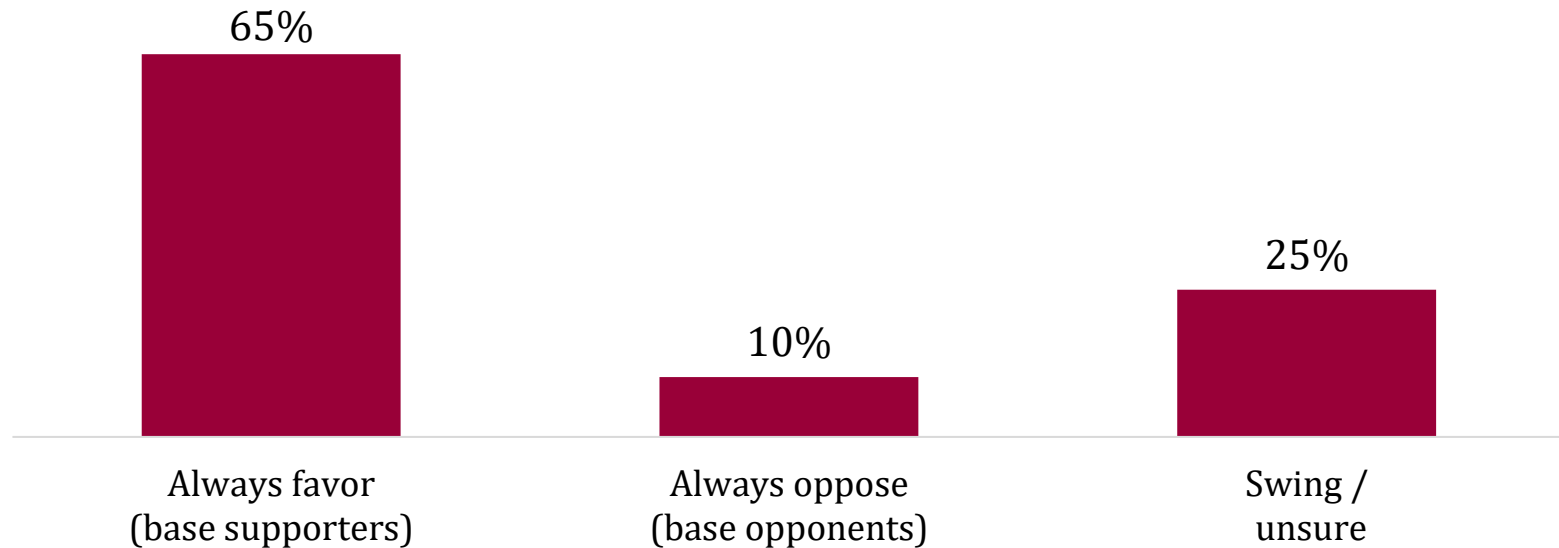
Q: State leaders in Massachusetts are considering a new law to mental health called assisted outpatient treatment. The law would let a court order people with serious mental illness to get treatment in their community. This would happen if they have a history of not following treatment, were recently hospitalized for mental illness, got mental health services while in jail, or if they are a danger to themselves or others. Based on this description, would you favor or oppose such a law?

Base vs swing voters

- About two thirds (65%) favor the AOT policy throughout the entire poll, while just 10% oppose it throughout.
- Those who move or are unsure represent 25% of voters.

One quarter of voters swing between favor and oppose AOT after messaging

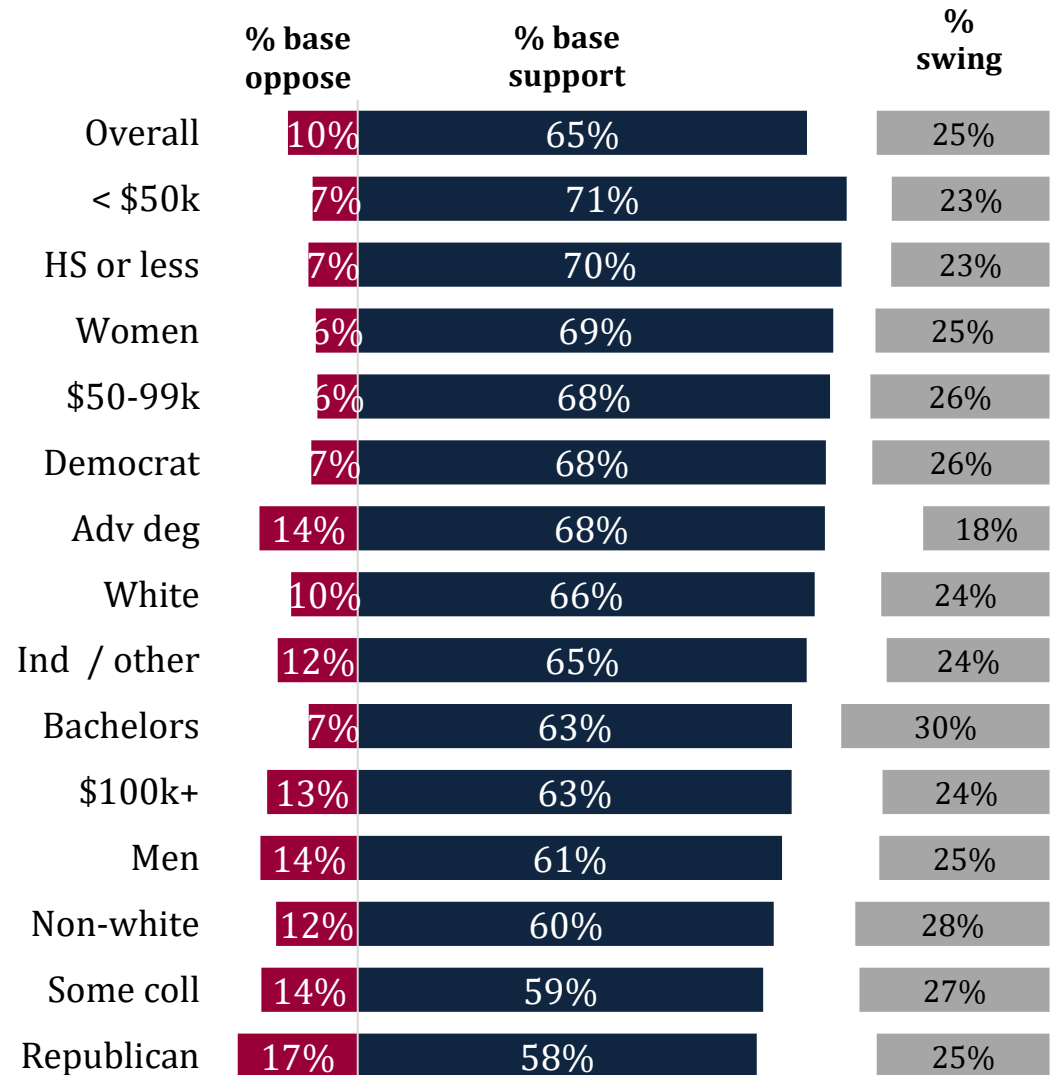
% who say they _____ the AOT law



Shape of base and swing groups

- Majorities of each demographic group fall within “base supporters,” meaning they supported the proposal throughout the survey.
- There are small gender and party gaps, with women and Democrats more consistently supportive than men and Republicans.

Most are supporters, one in four are “swing voters”
% support / oppose AOT law initially by demographic

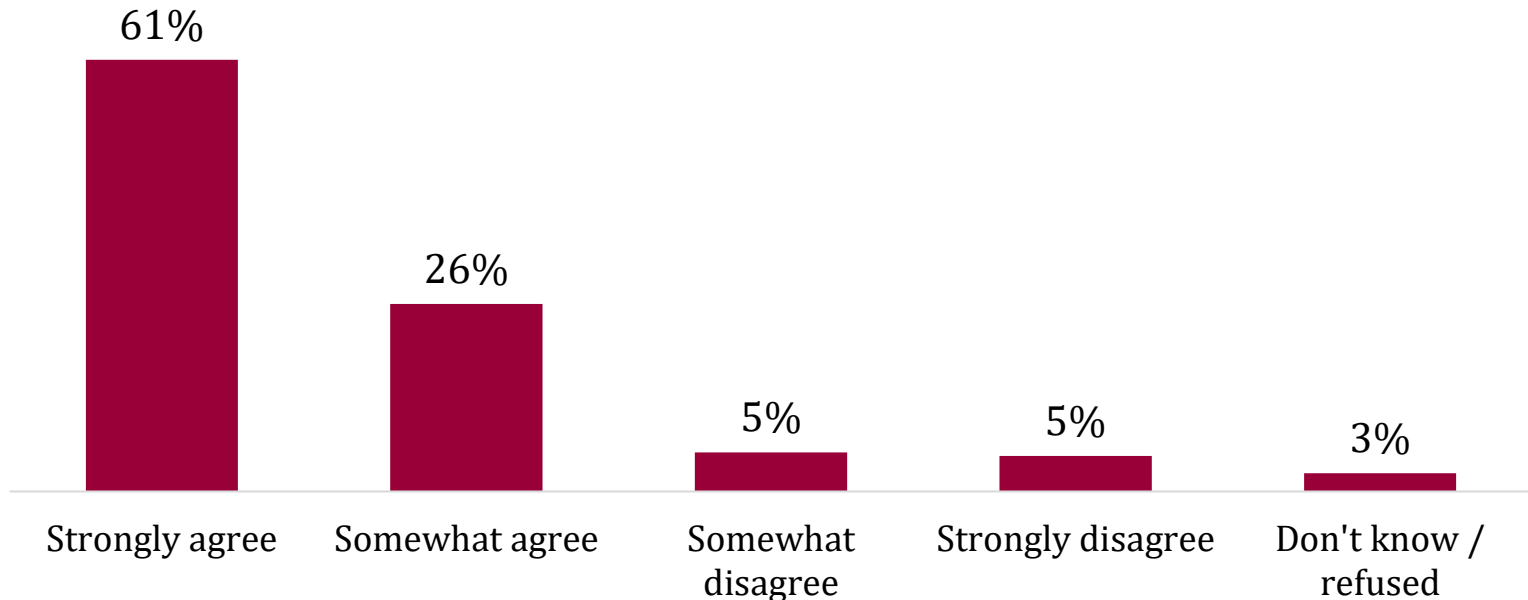


Support for AOT concept

- A majority (61%) of voters “strongly agree” with the AOT concept of requiring treatment if they are a danger to themselves or others while very few disagree.

Most say treatment should be required for those pose a danger

% who say they _____ that mentally ill should be required to receive treatment if they are a danger

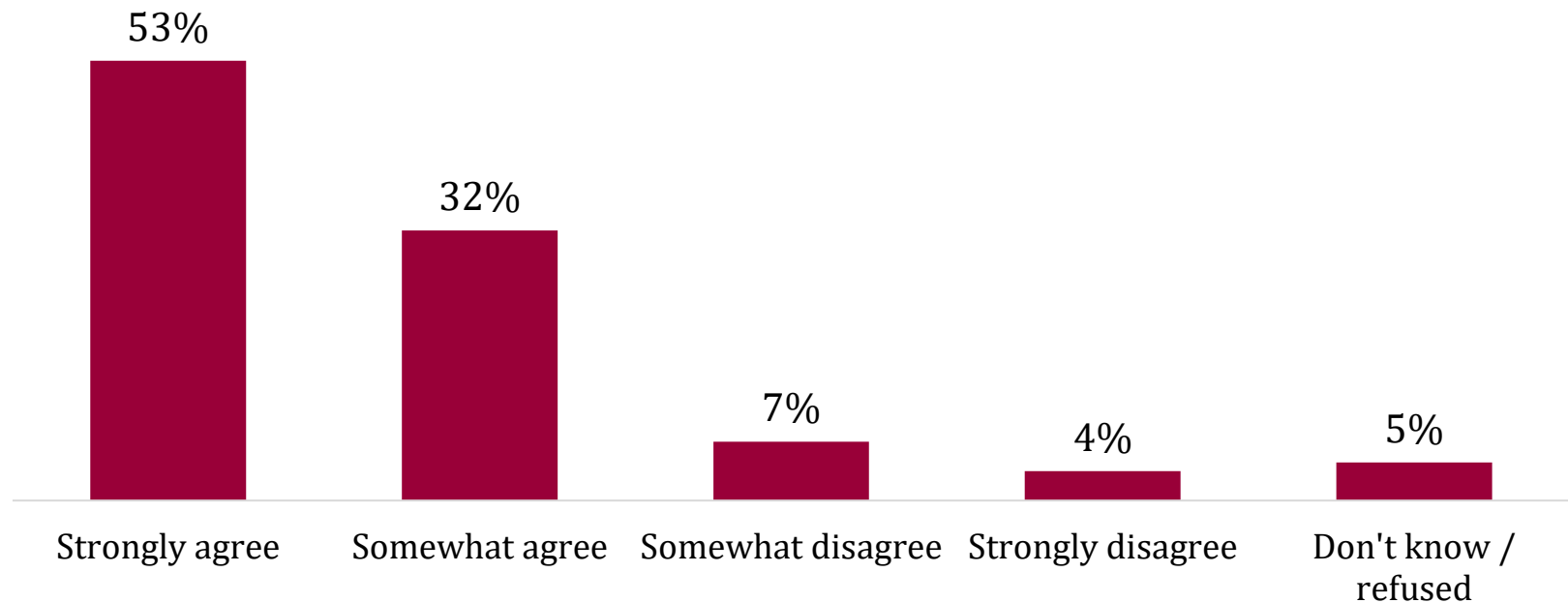


Mental illness as a top priority

- Voters see mental illness as a serious problem for Massachusetts that should be a top priority.

Voters see untreated mental illness as a serious problem and a priority for Mass.

% who say they _____ that mental illness is a serious problem and should be a top priority

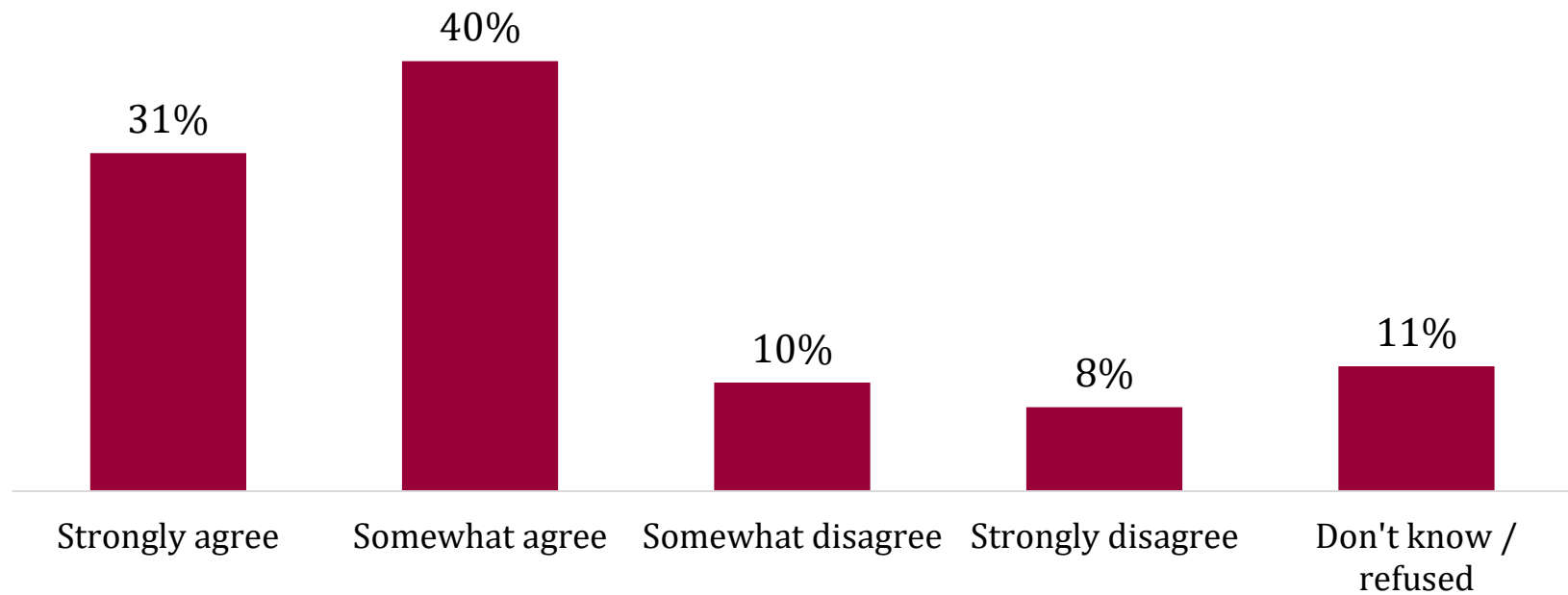


Reduction in homelessness

- Fewer (31%) “strongly agree” that court supervised treatment will get homeless mentally ill people off the streets, 71% at least “somewhat agree”.

Majority at least “somewhat agree” treatment will get homeless mentally ill off the streets

% who say they _____ that court ordered treatment will get mentally ill homeless off the streets



In their own words

“Mental health issues affect us all. Anything to improve health and safety for the general public is good.”

“It gives the judge too much power. And it seems to criminalize mental illness.”

“Mental health is a serious issue. Patients need much more support and requiring patients to continue care supports the individual, their families, their communities and society at large.”

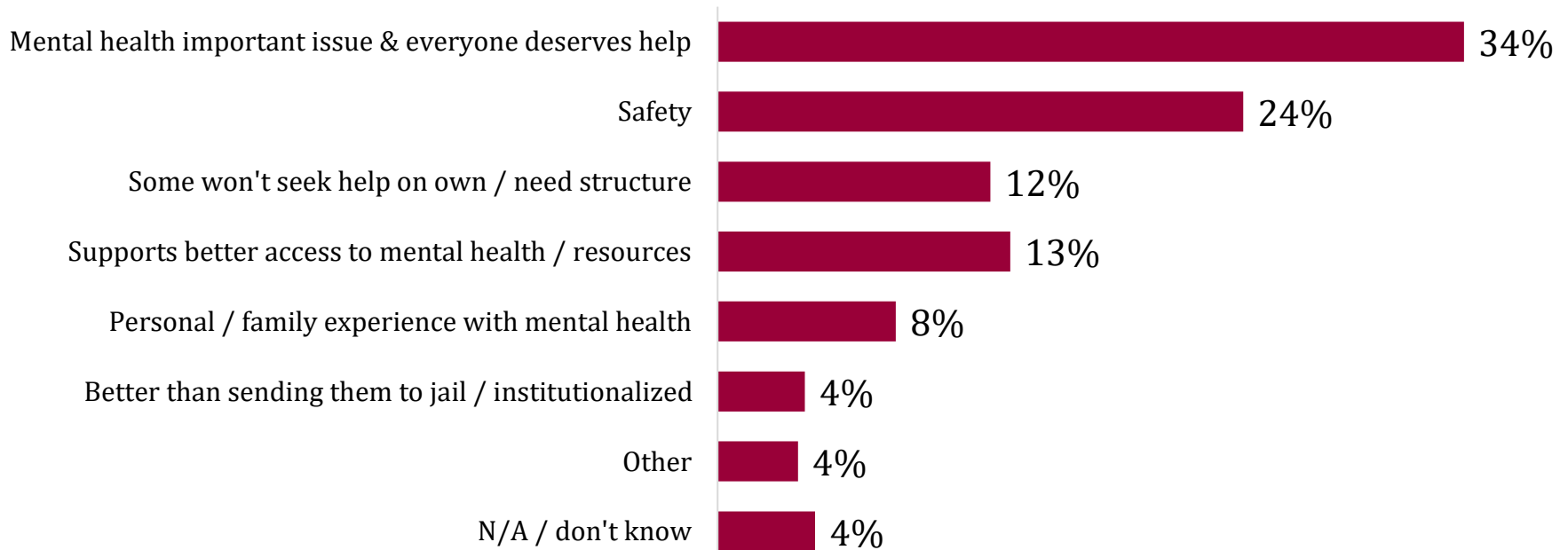
“Human rights. People can choose to seek assistance or not and should not be forced. We have rights to choose medications and services, unless guardianship is required.”

“I would need to know how it would be applied and how services would be made available to people ordered to receive them.”

Open ended responses – in favor

- The most cited reason for supporting AOT is that everyone deserves help because mental health is an important issue (34%).
- Another quarter (24%) cite safety as a concern.

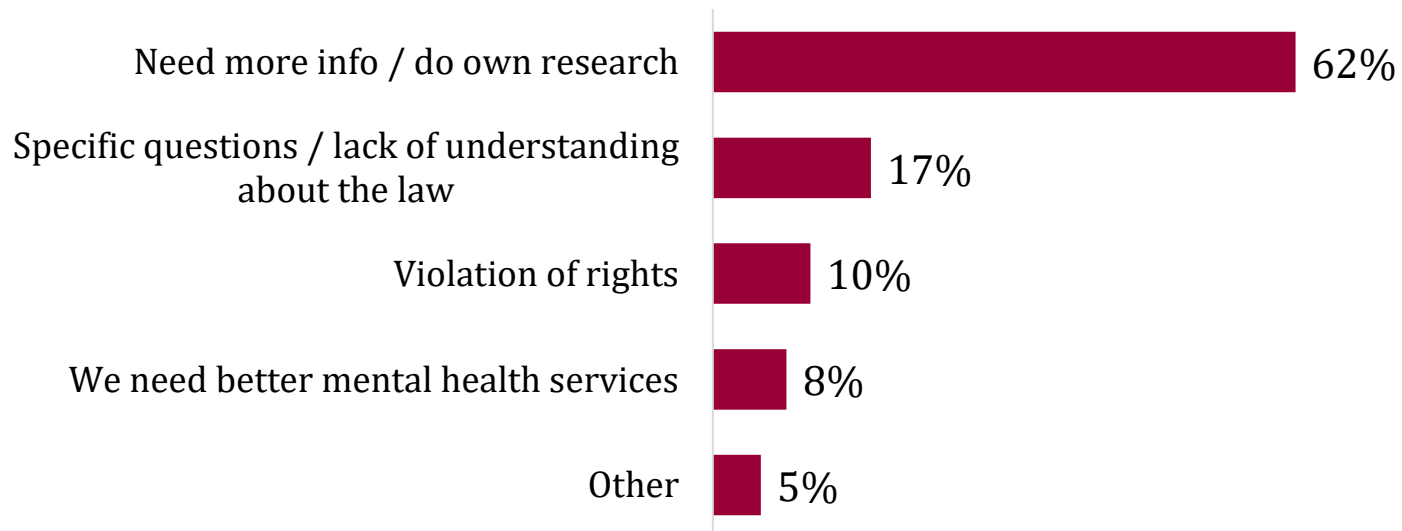
Of those that support AOT, plurality reference the importance of mental health support
% who say they support AOT because _____



Open ended responses – Unsure

- Of those who were unsure, 62% said they needed more information on the law or to do their own research before making a decision.
- Another 17% had specific questions about the law, some stated that because of their questions they did not understand it enough to make a decision.

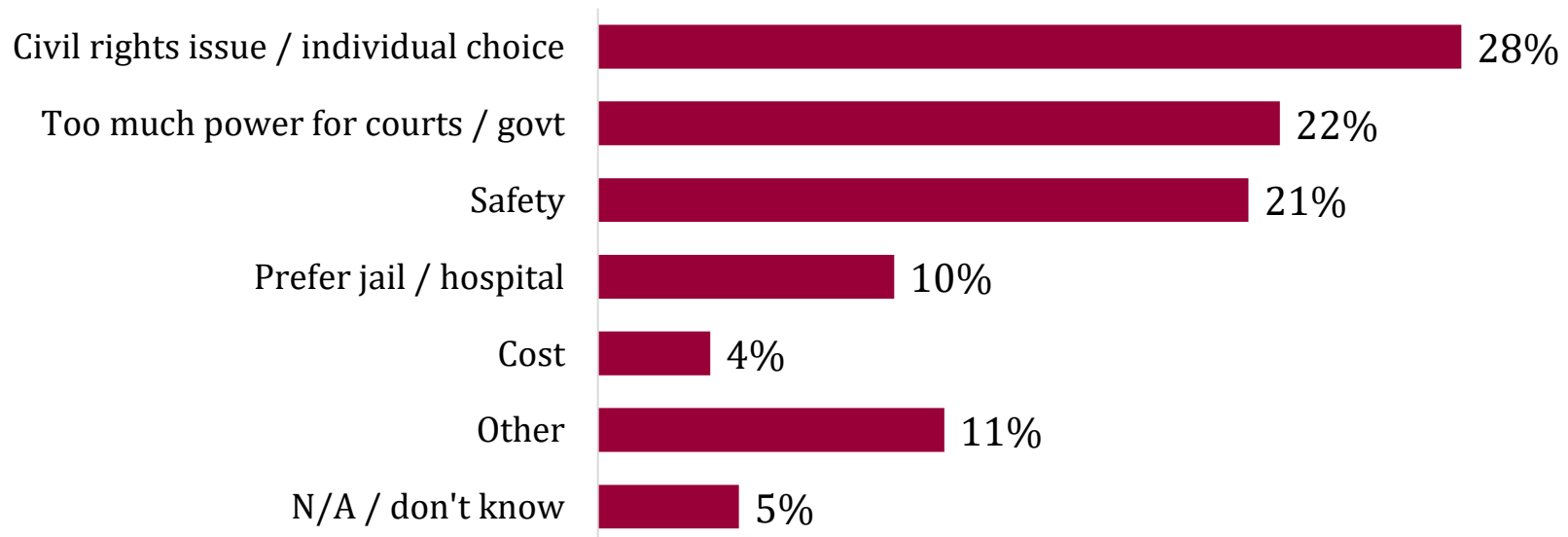
Of those that are undecided, majority need more information or want to research topic
% who say they are undecided about AOT because _____



Open ended response - opposed

- Of those who opposed AOT on the initial ask, top concerns relate to civil rights (28%), and whether the proposal would give courts and the government too much power (22%).

Of those that oppose AOT, plurality reference civil rights violation and individual choice
% who say they oppose AOT because _____

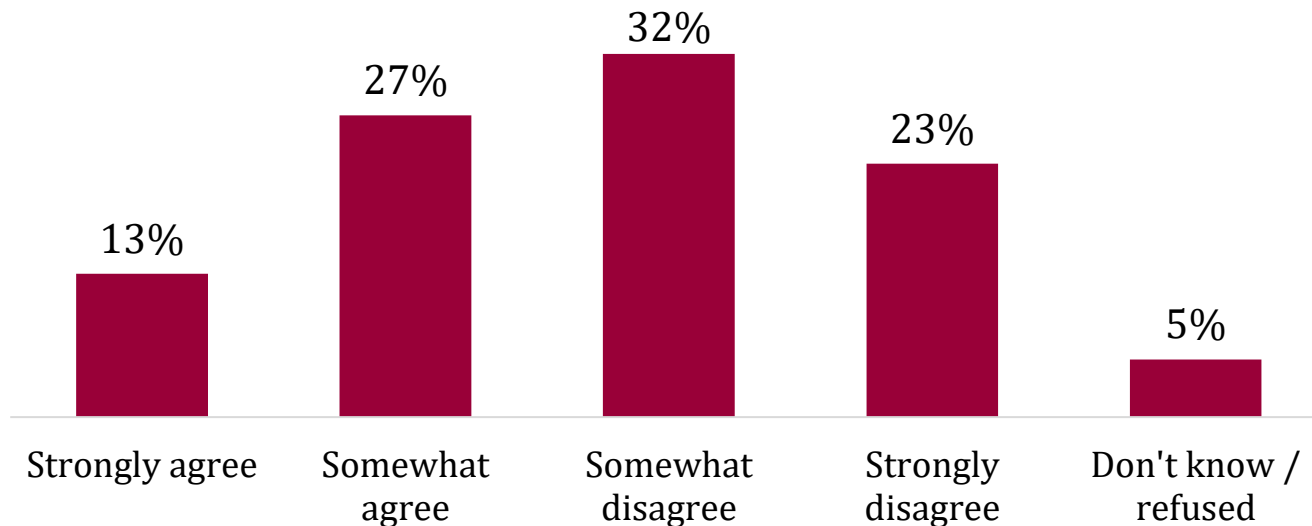


Civil rights concern? Most say no.

- While it is a top concern of opponents, most (55%) do not agree that forcing mentally ill people to get treatment is a violation of their civil rights.

Most do not agree that forcing treatment is a violation of civil rights

% who say they _____ that forcing mentally ill people to get treatment is a violation of their civil rights

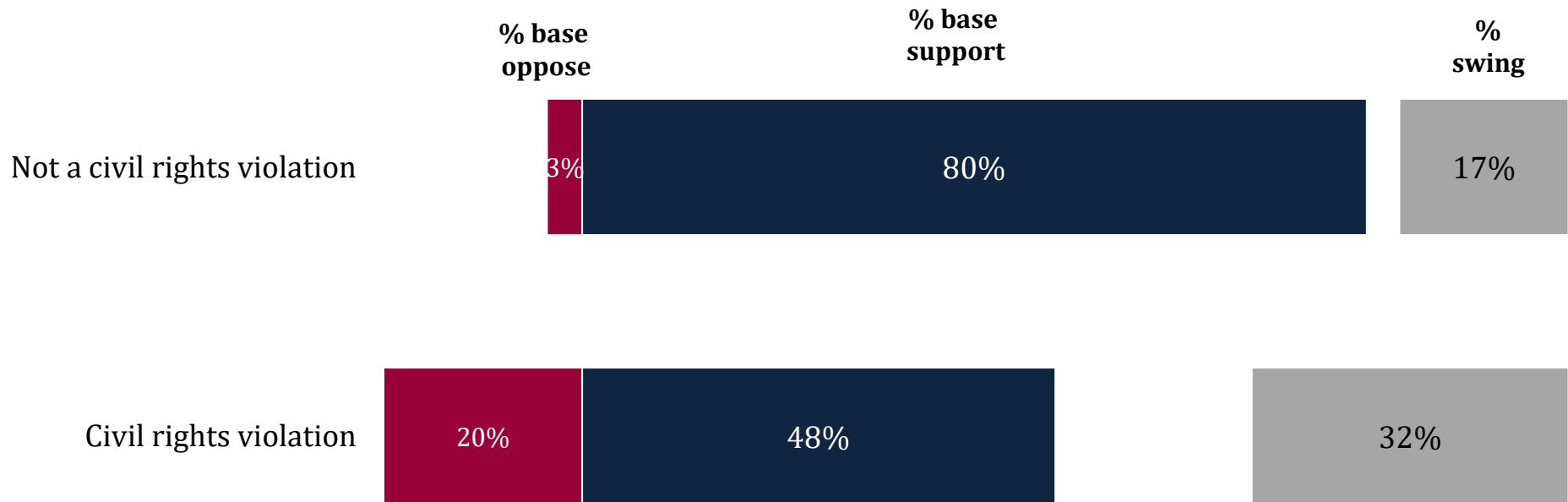


Civil rights – a dividing line?

- The idea that forcing people to get treated violates their civil rights is a potentially important divide in opinion. Those who see it as a violation are much less likely to be supporters.

Those that think AOT is civil rights violation harbor more skepticism

% who say they _____ that forcing treatment is a civil rights violation by base vs swing



Most compelling positive messages

- The top performing messages focus on community treatment, people who are mentally ill being unaware of their disorder, and continuity of care.

Ordering of positive messages for voters overall

% rating each message as _____

7: Very compelling

5-7: At least somewhat compelling

COMMUNITY TREATMENT: Mental illness requires long term continued treatment to find the right treatment. It is impossible to get long term continued treatment in an inpatient facility, due to lack of inpatient beds in the state. Assisted outpatient treatment will provide a way to find the right treatment in the community

35%

71%

UNAWARE OF DISORDER: Many people who suffer from serious mental illness are unable to recognize that they have a disorder and need assistance. Without assisted outpatient treatment, family members cannot intervene to get necessary mental health treatment for their loved ones

35%

70%

CONTINUITY OF CARE: Assisted outpatient treatment promotes continuity of care, breaking the revolving door of repeat hospitalizations, incarceration, homelessness, and even tragic interactions with law enforcement

34%

70%

NO FORCE: Assisted outpatient treatment helps severely mentally ill people get outpatient treatment in their community, while respecting their personal rights. It does not force people into hospitalization or to take medication

34%

66%

OTHER STATES: Forty-Seven states have an assisted outpatient law on the books, giving mental health professionals and families in those states an additional tool to help treat people suffering from serious mental illness in a community-based setting

32%

67%

Less compelling positive messages

- The lowest performing positive messages focus on saving money, homelessness, and the laws in place being enough.

Ordering of positive messages for voters overall

% rating each message as _____

7: Very compelling

5-7: At least somewhat compelling

PROVIDE TOOLS: Assisted outpatient treatment will make the current Massachusetts mental health programs far more effective by giving them the tools to actually treat people with mental illness. Currently, lot of patients under these programs are denying treatment and are left on their own

31%

66%

PUBLIC SAFETY: Implementing an assisted outpatient treatment law will help improve health outcomes and public safety because the court will be able to supervise severely mentally ill individuals who are a danger to themselves and others to receive mental health treatment

30%

63%

SAVE MONEY: Assisted outpatient treatment will save money for Massachusetts by reducing the need for expensive hospitalizations, incarcerations, homeless programs, and other services among severely mentally ill people

29%

60%

DECREASE HOMELESSNESS: Many of the state's homeless are seriously mentally ill people who lack insight into their illness, repeatedly stop taking medication, or refuse services. Requiring them to receive treatment will help them get off the streets and improve their quality of life

28%

63%

LAWS IN PLACE: The laws we currently have in place in Massachusetts are not enough. The state should do more to require seriously mentally ill people to comply with treatment

27%

58%

Outcomes of negative messages

- Negative messaging yield appears less effective than positive messages. Concern about programs being over capacity is the only message where a majority rate it a 5 to 7.

Ordering of negative messages for voters overall

% rating each message as _____

7: Very compelling

5-7: At least somewhat compelling

OVER CAPACITY: Massachusetts' current mental health programs are already over capacity. We need to have better and additional mental health services before we can implement a law like this or it will just make an already overcrowded system even worse

29%

56%

INEFFECTIVE: Assisted outpatient treatment court orders are not effective. They do not lead to increased patient compliance with treatment, can drive people from the mental health system, and do not lead to lower rates of hospitalizations, arrests, or acts of violence

13%

35%

CIVIL RIGHTS: This law would violate an individual's civil rights and deprives severely mentally ill people of the dignity and empowerment to choose their own path. People with serious mental illness have a constitutional right to refuse treatment

13%

34%

NOT FAR ENOUGH: This proposed law does not go far enough to make a difference. There is no provision for forced medication in the proposal, so it won't require mentally ill individuals to take anti-psychotics even if they are prescribed

12%

32%

ROGER'S GUARDIANSHIP: Current Massachusetts law, known as the Roger's Guardianship, is sufficient to treat people with serious mental illness

4%

10%



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