



Housing First
for Hampden, Hampshire,
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

January 6, 2019

Hon. Brendan Crighton, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Housing
State House, Room 520

Hon. Kevin Honan, Chair
Joint Committee on Housing
State House, Room 38

RE: Testimony in support of Rent Arrearage Assistance Program (RAAP), Bill 1264

Dear Senator Crighton, Representative Honan and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to submit this testimony on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness in support of the Rent Arrearage Assistance Program (Bill 1264).

The Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”) supports collaborative solutions across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties to prevent and end homelessness through a Housing First approach. It includes hundreds of partners from virtually every community sector – housing, child care, health care, education, workforce development – committed to making housing security a reality for all in Western Massachusetts.

First, we wanted to thank you and your colleagues for recent supplemental funding that brought an additional \$2.03 million to the Upstream RAFT pilot already underway (Residential Assistance for Families in Transition). This funding, which will allow eligible households up to four months of back rent or mortgage payments to prevent eviction or foreclosure, will make a significant impact in reducing homelessness here in Western Massachusetts and across the Commonwealth. Thank you for your leadership and your support to make this happen!

Passage of Bill 1264, the RAAP program, will allow the Pilot Program that you just funded to become permanent; it will codify these changes into law and make the impact of its demonstrated success lasting. What an exciting opportunity!

The Network convenes housing and shelter providers from across the four Western counties to strategize and implement the most effective responses to homelessness. Around every table, among dozens of providers serving both urban and rural communities working to preserve housing for families and individuals, the call for more upstream prevention resources is constant. Adopting the RAAP program would be the most powerful and immediate response to that call.

We ask you to issue a favorable report on Bill 1264, and in so doing further our shared goal of housing stability for all in the Commonwealth.

Thanks again for your support and your leadership. All of us in Western Massachusetts deeply appreciate it.

Best,

Pamela Schwartz, Director
Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness
pschwartz@westernmasshousingfirst.org
413-219-5658