



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

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Please Actively Support Representative Decker's Bill to Protect Families from Having to Sleep in Places Not Meant for Human Habitation (House Docket 2406)



An Act to Protect Families Experiencing Homelessness from Having to Sleep in Unsafe Places House Docket 2406

Lead Sponsor: Representative Marjorie Decker

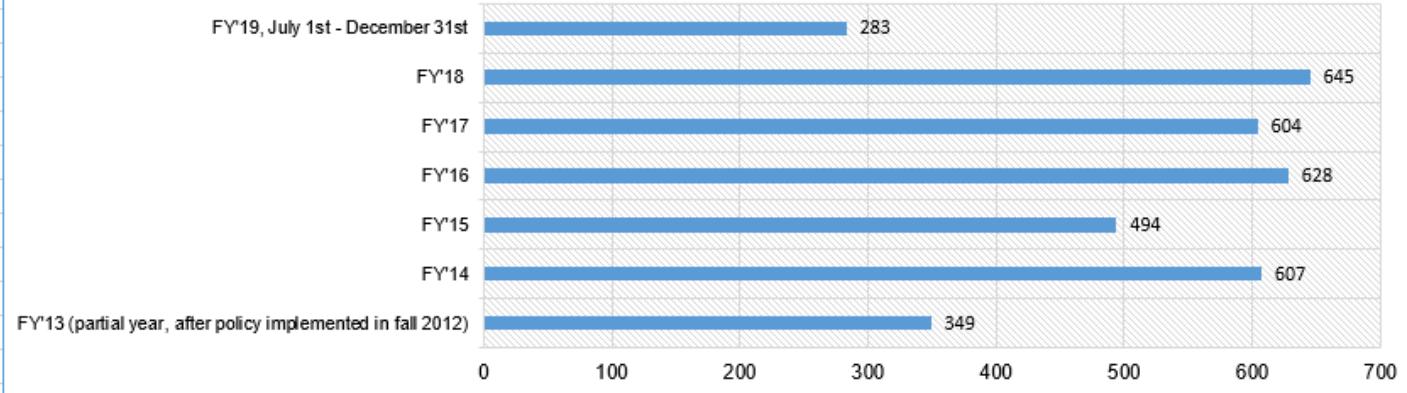
Cosponsors: Representatives Ashe, Ayers, Barber, Blais, Brodeur, Capano, Connolly, Cullinane, Domb, Donahue, DuBois, Dykema, Ehrlich, Elugardo, Farley-Bouvier, Fernandes, Galvin, Garballey, Gentile, González, Gordon, Gouveia, Hawkins, Hecht, Higgins, Hogan, Honan, Hunt, Kafka, Keefe, Khan, Lewis, Linsky, Livingstone, Madaro, Malia, McMurtry, Miranda, Murray, Nguyen, O'Connell, O'Day, Poirier, Provost, Robertson, Rogers, Sabadosa, Tosado, Tucker, and Vitolo and Senators Boncore, Brady, Chandler, Chang-Díaz, Collins, Comerford, DiDomenico, Eldridge, Jehlen, Kennedy, Lewis, and Rausch

Bill History: This bill was refiled for the 2019-2020 session in January 2019, and has been assigned to the Joint Committee on Housing. Last session, this bill was reported out favorably by the Joint Committee on Housing and referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means.

What Would This Bill Do? 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.

Over 3,600 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



Based on the state's own data, **645 families with children** had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places in FY'18 (July 2017 through June 2018) *before* they were found eligible for emergency shelter

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through the state's Emergency Assistance (EA) program (17% of all families approved). In the first six months of FY'19, another **283 families** were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances (16% of all families approved, for an average of 47 families/month). Since the policy was implemented in late 2012, over **3,600 families** were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances. These numbers do not include additional families who have stayed in unsafe places and never are approved for shelter.

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 Emergency Assistance 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 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);"

Which organizations are endorsing this bill as of March 2019?

Action for Boston Community Development, Inc.
Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness
AIDS Project Worcester
Allston Brighton Health Collaborative
Arise for Social Justice
Boston Area Rape Crisis Center
Central West Justice Center
City Mission Boston
EMPath
Greater Boston Legal Services
Homes for Families
HomeStart, Inc.

Horizons For Homeless Children
Housing Families Inc.
HousingWorks.net
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
Mental Health Legal Advisors Committee
National Association of Social Workers- MA Chapter
Northeast Justice Center
Out Now
Poor People's United Fund
Rosie's Place

Please actively support this important bill to better serve families experiencing homelessness and end the shameful eligibility criteria!

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