



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

Take Action to Uphold the Right to Shelter and Improve the Emergency Assistance Program:

Please cosponsor and actively support House Bill 145 and Senate Bill 86, An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness

Sponsored by Representative Marjorie Decker and Senator Adam Gomez

House Bill 145 and Senate Bill 86, An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness would:

- Ensure that the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) places families that have an immediate need for Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter, even if they have not yet stayed in a place not meant for human habitation
- Prohibit EOHLC from turning families away due to lack of documentation and mandate that HLC accept self-declarations (when the Executive Office has no specific information to the contrary) and look in existing state benefits databases to obtain requested documentation instead of delaying applications by requiring families to provide third-party documentation directly
- Establish an independent ombudsperson unit located in EOHLC to mediate between EA and HomeBASE participants/applicants and HLC
- Add protections for families seeking to access or retain EA shelter during states of emergency, such as the recent COVID-19 state of emergency
- Direct EOHLC to place families in their own room while in shelter to increase privacy and dignity and to improve public health (House version of the bill)
- Prohibit EOHLC for denying or terminating a family from EA due to assets (House version of the bill)

Importance of this legislation: This legislation would build upon, and enshrine in statute, protections the Legislature has repeatedly passed through the budget process that do away with barriers to access and strengthen reporting requirements. It also would build upon FY22 budget language to create an ombudsperson office within HLC to provide families with systemic support in accessing and retaining shelter and related HomeBASE program benefits. **Massachusetts families deserve a right to shelter with dignity and stability.**

On top of the existing waiting list, families with children face many barriers in securing Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter placements and related HomeBASE rehousing resources from the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (previously the Department of Housing and Community Development), including difficulty accessing the application, requirements that they provide verifications multiple times, and rules that often force families to stay in unsafe places before being deemed "homeless enough" to qualify. Additionally, families often are disempowered and do not have an advocate to help them navigate the process. This results

in far fewer families approved for shelter and HomeBASE benefits than are eligible, and scores of children and families exposed to the traumas of unstably sheltered or unsheltered homelessness.

Legislative sponsors/cosponsors of the EA bill: As of March 27th, the bill has been sponsored or cosponsored by Representatives Decker (**sponsor**), Arena-DeRosa, Arriaga, Blais, Cahill, Domb, DuBois, Duffy, Gifford, Higgins, Howard, LeBoeuf, Montañó, O'Day, Sabadosa, Sousa, Tyler, Vitolo, and Williams, and Senators Gomez (**sponsor**), Comerford, DiDomenico, Eldridge, Jehlen, Keenan, Moran, and Rausch.

42 statewide organizational endorsers of the EA bill: As of March 27th, the bill has been endorsed by organizations across the Commonwealth, including Abby's House, Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness, AIDS Project Worcester Inc., Alliance of Cambridge Tenants (ACT), Allston Brighton Health Collaborative, Arise for Social Justice, Berkshire Housing, Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC), Brazilian Women's Group, Catholic Charities Worcester County, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, Children's HealthWatch, Community Action Agency of Somerville, Inc., Community Service Network, Inc., Disability Law Center, Dismas House, Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath), Family Promise North Shore Boston, Friends of Boston's Homeless, Greater Boston Legal Services (GBLS), Grow Food Northampton, Housing Families Inc., Housing Greenfield, Justice 4 Housing, Lazarus House Inc., LEO, Inc., Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, Massachusetts Immigration and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, Mass Senior Action Council, MLPB, One Family, Opportunity Communities, LLC, Rosie's Place, Safe Passage, SeniorCare Inc., Somerville Community Corporation, St. Clare of Assisi, Sweet Scents, Temple Sinai of Sharon, MA, The Center for Teen Empowerment, and Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness.

Bill status: The bills were assigned to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities on February 16, 2023. The bills were heard by the Committee on June 13, 2023. The Committee reported out Senate Bill 86 favorably in February 2024, with House Bill 145 attached. On March 18, 2024, Senate Bill 86 was referred to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means.

Please cosponsor and actively support An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness, [House Bill 145](#) and [Senate Bill 86](#) today!

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

-Last updated March 27, 2024