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MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

June 9, 2014

Youth Without Homes Can't Wait! Please Ask Your Legislators to Sign onto Rep. O'Day's Letter to Chairman Dempsey in Support of House Bill 135!

You also have a chance to sign onto the Coalition's online action in support of the bill, and to weigh in to support key youth homelessness provisions in the FY'15 budget!

Quick Links

[Coalition's home page](#)

[Online action in support of House Bill 135](#)

Please take action and share this link widely!

[Dominique's story + testimonies from other youth who have experienced homelessness](#)

[House Bill 135 fact sheet](#)

[Coalition's letter to Conference Committee members](#)

[Coalition's Present Policy Campaigns page](#)

[Overview of budget process](#)

Greetings!

As you know, youth without homes cannot wait another legislative session before the Legislature takes decisive action to address unaccompanied youth homelessness. Please [read 21-year old Dominique's story](#) and then take these quick actions this week to help advocate for the passage of [House Bill 135](#), An Act providing housing and support services to unaccompanied homeless youth, and for funding for related line items.

Actions for Today:

1. **Legislative Sign-On Letter:** Please call your State Representative and State Senator to ask them to sign onto [Representative Jim O'Day's](#) "Dear Colleague" letter to [Representative Brian Dempsey](#), Chair of the House Committee on Ways and Means. As the bill currently is awaiting action by House Ways and Means, Representative O'Day, the bill's lead sponsor, is coordinating a letter to ask Chairman Dempsey and the Committee to release the bill swiftly and favorably. The text of the letter is included below.

Your Legislators can sign on until noon on Wednesday (extended deadline) by contacting Khadeejah Ahmad in Rep. O'Day's office: khadeejah.ahmad@mahouse.gov or by calling 617-722-2810.

2.) **FY'15 Budget Conference Committee Advocacy on**

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Unaccompanied Youth Homelessness Funding: Please also ask your Legislators to support the House language and recommended funding level of \$150,000 for the Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, as well as the \$200,000 earmark in the House version of the budget for LGBT youth housing within the Home and Healthy for Good line item.

For more details about the Coalition's Conference Committee requests on youth homelessness, please see the block below. Please [click here to read the Coalition's letter to the Conference Committee members](#).

Action for This Week:

Please also take a minute to sign our current online action to legislators in support of House Bill 135:

<https://secure2.convio.net/mch/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=126> If you haven't taken action with us online yet, the process is really simple. Just enter your name and contact information on the action page, and an email will be sent on your behalf to your State Representative and State Senator.

To reach your legislators, please call the State House switchboard at 617-722-2000 or go to www.wheredoivotema.com.

Thank you for your advocacy and your continued support for unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness!

-Kelly Turley
Director of Legislative Advocacy
kelly@mahomeless.org
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Text of Representative O'Day's Dear Colleague Letter to Chairman Dempsey in Support of House Bill 135

Dear Chairman Dempsey:

We, the undersigned, are writing to ask for your support for House Bill 135, An Act providing housing and support services for unaccompanied homeless youth (a.k.a. Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Act). The proposed legislation would address the desperate need for increased housing, shelter, and service options for youth and young adults under the age of 25 who are living outside the custody and care of their parents.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education estimates that nearly 6,000 high school students are experiencing homelessness and are on their own in Massachusetts. Thousands more unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness are not reflected in these numbers because they have already dropped out of or have finished school.

We remain incredibly grateful that the legislature recognized the vast need that exists when you created the Massachusetts Special

Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth as part of the FY13 budget. With funding from the FY13 and FY14 budgets, the Commission has just conducted a first-in-the-nation statewide youth homelessness survey through the Continua of Care networks, in partnership with youth and youth providers. These data, which are currently being analyzed, will shed even greater light on the extent of youth homelessness and the vast needs of this population throughout the Commonwealth.

However, as you know, we cannot wait. The thousands of youth throughout Massachusetts who are experiencing and have experienced homelessness need your help. Homelessness in children often leads to an increased risk of death, exposure to violence, susceptibility to exploitation, and poor academic performance. Youth who experience homelessness as adolescents often face bleak outcomes, taking a toll on both the youth themselves and on our society at large.

HB135 would build upon the critical work of the Commission and would seek to reduce youth homelessness and its adverse effects by funding a continuum of housing and support services geared specifically towards unaccompanied youth. The bill would provide Massachusetts' unaccompanied youth with greater education, stable housing, reduce their risk of harm, and improve their physical and mental health through wraparound support services.

It is our intention to assist this vulnerable population of unaccompanied youth by any means possible, as they are the future of the Commonwealth and of our country. Our proactive investment in unaccompanied youth through this bill is not only socially prudent, but economically prudent as well, and will yield cost savings for the Commonwealth in the future.

Thank you very much for your leadership and consideration of this essential legislation.

Sincerely,

Youth Homelessness Issues for the FY'15 Budget Conference Committee Deliberations

1. Unaccompanied Youth Homelessness Resources (via line item 4000-0300)

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt the House's earmark to support unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness. The House budget included language and funding to continue to provide \$150,000 within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) administrative line item, 4000-0300.

We are asking the conferees to provide at least \$150,000 so that the

Commission can:

- Build upon the first-in-the-nation statewide youth homelessness survey, the Massachusetts Youth Count, which was conducted between December 2013-February 2014. A 2014-2015 continuation of the count will allow the Commonwealth to better understand the scope of youth homelessness in communities around the state and the needs of youth, as well as to engage more youth ambassadors in the implementation and distribution of the survey.
- Hire a staff person or consultant to oversee implementation, to analyze data, and to report to the Commission.
- Support demonstration projects to identify service and housing models appropriate to support unaccompanied youth in their education and successful transition from childhood to adulthood.

In the coming weeks, the Coalition will be working with the Commission to finalize our analysis of the 2014 youth surveys. This data will provide a snapshot of the experiences and circumstances of unaccompanied youth from across the Commonwealth, and underscore the need for swift action.

2. Home and Healthy for Good (Line Item 7004-0104)

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the House's higher recommended appropriation of \$1.8 million** for this successful Housing First program for individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness. We also ask the Committee to **include the House's language that would continue to fund the pilot program started in FY'14 to provide supportive housing to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender unaccompanied young adults.**

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley at kelly@mahomeless.org or 781-595-7570 x17.

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