



July 16, 2019

Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz
Senate Committee on Children, Families and
Persons with Disabilities
State House Room 111
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Kay Khan
House Committee on Children, Families and
Persons with Disabilities
State House Room 146
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Testimony in support of H102/S36 An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty.

Dear Chairwomen Chang-Diaz and Khan,

I am writing today in support of S102/S36 *An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty*, on behalf of Jane Doe Inc. (JDI), the Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence, and our 55 community-based member agencies that provide direct services to sexual and domestic violence survivors throughout Massachusetts.

An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty would raise Temporary Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) cash assistance grants by 10% each year beginning July 1, 2019 until grants reach 50% FPL for the household size. Once grant amounts reach this threshold, which is estimated to take approximately 4 years, the grants would continue to be increased annually in order to maintain a payment standard of no less than 50% FPL for the household size.

JDI and our member agencies support the proposed increase in TAFDC grants because it will be a step forward for families seeking to achieve economic stability—including families that have been impacted by sexual and/or domestic violence. Massachusetts' current TAFDC benefits—\$593 with no rent allowance and \$633 with rent allowance for a family of three—fall below more than half of the established Health and Human Services federal poverty guidelines, leaving 95,000 Massachusetts children in deep poverty.¹ The term “deep poverty” is used to describe families living below 50% of the federal poverty level (FPL). In 2017, 7% of Massachusetts children were living in deep poverty.²

Survivors and their families often find themselves in difficult financial circumstances as a consequence of experiences of sexual and domestic violence. For example, when a victim/survivor leaves a violent relationship, it can mean the loss of financial resources that were controlled or provided by an abuser. As a result, the survivor has fewer financial resources for themselves and their children/dependents as they try to rebuild their life. Increasing TAFDC cash assistance to 50% FPL will help survivors who need to access this benefit to achieve economic stability and provide basic needs to their dependents.

¹ The Annie E. Casey Foundation Kids Count Data Center. (September 2018). “Children in extreme poverty (50 percent poverty) in Massachusetts.” <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/45-children-in-extreme-poverty-50-percent-poverty?loc=23&loc=2#detailed/2/23/false/871,870,573,869,36,868,867,133,38,35/any/325,326>

² Ibid.

As the cost of living has increased over time, our grant levels having remained frozen—increasing only equivalent to the percent increase in the United States Consumer Price Index. As a result, our TAFDC cash-assistance can now only purchase half as much as it did 30 years ago. This has caused the gap between the TAFDC grand level and poverty level to continue to widen each year as children and families continue to suffer.

Because grant amounts are so low, families cannot afford basic necessities for their children including food and washing laundry. Families also struggle to afford after school activities and enrichment opportunities for children. Some families also struggle to pay rent and are faced with the possible reality of becoming homeless. Maintaining paid work is also a challenge when one may not be able to afford transportation or has to spend significant time obtaining food and other basic needs from food pantries and other benefit programs.

Living in deep poverty has long-term consequences for children's physical and emotional health. Children who grow up in poverty have poorer academic performance outcomes than their peers who do not experience poverty. Poverty correlates with poor cognitive development, negative self-image, inadequate access to academic resources such as computers, and not having a stable place to live. Survivors trying to achieve economic stability after violence experience the added impacts of the trauma that effects them and their children—and the physical and emotional needs that result.

All of the effects of poverty make it harder for survivors to achieve and maintain safety and stability. Economic stability can be jeopardized by the smallest unexpected expense, forcing families into precarious situations, including, perhaps, returning to an abusive situation in order to ensure that there is food on the table and a roof over their children's heads. This modest financial increase can make all the difference for a family to be able to survive and thrive.

JDI and our member programs respectfully urge the Committee to give *An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty* a quick and favorable report. It is long past time for Massachusetts to fully to address our children's basic needs.

Sincerely,

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