



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bill Supporting Unaccompanied Youth Experiencing Homelessness Reported Out of Committee

BOSTON— A bill that would address unaccompanied youth homelessness was reported out favorably from the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities on Wednesday afternoon. Filed by Representative James O’Day (D-West Boylston), House Bill 1862, *An Act Providing Housing and Support Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth*, would provide housing and programs to unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness and create a special commission to inform the state’s response to this vulnerable population.

Kelly Turley, Director of Legislative Advocacy at the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, says: “We are thrilled that the Committee reported House Bill 1862 out favorably and unanimously. The Coalition thanks the Committee members for recognizing the importance of this bill and the life-saving services it will provide to youth and young adults who are on their own and experiencing homelessness.”

An “unaccompanied homeless youth” is a youth aged 22 or under who is without shelter and not in the care of a parent or guardian. Nearly 6,000 Massachusetts high school students are considered unaccompanied homeless youth. There are thousands more who are not reflected in these numbers, as they cannot be accounted for because they already have dropped out of school..

Representative O’Day says: “The release of the Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Bill from the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities is an encouraging step in the right direction, with the ultimate goal being the final passage of this critical piece of legislation. The favorable release of the bill is a direct result of the unwavering support of the legislation from countless Representatives and Senators who acknowledge that youth homelessness is not a problem that is subsiding anytime soon and must be addressed at the state level. I am hopeful that the House Committee on Ways and Means will recognize the value and urgency of this legislation and release the bill in a timely manner.”

Unaccompanied youth homelessness occurs for many reasons. Some youth run away to avoid an unbearable home situation, such as abuse or an unstable parent, while others find that they are homeless and on their own after aging out of foster care or other state-run programs. Other youth find themselves abandoned by their families after coming out as part of the LGBT community, announcing a pregnancy, or making a life choice their parents do not condone.

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Representative Kay Khan (D-Newton), the House Chair of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, says, “With a known 6,000 unaccompanied youth in the state, we as a Commonwealth have to begin to learn where they are, why they are not receiving services, and how we can help them. The commission included in this bill will begin that long process.”

Senator Michael J. Rodrigues, (D-Westport), Senate Chair of the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities, echoes this sentiment: “I’m pleased to see this very important piece of legislation voted favorably out of committee,” Rodrigues said. “The bill will go a long way towards protecting the Commonwealth’s most vulnerable citizens by ensuring these children get a second chance.”

“This legislation is an important step as we work to help this at-risk group of young people,” said Senator Katherine Clark (D-Melrose), a proponent of the bill and long-time advocate for homelessness prevention. “We have too many teenagers and young adults falling through the cracks of the system and it is critical we develop a plan to get them the help they desperately need.”

The bill will be sent to House Ways and Means, where it will need to receive a favorable report in order to come to the floor for a vote.

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