

**TESTIMONY OF PROJECT HOPE IN SUPPORT OF  
H.659 An Act to Protect Families Experiencing Homelessness  
from Having to Sleep in Unsafe Places**

**S.725/H.2245 An Act Relative to Interagency Efforts to Reduce and Prevent Homelessness**

**S.724/H.3020 An Act Relative to the Economic Mobility and Stability Program**

**S.719 An Act Relative to the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program**

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Chairman Boncore, Chairman Honan, and Members of the Joint Committee on Housing, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony in support of four key bills (H.659, S.725/H.2245, S.724/H.3020, and S.719) that would help ensure low-income families have a safe, affordable place to live and are able to achieve economic mobility. On behalf of Project Hope, I urge the Committee to report on these bills quickly and favorably.

Project Hope is a nonprofit social service agency that serves low-income families in the Dorchester and Roxbury neighborhoods of Boston. Project Hope operates a small family shelter and a family childcare business enterprise, in addition to providing a variety of housing services, job training programs, and adult education classes. Many of the families we serve are homeless or at risk of homelessness, and their efforts to secure stable housing and achieve economic mobility are often stymied by state policies.

**H.659 An Act to Protect Families Experiencing Homelessness from Having to Sleep in Unsafe Places**

House bill 659, sponsored by Representative Marjorie Decker, would direct the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to provide Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter to otherwise eligible families with children without requiring families to prove that they have already stayed in a place not meant for human habitation, such as a car, emergency room, or campground. In other words, if a family has no feasible alternative housing and is clearly going to have to stay in an unsafe place tonight, they would qualify for shelter *today* instead of tomorrow.

It is unconscionable that we call ourselves a “right-to-shelter” state and yet still force some homeless families to sleep in unsafe places before qualifying for EA shelter. Between July 2016 and March 2017, DHCD data shows that approximately 474 families entered EA shelter after staying in an unsafe place (16% of all families entering shelter). Families are often sleeping in their cars or in hospital emergency rooms, which exposes them to health and safety risks and can be extremely traumatic. This bill would ensure that qualifying families can enter shelter before—not after—having to sleep in such harmful environments.

**S.725/H.2245 An Act Relative to Interagency Efforts to Reduce and Prevent Homelessness**

Senate bill 725, sponsored by Senator Linda Dorcea Forry, and House bill 2245, sponsored by Representative Byron Rushing, would create a Memorandum of Understanding among the Secretaries of Housing and Economic Development, Health and Human Services, Labor and Workforce Development, Education, and Administration and Finance to direct these agencies to work together in coordinating services and resources for households that are facing economic

instability and homelessness. The legislation would also require these agencies to track and report data on programs that serve low-income households, to help identify areas for improvement.

**S.724/H.3020 An Act Relative to the Economic Mobility and Stability Program**

Senate bill 724, sponsored by Senator Linda Dorcea Forry, and House bill 3020, sponsored by Representative Aaron Vega, would create a commission to study programs that provide joint support for stable housing and economic self-sufficiency for the purpose of producing a report with recommendations for a new statewide economic mobility and financial stability program for extremely low-income households. The commission would also examine the impact of cliff effects and determine ways to adjust assistance in response to changes in income.

**S.719 An Act Relative to the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program**

Senate bill 719, sponsored by Senator Jamie Eldridge, would codify the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) into the General Laws. MRVP vouchers have been a critical resource for homeless families across the Commonwealth. Currently, MRVP is only authorized through the annual state budget. Codifying the program will create a more permanent authorization and allow for a more deliberative process to improve the program through legislation as MRVP grows to serve more households.

We urge the Committee to favorably report out these important pieces of legislation, and we thank you for your commitment to ensuring that all Massachusetts residents have a safe, affordable place to call home.