



Housing First
for Hampden, Hampshire,
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

July 23, 2025

The Honorable Julian Cyr
Joint Committee on Housing
State House, Room 111
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Richard Haggarty
Joint Committee on Housing
State House, Room 146
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Testimony in Support of:

H.1488/S.961 – Providing Upstream Homelessness Prevention Assistance

H.1469/S.1011 – Strengthening HomeBASE

H.1547 – Codifying the Mass. Rental Voucher Program

H.4015/S.475 – Promoting Housing Stability for Older Adults

H.1552/S.991 – Creating an Interagency Supportive Housing Finance and Strategy Board

Dear Chair Cyr, Chair Haggarty and Members of the Joint Housing Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”) in support of a number of bills that would reduce homelessness and increase housing stability across western Massachusetts.

The Network includes roughly 200 partners committed to coordinating efforts to prevent and end homelessness across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties with a Housing First approach that centers racial equity.

The following bills are each critical components of keeping and getting people housed and we urge you to vote them out of Committee favorably as soon as possible:

H.1488/S.961 - An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults *Lead Sponsors: Rep. Marjorie Decker, Sen. Brendan Crighton*

In the western four counties, on average **every week over 600 households seek rental assistance** from the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program.

This bill would put RAFT into state statute and address this crisis by:

- Ensuring RAFT benefits are available to families and individuals prior to receiving a notice to quit or utility shut-off;
- Allowing households to receive up to 12 months of assistance without arbitrary dollar caps
- Requiring the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities to publicly post reports on RAFT to increase transparency on how the program is operating

In western Massachusetts alone, eviction filings have increased 66% between 2022 and 2024. Providing access to RAFT further “upstream” – prior to the traumatic event of receiving a Notice to Quit – will create greater stability for both tenants and landlords. We have already learned from prior years when

upstream RAFT was available that this access means more families stay housed. This bill would prevent more homelessness and sustain more of our most vulnerable residents' housing.

H.1469/S.1011 – An Act promoting housing stability for families by strengthening HomeBASE program *Lead sponsors: Rep. Christine Barber/Sen. Liz Miranda*

HomeBASE offers families the necessary resources to exit shelter and become housed. With the closure of hotel shelter in our region (and across the Commonwealth), hundreds of families were quickly rehoused through the HomeBase program. This fast action can only be considered a success if they do not return to homelessness at the expiration of their HomeBASE subsidy. Right now, given the challenging path to stability, the risk of return is extremely high.

This bill, while putting HomeBASE into state statute, would also create the necessary flexibility to keep families housed by:

- Directing the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities to provide renewals of HomeBASE rental assistance to families and children who otherwise would be facing a return to homelessness;
- Allowing families to access HomeBASE upstream to maintain existing housing if they otherwise would be eligible for the Emergency Assistance family shelter program; and
- Increasing the maximum benefit levels to \$50,000 over the first 24 months of the program and up to \$25,000 in subsequent years for families needing additional time in the program.

Strengthening the HomeBASE program will prevent returns to homelessness and keep families housed.

H.4015 – An Act promoting housing stability for older adults across the Commonwealth *Lead Sponsor: Rep. Shirley Arriaga*

Tragically, older adult homelessness is on the rise in western Massachusetts: in Hampden County alone, in the Homelessness Point in Time count in January 2025, 42 individuals over the age of 65 were identified as homeless, 5 of whom were sleeping outside. Over the full year of 2024, 99 older adults slept in emergency shelter or other temporary shelter programs. These numbers are cause for alarm, and for action.

This bill would expand a bridge subsidy program for low-income older adults, aged 60 years and older, allowing them to remain in place while they await approval for long-term subsidized housing. This resource will be a vital tool to stem the tide of more older adults entering homelessness, and ensuring they are treated with the dignity they deserve.

Also notable: on July 14, the Senate version of the bill, S.475, filed by Senator Jehlen, was reported out favorably with a unanimous vote from the Joint Committee on Aging and Independence. Please build on this momentum with a favorable report from this Committee.

H.1547/S.1008 – An Act codifying the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) *Lead Sponsors Rep. Adrian Madaro, Sen. Joan Lovely*

This bill would protect and strengthen the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP), the state's rental assistance program that currently serves approximately 10,500 households with over 168,000 on the wait list. Tens of thousands of western Massachusetts households are on that wait list. Specifically, this bill would:

- Create a permanent legal foundation for MRVP;

- Expand access to vouchers and target 75% of new vouchers to lowest-income households;
- Require EOHLIC to publish data on voucher use, improving transparency, and much more.

H.1552/S.991 – An Act to create an Interagency Supportive Housing Finance and Strategy Board

Lead Sponsors: Rep. Rita Mendes and Sen. Paul Feeney

Across the western region, individual homelessness increased almost 20% compared to last year (from 1,000 to 1,209 people) and unsheltered homelessness rose almost 23% to 318 individuals, 4 times as high as in 2021, according to the most recent homelessness Point in Time count. Supportive housing is the proven response to meet this challenge.

This bill offers a no-cost opportunity to build on the Affordable Homes Act by establishing an **Interagency Supportive Housing Finance and Strategy Board**. This Board would provide a vehicle for state agencies and nonprofit partners to come together to ensure the efficient production of more supportive housing. It would create a roadmap for this development; identify opportunities to combine public and private resources; and ultimately create at least 2,000 supportive housing opportunities across the Commonwealth.

In the midst of federal uncertainty and a growing homelessness crisis, we urge you to issue a favorable report on these five bills above at the soonest possible date. We deeply appreciate your consideration and your fast action.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,



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