



ROSIE'S PLACE

Tuesday, March 5, 2019

Committee Chair Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz
Committee Chair Rep. Kay Khan
Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
State House
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

Testimony in support of repealing the “family cap,” S.37/H.104

Committee Chairs Sen. Sonia Chang-Díaz and Rep. Kay Khan, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of *S.37 An Act relative to well-being and care of a child* by Senator Sal DiDomenico and *H.104 An Act to lift the cap on kids* by Representative Marjorie Decker. **Rosie’s Place urges the Committee to Lift the Cap on Kids this year by reporting favorably and expeditiously on S.37/H.104, or by including a provision to Lift the Cap on Kids in the FY20 or supplemental budget.** The Cap on Kids – also called the “family cap” – denies Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) cash benefits to children conceived while (or soon after) their families receive benefits.

Rosie's Place was founded in 1974 as the first women’s shelter in the United States. Our mission is to provide a safe and nurturing environment that helps poor and homeless women maintain their dignity, seek opportunity and find security in their lives. We serve over 12,000 women a year. We have never taken any money from city, state or federal government. Our Advocacy, Public Policy and Legal programs help guests with public benefits, including housing, food assistance, cash assistance and health insurance.

The “family cap” was enacted in 1995 on the basis of flawed, racist and classist assumptions about families who receive welfare. Contrary to these assumptions, we know that families who receive welfare have the same number of children on average as do families who do not¹. What’s more, the presence of a “family cap” or similar policy has no impact on childbearing decisions. Instead, it just penalizes children². We often hear from Rosie’s Place guests that they had their children out of love, a desire to create life, and a wish to raise a family, not for a

¹ Foster, A. C., & Hawk, W. R. (2013, December). Spending patterns of families receiving means-tested government assistance. *Bureau of Labor Statistics: Beyond the Numbers*. United States Department of Labor. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/opub/btn/volume-2/spending-patterns-of-families-receiving-means-tested-government-assistance.htm>

² Wiltz, T. (2016, July). Welfare Caps: More Harm than Good? The Pew Charitable Trusts. Retrieved from <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2016/07/13/welfare-caps-more-harm-than-good>

possible \$100 increase in cash assistance. **Today there are about 8,700 children who are not getting benefits due to this rule – proof that children are still being born to families on welfare despite the “family cap”.** We have known that the “family cap” policy is a failed one for over two decades³ and it should be repealed.

Many of our guests receive TAFDC and we help mothers who are harmed by the “family cap”. Welfare benefits are already very low for all families and have not kept up with inflation⁴. This grim reality is further exacerbated when a mother receiving TAFCD gives birth to another child and the Commonwealth punishes the child and their family by placing a cap on much needed assistance. A family of three with no other income receives \$593/month, but only \$491 if one of the children is excluded by the “family cap”. We urge the Committee to report favorably on this important legislation and take immediate action to repeal this draconian and outdated policy.

At Rosie’s Place, we strive to fill the gaps when public assistance doesn’t meet all of a family’s needs. Our dining room serves healthy meals to an average of 220 women and children each day, and our food pantry supplements food budgets for 2,000 women each month. Our advocacy department assists guests with back rent, high utility bills, and navigating complex health and public benefits systems. We know that the extra \$100 per child that families would receive if the state lifted the “family cap” would not eliminate the need for the services we provide – but it would make a big difference for families struggling to pay utilities, rent, and afford food, essential household and family needs.

Rosie’s Place joins with more than 70 organizations across the Commonwealth and over 130 legislative co-sponsors in support of S.37/H.104. We urge the Committee to Lift the Cap on Kids.

Sincerely,



Filipe Zamborlini
Public Policy Director

³ Donovan, P. (1995, August). The ‘Family Cap’: A Popular but Unproven Method of Welfare Reform. *Family Planning Perspectives*. Guttmacher Institute. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/2136262?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents

⁴ Wagman, N., & Bernstein, J. (2013, March). TAFDC: Declines in Support for Low-Income Children and Families. Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center. Retrieved from http://www.massbudget.org/report_window.php?loc=declines_tafdc.html