



July 21, 2020

The Honorable Robert F. DeLeo  
Speaker, House of Representatives

The Honorable Karen Spilka  
President, Senate

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz  
Chair, House Ways and Means Committee  
Committee

The Honorable Michael Rodrigues  
Chair, Senate Ways and Means  
Committee

Dear Mr. Speaker, Madam President, Chair Michlewitz and Chair Rodrigues:

Thank you for the work you are doing to address the consequences of the pandemic in Massachusetts. On behalf of Children's HealthWatch, based at Boston Medical Center, we are writing to urge you to **enact the bills to Lift Kids Out of Deep Poverty (House 102, Senate 36)**, which would set a floor for cash assistance benefits at 50% of the federal poverty level.

As a nonpartisan network of pediatricians, public health researchers, and children's health and policy experts committed to improving children's health in America, we know children and their families need enough financial resources to live in safe, stable homes, have access to child care, and be able to afford basic needs without sacrificing expenses that are necessary to thrive. **The maximum cash aid grant for a family of three (\$593/month) - less than one-third of the federal poverty level - is simply too low to ensure families with children are able to meet the most basic of needs.**

We at Children's HealthWatch have found consistently across our and others' research that when low-income families cannot afford basic needs, they experience significant hardships (such as food insecurity, housing instability, and energy insecurity) that have lasting adverse child and adult health and economic impacts across the life course.<sup>1,2,3</sup> We also know that for those living in deep poverty, particularly children, this condition often persists over time as it becomes even more difficult to escape poor conditions and achieve upward economic mobility.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ettinger de Cuba S, Casey PH, Cutts D, Heeren TC, Coleman S, Bovell-Ammon AR, Frank DA, Cook JT. Household food insecurity positively associated with increased hospital charges for infants. *Journal of Applied Research on Children: Informing Policy for Children at Risk*. 2018;9(1):8.

<sup>2</sup> Children's HealthWatch. From Hardship to Health: Improving Food Security is Linked to Many Forms of Economic Stability. Food Security in Young Children Report Card Series. Available at <https://childrenshealthwatch.org/wpcontent/uploads/JPB-report-card-2-hardship-to-health-web.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Council on Community Pediatrics. Poverty and child health in the United States. *Pediatrics*. 2016;137(4).

<sup>4</sup> Magnuson KA, Votruba-Drzal E. Enduring influences of childhood poverty. University of Wisconsin-Madison, Institute for Research on Poverty. 2008. Available at <http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.217.5778&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

Current grant levels do not even reach the federal measure of Deep Poverty. House 102 and Senate 36 would raise grants by 10% each year until they reach Deep Poverty – half of the federal poverty level. We must do at least this for our state’s children and families. Grants would then go up by a small amount each year to keep pace with inflation as the Deep Poverty level goes up accordingly.

We understand that the Commonwealth is facing a revenue shortfall as well as increased costs due to the pandemic. The bills to Lift Kids Out of Deep Poverty would raise grants slowly to mitigate the budget impact.

Supporting the health and development of children and families across our Commonwealth is necessary for our state’s current and future prosperity and well-being. Decades of research show comprehensive, multi-sector strategies that reduce poverty and hardships are necessary to achieve optimal health outcomes. For these reasons, we strongly urge you to pass these important bills.

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, MPH  
Executive Director, Children’s HealthWatch