



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

Please Actively Support Representative Decker's Homelessness Bills to Protect Families from Having to Sleep in Places Not Meant for Human Habitation (House Bill 659) and to Establish a Rental Arrearage Program for Families and Individuals (House Bill 84)



An Act to Protect Families Experiencing Homelessness from Having to Sleep in Unsafe Places House Bill 659

Lead Sponsor: Representative Marjorie Decker

House Cosponsors: Representatives Cory Atkins, Mike Connolly, Michelle DuBois, Kay Khan, Peter Kocot, John Lawn, Jack Lewis, David Linsky, James O'Day, Byron Rushing, Jose Tosado, Steven Ultrino, Chris Walsh, Brian Ashe, Ruth Balsler, Christine Barber, Paul Brodeur, James Cantwell, Brendan Crighton, Michael Day, Lori Ehrlich, Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Sean Garballey, Kenneth Gordon, Jonathan Hecht, Louis Kafka, Juana Matias, James Miceli, Keiko Orrall, Denise Provost, David Rogers, John Scibak, Frank Smizik, Chynah Tyler, and Aaron Vega.

Senate Cosponsors: Senators Sal DiDomenico, James Eldridge, Patricia Jehlen, Barbara L'Italien, Jason Lewis, and Michael Moore.

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.

Based on the state's own data, **628 families with children** had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places in FY'16 (July 2015 through June 2016) *before* they were found eligible for emergency shelter through the state's Emergency Assistance (EA) program. In the first 6 months of FY'17, another **409 families** were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances (17% of all families approved).

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 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 or related budget language are not adopted.

This bill would change the EA statute, Chapter 23B of the General Laws, to ensure that otherwise eligible families are able to access EA 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

(Version 3-15-17; Continued on reverse side)

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);”

An Act to Further Provide a Rental Arrearage Program
House Bill 84
Lead Sponsor: Representative Marjorie Decker

House Cosponsors: Representatives Cory Atkins, Mike Connolly, Michelle DuBois, Solomon Goldstein-Rose, Danielle Gregoire, Kay Khan, Peter Kocot, John Lawn, Jack Lewis, David Linsky, Elizabeth Malia, James O'Day, Byron Rushing, Jose Tosado, Steven Ultrino, and Chris Walsh.

Senate Cosponsors: Senators Sal DiDomenico, James Eldridge, Patricia Jehlen, Barbara L'Italien, Jason Lewis, and Michael Moore.

Homelessness and housing instability remain at high levels across the Commonwealth. This bill would reestablish a rental arrearage program under the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA), based on the successful homelessness prevention program administered by the Department for many years. The new program would continue to provide up to four months of assistance to pay for back rent or mortgage payments, and now would serve families, individuals, and unaccompanied youth with incomes up to 130% of the federal poverty guidelines. The 25 state agencies and secretariats participating in the [Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness](#) would collaborate with DTA to refer potential participants and provide wraparound support services. This rental arrearage program would be an important supplement to the important work of the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program, by exclusively focusing on lower income households and by providing resources more upstream for earlier intervention and homelessness prevention.

This bill would change Chapter 18 of the General Laws by adding a new section:

“Section 2C: Subject to appropriation, the department of transitional assistance shall administer a rental and mortgage arrearage program for households whose incomes are at or below 130 per cent of the federal poverty limit and who are at risk of homelessness within the next 12 months. For purposes of this program, eligible households shall include but not be limited to families with children under the age of 21, elders, persons with disabilities, and unaccompanied youth. Benefits under the arrearage program shall be made available to households for the prevention of the loss of housing, the actual liability up to four times the monthly rental or mortgage liability. In administering the program, the department shall coordinate with the member agencies and offices of the Massachusetts interagency council on housing and homelessness on behalf of eligible households served by the members so as to streamline the application process, provide additional support services, and better promote homelessness prevention and housing stability.”

Please actively support these two important bills to address and prevent homelessness!

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

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