



ON SOLID GROUND COALITION

BUILDING OPPORTUNITY, PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS

November 21, 2017

Senator Lovely and Representative Khan,
Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities

RE: Testimony Supporting *An Act Providing Immediate Child Care Assistance to Homeless Families*

Dear Chairperson Lovely, Chairperson Khan, and Distinguished Members of the House Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of *An Act Providing Immediate Child Care Assistance to Homeless Families*.

The On Solid Ground is a cross sector group of 40+ partners led by Center for Social Policy, Citizens' Housing and Planning Association, and Homes for Families. We are committed to a research based and family centered approach to ensuring economic mobility and housing stability for families living in Massachusetts. Our vision is that families have safe stable homes, in communities of their choice and opportunities for economic mobility and wellness.

Lack of Childcare - A Barrier for Economic Development

On any given night in Massachusetts, more than 13,000 individuals in families experience homelessness, approximately 60% of them children¹. Since FY2008, Massachusetts has experienced one of the largest increases in family homelessness in the country³. Eighty-eight percent of children living in shelters are not served by a childcare or early education program². Family homelessness is a complex problem that arises from stagnating or decreasing wages, shortage of affordable housing, and lack of tools to help families obtain and maintain housing and economic stability³. As a cross-sector coalition focused on economic mobility to prevent family homelessness, we work towards addressing 'cliff effects'. Families on public supports, often experience a sudden and total decline in supports with income increases that leaves them in worse off financially because the increase in income is less than the value of the supports lost—phenomenon that we know as the “cliff effects”.

¹ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Community Planning and Development (2016). The 2016 Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Washington, D.C.

² Administration of Children and Families, 2016

³ The Boston Foundation Report. (2017). The Growing Challenge of Family Homelessness. Homeless Assistance for Families in Massachusetts: Trends in Use FY2008-FY2016.

In our research on cliff effects, lack of childcare emerges as one of the significant barriers in economic mobility⁴. Lack of childcare is a barrier for parents trying to look for work, find housing, overcome a health or addiction issue, or otherwise support their families. The stress due to homelessness impacts emotional, social, and cognitive development of children⁵. Early education and childcare can reduce the impact of this stress and help children from homeless families catch up to their peers before kindergarten⁵.

An Act Providing Immediate Child Care Assistance to Homeless Families

The On Solid Ground Coalition supports *An Act Providing Immediate Child Care Assistance to Homeless Families*.

The current system, mandates a 30 hours per week work or training requirement for parents to qualify for a full-time childcare voucher via Transitional Aid for Families with Dependent Children. But, for homeless parents trying to look for work, this mandate can be an additional barrier in achieving financial independence. For homeless families, accessing child care offers two important benefits—a safe setting for children to grow and learn and the opportunity for parents to search for and sustain a stable connection to the workforce. Without first arranging care for their children, homeless parents cannot look for work or participate in the education and training programs necessary to improve their employability.

This legislation allows families living in all types of homeless shelters including a congregate, motel, scattered-site shelter, and others, to be deemed eligible to access childcare as soon as they enter a shelter. The legislation eliminates the red tape so that homeless children in Massachusetts can qualify for and receive subsidized early education and school-age care immediately. Childcare subsidies make it possible for parents to look for and maintain work and to participate in job training, education, and other programs necessary to resolving housing instability while simultaneously helping to improve educational outcomes for young children⁶.

This legislation is thus crucial for providing equal opportunity for all children and economic opportunity for parents striving hard towards self-sufficiency. The legislation is an important step towards increasing access to support services for families, one of the main goals of the On Solid Ground Coalition. We hope this bill will be reported out favorably by the Committee soon.

As always, thank you for your leadership and efforts to give families Commonwealth opportunities for growth and wellness.

⁴ On Solid Ground Report, Building Opportunity, Preventing Homelessness, 2014.

⁵ Children and Homelessness in Massachusetts. 2013. Donna Haig Friedman, Ph.D., with the assistance of Katherine Calano, Marija Bingulac, Christine Miller, and Alisa Zeliger

⁶ Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness. “Meeting the Child Care Needs of Homeless Families – How Do States Stack Up”, July 2014.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Abhidnya Kurve
Policy Coordinator
On Solid Ground Coalition