



Housing First
for Hampden, Hampshire,
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

June 13, 2023

Representative William Straus and Senator Brendan Crighton
Joint Committee on Transportation
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Testimony in support of An Act to provide identification to youth and adults experiencing homelessness (H.3388, H.3360, S.2251)

Dear Chairs Straus and Crighton:

I am pleased to submit this written testimony on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness in support of creating access to identification to youth and adults experiencing homelessness (H.3388, Representative Jim O’Day; H. 3360, Representative Kay Kahn and S.2251, Senator Robyn Kennedy)

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 that centers racial equity. It includes hundreds of partners from virtually every community sector who are committed to making safe, decent and affordable housing a reality for all in western Massachusetts.

Homelessness in western Massachusetts is higher than it has been at any point in the last 5 years: 3,305 people were counted as experiencing homelessness in the most recent annual Point in Time count conducted in January, 2023. The number of people sleeping unsheltered rose to 199, a 150 percent increase since 2021. Young adult homelessness also saw a 25 percent increase from 2022 with a total of 96 people ages 18-25 years old sleeping in shelter or on the streets.

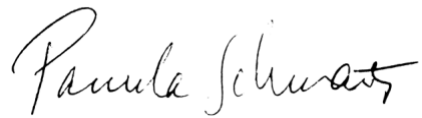
The Point in Time Count also revealed in western Massachusetts the same racial inequity in homelessness that pervades the entire Commonwealth and nation. Here in the four western counties, Blacks make up 23 percent of the population experiencing homelessness while only 5 percent of the general population (4.6x over-representation); Latinos make up 49 percent of the homeless population while only 17 percent of the general population (2.9x over-representation).

While this crisis of increasing homelessness and its grossly disproportionate impact on people of color requires a comprehensive approach, one critical solution lies in reducing the barriers

that can perpetuate homelessness. The current difficulty in obtaining Massachusetts identification (MA ID) for people who are homeless is one such barrier that the bills before you would address. A MA ID offers a pathway to so much that makes housing stability possible: education, employment and housing itself. We owe it to the most vulnerable residents of our state to not let lack of a MA identification stand in their way.

Please issue a favorable report of H.3388, H.3360, and S.2251 as soon as possible. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pamela Schwartz". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the salutation "Best,".

Pamela Schwartz, Director
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