March 5, 2019

Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz, Chair

Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities

State House Room 111

Boston, MA 02113

Rep. Kay Khan, Chair

Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities

State House Room 146

Boston, MA 02113

RE: Testimony in support of S37 and H104 to “lift the cap on kids”

Dear Chairpersons Chang-Diaz and Khan:

On behalf of Jane Doe Inc. (JDI) and our 58 community-based member agencies that provide direct services to sexual and domestic violence survivors throughout Massachusetts, I am writing to express our strong support for S37/H104, *An Act relative to the wellbeing and care of a child,* commonly known as the act to “lift the cap on kids.”JDI, the Massachusetts Coalition Against Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence, is a social justice organization committed to addressing the root causes of sexual and domestic violence and promoting justice, safety, and healing for survivors.

We urge the Committee to give a quick and favorable report to these bills. We find it untenable that Massachusetts’ children and families who are in the most need are suffering further because TAFDC benefits exclude any children born during the period that the family is receiving benefits. The exclusion seems to be based in the misguided beliefs that limiting this benefit is a deterrent for individuals to have more children, and that the state should have a say in who should have more children and when. It is startling that Massachusetts has maintained this policy in spite of its roots in classism, sexism and racism, and remains one of only sixteen states that still implements the cap.

This failed policy harms children. Families that have a child in these circumstances are precluded from receiving up to an additional $100 monthly benefit for that child, requiring them to stretch the same amount of resources to support all of their children. Parents who were barely managing on inadequate resources before the child was born struggle even more to pay for the basic needs of other members of the family. Pediatricians report that often it is the older sibling who suffers most – such as from undernutrition and related health problems – because the small grant for the older sibling is diluted to pay for the new family member.

It is well-established that extreme poverty causes children long-term cognitive, emotional and physical health challenges. Denying this small increment exacerbates the stress that parents raising children in poverty experience and makes it even more challenging to pursue and maintain education or employment as they seek financial stability.

As the Commonwealth’s only statewide sexual and domestic violence coalition, JDI must also note that there is an exception under current policy allowing cash benefits for families in which the child “in question” is conceived as a result of rape. While we appreciate that this policy has ensured that some individuals are not denied benefits as a result of sexual violence victimization, the exception is problematic and does not recognize the trauma and risk of disclosing sexual violence. In reality, many individuals who may qualify under this exception are not helped by it because of the many barriers to disclosing this personal information—shame and stigma, not being believed, concern about having to provide some sort of documentation, privacy, fear of retaliation, impact on child/children—just to name a few. Beyond the problems with this exception, JDI and our members also strongly believe that every child should have their basic human needs met.

JDI and our members urge the Committee to swiftly give these bills a favorable report. The time has come for Massachusetts to reject the classism, sexism and racism that is imbedded in this policy.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at any time regarding this matter.

Sincerely,

Maureen L. Gallagher

Policy Director

Cc: Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities