



Housing First  
for Hampden, Hampshire,  
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

November 19, 2025

Chair Robyn Kennedy  
Joint Committee on Children, Families  
and Persons with Disabilities  
24 Beacon St., Room 312-D  
Boston, MA 02133

Chair Jay Livingston  
Joint Committee on Children, Families  
and Persons with Disabilities  
24 Beacon Street, Room 134  
Boston, MA 02133

**RE: Support for H.216, An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness**

Good afternoon Chair Livingstone, Chair Kennedy and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”) in support of *H.216, An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness*. This bill is a crucial and urgent response to the dangerous constriction of the family shelter system. Our state's proud legacy of ensuring every child is sheltered and protected from sleeping outside or places not fit for human habitation is under severe threat right now.

The Network convenes roughly 200 partners from across our four western counties - Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire - including legislators, mayors and town managers and dozens of partners working to prevent and end homelessness with a housing first approach that centers racial equity.

This bill would restore essential protections to children and families. Chief among them is restoring presumptive eligibility so that a family who is imminently at risk of homelessness is approved for shelter while the family collects the required documentation.

Our Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter providers have shared the dire consequences of the elimination of presumptive eligibility. Recently, one of our EA providers in Berkshire County reported that a young pregnant women who was unable to get all of her documents together prior to giving birth lost custody of her baby when she was born because the mom was homeless. Other families are reported to be sleeping in their cars or outside awaiting access until their documents are complete. This is a profound deviation from the legislature's intent to ensure children's right to shelter is protected.

Additionally, this bill would require that a length of stay cap is not less than 9 months. Right now, the cap of 6 months is simply not long enough to rehouse families and prevent an immediate return to homelessness. Providers are seeing families forced to leave shelter only to have to return to it, if they are "lucky" enough to pass through the gauntlet of requirements yet

again. There is particular concern that in this coming month of December, many more families will be arriving at their 6 month time limit with nowhere to go. The housing scarcity and high rents make a tough situation almost impossible.

Please report out favorably H.216 as soon as possible. With colder weather upon us, fast action could not be more urgent.

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  
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