



TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF H. 144 and S.75 TO

LIFT KIDS OUT OF DEEP POVERTY

September 12, 2023

Chair Livingstone, Chair Kennedy, and Members of the Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, thank you very much for the opportunity to address the Committee **in support of the House and Senate bills to Lift Kids Out of Deep Poverty: H. 144 (Rep. Decker) and S. 75 (Sen. DiDomenico)**. We urge the Committee to give these bills a quick and favorable report.

My name is Kate Adams, Public Policy Manager with The Greater Boston Food Bank (GBFB). I present this testimony on behalf of my organization, our network of 600 food distribution partners and the low-income families in the 190 cities and towns we serve across Eastern Massachusetts. GBFB is one of the 160 partners in the Lift Our Kids Coalition. We serve over 600,000 people in need of food across Eastern Massachusetts every month, and many of our food distribution partners are reporting more neighbors in need of food now than during the height of the pandemic, in large part due to affordability and cost of living in Massachusetts. **Families are struggling to keep food on the table, and according to our research, one in three individuals in Massachusetts are facing food insecurity and those numbers are persisting currently.** The charitable food system is doing what it can to meet the demand, but cash assistance must keep up with the current cost of living to better support families' basic needs.

The Act to Lift Kids Out of Deep Poverty sets a floor for cash assistance at 50% of the federal poverty level (FPL). Families living below this level are considered to be in "Deep Poverty." Once grant amounts reach 50% FPL, the bills would require grants to be adjusted annually for inflation so they do not lose their value over time.

The Committee favorably reported prior versions of these bills in two previous legislative sessions. Those favorable reports laid the groundwork for the Legislature's inclusion – after decades of frozen funding – of four grant increases in General Appropriations Acts, with the first increase effective January 2021 and the most recent increase effective April 2024.

However, even with these recent increases, the current maximum grant of \$783 a month for a family of three with no income is still less than Deep Poverty – currently \$1,036 a month. While the incremental increases in the budget are greatly appreciated, whether to raise cash assistance grants should not have to be a question every year. Instead, as the bills provide, grants should be increased more rapidly to the modest Deep Poverty level and then adjusted each year to keep up with increases in the cost of living.

As things are now, because grant amounts are insufficient, families cannot afford basic necessities for their children or themselves. They struggle to buy food at the end of the month when SNAP benefits have run out. They don't have money to do laundry. They can't pay for school activities for their children. And many end up homeless or doubled-up because their grants aren't enough to pay rent.

Living in deep poverty has long-term consequences for children's physical and emotional health. Children who grow up desperately poor do worse in school – sometimes because of poverty-related cognitive challenges, sometimes because of bullying, negative self-image, not having access to a computer, or not having a stable place to live.

Please give your full support to these bills. It is long past time for Massachusetts to make a commitment to our state's future by lifting our children out of deep poverty. Additionally, we urge your support for *An Act establishing basic needs assistance for Massachusetts immigrant residents* (HB135, SB76). These bills would restore basic food benefits and basic cash benefits for low-income, legally present immigrants living in Massachusetts.

Many thanks for your consideration,

Kate Adams

*Kate Adams*

Public Policy Manager

The Greater Boston Food Bank