

October 18, 2021

Honorable Adam Gomez, Senate Chair and Honorable Michael Finn, House Chair  
Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities

**Re: Testimony in Support of Emergency Assistance Bill (H.202/S.111) and Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness (H.264/S.142)**

Dear Chair Gomez and Chair Finn and Members of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities:

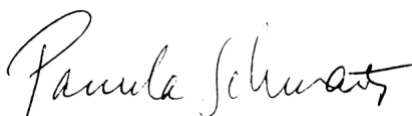
I am writing on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”) to urge the Housing Committee to report favorably on the Emergency Assistance bill (H.202/S.111) and the Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness (H.264/S.142). The [Western MA Network to End Homelessness](#) (“Network”) supports collaborative solutions across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties to prevent and end homelessness through a Housing First approach that centers racial equity. It includes hundreds of partners from virtually every community sector who are committed to making homelessness rare, brief and non-recurring.

**Emergency Assistance bill (H.202/S.111, Lead Sponsors Rep. Marjorie Decker, Rep. Liz Miranda and Senator Adam Gomez):** This omnibus legislation would address access and administrative issues for families and children seeking to access or retain Emergency Assistance shelter and HomeBASE rehousing benefits. This bill would build upon, and enshrine in statute, protections the Legislature has repeatedly passed in the budget process that eliminate barriers to access and strengthen reporting requirements. Families experiencing homelessness in Western Massachusetts and across the Commonwealth should not suffer lack of access to these critical resources, and even greater trauma, due to administrative barriers. This bill will repair these gaps and give families the access and stability they deserve.

**Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness (H.264/S.141, Lead Sponsors Rep. Smitty Pignatelli, Rep. Frank Moran and Senator Becca Rausch):** This bill would recognize and affirm various rights of people experiencing homelessness, such as the right to move freely in public spaces, the right to confidentiality of records, the right to privacy of property, the right to register to vote and to vote and would provide additional civil protections for people experiencing homelessness. In Western Massachusetts alone, over 700 individuals experience homelessness (according to the 2021 Point in Time Count). While they are struggling to find housing stability, our Commonwealth should ensure they have the most basic protections of their most basic rights. This bill would provide that.

We urge you to report both of the above bills out favorably. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Best,



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