



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
In Support of H.145/S.86 An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and
families experiencing homelessness
By Lucy Kennedy, LWVMA Affordable Housing Specialist
June 13, 2023**

The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports H.145/S.86, An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness. The bill improves 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 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. An annual report of the services provided would allow evaluation of how these new provisions are working.

We have had many years when thousands of families with children have been homeless in Massachusetts. Moratoriums on evictions helped many families stay in housing during the Covid-19 emergency. Yet as of May 23, 2023, the [Massachusetts Rehousing Data Collective public dashboard](#) reported there were 22,128 homeless households; 9% of whom were unsheltered. Data from June 2022 showed 29% of homeless households included at least one child. Department of Housing and Community Development data from September 2022 showed 2,521 individuals applied for shelter; only 29% were placed in the HomeBASE program seeking a more permanent housing solution or emergency shelters.

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. It is important to have an overall system in place for timely assistance to families that does not prolong their struggles and trauma. Particularly for children, both medical and educational costs have been shown to increase because of family homelessness.

For decades, the League of Women Voters has been advocating for every American family to have a decent home and a suitable living environment. We believe that state and local governments should establish effective agencies to aid, promote, coordinate, and supplement the housing programs of the federal government and the private sector. Governments at all levels should make available sufficient funds for housing assistance programs.

The Massachusetts League is made up of 44 local Leagues from the Berkshires to Cape Cod. We urge the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities to report this bill favorably out of committee and guide its passage during this 193rd session.