



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

**Please Actively Support the Coalition's 2017-2018 Legislative Session Bill Priorities:
Preventing Homelessness and Improving Quality of Life for
Families, Youth, Elders, and People with Disabilities**

1.) An Act Relative to Assisting Elders and People with Disabilities in the Commonwealth

Lead Sponsors: Representative James O'Day and Senator Patricia Jehlen

House Bill 2077 and Senate Bill 2039

These bills would:

- Increase monthly grants under the Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children Program (EAEDC) to match the benefit levels provided under the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program for households of comparable size
- Remove the 70% benefit reduction/penalty for individuals experiencing homelessness, who have their average grants reduced from \$303.70/month to \$92.80/month
- Increase the allowable personal asset limit from \$250 to \$2,500
- Create an annual cost of living adjustment for EAEDC program participants

2.) An Act Providing a Homeless Bill of Rights/Creating a Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness

Lead Sponsors: Representative William Smitty Pignatelli and Senator Linda Dorcena Forry

House Bill 695 and Senate Bill 46

These bills would:

- Ensure that people experiencing homelessness have the same rights as any other resident of Massachusetts by seeking to prevent discrimination based on housing status
- Reinforce the rights to move freely in public spaces, receive equal treatment by municipal agencies, experience freedom from discrimination in employment, receive emergency medical care, register to vote and to vote, experience freedom from unauthorized disclosure of records (in accordance with relevant laws), and have a reasonable expectation of privacy of property
- Outline these rights as a statement of legislative intent, as a guide for state and municipal agencies

3.) An Act to Further Provide a Rental Arrearage Program

Lead Sponsor: Representative Marjorie Decker

House Bill 84

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. Agencies participating in the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness would collaborate with DTA to refer potential participants and provide wraparound support services.

4.) An Act to Protect Families Experiencing Homelessness from Having to Sleep in Unsafe Places

Lead Sponsor: Representative Marjorie Decker

House Bill 659

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.

5.) An Act to End Child Homelessness

Lead Sponsor: Representative Denise Provost

House Bill 115

This bill would:

- Protect many children and families who are at imminent risk or experiencing homelessness from having to stay in places not meant for human habitation
- Require the Department of Children and Families (DCF), in consultation with the Department of Housing and Community Development to conduct an assessment to ensure that no child under the age of 18 would be forced to stay in a place not meant for human habitation upon a household's eviction from subsidized housing or termination from a publicly funded shelter
- For children at risk of having to stay in such conditions, DCF and DHCD would develop and implement a plan to ensure that they are housed in a safe location, with every reasonable effort being made to keep those children in the care and custody of their parents/guardians

6.) An Act to Prevent Homelessness among Recipients of Transitional Assistance

Lead sponsor: Representative Denise Provost

House Bill 114

This bill, also known as the No Place Like Home Bill, would:

- Establish a homelessness prevention and early intervention program within the Department of Transitional Assistance to give DTA the tools to help families and individuals remain housed.
- Direct DTA to conduct housing stability screenings for families and individuals participating in DTA's cash and nutritional assistance programs
- Create a statewide homelessness prevention fund at DTA, targeting the lowest income family and individual households who are often ineligible for, or unable to access, other resources in a timely way
- Create escrow accounts for families and individuals experiencing homelessness while they are participating in the Department's cash assistance programs. Currently, households have their monthly cash assistance grants reduced if they do not have housing expenses. Under the No Place Like Home bill, these funds would be captured and directed into an escrow account to be used by the household to help in obtaining or retaining housing

7.) An Act to Provide Identification to Homeless Youth and Families

Lead Sponsors: Representative Kay Khan and Senator Harriette Chandler

House Bill 2737 and Senate Bill 1906

These bills would direct the Registry of Motor Vehicles (RMV) to eliminate fees and reduce barriers for people experiencing homelessness, unaccompanied youth, and others, if needed to ease access to Massachusetts identification cards.

8.) An Act Relative to the Well Being and Care of a Child/An Act to Lift the Cap on Kids

Lead Sponsors: Representative Marjorie Decker and Senator Sal DiDomenico

House Bill 85 and Senate Bill 34

These bills would eliminate the so-called "family cap rule" that currently prohibits 9,400 children from receiving Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (TAFDC) benefits because their family was participating in the TAFDC program at the time of their conception (or shortly thereafter). This punitive and misguided policy has left thousands of Massachusetts families further in poverty. The bill would allow Massachusetts to join 33 other states that do not punish families with such limits on access to vital welfare benefits.

9.) An Act Relative to the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program

Lead Sponsor: Senator Jamie Eldridge

Senate Bill 719

This bill would put the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) in state statute, and would connect allowable rent levels to the current fair market rents as established by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (Currently, households receiving new subsidies are expected to find units at or below the 2005 FMRs, unless a waiver is issued. This makes the housing search process more arduous and sometimes impossible, given the current rental climate in Massachusetts.)

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

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