



**MASSACHUSETTS
COALITION
FOR THE HOMELESS**

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Dear UCC Member:

As Christmas fast approaches, there are homeless youth in our state facing the holiday without a place to call home. Although each of their stories are different, these youth have one common thread, that is – not one of them would ever have imagined they would be homeless this Christmas.

My name is Tina. I know firsthand how it feels to be homeless for the holidays. At age 13, by no mistake of my own, my life changed forever. Growing up in a home where both my parents battled with addiction, my father died of an overdose and shortly after, my mother was sent to prison. From that moment on I became a homeless unaccompanied youth.

At first I was shuffled from family member to family member sleeping on their couches – never being able to stay too long at any one of their homes. I didn't have much of a choice but to grow up fast as a child. The influence of drugs, alcohol abuse and mental instability can put a toll on anyone, especially someone who has found themselves constantly fighting a fight against the world. I learned to survive very quickly. With no parent or formal guardian and with no real home life, I miraculously finished high school magna cum laude. School became the one place I found refuge from the chaos of my life.

In the late summer after graduating from high school I moved to Massachusetts to attend Salem State University. During the school year I lived in student housing but come summer break I was once again facing homelessness. Desperate to succeed, I had to learn the ins and outs of Massachusetts and the different programs that might be able to help me. With little success I discovered that there were not many homelessness programs geared for homeless youth – or at least not any places for drug free and hardworking homeless students. I reached out to agencies searching for solutions and plausible options and there weren't many. They all seemed to lead to a solution no one wants to accept: A homeless shelter, it was scary to even think that my independence only led me to a shelter.

Gratefully since moving to Massachusetts, I began building a relationship with my parent's family. Luckily, I had the opportunity to move in with my 90 year old grandfather. I am one of the fortunate ones but sadly approximately 6,000 young adults in Massachusetts* don't have a place to go to other than the streets. Far too many young adults, are sleeping in alleys and abandoned buildings. Some are forced into the sex trade just to get off the streets, or engage in survival sex; even more turn to alcohol and drugs to dull the pain.

I can only speak for myself, as I have overcome homelessness and adversity. But I'm sure there are many who cry themselves to sleep longing for a way out of their nightmare. That is why I have joined the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless in their fight to end youth homelessness through the passage of House Bill 135: "An Act Providing Housing and Support Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth", to learn more about this bill please visit <http://mahomeless.org/advocacy/2013-09-24-20-38-15> The passage of this important legislation would make it possible for thousands of youth faced with nowhere to go to have a place to turn. The bill would make it possible for the creation of supportive housing and case management for at risk or homeless youth throughout the state.

In the time that it took you to read this letter, you can make an impact by the simple act of clicking on this link www.mahomeless.org will bring you to the Coalition's website where you can take action by filling out an online letter to your State Senator and Representative.

Your legislative representatives at the State House need to hear from you that you support "An Act providing housing and support services for unaccompanied homeless youth", House Bill 135. The passage of this bill will ensure that by next Christmas there will be hope for at risk and homeless youth in Massachusetts.

Thank you for taking the time to read my story and more importantly taking action.

Tina

The mission of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless is to eradicate homelessness from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Our work as a coalition to find common ground and to seek essential solutions has enabled us to full fill our role as an organizer, coordinator and resource. At the same time, our organizational philosophy has compelled us to take action, rather than merely observe, react, or study.

We seek to full fill our mission as a voice with people experiencing homelessness in their struggle for decent housing, adequate income and accessible services.

To learn more about our work please visit our website at www.Mahomeless.org

**According to the Department of Secondary Education of Massachusetts*