

Advocates balk at stay-on-street rule to qualify for shelter

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BOSTON — Advocates for homeless families in Massachusetts are pushing legislation that would remove a state requirement that they spend at least one night on the streets before being eligible for emergency shelter.

The Massachusetts Joint Committee on Housing was scheduled to hold a hearing on the legislation Tuesday, MassLive.com reported (<http://bit.ly/2x8TFYN>).

Under cost-cutting regulations adopted under former Democratic Gov. Deval Patrick in 2012, families must first stay overnight in a car, bus station, emergency room or other place “not meant for human habitation.” Republican Gov. Charlie Baker has kept the rule in place.

“It shocks me to say it out loud,” said State Rep. Marjorie Decker, a Cambridge Democrat and the primary sponsor of the bill. “This is no way for government to even think about dealing with homelessness.”

The new legislation would let families that meet all other requirements, such as income eligibility, into state-funded shelters if they have no other feasible housing alternative.

The Baker administration has declined to take a position on the bill. A spokeswoman for the Department of Housing and Economic Development said the administration will “carefully review any legislation reaching the governor’s desk.”

The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless estimates doing away with the rule would cost the state \$100,000 to \$300,000 per year.

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