

August 19, 2020

Re: Economic Development Bill Negotiations

Representative Aaron Michelwitz
Chair, House Committee on Ways & Means
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Michael J. Rodrigues
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Ann-Margaret Ferrante
Chair, House Committee on Ways & Means
Development and Emerging Technologies
State House, Room 42
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Eric P. Lesser
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Development and Emerging Technologies
State House, Room 410
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Donald H. Wong
Massachusetts House of Representatives
State House, Room 541
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Patrick M. O'Connor
Minority Whip
State House, Room 419
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Honorable Conferees,

As the Conference Committee considers the reconciliation of H.4887 and S.2874, “An Act enabling partnerships for growth”, we at Children’s HealthWatch urge you to include several provisions that are critical to promoting family health through creating and preserving affordable housing in Massachusetts, supporting our economy, and addressing inequities in housing. These provisions are more critical now than ever, as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to deepen the public health and economic crises – both of which exacerbate pre-existing inequities – in Massachusetts and across the country, and threaten the housing stability and health of thousands of families across our state.

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 understand the harmful health and economic consequences of unstable housing. Our research demonstrates that children and their families need consistent access to safe and affordable homes throughout their lifetime in order to thrive. Currently, the state has an opportunity to provide and maintain access to affordable housing and improve the health of young children and their families by enacting legislation that responds to the realities of families with young children and supports their stability and well-being. We write today in strong support of the following housing provisions in the Massachusetts Economic Development bill:

- **Housing Choice and inclusionary zoning**, *as authorized in the Senate bill*, to promote the growth of affordable housing developments and ensure the creation of affordable housing units within market-rate housing buildings.
- **Affordable housing production goals**, *as contained in the Senate bill*, to meet the growing needs of families with low incomes in the Commonwealth and create a commission to study sustainable and effective methods to meet these goals.

- **Eviction court record sealing**, *as authorized in the Senate bill*, to prohibit any child from being included as a named party in an eviction case and create a process to seal records for no-fault eviction cases to protect tenants seeking housing in an already limited and difficult market from the devastating barrier of an eviction. Furthermore, the Senate version of this provision prohibits no-fault evictions from having negative impacts on a person's credit score, thus shielding families from the damaging ripple effect an eviction can place on financial stability.
- **Expansion of the Massachusetts Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC)**, *as contained in the House bill*, to build and preserve affordable homes and create jobs essential for economic recovery.
- **Affordable housing near public transportation**, *as authorized in the House bill*, to address transportation barriers felt most deeply by families with low and moderate incomes.

In addition to the above housing priorities, we support other efforts within these bills to promote equity and housing stability, including all those recommended by Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) in their [letter](#) to the Conference Committee.

Based at Boston Medical Center, Children's HealthWatch interviews caregivers of young children on the frontlines of pediatric care to understand how economic hardships, like housing instability, impact the health of young children and their families, and what policy improvements are necessary to alleviate these hardships. Based on our extensive research, we understand the harms of housing instability that families face, and thus write today in strong support of an Economic Development bill that will address and mitigate circumstances that may threaten families' ability to maintain stable homes.

Across the Commonwealth, the combination of increasing housing costs, inadequate supply of affordable housing, and stagnant wages mean many families are unable to afford a stable home. This reality is most deeply felt in households with the fewest resources, as housing costs routinely consume an outsized portion of household income among low-income families.¹ The unprecedented economic disruption caused by COVID-19 has exacerbated this reality and hit families with low incomes and communities of color particularly hard. Recent polling data from MassInc found that between April and June 29% of renters in Massachusetts – who are disproportionately low-income and people of color, compared to homeowners – were unable to pay a full rent payment, and that 13% of homeowners have missed payments.² This high prevalence of Massachusetts residents unable to pay rent and mortgage payments is deeply concerning, and highlights the need for affordable housing as part of an economic recovery.

Experts predict the current housing crisis, exacerbated by COVID-19 related hardships, will result in an increase in evictions nationwide.³ Previous research from Children's HealthWatch found that children in families with a history of evictions within the last five years were more likely to be in fair/poor health (versus excellent/good health)¹ and at developmental risk compared to those in families without an eviction history. Their mothers were more likely to report depressive symptoms, and their families were more likely to endure multiple economic hardships, including struggles to afford enough nutritious food, utilities, and health care than families without an eviction history. Additionally, they are more likely to have incurred medical costs and consequently had difficulty affording other basic needs.³ We have also shown that families with a history of eviction are four times more likely to experience homelessness, and two to three times more likely to experience other forms of housing instability, as those without an

¹ Based on a long-standing, well-validated health status question that is strongly associated with health resource and service utilization.

eviction history.⁴ These findings are consistent with others' research, which documents the harmful effects eviction has on children, entire families, and communities.^{5,6,7,8,9}

In addition to the upfront health and financial costs associated with a forced move, housing instability and homelessness are also linked to adverse health outcomes across the lifespan, findings supported by an extensive body of research, including research by Children's HealthWatch.^{10,11,12,13,14} For young children, experiences of homelessness, even if temporary, can severely affect their health and development during the first years of life. Our research has found homelessness during the prenatal and/or first year of a child's life is associated with poor birth and infant outcomes, which lead to large health care costs and adversely change the trajectory of the child's health and ability to thrive.^{15,16} This is in addition to incremental and direct costs for health care utilization due to homelessness, and as a result of infant health outcomes associated with homelessness, such as low birth weight.^{17,18,19}

Supporting the health and stability of children and families across our Commonwealth is necessary for its current and future prosperity and well-being. Decades of research show comprehensive, multi-sector strategies that promote housing stability are necessary to reduce hardships, promote health equity, and achieve optimal health and economic outcomes. Children's HealthWatch thanks House and Senate leadership for recognizing the role of housing in economic development and urges the Conference Committee to include the above housing provisions in their final version of the bill.

Sincerely,



Megan Sandel MD, MPH
Co-Lead Principal Investigator, Children's
HealthWatch
Boston, MA



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



Deborah A. Frank, MD
Principal Investigator and Founder, Children's
HealthWatch
Boston, MA



John Cook, PhD, MAEd
Principal Investigator, Children's HealthWatch
Boston, MA

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