



**MASSACHUSETTS  
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- Children's League of Massachusetts
- Citizens' Housing and Planning Association
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- Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders
- GetEQUAL Massachusetts
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- Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
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- One Family, Inc.
- Rediscovery at JRI
- Safe Homes
- School on Wheels
- South Coast Regional Network to End Homelessness
- South Shore Regional Network to End Homelessness
- Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness
- Worcester Community Connections Coalition
- Youth on Fire

**An Act Providing Housing and Support Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, a.k.a. Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Act**

***House Bill 135***

**Lead Sponsor:** Representative James O'Day

**Co-sponsors (in alphabetical order):** Denise Andrews, Cory Atkins, Michael Barrett, John J. Binienda, Paul Brodeur, William N. Brownsberger, Gale D. Candaras, Harriette L. Chandler, Sonia Chang-Díaz, Katherine Clark (former State Senator/original Senate sponsor), Cheryl A. Coakley-Rivera, Thomas P. Conroy, Marjorie C. Decker, Sal N. DiDomenico, Kenneth J. Donnelly, James J. Dwyer, Carolyn C. Dykema, Lori A. Ehrlich, James B. Eldridge, Ann-Margaret Ferrante, Jennifer L. Flanagan, Linda D. Forry, Gloria L. Fox, John P. Fresolo, Sean Garballey, Kenneth I. Gordon, Danielle W. Gregoire, Carlos Henriquez, Paul R. Heroux, Bradford Hill, Patricia D. Jehlen, Louis L. Kafka, Jay R. Kaufman, Mary S. Keefe, John F. Keenan, Kay Khan, Peter V. Kocot, Stephen Kulik, Jason M. Lewis, John J. Mahoney, Elizabeth A. Malia, Brian R. Mannel, Michael O. Moore, Sarah K. Peake, Elizabeth A. Poirier, Denise Provost, David M. Rogers, Tom Sannicandro, John W. Scibak, Carl M. Sciortino, Alan Silvia, Frank I. Smizik, Theodore C. Speliotis, Karen E. Spilka, Thomas M. Stanley, Ellen Story, Benjamin Swan, Timothy J. Toomey, Joseph F. Wagner, Chris Walsh, Martin J. Walsh, Steven M. Walsh, James T. Welch, and Daniel A. Wolf

**Bill History:** Referred to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities on January 22, 2013. Heard by that committee at a public hearing on July 16, 2013. Reported out favorably and referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means on August 12, 2013.

**The Need for Action:**

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education estimates that nearly 6,000 high school students are experiencing homelessness and out on their own. Thousands more unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness are not reflected in these numbers because they have already dropped out of school or are older and have finished school. There is a desperate need for increased shelter and housing options for youth living without their parents.

Youth homelessness takes its toll on both the youth and our society at large. Youth who experience homelessness as adolescents often face bleak outcomes. While many youth are resilient and are able to overcome the ravages of homelessness, homelessness often leads to poor health outcomes including increased risk of death, exposure to violence, susceptibility to exploitation and high risk behaviors, and poor academic performance with increased risk of dropping out of school.

**The Goals of This Act:**

This bill seeks to reduce youth homelessness and its adverse effects by funding a continuum of housing and support services geared specifically for unaccompanied youth. The goal of these efforts is to improve housing and residential stability, reduce the risk of harm and improve educational, physical and mental health outcomes for this population.

This bill builds upon the work of the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, which was created through the FY'13 state budget. The Commission has been working since December 2012 to identify the needs of unaccompanied youth and identify real, tangible solutions to the problem of unaccompanied youth homelessness. The Commission's first report was submitted to the Legislature and other stakeholders in June 2013.

**What this Bill Does:**

**Section 1:** Requires the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to enter into performance-based contracts with organizations and agencies to provide services to unaccompanied homeless youth. These service needs will be identified in the Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Commission Report. Programs funded under this Act shall provide a continuum of housing options for this population provided on a voluntary basis in conjunction with wraparound support services, which shall include but not be limited to: emergency shelter, “kinship” home placements, short term housing and “Transition to Independent Living” programs. The funded programs shall provide unaccompanied homeless youth with a stable out-of-home placement and help to reunite the youth with the youth’s parent or legal guardian if family reunification is in the youth’s best interest, and help to create educational and residential stability. Additional support services funded through these contracts may include but are not limited to: individual, family and group counseling; access to medical, dental and mental health care; education and employment services; case management, advocacy and referral services; independent living skills training; and provision of basic needs.

**Section 2:** Will define “unaccompanied homeless youth” as a person 24 years of age or younger who is not in the physical custody or care of a parent or legal guardian and who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. The more specific definition of unaccompanied homeless youth can be found in the bill’s language and is also expected to encompass the findings of the Homeless Youth Commission.

**Section 3:** Mandates the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to establish contracts to provide services to unaccompanied homeless youth in urban, suburban, and rural areas across Massachusetts.

**Section 4:** Requires the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to monitor contracted agencies providing said services to unaccompanied homeless youth to ensure quality and transparency. The Executive Office of Health and Human Services will be required to collect this data on service agencies it has entered into contracts with and report this data annually to the Clerks of the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities, the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means and the Office of the Child Advocate by December 31<sup>st</sup> of each year.

**For more information, please contact Kelly Turley at the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless: 781-595-7570 x17 or [kelly@mahomeless.org](mailto:kelly@mahomeless.org).**