



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

LEGISLATIVE ACTION DAY



Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home.

Please Actively Support Key Homelessness, Housing, Benefits, and Equity Bills in the Remaining Months of the 2023-2024 Legislative Session

Top Bill Priority Campaigns

- Permanently establish and improve the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) homelessness prevention program

- **Lead Sponsors:** Representative Marjorie Decker and Senator Brendan Crighton
- **Bill Name:** An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults
- **Bill Numbers:** House Bill 1312/Senate Bill 856
- **Description:** This bill would put the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) homelessness prevention program into state statute and ensure that benefits are available to families and individuals earlier in a housing or utility crisis ("upstream"). The bill also seeks to streamline access, improve cross-agency collaboration, and allow households to access up to twelve months of assistance, without arbitrary dollar caps. In addition, the bill would require the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities* (EOHLC) to publicly post reports on RAFT to provide increased transparency on how the program is operating and greater understanding of who the program is serving and not serving. (*The bill refers to the Department of Housing and Community Development that oversaw RAFT at the time of bill filing, before the creation of EOHLC later in 2023.)
- **Status:** The bill is awaiting action by the Joint Committee on Housing, after the committee filed an extension order in February 2024. A decision is expected on/before April 18, 2024.

- Ease access to standard Massachusetts ID cards for people experiencing homelessness by eliminating the \$25 fee and allowing alternative ways to verify Massachusetts residency without requiring a permanent address

- **Lead Sponsors:** Representative Jim O'Day, Representative Kay Khan, and Senator Robyn Kennedy
- **Bill Name:** An Act to provide identification to youth and adults experiencing homelessness
- **Bill Numbers:** House Bill 3388/House Bill 3360/Senate Bill 2251
- **Description:** The Mass ID access bill (a.k.a. Everyone Needs ID bill) would ease access to Mass IDs for people experiencing homelessness by waiving the \$25 fee for IDs and easing the verification requirements for youth and adults who are unhoused and seeking IDs. The bill would apply to standard Mass IDs, not REAL ID Act-compliant Mass IDs, for which residents must provide additional verifications that meet federal standards. Versions of this bill were passed unanimously by the Senate during the past three sessions.
- **Status:** The Senate unanimously passed Senate Bill 2251 and referred it to the House Committee on Ways and Means in July 2023. The Joint Committee on Transportation reported out House Bill 3388 favorably in February 2024, with House Bill 3360 attached.

- Omnibus bill to ease access to the Emergency Assistance program (EA) and to create an ombudsperson unit to assist families applying for and participating in EA and HomeBASE

- **Lead Sponsors:** Representative Marjorie Decker and Senator Adam Gomez
- **Bill Name:** An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness
- **Bill Numbers:** House Bill 145/Senate Bill 86

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- **Description:** This omnibus legislation would address access and administrative issues for families and children seeking to access or retain Emergency Assistance shelter and HomeBASE rehousing benefits. It would allow families that appear to be imminently at risk of homelessness to gain admission into EA shelter. It also would prohibit the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities* from turning families away due to lack of documentation and mandate that EOHLC look in existing state benefits databases to obtain requested documentation instead of delaying applications by requiring families to provide such documentation directly. The bill also would establish an independent ombudsperson unit located in EOHLC* to mediate between EA and HomeBASE participants/applicants and the EOHLC's Division of Housing Stabilization. (*The bill refers to the former Department of Housing and Community Development, which oversaw EA and HomeBASE, and the former the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, which was the relevant secretariat at the time of bill filing, before the creation of EOHLC later in 2023.)
- **Status:** The Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities reported out Senate Bill 86 favorably in February 2024, with House Bill 145 attached.

- Establish a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness

- **Lead Sponsors:** Representative Smitty Pignatelli, Representative Frank Moran, and Senator Becca Rausch
- **Bill Name:** An Act establishing a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness/An Act providing a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness
- **Bill Numbers:** House Bill 211/Senate Bill 1112
- **Description:** This bill would recognize and affirm various rights of people experiencing homelessness, such as the right to move freely in public spaces, the right to confidentiality of records, the right to privacy of property, and the right to register to vote and to vote. The bill would provide additional civil rights protections for people experiencing homelessness. The bill would affirm the right to rest, eat, pray, and be in public spaces by amending the Commonwealth's public spaces laws, amend the Commonwealth's voting laws to affirm the right to vote and register to vote without a permanent address, amend the Commonwealth's anti-discrimination laws to include housing status, and repeal archaic sections of Massachusetts General Laws regarding so-called "tramps," "vagrants," and "vagabonds." The bill would give the Superior Court jurisdiction to enforce the rights included in the legislation.
- **Status:** The Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities reported out House Bill 211 favorably in February 2024, with Senate Bill 1112 attached. House Bill 211 is now awaiting action in the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing.

- Permanently establish and improve the HomeBASE family rehousing program

- **Lead Sponsors:** Representative Christine Barber and Senator Liz Miranda
- **Bill Name:** An Act promoting housing stability for families by strengthening the HomeBASE program
- **Bill Numbers:** House Bill 1297/Senate Bill 890
- **Description:** This bill would put the HomeBASE program into state statute, direct the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities* to continue to provide renewals of HomeBASE rental assistance to families and children who otherwise would be facing a return to homelessness, and increase or at least maintain the current maximum benefit levels. (*The bill refers to the former Department of Housing and Community Development that oversaw HomeBASE at the time of bill filing, before the creation of EOHLC later in 2023.)
- **Status:** The bill is awaiting action by the Joint Committee on Housing, after the committee filed an extension order in February 2024. A decision is expected on/before April 18, 2024.

- Improve the Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children program (EAEDC)

- **Lead Sponsors:** Representative Jim O'Day and Senator Pat Jehlen
- **Bill Name:** An Act relative to assisting elders and people with disabilities in the Commonwealth
- **Bill Numbers:** House Bill 205/Senate Bill 371
- **Description:** This bill would put the 2018 removal of the EAEDC homelessness penalty into statute, increase monthly grant levels, and provide an annual cost of living adjustment for older adults and people



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with disabilities who are participating in the Department of Transitional Assistance's Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children program.

- **Status:** The Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities reported out Senate Bill 371 favorably in February 2024, with House Bill 205 attached.

- Allow cities and towns to stabilize rents and protect tenants

- **Lead Sponsors:** Representative Dave Rogers, Representative Sam Montaña, and Senator Pat Jehlen
- **Bill Name:** An Act enabling cities and towns to stabilize rents and protect tenants
- **Bill Numbers:** House Bill 2103/Senate Bill 1299
- **Description:** This bill would remove the statewide ban on rent control and establish a local option for cities and towns to regulate rents. If passed, cities and towns opting in would be able to limit annual rent increases and limit no fault evictions for certain dwelling units. The bill would limit annual rent increases for covered dwelling units to the change in the Consumer Price Index or 5%, whichever is lower.
- **Status:** The bill is awaiting action by the Joint Committee on Housing, after the committee filed relevant extension orders in February 2024. A decision is expected on/before April 18, 2024.

See our full list of bill priorities with links to the legislative language here: <http://tinyurl.com/mchbills2324>

Please actively support these critical homelessness, housing, benefits, and equity bills today!

Thank you for your support and collaboration to address and end homelessness for families, individuals, and youth across the Commonwealth.

For more information, please contact the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless:
Kelly Turley, kelly@mahomeless.org, 781-595-7570 x17.

-Last updated March 1, 2024