



Housing First
for Hampden, Hampshire,
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

January 24, 2024

The Honorable William Straus
Chair, Joint Committee on Transportation
State House, Boston, MA

The Honorable Brendan Crighton
Chair, Joint Committee on Transportation
State House, Boston, MA

RE: Support for H.3272/S.2277 in order to increase regional transit accessibility in Western MA

Dear Chair Straus, Chair Crighton, and members of the Joint Committee on Transportation:

I am pleased to submit this testimony on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”), a network of over 300 partners across the western four counties working to prevent and end homelessness with a Housing First approach that centers racial equity, in support of H.3272/S.2277, known as the RTA Advancement Bill.

We are grateful to our western Massachusetts Representative Natalie Blais for her leadership on this bill and to virtually every single member of our western Massachusetts legislative delegation, several of whom sit on this committee - Vice Chair Mark, Rep. Sabadosa and Rep. Whipps for their co-sponsorship.

I am pleased to submit this testimony on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”), a network of over 300 partners across the western four counties working to prevent and end homelessness with a Housing First approach that centers racial equity, in support of H.3272/S.2277, known as the RTA Advancement Bill.

Their universal support for this bill mirrors that of our entire region. And the intersection of improved regional transit with preventing and ending homelessness fuels the Network’s urgency as well.

The Network regularly convenes outreach workers, case managers and housing navigators across the four western counties across every population – individuals, families, youth and young adults and veterans. In virtually every setting, the lack of public transportation as a barrier to stable housing comes to the fore. As you may know, we have many miles of road in our part of the state, long roads between communities, work places and homes. Right now, despite the efforts of the Pioneer Valley, Franklin and Berkshire Transit Authorities, public transportation is not available on many of those roads at many times through the day and night. This bill is needed to do more of what transit authorities are intended to do

Without adequate transportation, people cannot get to a job, and without a job, people do not have the income to maintain their housing. Without adequate transportation, people have radically fewer options to even locate a home. The relationship between public transportation and housing in western Massachusetts is deeply intertwined.

In western Massachusetts, similar to the rest of the Commonwealth, we are seeing an unprecedented number of eviction filings while every single shelter is full to capacity. We know that to stem this tide of homelessness, we need to tackle every barrier with speed and clarity. The great news is that this RTA bill offers a clear blueprint to increase accessibility to public transportation and in so doing will make stable housing more possible.

We urge you to give this bill a favorable report as quickly as possible.

Thank you 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 word "Best,".

Pamela Schwartz, Director
Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness
pschwartz@westernmasshousingfirst.org
413-219-5658
<http://westernmasshousingfirst.org>