



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

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**Please Actively Support Representative Decker's Homelessness Bill to Protect Families from Having to Sleep in Places Not Meant for Human Habitation (House Bill 659)**



## **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 Balser, 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, **604 families with children** had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places in FY'17 (July 2016 through June 2017) *before* they were found eligible for emergency shelter through the state's Emergency Assistance (EA) program (16% of all families approved). Since the policy was implemented in late 2012, at least **2,682 families** were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances.

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:

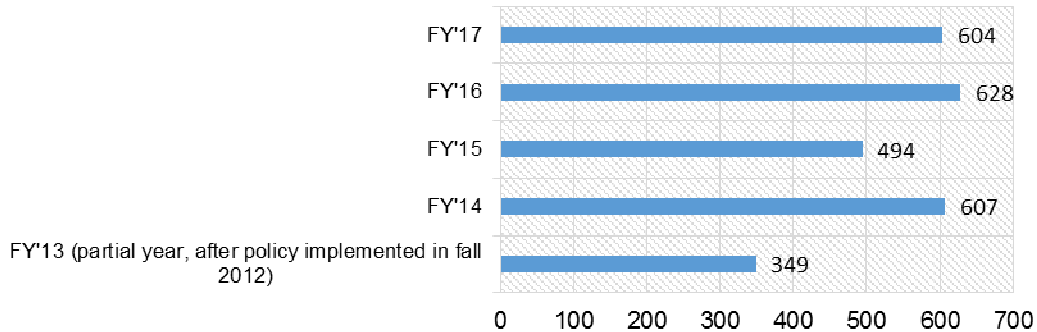
"The department shall provide emergency housing assistance to eligible families including but not limited to families who on the date of application for emergency assistance have no other feasible alternative housing, as defined in 760 CMR 67.06.1(b), and

(Version 8-25-17; 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);”

### **Over 2,600 Families Have Stayed in Places Not Meant for Human Habitation Before Being Able to Access State-Funded Emergency Assistance Shelter**

**\* Data from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development**



**Please actively support this important bill to address homelessness!**

For more information, please check out [www.mahomeless.org/advocacy/item/ea-bill-hearing-8-17](http://www.mahomeless.org/advocacy/item/ea-bill-hearing-8-17) or contact Kelly Turley, Associate Director, at 781-595-7570 x17 or [kelly@mahomeless.org](mailto:kelly@mahomeless.org).

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