



**TESTIMONY OF CHELSEA SEDANI, DIRECTOR OF ADVOCACY
AT ECONOMIC MOBILITY PATHWAYS,
IN SUPPORT OF H.85 AND S.34 TO LIFT THE CAP ON KIDS
May 16, 2017**

Chairwoman Flanagan, Chairwoman Khan and Members of the Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, thank for the opportunity to share written testimony with the Committee in support of the House and Senate bills (H85/S34) to lift the Cap on Kids.

I am the Director of Advocacy at Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath). EMPath is a poverty disrupting organization that transforms lives by helping people move out of poverty and provides the tools to help other organizations and institutions to do the same. We provide emergency shelter and transitional housing as well as economic mobility mentoring and support services to 1,400 people annually. Today, there are more families in deep poverty than there are families getting Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC). As a state, we must provide more support to families struggling to escape poverty rather than demonize them.

We urge the Committee to report these bills out favorably. It is unconscionable that Massachusetts has a rule that penalizes children born into poverty based on when they were conceived. In our experience working with very low-income families, we know that any additional monetary assistance would go a long way. However, we have never seen a family have a child in order to get an additional \$100 a month in benefits. It is clear though that this rule does not deter families from having more children.

It is an ineffective policy that does nothing but harm children. Families who cannot afford basic necessities for a new baby are forced to short change the other siblings. Parents who were barely managing on inadequate grants before the baby was born are struggling even more to pay for the basic needs of all members of the family. Research shows that both the new baby and the older siblings are at greater risk of health issues including increased hospitalizations as a result of this harmful policy.

It is well-established that extreme poverty causes children long-term cognitive, emotional and physical health challenges including negatively impacting their ability to form critical executive functioning skills which are necessary to escape poverty. Denying the small increase (of about \$100 a month per additional child) also aggravates the stress their parents experience and makes it harder for parents to take steps towards being able to support their families through paid work. A parent cannot focus on work and/or advancing their education and training if they are trying to figure out how to diaper their baby, buy basic necessities like toilet paper and dish soap and access food and transportation. Struggling families need more money in their pockets to meet their most basic needs, such as housing and utilities, child care, food, transportation, and health care so that they may then focus on moving forward.

For these reasons, we urge the Committee to give your full support to these bills. It is time to get rid of this unfair and unjust policy.