

**Testimony to the Massachusetts Legislature, Joint Committee on Housing**

**Hearing, August 22, 2017**

**State House, Room B-2**

To Chairmen Senator Boncore and Representative Honan, and members of the Committee,

I testify today on behalf of and as a member of the Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness which is comprised of over 900 Massachusetts citizens from 19 towns. We strongly support passage of House Bill, H659, An Act to protect families experiencing homelessness from having to sleep in unsafe places, submitted by Representative Marjorie Decker to take into shelter families who are otherwise eligible and within 24 hours of having to sleep in unsafe places.

There is a contradiction in our current Emergency Assistance policy for help to homeless families. On one hand we claim to be a “right-to-shelter” state. On the other, we require otherwise eligible families to sleep in unsafe places. This has been estimated to be approximately 600-700 families annually across the State. One must wonder if the Commonwealth is really succeeding in ending family homelessness after several years of this contradictory and hurtful policy.

Our state agency for emergency assistance to at-risk families knows that this population is approximately 60% single mothers with children. They also accept that the temporary rejection of these families from shelter has caused documented assault and injury of some staying in public places. They say without explanation that offering shelter to this category of applicant families will “open the flood gates”, but we can’t think of any other program in which the State is requiring families with children to sleep in unsafe places.

It’s time for us to eliminate this inhumane and harmful policy with passage and implementation of H659.

Respectfully submitted for testimony to the Joint Committee on Housing, August 22, 2017.

For the Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness,

Frank Austin, Convener

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