



July 5, 2023

The Hon. James Arciero, Chair  
The Hon. Lydia Edwards, Chair  
Joint Committee on Housing  
State House  
Boston, MA 02133

**Re: H.1312/S.856, H.1297/S.890, and H.1301/S.868**

Dear Chair Arciero and Chair Edwards,

I am writing on behalf of One Family, Inc., to provide written testimony in support of the following bills currently under consideration by the Committee on Housing:

- H.1312/S.856, *An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults;*
- H.1297/S.890, *An Act promoting housing stability for families by strengthening the HomeBASE program;* and
- H.1301/S.868, *An Act to eliminate asset limits for homeless shelters.*

### **Background - One Family**

One Family, Inc. was incorporated as a non-profit organization in 2002 with a mission to prevent homelessness and break the cycle of family poverty in Massachusetts, by promoting pathways to economic independence through advocacy, education, and innovation. We currently serve about 500 families across Massachusetts through three direct service programs - One Family Scholars, Credential to Career Coaching (C2C), and Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS). The underlying philosophy of all three programs is that long-term housing stability is built on a foundation of education and career success. Through each we help parents with low incomes throughout Massachusetts identify and pursue education and career goals, and increase their income to achieve economic independence and housing stability.

In addition to our direct service work, we also help state agencies and nonprofit organizations incorporate education coaching and career coaching into their housing and asset-building programs. Finally, we advocate for policies that support housing stability and economic opportunity; importantly, we engage the families we serve in that advocacy.

### ***H.1312/S.856, An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults***

**H.1312/S.856 would prevent family homelessness and promote housing stability, and we respectfully urge the Committee to favorably report these bills.** If enacted, H.1312/S.856 would codify the RAFT homelessness prevention program in the Massachusetts General Laws, and ensure that benefits are available to families early in a housing or utility crisis. The bill would also allow families to access the resources needed to clear arrearages without arbitrary caps on assistance levels.

It would also require the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) to coordinate with other state agencies and the RAFT Regional Administering Agencies to further simplify the RAFT application process, provide additional support services to applicants and participants, and track and report important program data and outcomes for participating households.

Current administratively-implemented program rules deny households access to RAFT unless their landlord has served them with a Notice to Quit, or they have received a utility shutoff notice. By restoring “upstream” access to RAFT on a permanent basis, H.1312/S.856 would make it possible for households to access rental and/or utility assistance before they experience a housing or utility crisis, and would protect families from being at risk of eviction.

***H.1297/S.890, An Act promoting housing stability for families by strengthening the HomeBASE program***

**H.1297/S.890 would strengthen the effectiveness of HomeBASE and help more families remain stably housed, and we respectfully urge the Committee to favorably report these bills.**

If enacted, H.1297/S.890 would codify the HomeBASE program in the Massachusetts General Laws, direct EOHLC to provide renewals of HomeBASE rental assistance to families who otherwise would face a return to homelessness after the first 24 months in the program, and increase the maximum benefit levels to \$30,000 over the first 24 months and \$15,000 in subsequent renewal periods.

Currently, families can receive up to 24 months of HomeBASE benefits capped at \$20,000, and risk losing benefits even if it puts them at risk of returning to homelessness. This means that families with children that are stably housed with HomeBASE can lose that support and face eviction and a return to homelessness. H.1297/S.890 would improve HomeBASE and greatly reduce the risk of families experiencing homelessness again.

***H.1301/S.868, An Act to eliminate asset limits for homeless shelters***

**H.1301/S.868 would eliminate an existing barrier that prevents families experiencing homelessness from entering an Emergency Assistance homeless shelter, and we respectfully urge the Committee to favorably report these bills.** Under existing regulations, a family experiencing homelessness that has assets valued in excess of \$5,000 is prohibited from entering an Emergency Assistance homeless shelter. (760 CMR 67.02(6)(a).) This asset limit arbitrarily bars families who are experiencing homelessness from accessing shelter. The mere fact that a family without a home has assets of more than \$5,000 - a very low threshold that even a low-income family can easily exceed - does not change the fact that they are homeless. If enacted, H.1301/S.868 would help ensure that any family experiencing homelessness can access shelter, without arbitrary restrictions.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of H.1312/S.856, *An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults*; H.1297/S.890, *An Act promoting housing stability for families by strengthening the HomeBASE program*; and H.1301/S.868, *An Act to eliminate asset limits for homeless shelters*. We respectfully urge the Committee to report each of these bills favorably.

Sincerely,



Valerie Paric

Executive Director

cc: Representative Christine P. Barber; Representative Simon Cataldo; Senator Brendan P. Crighton; Representative Marjorie C. Decker; Senator James B. Eldridge; Senator Liz Miranda