

Massachusetts Legislative Priorities for the 193rd General Court

Children's HealthWatch is a network of pediatricians, public health researchers, and policy experts committed to achieving health equity for young children and their families by advancing research to transform policy. Based at Boston Medical Center, we conduct research on family economic hardships, health, and public policies from the frontlines of pediatric care. We use this research to inform public policies and practices that can give all children and their families equal opportunities for healthy, successful lives.

Promote racial health equity by closing income and wealth gaps

An Act to reduce poverty by expanding the EITC and the child and family tax credit ([S.1798](#))

Filed by Senator Eldridge; priority led by the [Healthy Families Tax Credits Coalition](#)

This legislation would expand the state EITC and streamline existing dependent tax credits to deliver larger, inclusive benefits to all households. Specifically, the bill would:

- Increase the EITC state match from 30% to 50% of the federal credit;
- Expand the EITC to immigrants who file taxes using an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN);
- Combine the Household Dependent Tax Credit (HDTC) and the Dependent Care Tax Credit (DCTC) into a single Child and Family Tax Credit (CFTC) valued at \$600 per dependent, including all children under age 18;
- Extend the \$600 CFTC to households without dependents;
- Remove the large family penalty from both the EITC and the new CFTC;
- Improve access to the EITC and new CFTC through a robust communications and outreach campaign; and
- Eliminate the \$1,000 dependent exemption to reduce cost while supporting families with low incomes.

An Act to increase family stabilization through the earned income tax credit ([H.2762](#) and [S.1793](#))

Filed by Representative Decker, Representative Vargas, and Senator DiDomenico; priority led by the [Healthy Families Tax Credits Coalition](#)

This legislation would:

- Increase the state EITC match rate from 30% to 50% of the federal credit;
- Expand eligibility to previously excluded groups of people, including immigrants who pay taxes with an Individual Tax Identification Number (ITIN), low-income college students not supported by a parent or caregiver, and younger (<25) and older (65+) adults without children
- Remove the large family penalty to support all families with children regardless of size
- Extend the credit to middle-income families by expanding the phase-out to those earning up to \$75,000; and
- Improve access to the EITC and new CFTC through a robust communications and outreach campaign.

An Act establishing a child and family tax credit ([H.2761](#) and [S.1792](#))

Filed by Representative Decker, Representative Vargas, and Senator DiDomenico; priority led by the [Healthy Families Tax Credits Coalition](#)

This legislation combines the Household Dependent Tax Credit and the Dependent Care Tax Credit into a single, streamlined Child and Family Tax Credit valued at \$600 per dependent. By removing the large family penalty and raising the dependent age limit, this credit will support all families with dependents, including children under the age of 18, disabled adults, and individuals age 65 and older.

An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty ([H.144](#) and [S.75](#))

Filed by Representative Decker and Senator DiDomenico; Priority led by the [Lift Our Kids Coalition](#)

This legislation would raise Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) and Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disable, and Children (EAEDC) cash assistance grants by 25% per year until they reach 50% of the federal poverty and then increase grants each year to keep up with inflation. The current maximum TAFDC grant for a family of 3 is only \$783 per month. For an elder or disabled individual, the maximum EAEDC grant is just \$401 per month.

An Act addressing the racial wealth gap ([H.1157](#) and [S.1999](#))

Filed by Representative Vargas and Senator Feeney

This legislation would establish and regulate a Massachusetts Baby Bonds Trust Fund, administered by the state treasurer. Eligible children would be those who are born after July 1, 2024 and, within the first 12 months of their life, receive cash assistance under TAFDC or is a child under the care or custody of the MA Department of Children and Families. Eligible expenditures of the fund include: higher education; investment in small businesses; purchase of a home; and any investment in financial assets or personal capital that provides long-term gains to wages or wealth.

Children's HealthWatch also supports An Act to promote economic mobility through matched savings ([HD.2411](#) and [SD.1221](#)) filed by Representative Gentile and Senator Eldridge, priority led by the [Midas Collaborative](#)

Provide high-quality, affordable child care so all children thrive

An Act providing affordable and accessible high quality early education and care to promote child development and well-being and support the economy in the Commonwealth ([H.489](#) and [S.301](#))

Filed by Representative Gordon, Representative Moran, Senator Lewis, and Senator Moran; Priority led by the [Common Start Coalition](#)

This legislation would use a combination of direct-to-provider operational funding and family financial assistance to reduce costs of child care for families while compensating providers for the true cost of providing quality care. The bills would (1) permanently establish a direct-to-provider funding allocation based on provider capacity (not attendance) that directly offsets provider operating costs, including higher educator pay, and (2) provide financial assistance to enable more families to afford and access high-quality early education. Families earning at or below 85% of state median income (\$115,546 for a family of 4, or \$78,571 for a family of 2) would be prioritized. As funding becomes available, eligibility for financial assistance would extend to middle-income families. Under the bills, programs would be available in early education and child care centers, private homes, and schools.

Improve the health and well-being of immigrant families by removing barriers to assistance

An Act establishing basic needs assistance for Massachusetts immigrant residents ([H.135](#) and [S.76](#))

Filed by Representative Cabral, Representative Garcia, and Senator DiDomenico

This legislation would restore eligibility for TAFDC and reestablished state-funded food assistance for legally present immigrants.

Children's HealthWatch also supports An Act to ensure equitable health coverage for children ([H.1237](#) and [S.740](#)), filed by Representative Rogers and Senator DiDomenico

Advance child health through comprehensive policies that reduce inequities

An Act to advance health equity ([H.1250](#) and [S.799](#))

Filed by Representative Williams, Representative Garcia, and Senator Payano; priority led by the [Health Equity Compact](#)

This omnibus legislation would advance health equity in the Commonwealth through the prioritization of health equity in state government, standardizing and reporting on health equity data, and improving access to and quality of care.

Children's HealthWatch also supports An Act to establish a Massachusetts children's cabinet ([H.3187](#) and [S.79](#)), filed by Representative Khan, Representative Cabral, and Senator DiDomenico.

Increase access to stable, affordable homes that promote family health

Promoting housing stability through rental assistance and affordable housing:

An Act codifying the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program/An Act relative to the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program ([H.1351](#) and [S.888](#))

Filed by Representative Madaro and Senator Lovely; priority led by the [Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless](#) and Citizens Housing & Planning Association ([CHAPA](#))

This legislation is the first step toward ensuring universal access to rental assistance for families in the Commonwealth and would codify the MRVP and enable lawmakers to continue to make non-budgetary improvements to the program. The bill would also increase affordability for renters by providing larger voucher amounts.

Preventing evictions and homelessness

An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults ([H.1312](#) and [S.856](#))

Filed by Representative Decker and Senator Crighton; priority led by the [Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless](#)

This legislation would put the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) homelessness prevention program into state statute and ensure that benefits are available to families and individuals earlier in a housing or utility crisis. The bill also seeks to streamline access, increase DHCD transparency, improve cross-agency collaboration, and allow households to access up to twelve months of assistance, without arbitrary dollar caps.

An Act promoting access to counsel and housing stability in Massachusetts ([H.1731](#) and [S.864](#))

Filed by Representative Rogers, Representative Day, and Senator DiDomenico; priority led by the [Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless](#) and [CHAPA](#)

This bill seeks to establish a right to counsel to level the playing field to ensure that low-income tenants, occupants, and certain owner-occupants have representation in court during eviction proceedings.

Improving the Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter system

An Act improving emergency housing assistance for children and families experiencing homelessness ([H.145](#) and [S.86](#))

Filed by Representative Decker and Senator Gomez; priority led by the [Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless](#)

This omnibus legislation would address access and administrative issues for families and children seeking to access or retain EA shelter and HomeBASE rehousing benefits. It would allow families that appear to be imminently at risk of homelessness to gain admission into EA shelter. The bill also would establish an independent ombudsperson unit located in the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development to mediate between EA and HomeBASE participants/applicants and DHCD.

An Act to eliminate asset limits for homeless shelters ([H.1301](#) and [S.868](#))

Filed by Representative Cataldo and Senator Eldridge

This legislation would amend the EA family shelter program statute to remove the asset limit for families applying for and/or participating in EA. While language included in an outside section of the FY22 budget already directed the Department of Housing and Community Development to remove the EA asset limit, this change has not been implemented to date.

Protecting families by preventing discrimination

An Act promoting housing opportunity and mobility through eviction sealing (HOMES) ([H.1690](#) and [S.956](#))

Filed by Representative Moran and Senator Edwards; priority led by the [Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless](#) and [CHAPA](#)

This legislation would seal many eviction records in Massachusetts that are now held permanently in a public database maintained by the Massachusetts Trial Courts. Among other provisions, the bill would: (1) seal all eviction cases as soon as they are filed and while they are pending, until and unless an allegation is proven; (2) seal no-fault evictions; (3) only make non-payment and fault eviction cases publicly available when there is a judgment against the tenant on the merits,

or there is an agreement for judgment and the tenant has actually been evicted; and (4) seal all eviction records after 3 years and provide a process for sealing sooner with good cause.

An Act to establish an office of fair housing and fair housing trust fund ([H.1377](#) and [S.866](#))

Filed by Representative Tyler, Representative Rogers, and Senator Edwards; priority led by [CHAPA](#)

This legislation would help combat housing discrimination at all levels – including development, sales, lending, appraisals, marketing, tenant selection, applications, and zoning – by establishing an Office of Fair Housing and Fair Housing Trust Fund. The OFHF and HTF will help ensure Massachusetts has an institution and the resources needed to create, coordinate, and enforce equitable housing policy and practices across all communities and state agencies.

Children's HealthWatch also supports (1) An Act promoting housing stability for families by strengthening the HomeBASE program ([H.1297](#) and [S.890](#)) filed by Representative Barber and Senator Miranda; (2) An Act promoting fair housing by preventing discrimination against affordable housing ([H.1295](#) and [S.859](#)) filed by Representative Barber and Senator Cyr; (3) An Act creating the healthy homes program ([H.1307](#) and [S.881](#)) filed by Representative Cruz, Representative Arriaga, and Senator Keenan; (5) An Act enabling cities and towns to stabilize rents and protect tenants ([H.2103](#) and [S.1299](#)) filed by Representative Rogers, Representative Montañó, and Senator Jehlen (6) An Act financing the immediate economic revitalization, community development, and housing needs of the Commonwealth ([H.51](#)) filed by Governor Healey.

Strengthen nutrition assistance programs to address hunger and improve health

An Act relative to universal school meals ([H.603](#) and [S.261](#))

Filed by Representative Vargas and Senator DiDomenico; priority led by the [Feed Kids Coalition](#)

This legislation would give every student access to breakfast and lunch in school at no cost to their family. The cost would be covered by the existing National School Lunch Program federal reimbursement, combined with a supplemental state reimbursement.

For more information, please contact Charlotte Bruce, Senior Research and Policy Analyst:

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