

September 15, 2025

The Honorable Senator Robyn K. Kennedy
Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities

The Honorable Representative Jay D. Livingstone
House Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families, and Persons with Disabilities

Via email: Audrey Herrmann (Audrey.Herrmann@mahouse.gov); Olivia Mathot
(Olivia.mathot@masenate.gov)

Dear Chair Kennedy, Chair Livingstone, Vice Chairs, and Committee members,

The Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) is a statewide non-profit association of 60 members, providers of and advocates for child and family services. Together we promote the availability, accessibility, and quality of services that promote the safety, health, and well-being of children and families. We are writing today **in support of "an act to lift our kids out of deep poverty"** (S.118, Sen. DiDomenico / H.214 Rep. Decker), which would raise cash assistance grants by 20% a year until they reach 50% of the federal poverty level (FPL), thereby benefiting thousands of families and nearly 70,000 children. Once grant amounts reach 50% FPL, these bills would adjust grants annually so that they remain at 50% FPL. Please pass these bills to directly improve family stability and child safety.

Thank you to the Committee for favorably reporting prior versions of these bills in three previous legislative sessions. Your favorable reports laid the groundwork for the Legislature's increases to cash assistance grants after decades of frozen funding.

Successive increases are necessary to keep pace with inflation and improve the ability of low-income families to meet their basic needs in our high-cost state. We appreciate that a planned April 2025 10% grant increase took effect despite threats of cuts. This increase, the first to take effect since October 2022, increased the maximum monthly grant for a family of three by \$78, up to \$861/month. We thank the House and Senate for maintaining this increase in the FY26 budget. However, Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) grants for \$861 a month for a family of three without income is still less than half of the federal poverty level, which is called, "Deep Poverty", currently \$1,110 a month. EAEDC grants (which provides emergency aid to older adults, adults with disabilities, children being cared for by non or distant relatives, and adults caring for an individual with a disability) are even lower, at only \$441 a month for an individual, compared to the Deep Poverty level of \$652 a month.

Families living in poverty cannot afford basic necessities which is detrimental to each family member's

wellbeing and increases their risk of child abuse and neglect, and child welfare system involvement. Many caregivers experiencing poverty are forced to choose between using their constrained resources to maintain their home, buy food, or pay for essential utilities like power and water. There is often a struggle to buy food at the end of the month when food stamps have run out and insufficient funds to clean laundry, let alone pay for children's school activities. Many families in deep poverty experience homelessness or otherwise less-than-ideal housing, such as "doubling up" with others, because the cash assistance grants they rely on are not enough to pay rent.

Living in Deep Poverty has long-term consequences for children's physical health and well-being. Children who grow up chronically poor are at increased risk for negative cognitive, academic, social, health, and long-term economic outcomes. Financial instability and the constant struggle to meet basic needs can put children at greater risk of exposure to high-stress, substance use disorder, domestic violence, and mental health disorders like depression and anxiety. Addressing poverty at its root has tremendously positive effects downstream through better child outcomes and more efficient use of state dollars.

In the child welfare system, too often poverty is the primary driver of system involvement. Reports of "neglect" based solely on a family's inability to pay for certain provisions are common, such as when a child comes to school hungry or a family has trouble with stable housing. Parents have lost custody and other rights associated with their children due to economic "neglect." Meanwhile resources have gone to state agencies and foster families that could have prevented families from entering the system in the first place.

Decreasing poverty decreases child welfare involvement and improves child and family well-being.

The [final report of the Poverty Commission](#) recommends raising cash assistance programs as a key component of the roadmap to expanding economic mobility in Massachusetts. Research demonstrates that investment in, and availability and accessibility of sufficient public benefits (like cash assistance, housing assistance, childcare assistance, refundable EITC, and medical assistance programs) significantly reduces involvement in the child welfare system ([2023 Chapin Hall Report](#)). Financial support is the solution to prevent the trauma of child welfare involvement.

Implementation of anti-poverty efforts would also support reduction of racial disproportionality in child welfare involvement. There is a disproportionate number of families of color living in poverty due to structural racism and decades of disinvestment in communities of color. 29% of Latino children and 24% of African-American children in Massachusetts live in poverty, compared to 6% of white children ([2002 Kids Count Data](#)). Meanwhile, national estimates suggest that anti-poverty efforts can reduce child welfare investigations of Black children by 19 to 29% and Latinx children by 13 to 24% ([2023 Chapin Hall Report](#)).

It is past time to end Deep Poverty in Massachusetts. This bill not only provides our most vulnerable children and their families with the means to improve self-sufficiency, but it also heads off more costly interventions



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down the line. We urge the Committee's support. Please report this bill out favorably and secure its timely passage to bring our state's children out of deep poverty.

Sincerely,

Rachel Gwaltney
Executive Director
Children's League of Massachusetts