



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless Encourages the Conference Committee to Include Funding for the Landmark Unaccompanied Youth Homelessness Law in the FY'16 State Budget

BOSTON— The Massachusetts Legislature has named a conference committee to iron out differences between the House and Senate versions of the fiscal year 2016 state budget, including alternative approaches to addressing youth homelessness. The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, its members, allied organizations, and key legislators are advocating for the inclusion of language and funding recommended by the State Senate to provide \$2 million to support the creation of housing and wraparound supportive services for youth and young adults age 24 and under who are experiencing homelessness outside the care and custody of a parent or legal guardian. The Coalition also supports the House's recommendation to continue to fund the work of the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth at \$150,000 in FY'16.

The \$2 million in funding recommended by the Senate (via line item 4000-0007) would be used to implement Chapter 450 of the Acts of 2014, the groundbreaking youth homelessness legislation signed into law by former Governor Deval Patrick in January 2015. It would provide the financial resources for a coordinated statewide response to unaccompanied youth homelessness. The funding would be given to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to enter into performance-based contracts with organizations and agencies to provide a continuum of housing and wraparound support services to unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness. The types of resources that eventually could be funded under this new line item include "kinship" home placements, short-term housing, Transition to Independent Living programs, shelter, counseling, access to medical/dental/mental health care, education, employment services, case management, advocacy/referral services, and the provision of resources to meet basic needs.

"I am thrilled that the Senate budget includes funding for necessary housing and support services for unaccompanied homeless youth," said Senate Majority Leader Harriette L. Chandler (D-Worcester). "This brings us one step closer to the goal that we had in mind and affirms the work of the Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. I hope this funding will be included in the final FY'16 budget."

State Representative Jim O'Day (D-West Boylston) said, "Since late 2010, I have been working with the Coalition and others on this campaign to elevate the needs of unaccompanied youth and work towards solutions. To build upon the momentum of the youth homelessness bill becoming law earlier this year, I will advocate with the Conference Committee and leadership in strong support of Senate youth homelessness line item and \$2 million in funding to address this pervasive issue."

A young man known as W talked of the importance of housing and supports as he told his story of fleeing his mother's drug-filled apartment in eighth grade, then doubling up with an uncle throughout high school, only to be kicked out after graduation. He shared, "I lived on the streets for six months. I slept on hidden church steps, MIT classrooms – anywhere I wouldn't be seen and could be alone. I needed to find privacy. Over the winter, it was cold. I used my backpack as my pillow and put on every item of clothing I had. Then a friend told me about Caritas Communities. That's when everything changed. I moved in to Caritas' Central House and the first time I opened the door to my room and laid down on my bed, I was speechless. I didn't have to depend on anyone. I wanted to sleep for days. I was so happy."

W continued, "After taking some time off from college, I am back at school at Bunker Hill Community College taking three classes, as I work toward my degree in Computer Science. I also study Chinese twice a week and work 30 hours a week at a deli. I want to be humble and positive and help people who need help. I hope all of you will do what you can to help others in my situation – people who were dealt a bad hand and are determined to have a good life."

In addition to youth and young adults like W who have struggled with homelessness, many young people who are stably housed have taken up the cause. "Helping homeless youth is an important cause to me because I wouldn't want to end up homeless. For this reason, I want to help everyone who is. I really hope the funding makes it through and will greatly improve the lives of unaccompanied homeless youth," commented Sophie Lewis of Newton, age 12.

"When we were looking for a social action project, we discovered that there are over 6,000 young people in Massachusetts public schools who were homeless and without any adult to help care for them. We knew that we needed to do something to help. That averages to seventeen kids in every city and town in Massachusetts. We learned that State Representative Jim O'Day, State Representative (now State Senator) Jason Lewis, and State Senator (now U.S. Congresswoman) Katherine Clark were promoting legislation to help this crisis, so we decided to work together to help those legislators get the bill passed. Now we need to get it funded so it can do what it is intended to do: help the unaccompanied youth. We have been working for the last two years to help these kids. We are kids helping kids," said Max Davis of Stoneham, age 12.

Kelly Turley, Director of Legislative Advocacy at the Coalition, remarked, "We are so excited to see that the State Senate wants to more deeply commit itself to addressing the unmet needs of unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness out on their own. In the days and weeks ahead, we will work with House and Senate leadership to ensure that this funding is in the final version of the upcoming state budget. We will continue to work with youth and young adults like W, Sophie, and Max and to expand the network of community members engaged in the process of making sure that funding becomes available to begin to serve the thousands of unaccompanied youth across the Commonwealth."

Since 2008, the Coalition has organized advocacy efforts with and for unaccompanied youth, including the 2010 creation of a statewide task team on unaccompanied youth homelessness. These efforts have involved key partners such as MassEquality, DIAL/SELF Youth and Community Services, Rediscovery at JRI, AIDS Action/Youth on Fire, LUK Crisis Center, Inc., Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, faith communities, schools, and youth themselves.

"The Coalition has been very fortunate to partner with key legislators such as Senator Harriette Chandler, Representative Jim O'Day, Senate President Stan Rosenberg, and Senate Ways and Means Chair Karen Spilka, as well as amazing young people and numerous non-profit organizations, faith communities, schools, and policymakers to push for the funding to create more housing and services for unaccompanied youth. We feel a great urgency to ensure that the \$2 million in funding is in the final version of the state budget, as we know that youth who are without homes right now cannot afford to wait another year for concrete actions to help them secure housing, support services, and brighter futures," said Turley.

For more information on the Coalition's mission, public policy priorities, and direct service programs, please visit www.mahomeless.org. For more information on youth homelessness in Massachusetts, please go to our website and see the unaccompanied youth homelessness page under "Advocacy".

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