



**Testimony in Support of *An Act Relative to Community Housing and Services*
House Bill 368 and Senate Bill 607**

Joint Committee on Housing

May 10, 2011

**Submitted by:
Sean Caron
Director of Public Policy
CHAPA**

Dear Chairman Honan, Chairman Eldridge and members of the Committee:

I am here today to testify in favor of *An Act Relative to Community Housing and Services*, House Bill 368 and Senate Bill 607, filed by Chairman Kevin Honan and Senator Pat Jehlen.

This legislation aims to produce a more coordinated and efficient process to produce supportive housing – affordable housing linked with supportive services designed to help tenants with modest incomes maintain housing stability and maximize their independence.

As you can deduce from the definition, supportive housing comes in different models depending on the population the housing provider aims to serve. Formerly homeless families and individuals, persons with disabilities, and seniors all can benefit from supportive housing. This testimony focuses on supportive housing for formerly homeless people¹.

I wanted to start by describing the state of homelessness in Massachusetts today.

There are approximately 3,367 families that are currently residing in the state's homeless shelters, 1,267 of which are in budget motels because shelter capacity is full. That means that over 7,000 Massachusetts children woke up this morning homeless. An additional 4,041 individuals are homeless according to the most recent HUD Continuum of Care point in time count taken in 2010. Within the total 7,407 Massachusetts households that are homeless, 1,181 are homeless veterans.

¹ We fully support *An Act Relative to Community Housing and Services* because it will expand sustainable affordable housing options for formerly homeless people, persons with disabilities, and seniors. This testimony focuses on homelessness due to today's Committee hearing subject.

Of the families in shelters, approximately 85% of households are headed by single mothers². The median head of household age is 29 years old³. The average household income is just \$751 per month and just over 1/4 of homeless families have wage income⁴. More than half of female head of households of homeless families have experienced domestic or sexual abuse, and many are products of our foster care system⁵. There are homeless families in every region of the state; families from over 200 Massachusetts municipalities reside in shelter today⁶.

The Commonwealth's Special Commission to End Homelessness called for a "Housing First" approach to ending homelessness, an approach embraced by the Governor, Legislature and advocates. The Housing First approach requires a sufficient supply of affordable housing and services available to make the housing sustainable for people that need them.

The Commission estimated that 75% of families that experience homelessness have significant social and economic challenges that require supportive services in order for the family to make progress towards self-sufficiency⁷.

Permanent Supportive Housing is a national best practice to reduce homelessness among families and individuals with significant social and economic challenges. Many families and individuals that face considerable social and economic challenges spend a significant amount of time in shelters at a great expense to the Commonwealth. The public health impacts of homelessness are also costly to the homeless person's quality of life and to the taxpayer. Supportive housing provides both housing and the services tenants need so they can live up to the terms of a lease, and avoid the costs of eviction, shelter, poorer health and related healthcare costs, and other government resources.

A 2009 Journal of the American Medical Association article explored the effectiveness of supportive housing in reducing healthcare utilization by homeless adults⁸. The findings of the study show conclusively that housing with case management for homeless adults, particularly those with mental health challenges, significantly reduces hospital days and emergency department visits and boosts overall quality of life for these homeless adults. More locally, the Home and Healthy for Good program has won national acclaim for its success securing supportive housing for chronically homeless adults, and the significant MassHealth, shelter, and law enforcement cost savings generated through that approach⁹.

For some families, homelessness is an episodic one-time event related to an unexpected job loss, health issue, or life change. However, many families have deeper challenges to housing stability that lead to longer shelter stays or returns to shelter. If the family is able to find housing, family

² Rapid Re-Housing of Motel-Sheltered Families: MBHP's Preliminary Assessment, November 2010. HomeFunders Facts on Family Homelessness: <http://www.homefunders.org/facts.html>

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ HomeFunders Facts on Family Homelessness; HUDs 2010 Continuum of Care Homeless Assistance Programs Homeless Populations and Subpopulations.

⁶ Source: DHCD Intake Data

⁷ Report of the Special Commission Relative to Ending Homelessness (under Chapter 2 of the Resolves of 2006 and Chapter 1 of the Resolves of 2007), December 28, 2007

⁸ Effect of a Housing and Case Management Program on Emergency Department Visits and Hospitalizations Among Chronically Ill Homeless Adults, a Randomized Trial, Sowski, Kee, VanderWeel and Buchanan, 2009. <http://jama.ama-assn.org/content/301/17/1771.abstract>

⁹ Home & Healthy for Good: A Statewide Housing First Program Progress Report December 2010, www.mhsa.net

members also need readily accessible services, including education or job training, employment assistance, childcare, and case management. They may also have services needs to address health, substance abuse, mental health and trauma. Supportive housing has also proven to be effective and necessary to increase self-sufficiency for these families¹⁰.

An Act Relative to Community Housing and Services aims to increase the state's focus on the development of permanent supportive housing. The legislation calls on the Administration to determine numeric benchmarks for the creation of supportive housing, charges them with creating an efficient and effective application process for creating supportive that eliminates government silos, and sets a modest goal of 1,000 units of new supportive housing over the next 36 months.

If an organization were to attempt to develop a new supportive housing site today, they would need to access funding for the housing development subsidies from the state's housing agencies. In a separate, uncoordinated process, they would need to access a litany of resources and service commitments depending on the population the developer wishes to serve. This disjointed process is too costly and too cumbersome to meet our state's needs. Increasing the development of supportive housing through a coordinated application process would replace the current band-aid approach to managing homelessness with a comprehensive approach to increase housing stability and self-sufficiency for formerly homeless families and individuals.

We respectfully request a favorable report for House Bill 368 and Senate Bill 607 as a necessary component to the Commonwealth's strategy to end homelessness. Thank you for considering these remarks and for your commitment to expanding sustainable housing options for families and individuals at-risk of homelessness.

¹⁰ Supportive Housing Research FAQs, Corporation for Supportive Housing, January 2007.

**MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Members of the Joint Committee on Housing
From: James F. Driscoll Esq., Executive Director
Re: House 368/Senate 607 “An Act Relative to Community Housing Services”
Date: May 10, 2011

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference (“Conference”) respectfully submits this testimony in support of House 368/Senate 607, “An Act Relative to Community Housing Services”.

The Planning Office for Urban Affairs of the Archdiocese of Boston clearly articulated the benefits of this legislation in their testimony submitted to the Committee today.

The four Roman Catholic Bishops of Massachusetts highlighted the need for affordable housing in their Statement on September 21, 2010, when they referenced the need for affordable housing. Their Statement states in part: “The stories we hear in our parishes and through our diocesan ministries are painful: families made homeless when they lost their house to foreclosure; families paying high rents for apartments that are in poor condition or are far from good schools and good jobs; young middle class families who cannot afford to buy homes in the communities in which they grew up; elderly residents on fixed incomes who choose between paying their rent and paying for costly prescription medications; and people with special needs who cannot find homes that are accessible”.

For these reasons, the Conference urges the Committee to give House 368 and Senate 607 a favorable report recommending their passage.

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference is the public policy office of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, representing the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester.



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Testimony of Dianne Glennon
To the Joint Committee on Housing
May 10, 2011
RE: SB607

Chairman Honan, Chairman Eldridge and members of the Joint Committee on Housing,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address you today. My name is Dianne Glennon and I am the Secretary of the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council. The MDDC is an independent agency funded by the federal government that works with the state of Massachusetts to help people with developmental disabilities and their families enjoy full and productive lives in their communities. An important component of being successful in the community is for people with disabilities to be able to choose where and with whom they live.

However, the lack of supportive housing for people with disabilities is consistently ranked as a top barrier for people with disabilities to enjoy full and productive lives. Many people living in costly nursing homes and other institutions are prevented from living in the community because affordable accessible housing and supports are not available to them. Similarly, many adults with disabilities who are capable of living independently with appropriate supports continue to live with elderly parents or in less than desirable living arrangements because of the shortage of supportive housing in their communities.

Supportive housing is nothing new; it is successful but it is difficult to navigate for both the developer and those in need of it. It takes a long time to create, and many more units are needed than currently exist. The scarcity of accessible affordable housing for people with disabilities in Massachusetts has been an ongoing crisis for decades. This crisis is real, as substantiated by numerous reputable reports on housing over the years. Individuals and families with low income and extremely low income have disproportionately borne the brunt of the ongoing affordable housing shortage. According to the 2000 census, the poverty rate for people with disabilities is two thirds higher than for people without disabilities. Senate bill 607 includes language to increase housing for residents in the lowest income brackets.



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One significant barrier for people with disabilities to obtain supportive housing is the complexity in navigating a system where housing subsidies are provided by housing agencies and supports are provided by human service agencies. The Bill's requirement to issue a "Community Housing and Services" Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Housing and Community Development and the Executive Office of Health and Human Services and other human service and finance agencies will ensure collaboration among these agencies in identifying and remediating obstacles to provide permanent affordable supportive housing for people with disabilities. This will tie the service component to the housing with a framework for funding service coordinators.

Although I am providing testimony as the Secretary of the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council, I have financed affordable housing both in Massachusetts and in New York for the last 18 years. I can attest to the fact that developing supportive housing is a long, complicated process. Nevertheless these projects are successful and can save money in the long run by reducing the funds required for emergency shelters, emergency services and institutional residency. With a more streamlined process and a shorter time frame for delivery of the financing components for both housing and services, developers will find it easier to create this type of housing. The bill's provision to create 1,000 units of permanent supported housing within 3 years of enactment provides a measurable benchmark to address this need and goes a long way toward creating awareness in the development community of the need.

Last but not least, I'd like to leave you with a quote from a recent survey of families and individuals conducted by the Council as to what areas they would like the Council to focus on during its next State Plan cycle. A parent wrote, "I am very concerned about the looming housing crisis for people with autism reaching adulthood. This is a particular problem for those who aren't eligible or prioritized for residential services through DDS."

While I have a sister who lives in a group home thanks to a successful (albeit dated) program I also have a future stepson with autism. As I sit here today there is no clear vision of a home for him in the community, unless a bill such as this one is passed into law. What we need to keep in mind is that such a bill benefits not only the individual but the community as a whole.

In summary, the Massachusetts Developmental Disabilities Council supports Senate Bill 607 and respectfully requests that the Joint Committee on Housing favorably reports this important legislation to the full Legislature.

Planning Office for Urban Affairs

ARCHDIOCESE OF BOSTON

Written Testimony in Support of
An Act Relative to Community Housing and Services
Submitted by Lisa B. Alberghini, President
May 10, 2011

Senator Eldridge, Representative Honan, and Members of the Joint Committee on Housing: thank you for the opportunity to comment on the important matter of supportive housing legislation. I submit testimony on behalf of the Planning Office for Urban Affairs of the Archdiocese of Boston, as President of that Office.

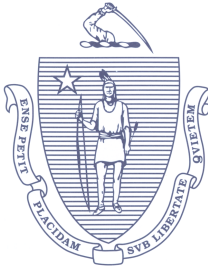
I would like to thank state legislators for your leadership in introducing *An Act Relative to Community Housing and Services* in the House and the Senate, which takes important steps to begin to implement a supportive housing model in Massachusetts.

The Planning Office has developed over 2,500 units of housing in metropolitan Boston in the last forty years, the majority of which are for vulnerable populations: elderly and disabled individuals, formerly homeless families and extremely low income families. We, and other housing developers like us, have long known that giving someone the key to an apartment is only the first step in helping those with the greatest needs live with dignity and respect. We know there are hundreds of very good service providers and networks in the Commonwealth to help people access physical and mental health care, job training, child care, quality education and development activities for their children, financial literacy and civic engagement programs – and yet what so many of us know is that the connections are missing and the connections require targeted resources.

Having supportive services funding in place in the developments where we make scarce capital and operating subsidy investments throughout the Commonwealth, stretches our dollars further, and helps people access the very valuable services and networks in their communities. Unfortunately, securing capital financing, rental assistance and services funds for a single development is at best inefficient and at worst, impossible. It is the exception, when it should be the rule. Too often supportive services funding is borrowed from other programs, built into already stretched capital budgets, or worse yet, not funded at all.

Real barriers exist and that is why we are strongly supportive of *An Act Relative to Community Housing and Services* as a smart and comprehensive approach, where the leadership comes from the top. Its provisions for state agencies to work together on an action plan, a demonstration program of 1,000 units and the establishment of an action grant for service coordination and housing support will finally begin to address this long-standing problem.

By breaking down the funding silos, multiple state agencies can achieve common objectives together. This is more than just an experiment, this is absolutely essential in the current resource environment. Resources are tight; and stable and supportive housing is a strategy that we know will save resources across all agencies and programs including mental health, human development, housing, health and human services, as well as improve the lives of thousands of Massachusetts residents.



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
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May 10, 2011

Joint Committee on Housing
State House, Room 38
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Dear Chairman Honan, Chairman Eldridge and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I write in support of House Bill 368, *An Act Relative to Community Housing and Services*. I am a sponsor and supporter of this bill.

Many Commonwealth residents need support services to live in community-based housing. In order to build permanent supportive housing for people with disabilities, elders, or households at-risk of homelessness, an affordable housing developer must access three disparate pots of capital, operating, and supportive service funds through multiple applications. Coordination of access to these elements is critical, but requires enhanced collaboration and coordination among key state agencies including housing and human services.

HB 368 calls for a coordinated process to build supportive housing by establishing formal relationships and shared principles among the relevant state agencies involved in the process. It also creates a goal of producing at least 1,000 units of supportive housing within three years.

I urge the committee to report H. 368 favorably. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Alice K. Wolf".

Alice K. Wolf
State Representative