



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Health Care Financing  
In Support of S 612 An Act improving public health through a common application for core food,  
health and safety-net programs

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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports Senate Bill 612 as a constructive and modernizing step to get essential benefits to residents who need them. For decades the League has supported legislation and programs that help meet the basic needs of individuals and alleviate the burdens of poverty. A Common Application for benefits is one of the most important ideas put forward that would truly improve the interface between those needing help and the bureaucracy of state implementation.

A Common Application should make it possible for persons experiencing the conditions of poverty to make a one-stop application for benefits that are usually administered by many state agencies. The process of assembling documents needed to prove eligibility for various forms of aid can be daunting, especially for persons who don't have their own cars, may need to bring young children with them, and have to pay to obtain documents and make copies.

Often the need for one type of benefit is clearly related to other needs. When someone applies for Mass Health, for example, their low income and lack of assets often indicates that they have lived in poverty or on the edge for some time and that their health is impacted by lack of good nutrition or sub-standard housing. All these needs are interrelated and it is often difficult to figure out what is primary. It makes a great deal of sense for the individual or family to be able to apply for all the state assistance programs they are eligible for in one Common Application and not run around to many agencies which have different paperwork and different documentation necessary. If reply letters are well-written, it should help people understand that they are eligible for some programs but not for others. It would also avoid the inconsistent feedback given by some employees and bad advice to apply somewhere else.

A Common Application for core safety net programs should streamline the work of state agencies as well. In an era when businesses scan documents and store information electronically, the agencies should be able to share information for their own benefit as well as to help applicants. Yet we know that electronic medical records have not been easy to implement, so great care must be taken to contract for software that is practical, correctable and will safeguard sensitive information.

Since the National Voter Registration Act required that state agencies offering SNAP (food stamps), Transitional Assistance to Needy Families, Medicaid, and other government benefits are legally required to assist their clients to register to vote, this should be part of the Common Application when it is developed. The long list of agencies in the bill is very helpful and perhaps can be extended to additional benefits such as the school lunch program.

Thank you for your consideration of these points. We urge you to vote favorably on Senate Bill 612 and do all you can to expedite its passage.