



**Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities  
In Support of H144/S75 An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty  
By Palma McLaughlin, LWVMA Specialist on Children and Family Issues  
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Thank you for demonstrating your commitment to our most vulnerable children and families by including the 10% increase in cash assistance in the FY'24 budget that will take effect in April 2024. The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, representing 44 local Leagues from Boston to the Berkshires, urges you to deepen that commitment by supporting H144/S75, An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty.

Deep poverty is an income level less than half of the federal poverty level, already an artificially low threshold. Deep poverty truly means doing without necessities. This bill will establish a poverty floor at half the federal poverty rate and gradually lift children and families up to the floor and out of deep poverty.

The recent public health crisis highlighted the precarious economics of all families. Those that live in the deepest poverty are in the most precarious position of all. Over the course of the pandemic, government at all levels worked to come up with stopgap measures. Passage of this bill is an opportunity to take longer lasting measures to lessen the vulnerability of these families.

Being poor cannot be summed up in one number. It is multidimensional. It is dealing with the stress of not having enough, of balancing needs and shortages and of always being at risk of different things going wrong at the same time.

Growing up in poverty has significant negative impact on child development. Only 22% of deeply poor children can be classified as flourishing, compared to 48% of poor children in the "upper half" of poverty. For parents in deep poverty, 21% reported frequent parenting stress compared to 15% of parents in poverty.<sup>1</sup> These family conditions have been shown to predict poor health and developmental outcomes.

Children growing up in extreme poverty find themselves in surroundings characterized by chaos, an absence of structure, and a perceived lack of control. Growing up in a poor household is linked with long-term consequences in educational outcomes, physical health and brain development that can follow a child well into adulthood. Children in families in deep poverty are less likely to succeed in all stages of life, and the gaps between the poor and the deeply poor widen considerably as the children get closer to adulthood.<sup>2</sup>

Children born into a deeply poor family are less likely to move up the income ladder, perhaps in part because they have further to climb simply to move up a rung. Deep poverty is "sticky"—14% of those who were born deeply poor will be in deep poverty at age forty, about three times as many as those who

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<sup>1</sup> Ekono, M., Yang, J., & Smith, S. (2016). Young Children in Deep Poverty. New York: National Center for Children in Poverty, Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University.

<sup>2</sup> Boghani, P. (2017, November 11). PBS Frontline: How Poverty Can Follow Children Into Adulthood. Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/how-poverty-can-follow-children-into-adulthood/>

were not born in deep poverty.<sup>3</sup> Of those born deeply poor, 40% are in the bottom income quintile as adults, compared to 30% of the poor but not deeply poor, and 18% of those born deeply poor are only one quintile higher.<sup>4</sup>

George Orwell wrote about his own experience living in deep poverty. “Poverty annihilates the future.”<sup>5</sup>

Our policies must effectively account for the full human costs of poverty – costs that are not always visible to the naked eye. Simply enabling families to move up from deep poverty can substantially improve life-long and generational outcomes. We must consider the future of children who are growing up in deep poverty and what it means for their future economic opportunity and ours as a Commonwealth.

Therefore, the League strongly urges you to support the passage and implementation of these two bills and to report these bills favorably and in a timely manner.

Thank you for your consideration.

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<sup>3</sup> Cuddy, E., Venator, J., Reeves, R. V., Cuddy, E., Venator, J., & Reeves, R. V. (2016, October 26). In a land of dollars: Deep poverty and its consequences. Retrieved from <https://www.brookings.edu/research/in-a-land-of-dollars-deep-poverty-and-its-consequences/>

<sup>4</sup> Ratcliffe, C. & Kalish, E. (2017). Escaping Poverty: Predictors of Persistently Poor Children’s Economic Access, Urban Institute.

<sup>5</sup> Orwell, G. (1933) Chapter 3. Down and Out in Paris and London. Retrieved from <https://www.planetebook.com/free-ebooks/down-and-out-in-paris-and-london.pdf>