



**Legislation Summary:**

**An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness**

Initial bill number(s): H.145/S.86.(Bill numbers will change as legislation proceeds.)

Sponsors: Rep. Marjorie C. Decker and Sen. Adam Gomez

These identical bills address access and administrative issues for families with children seeking Emergency Assistance shelter and HomeBASE rehousing benefits. It would allow families who are homeless or are at immediate risk of losing their homes to be placed in shelter immediately and not to be turned away because they do not have necessary documents in hand or have not spent at least one night in a place not suitable for sleeping (such as a car, abandoned building or waiting room). Other measures, such as access to Department of Transitional Assistance data and an ombudsperson unit in the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, would facilitate prompt access to housing resources and make an annual report of services provided.

Moratoriums on evictions helped many families stay in housing during the pandemic this past year. Yet on June 30, 2020 there were 3,096 families with children and pregnant individuals in the Emergency Assistance shelter program, with 13 families with children in motels. During the 2018-19 academic year, public schools reported serving 24,777 students who were experiencing homelessness. Every recent month over 300 families have applied for assistance and over 40% have been turned away, so “sheltered families” do not count those who are doubled up and living in very crowded or unsuitable situations. <https://mahomeless.org/basic-facts/#:~:text=It> is hard to estimate the need for housing as the pandemic continues and when evictions pick up again. Part of the problem is the overall shortage of housing in Massachusetts, particularly modestly priced rentals where lower income families can afford to live even when they get rental assistance.

**League position**

LWVMA supports these bills based on its national Meeting Basic Human Needs position. From [Impact on Issues:](#)

“Persons who are unable to work, whose earnings are inadequate, or for whom jobs are not available have the right to an income and/or services sufficient to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, and access to health care. The federal government should set minimum, uniform standards and guidelines for social welfare programs and should bear primary responsibility for financing programs designed to help meet the basic needs of individuals and families. State and

local governments, as well as the private sector, should have a secondary role in financing food, housing, and health care programs.” (p. 146)

From Criteria for Housing Supply:

“State and local governments should assist by establishing effective agencies to aid, promote, coordinate, and supplement the housing programs of the federal government and the private sector.

- Government at all levels must make available sufficient funds for housing-assistance programs.
- When families or individuals cannot afford decent housing, the government should provide assistance in the form of income and/or subsidized housing.” (p. 147)