



**Testimony of Chelsea Sedani, Director of Advocacy  
Economic Mobility Pathways  
To the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing  
In Support of An Act Improving Public Health Through a Common Application for Core  
Food, Health and Safety-Net Programs (S612/H101)  
May 2, 2017**

Dear Chairman Welch, Chairman Sanchez, and the distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Health Care Finance:

My name is Chelsea Sedani and I am the Director of Advocacy at Economic Mobility Pathways (EMPath). I am writing to express my support of House Bill 101 and Senate Bill 612. 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.

Currently in the state of Massachusetts, there are an estimated 680,000 people on Mass Health who are also likely to be eligible for Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program (SNAP), or food stamps, but are not currently receiving benefits. Working extensively with low-income families, we truly understand the difference that accessing and retaining these benefits can make. According to the M.I.T. Living Wage Calculator, a typical EMPATH participant, a mother with two young children needs to earn about \$65,000 per year or \$31.00 per hour to cover all her family's very basic expenses such as rent, child care, food and transportation. This means a single parent earning the minimum wage of \$11.00 earns only about one-third of what it costs her to rent and apartment and nourish her children. SNAP, Mass Health and other public benefits are an essential part of the calculation in ensuring the basic subsistence needs of low-wage workers.

The bill before your Committee would create a common application portal where low-income families could apply simultaneously for Mass Health and SNAP. This could lead the way to creating a common application process for additional safety net programs like Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC). If passed, this would reduce duplication of data collection, increase efficiency and allow more people to access the assistance they so desperately need.

The application process for programs like Mass Health and SNAP are currently inefficient and duplicative. Mass Health and SNAP and many other benefit programs have separate application processes that ask for the same basic information and documentation, duplicating efforts and creating more work for the state and those applying for benefits, who are already so strapped for time. Here are some quotes from our participants about the importance of SNAP and Mass Health and their challenges in accessing these programs.

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*“I needed Mass Health. I had to bring and send paperwork to the Mass Health office. Then, end of March, I applied for SNAP and I had to send in those forms. Consolidation, not only for SNAP and Mass Health but all safety net programs, is important and necessary and cost-efficient.”*

*“Access to SNAP is important and necessary because there are many families with young children who are working and making minimum wage or just above minimum wage who constantly have to choose whether to feed their children, do laundry, buy a T-pass, or other important necessities in life. When anyone is hungry, especially a child, they lack the necessary focus and concentration to contribute to society.”*

*“SNAP is important because if/when I have unexpected bills at least I don’t have to stress and worry about food costs.”*

Passing this bill would help streamline the process of applying for these benefits and save the state time and money in the long run. In addition to helping Massachusetts access more federal funding through the SNAP program which is 100% federally funded, this bill would also help more low-income families meet basic needs, reduce health care costs and be in a stronger position to work toward their own self-sufficiency.

We urge you to favorably recommend this bill out of committee.

Thank you for considering this request.

Sincerely,

Chelsea Sedani, MSW  
Director of Advocacy  
EMPath