



Help Ensure that TAFDC and EAEDC Program Participants Receive Needed Additional Cash Assistance during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Testimony in Support of Swift Passage of House Bill 4622, An Act to Provide Short-Term Relief for Families in Deep Poverty

Prepared for the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities

by Kelly Turley, Associate Director

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Dear Chairperson Chang-Díaz, Chairperson Khan, and esteemed members of the Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities:

On behalf of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, thank you for this opportunity to testify virtually and in written form today to express our unequivocal support for **House Bill 4622, An Act to provide short-term relief for families in deep poverty**¹. This bill, filed by Representative Marjorie Decker and Senator Sal DiDomenico in response to the coronavirus pandemic, would provide immediate and much needed financial resources to just under 50,000 households and over 91,500 family and individual households members in every corner of the Commonwealth participating in the Department of Transitional Assistance's (DTA) Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (TAFDC) and Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children program (EAEDC).²

House Bill 4622 would direct DTA to provide a one-time supplemental payment to TAFDC and EAEDC participants, matching the standard of need. This would mean, for example, an additional \$593 in TAFDC assistance for families of three. For EAEDC participants, passage of the bill would lead to a one-time payment of \$303.70 for households of one, and \$395.10 for households of two.

As this committee knows well, participants in the state's cash assistance programs have not seen benefit increases or cost of living adjustments in many years and decades. While the one-time payments that would be provided under this bill certainly would not be a panacea or lift these households out of deep poverty, the payments would be able to provide some relief and security at a time of great uncertainty and fear as COVID-19 ravages Massachusetts. As we have heard powerfully today from parents participating in the TAFDC program, cash assistance program participants are doing the best that they can to practice social distancing and support themselves and their family members during the pandemic. This is beyond challenging, though, as they incur additional, unanticipated expenses for food, toilet paper, soap, hand sanitizer, masks, gloves, laundry detergent, cleaning supplies, Internet connectivity, utility costs, transportation, and other basic needs.

At the Coalition, we are working each day with families and individuals worried about meeting their basic needs as they have lost jobs and are separated from friends and family members in their support network due to the need to practice social distancing. We are particularly concerned for the families and individuals experiencing homelessness right now, in overcrowded congregate shelters, in private-pay motel rooms, doubled up with family members and friends, and in places not meant for human habitation, and for those needing to flee

¹ The bill language and details can be found online at <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/191/H4622>.

² According to DTA's April 2020 monthly report on the cash assistance programs, at the end of March 2020, there were a combined 49,959 households in the two programs, including 91,584 household members. This included 30,372 families on TAFDC, with 71,788 household members, and 19,687 households on EAEDC, with 19,796 household members. The full report is available online at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/dta-facts-and-figures-april-0/download>.

domestic violence situations who are trapped with their abusers. Additional cash assistance during the pandemic could make the difference for families and individuals working to exit homelessness and secure a safe place to comply with a stay at home advisory, and can help ensure that fewer households fall behind on rent, lose their housing during the pandemic, and enter homelessness. Right now, Massachusetts is in the midst of a surge in COVID-19 cases among people experiencing homelessness, with the media reporting last week that almost 230 people without permanent housing were diagnosed with COVID-19 in Boston and Quincy alone. These numbers, tragically, are just the tip of the iceberg.

Taking swift action to provide additional cash assistance to TAFDC and EAEDC participants is a not only a matter of public health and housing stability, it is a matter of racial and ethnic equity. Across the country and here in Massachusetts, we are seeing higher rates of COVID-19 morbidity and mortality in African American and Latinx communities, communities also disproportionately impacted by homelessness and housing instability, and overrepresented in the state's cash assistance and Emergency Assistance family shelter programs. Recent DTA data on EAEDC participants for whom race and ethnicity were known showed 27.1% were African American and 26.3% were Latinx³. For families in the Emergency Assistance program, the majority of which are TAFDC participants, recent data from the Department of Housing and Community Development indicated that 41% of families in the EA program were African American and 43% were Latinx.⁴

We are grateful to Representative Decker and Senator DiDomenico for their leadership for this bill and related legislation on improving the state's cash assistance programs, and to the Committee Chairs for scheduling this hearing so quickly.

We respectfully ask the Committee to consider amending this bill or pursuing additional legislation to provide additional direct cash transfers as the pandemic becomes more protracted. We ask the Committee to give House Bill 4622 a swift and favorable report, and do all you can to ensure it becomes law, as part of a larger, holistic, statewide response to COVID-19 risks and realities of our lowest income neighbors.

Thank you! Please reach out to me if you have any feedback or questions: kelly@mahomeless.org.

³ Data from an October 2019 public records request response from DTA to the Coalition showed that of the EAEDC clients for whom race and ethnicity were known, 27.1% were listed as "Black or African American" and 26.3% were listed as "Hispanic or Latino".

⁴ Data released by Department of Housing and Community Development in January 2019 as part of the ongoing Emergency Assistance reprourement process indicated that 41% of families in the EA program were identified as "Black or African American" and 43% were identified as "Hispanic/Latino".