



Please Actively Support and Cosponsor An Act Relative to Assisting Elders and People with Disabilities in the Commonwealth

Senate Bill 356/House Bill 621

Lead Sponsors: Senator Patricia Jehlen and Representative Jim O'Day

Senate Cosponsors: Senators Sal DiDomenico, Patricia Jehlen, and Michael Moore

House Cosponsors: Representatives Christine Barber, Mike Connolly, Marjorie Decker, Sean Garballey, Carlos Gonzalez, Tami Gouveia, Jonathan Hecht, Natalie Higgins, Russell Holmes, Daniel Hunt, Louis Kafka, Mary Keefe, Kay Khan, Adrian Madaro, Denise Provost, and David Rogers

Bill History:

Both Senate Bill 356 and House Bill 621 were refiled in January 2019 and have been referred to the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs. Last session, both bills were reported out favorably by the Joint Committee on Elder Affairs and assigned to the House Committee on Ways and Means.

What is the Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children program (EAEDC)?

EAEDC is a state-funded cash assistance and benefits program providing support to over 19,000 extremely low-income individuals, administered by the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA).

Who is served by EAEDC?

- Extremely low-income adults 65 years of age or older who are in the process of applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Adults experiencing a mental or physical disability that inhibits their ability to work for at least 60 days
- Participants in the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission's programs
- Certain caretakers of children who are not eligible to receive Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) program benefits or caretakers of adults with severe disabilities
- Lawfully present immigrants who are residents of Massachusetts

How would Senate Bill 356/House Bill 621 improve the EAEDC Program?

These bills would:

1. Put into statute the recent removal of the homelessness penalty for individuals experiencing homelessness:

Before this fiscal year, EAEDC program participants who were experiencing homelessness received a reduced grant of only \$92.80/month. This monthly grant was significantly lower than the current grant for individuals who have housing (\$303.70/month) and clearly was insufficient to allow these participants to meet their basic needs. Through the FY'19 budget, the Legislature removed the homelessness penalty. By eliminating this grant reduction, EAEDC participants experiencing homelessness (in or out of a shelter) now are not further financially disrupted and may be able to transition into a more stable living arrangement sooner. This section of the bill would enshrine that positive change in statute.

2. Increase the EAEDC grant: The typical monthly grant of \$303.70* has not been increased since 1988. While EAEDC is a vital lifeline for program participants, the benefit levels are very low. We are proposing to match the levels provided under the TAFDC program for households of comparable size, so that, for example, one person on EAEDC could receive up to \$428/month (with rent allowance).

*This is the amount provided to single individuals who are responsible for paying some monthly rent, known as “Living Arrangement A”.

3. Increase the allowable personal asset limit from \$250 to \$2,500: Letting an individual have more than \$250 in total monthly assets will allow more EAEDC participants to have assets and to move toward housing stability (by being better able to afford ongoing rent, first month’s rent, last month’s rent, and security deposit payments). The bill language also would exclude the first \$15,000 in a vehicle’s trade-in value when determining the asset limit (as in the TAFDC program), so that more EAEDC applicants with cars can approved—which is especially vital in areas with limited or no public transportation.

4. Create an annual cost of living adjustment (COLA) for EAEDC program participants: Building in a COLA so that DTA can provide increased benefits in response to the wider economic conditions would ensure that participants do not fall behind further economically from year-to-year.

What Is the Bill Text?

SECTION 1. Section 1 of chapter 117A of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2016 Official Edition, is hereby amended by adding the following paragraph:-Any person experiencing homelessness, who (i) has no established place of abode, or lives in a temporary emergency shelter, and (ii) is otherwise eligible under the provisions of this chapter, shall receive the same payment rate as recipients who incur shelter costs including, but not limited to, rent or a mortgage. The department shall promulgate or revise any such rules and regulations necessary to implement the provisions of this section.

SECTION 2. Chapter 117A of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after section 10 the following new section:- Section 11. Effective July first of every year the department shall increase the total budget of each eligible recipient, before taking into consideration any available income and resources, by a percentage amount equal to the percentage rise in the United States Consumer Price Index for January first of that year over the level of said index for January first of the previous year plus such additional percentage amount as is recommended annually by the department and appropriated by the general court. The department shall promulgate such rules and regulations to implement the provisions of this section.

SECTION 3. Chapter 117A of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after section 10 the following new section: Section 12. The combined assets of an assistance unit may not exceed \$2,500. In determining countable assets, the department shall exclude the first \$15,000 in fair market value of a vehicle; provided that the commissioner may grant a waiver for a vehicle with a market value in excess of \$15,000 if the commissioner determines the vehicle is necessary for employment or because of other household circumstances.

SECTION 4. Chapter 117A of the General Laws is hereby amended by inserting after section 10 the following new section: Section 13. The department shall set the maximum benefit for the program in this chapter at the same level as the program in chapter 118 of the General Laws. The department shall promulgate such rules and regulations necessary to implement the provisions of this section.

Which Organizations Have Endorsed the Bill?

As of March 13, 2019, the following organizations have endorsed the EAEDC bill: AIDS Project Worcester, Catholic Charities of Boston, Coastline, Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, the Northeast Justice Center, The Psychological Center, and the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness.

Please actively support and sign on as a cosponsor of the EAEDC bill, Senate Bill 356/ House Bill 621!

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

