

**Testimony of Naomi Meyer, Senior Attorney, Welfare Law Unit
To the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs**

**In Support of
An Act relative to assisting elders and people with disabilities in the Commonwealth,
S. 356 (Jehlen) / H. 621 (O'Day)**

September 17, 2019

The Welfare Law Unit of Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS) appreciates the opportunity to provide testimony, on behalf of our clients, in support of S. 356 / H. 621. GBLS is a non-profit organization that provides free civil legal assistance to low-income people in Boston and thirty-one additional cities and towns. Every year, GBLS serves hundreds of families and individuals that need subsistence cash benefits, including Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children (EAEDC).

Section 1 of this bill would provide full EAEDC grants (the current maximum is \$303.70 per month for an individual) to participants experiencing homelessness by eliminating the homelessness penalty. Prior to FY 19, individuals who did not pay for shelter costs were eligible for only \$92.80 per month. This absurdly tiny amount is not enough to cover even basic necessities, such as clothing, toiletries, and transportation, much less to save the money needed to obtain housing.

We are thrilled that language similar to this section was included in the FY 19 and FY 20 budgets. Passing this bill would put the language into statute so that elders and people with disabilities are not left vulnerable to the budget cycle.

Sections 2 and 4 of this bill provide for modest but desperately-needed increases to the EAEDC grant, which has not been increased since 1988. Specifically, section 4 would increase the EAEDC grant to equal the TAFDC grant provided to a household of the same size; thus, a typical EAEDC household of one person could receive up to \$428 per month (if the \$40 rent allowance is included). While still less than half of the federal poverty level of \$1,041, this amount would help EAEDC recipients to meet more of their basic needs. In fact, given the high cost of living in Massachusetts, we believe EAEDC grants should be increased further -- up to 50% of the federal poverty level, as proposed in S. 36 and H. 102, recently heard by the Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities.

Section 2 provides for an annual cost-of-living increase to the EAEDC grant so it would not lose its value to inflation again, as happened over the last 31 years.

Section 3 of this bill would raise the EAEDC asset limit from \$250 to \$2500 and exclude the first \$15,000 of a vehicle's value from being counted. Current rules, which allow participants to have no more than \$250, make it impossible for them to save up for even the most modest goal, much less pay

first and last month's rent and security deposit to get an apartment. In addition, the current rules exclude only \$1500 of a vehicle's value from being counted, an unreasonably low threshold that has not been increased in decades.

We strongly urge the Committee to report S. 356 / H. 621 out favorably. Please contact me with any questions about this testimony at nmeyer@gbls.org or 617-603-1621. Thank you for your consideration.