



SUPPORT PASSAGE OF **HOUSE BILL 529** TO STRENGTHEN EMERGENCY AID TO THE ELDERLY, DISABLED AND CHILDREN (EAEDC)

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"Passing House Bill 529 will save lives and give hope!" – Cochise W.

My name is Cochise, and I am here today from Rosie's Place to share my story of why passing House Bill 529 is so important for the more than 21,000 EAEDC participants, including approximately 750 people who are experiencing homelessness.

As a former nurse, I loved my job, and worked hard for 38 years and was earning \$75/hour. However, in July 2013, I finally had to stop when sciatica, arthritis, and degenerative disk disease took its toll on my body. I lived off of my savings and then applied for SSI/SSDI, and have been receiving EAEDC benefits since 2014. Eventually, the \$304/month from EAEDC was insufficient to help pay my rent, even while I lived with other members of my family in a market rent apartment. So, I was forced to move out because I was not able to contribute financially. People become homeless for a reason --- it's not because they are lazy. You can't stigmatize people. This could happen to anyone but for the grace of God....

Stress has made the sciatica worse; I am in constant pain. I am grateful for my MassHealth coverage, since it allows me to afford all my doctor's visits and medications. However, my doctor told me I need back surgery. I don't think I can afford it even with my MassHealth coverage, so I am foregoing this operation.

I still have not been approved for SSI/SSDI yet, but with the help of a Greater Boston Legal Service's lawyer through Rosie's Place, I hope that will change. In the meantime, I now only receive the reduced benefit of \$92/month. This meager EAEDC benefit makes me feel that I have been reduced to dollars and cents. Living on \$92/month is only \$24 a week!!! This is unthinkable and mind boggling! A paper delivery person makes more than that. This is not fair. Could you live off of \$92 a month?

When you are homeless, you have more expenses- not fewer. If I buy an extra roll of toilet paper, I'm broke for the rest of the month. Even with food stamps, I have to go to the food pantry. My children occasionally buy food and household supplies for me when my benefits run out, but I don't like relying on them for help.

If the EAEDC benefits were increased, I would buy cleaning supplies and laundry detergent. You can't buy those things with food stamps. The last time I had coffee from a friend at Dunkin' Donuts last month, I kept the cup. It's like a status symbol. Now I drink my regular coffee out of that Styrofoam cup and try to trick myself. If you increased the benefit, maybe the women who are homeless would be able to buy a small gift for their grandchild or a little something for themselves to feel good.

Increasing the EAEDC benefits after 28 years is all about JUSTICE and HUMAN DIGNITY. Human lives and dignity are at risk here! Now that I can't work, the government's answer is to put me out to pasture. You are setting people up for a loss. This needs to change. **You could be saving somebody's life -- a mother, brother or sister... Set them up for HOPE. Yes, save lives and give hope. PASS HOUSE BILL 529!**

