



**MASSACHUSETTS
COALITION
FOR THE HOMELESS**

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17 Children’s League of Massachusetts
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17 Citizens’ Housing and Planning Association
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17 Youth on Fire

An Act Providing Housing and Support Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, a.k.a. Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Act

House Bill 135

Lead Sponsors: Representative James O’Day and Senator Katherine Clark

Co-sponsors: Denise Provost, James B. Eldridge, Linda D. Forry, Thomas P. Conroy, Steven M. Walsh, Ellen Story, William N. Brownsberger, Gloria L. Fox, Peter V. Kocot, Stephen Kulik, Bradford Hill, Jason M. Lewis, Jennifer L. Flanagan, Benjamin Swan, Martin J. Walsh, Frank I. Smizik, James J. Dwyer, Carlos Henriquez, Marjorie C. Decker, Elizabeth A. Poirier, Carl M. Sciortino, Louis L. Kafka, Sarah K. Peake, Lori A. Ehrlich, Martha M. Walz, Harriette L. Chandler, Kay Khan, Tom Sannicandro, Cheryl A. Coakley-Rivera, Paul R. Heroux, Mary S. Keefe, Thomas M. Stanley, Daniel A. Wolf, Cory Atkins, Brian R. Mannal, Danielle W. Gregoire, Denise Andrews, Kenneth J. Donnelly, Paul Brodeur, John P. Fresolo, David M. Rogers, Alan Silvia, Michael Barrett, John W. Scibak, Sal N. DiDomenico, Kenneth I. Gordon, Patricia D. Jehlen, John J. Binienda, Ann-Margaret Ferrante, Elizabeth A. Malia, Chris Walsh, Michael O. Moore, Jay R. Kaufman, John F. Keenan, John J. Mahoney, Karen E. Spilka, Carolyn C. Dykema, Sean Garballey, James T. Welch, Joseph F. Wagner, Sonia Chang-Diaz, Gale D. Candaras, Timothy J. Toomey, and Theodore C. Speliotis

Bill History: Referred to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities on January 22, 2013.

The Need for Action:

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education estimates that nearly 6,000 high school students are experiencing homelessness and out on their own. Thousands more unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness are not reflected in these numbers because they have already dropped out of school or are older and have finished school. There is a desperate need for increased shelter and housing options for youth living without their parents.

Youth homelessness takes its toll on both the youth and our society at large. Youth who are homeless as adolescents often face bleak outcomes. While many youth are resilient and are able to overcome the ravages of homelessness, homelessness often leads to poor health outcomes including increased risk of death, exposure to violence, susceptibility to exploitation and high risk behaviors, and poor academic performance with increased risk of dropping out of school.

The Goals of This Act:

This bill seeks to reduce youth homelessness and its adverse effects by funding a continuum of housing and support services geared specifically for unaccompanied youth. The goal of these efforts is to improve housing and residential stability, reduce the risk of harm and improve educational, physical and mental health outcomes for this population.

This bill builds off of a budget amendment passed during the Fiscal Year 2013 budget debate that established the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, tasked with identifying the needs of unaccompanied youth and identify real, tangible solutions to the problem of unaccompanied youth homelessness. The Commission’s first report is due to the Legislature on March 31, 2013.

What this Bill Does:

Section 1: Requires the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to enter into performance-based contracts with organizations and agencies to provide services to unaccompanied homeless youth. These service needs will be identified in the Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Commission Report. Programs funded under this Act shall provide a continuum of housing options for this population provided on a voluntary basis in conjunction with wraparound support services, which shall include but not be limited to: emergency shelter, “kinship” home placements, short term housing and “Transition to Independent Living” programs. The funded programs shall provide unaccompanied homeless youth with a stable out-of-home placement and help to reunite the youth with the youth’s parent or legal guardian if family reunification is in the youth’s best interest, and help to create educational and residential stability. Additional support services funded through these contracts may include but are not limited to: individual, family and group counseling; access to medical, dental and mental health care; education and employment services; case management, advocacy and referral services; independent living skills training; and provision of basic needs.

Section 2: Will define “unaccompanied homeless youth” as a person 24 years of age or younger who is not in the physical custody or care of a parent or legal guardian and who lacks a fixed, regular and adequate nighttime residence. The more specific definition of unaccompanied homeless youth can be found in the bill’s language and is also expected to encompass the findings of the Homeless Youth Commission.

Section 3: Mandates the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to establish contracts to provide services to unaccompanied homeless youth in urban, suburban, and rural areas across Massachusetts.

Section 4: Requires the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to monitor contracted agencies providing said services to unaccompanied homeless youth to ensure quality and transparency. The Executive Office of Health and Human Services will be required to collect this data on service agencies it has entered into contracts with and report this data annually to the Clerks of the House of Representatives and the Senate, the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities, the House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means and the Office of the Child Advocate by December 31st of each year.

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley at the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless: 781-595-7570 x17 or kelly@mahomeless.org.