



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

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Please Actively Support Representative Decker’s Bill to Protect Families from Having to Sleep in Places Not Meant for Human Habitation (House Bill 1265)



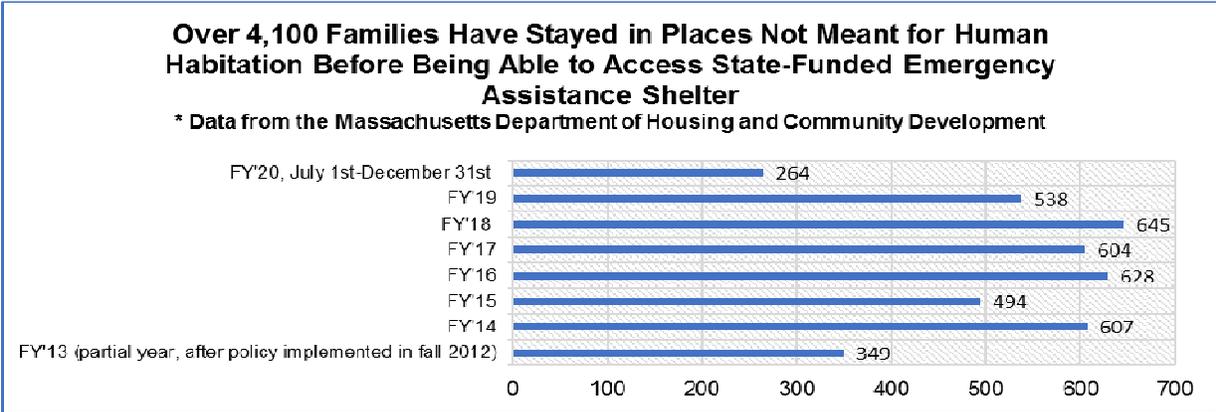
**An Act to Protect Families Experiencing Homelessness from Having to Sleep in Unsafe Places
House Bill 1265**

Lead Sponsor: Representative Marjorie Decker

Cosponsors: 62 legislators; Representatives Ashe, Ayers, Barber, Blais, Brodeur, Capano, Connolly, Cullinane, Domb, Donahue, DuBois, Dykema, Ehrlich, Elugardo, Farley-Bouvier, Fernandes, Galvin, Garballey, Gentile, González, Gordon, Gouveia, Hawkins, Hecht, Higgins, Hogan, Honan, Hunt, Kafka, Keefe, Khan, Lewis, Linsky, Livingstone, Madaro, Malia, McMurtry, Miranda, Murray, Nguyen, O’Connell, O’Day, Poirier, Provost, Robertson, Rogers, Sabadosa, Tosado, Tucker, and Vitolo and **Senators** Boncore, Brady, Chandler, Chang-Díaz, Collins, Comerford, DiDomenico, Eldridge, Jehlen, Kennedy, Lewis, and Rausch

Bill History: This bill was refiled for the 2019-2020 session in January 2019, and was assigned to the Joint Committee on Housing. The bill was reported out favorably by the Committee and sent to House Ways and Means on February 3, 2020. Last session, this bill also was reported out favorably by the Joint Committee on Housing and referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.

What Would This Bill Do? This bill 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 already have stayed in a place not meant for human habitation, such as a car, emergency room, or campground. **Similar language was included in the FY’20 budget, but we are concerned about DHCD’s inconsistent implementation of the budget language thus far.** Passing the bill would put the language into state statute, and not leave families vulnerable to the vicissitudes of the budget cycle. **We also are requesting additional legislative monitoring and oversight.**



Based on the state’s own data, **538 families with children** had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places in FY’19 (July 2018 through June 2019) *before* they were found eligible for emergency shelter

through the state's Emergency Assistance (EA) program (16% of all families approved). In the first six months of FY'20, another **264 families** were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances (15% of all families approved, for an average of 44 families/month). Since the underlying policy was implemented in late 2012, over **4,100 families** were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances. These numbers do not include additional families who have stayed in unsafe places and never are approved for shelter.

Families are showing up at hospital clinics and emergency rooms **with no other safe place to sleep**, which in turn drives up health care costs. Educators across the state are expressing concern about the fate of their students whose educations are being disrupted as their families search for a safe place to sleep.

This crisis is due to onerous shelter eligibility restrictions imposed by DHCD starting in September 2012. Based on DHCD's own numbers, we estimate that approximately **700-1,000 families** per year will first have to stay in places not meant for human habitation before getting shelter if this bill is not adopted or the related budget language is not properly implemented.

This bill would change the EA statute, Chapter 23B of the General Laws, to ensure that otherwise eligible families are able to access Emergency Assistance shelter and services in a timely manner by incorporating this new language:

"The department shall provide emergency housing assistance to eligible families including but not limited to families who on the date of application for emergency assistance have no other feasible alternative housing, as defined in 760 CMR 67.06.1(b), and who, but for not having spent 1 night in a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including but not limited to a car, park, abandoned building, medical facility, bus or train station, airport or camping ground, would be eligible for emergency assistance under clauses (i), (ii), (iii) or (iv);"

Which organizations are endorsing this bill as of February 2020?

Action for Boston Community Development, Inc.
Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness
AIDS Project Worcester
Allston Brighton Health Collaborative
Arise for Social Justice
Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)
Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Boston
Central West Justice Center
City Mission Boston
EMPath
Greater Boston Legal Services
Homes for Families
HomeStart, Inc.
Horizons for Homeless Children
Housing Families Inc.
HousingWorks.net

Human Service News and Information TV Program
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
MLPB
National Association of Social Workers - MA Chapter
Northeast Justice Center
On with Living and Learning [OWLL]
One Family
Out Now
Poor People's United Fund
Rosie's Place
Stavros
Y2Y Network

Please actively support this important bill to better serve families experiencing homelessness and end DHCD's shameful eligibility policies!

For more information, please go to www.mahomeless.org/advocacy or contact Kelly Turley, Associate Director, at kelly@mahomeless.org or 781-595-7570 x17.

