

July 16, 2019

Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz, Senate Chair
Joint Committee on Children,
Families, and Persons with Disabilities
State House, Room 111

Representative Kay Khan, House Chair
Joint Committee on Children,
Families and Persons with Disabilities
State House, Room 146

RE: Testimony in support of The Act of Living (S.76/H.15)

Dear Chair Chang-Diaz and Chair Khan:

I am pleased to submit this testimony on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness in support of The Act of Living (S.76/H.150).

The Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”) supports collaborative solutions across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties to prevent and end homelessness through a Housing First approach. It includes hundreds of partners from virtually every community sector – housing, child care, health care, education, workforce development – who are committed to making housing stability a reality for all in Western Massachusetts.

Discrimination against people who are experiencing homelessness poses a consistent and significant barrier to gaining that housing stability. From housing search to job search to accessing medical care, people living without homes frequently face prejudice based on their housing status. The Act of Living would provide protection against that discrimination and increase access to housing in doing so by:

- Extending anti-discrimination protections in Chapter 151B and Chapter 272 of the Massachusetts General Laws to persons experiencing homelessness, including protections when seeking employment, housing, voter registration, and access to public spaces and places of public accommodation.
- Securing the right of persons experiencing homelessness to rest, seek shelter from the elements, occupy a legally parked car, pray, eat, and avoid harassment in public spaces.
- Repealing Sections 63 through 69 of Chapter 272 of the MGL, which includes archaic and derogatory laws criminalizing homelessness.

Ending homelessness requires ending discrimination against the people who are experiencing it. The Commonwealth’s values and its goals compel the Act of Living’s favorable report.

Best,
Pamela

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