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The Joint Committee on Ways and Means
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon Street Boston, MA 02113

Dear Chair Rodrigues, Chair Michlewitz, and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to express our support for H.1547/S.2826, *An Act relative to the Massachusetts rental voucher program*. As pediatricians, we know that safe, stable, affordable housing leads to better health outcomes for our patients. We ask you to continue to ensure access to affordable, safe, and healthy housing by supporting MRVP, and codifying the program into state statute.

The Department of Pediatrics at Boston Medical Center (BMC) is dedicated to delivering the highest-quality care to all children. Our primary care physicians, nurses, and care teams partner closely with families to support every child's health and development. As leaders in wraparound care, our wide range of services recognize the importance of early detection and the role social determinants have on our patients' health and well-being, including the Curbside Care Program, GROW Clinic, StreetCred, and pediatric behavioral health, addiction medicine, and dentistry.

In addition to delivering high quality care, as an academic teaching hospital, BMC researchers are dedicated to pushing pediatric healthcare forward. With over 45 principal investigators and more than \$17 million in annual grant funding, the members of the department lead innovative research studies that focus on ensuring all children can thrive, especially those in marginalized communities. Through the Boston Combined Residency Program in Pediatrics, BMC clinicians provide world-class clinical training to the next generation of pediatricians and pediatric researchers to meet the evolving needs of children, families, and populations.

As pediatricians, we know that housing stability improves the lives of our patients and their families. The Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) provides rental subsidies to families with low incomes and enables better access to safe, stable, and affordable housing. Housing subsidies ensure families live in stable homes and help put children on a trajectory of healthy growth and development. In our clinics, every day, we see the ways in which MRVP fosters housing stability, contributes to improved health outcomes, and clears up space in families' budgets to meet other basic needs, like food, utilities, child care, and health care.

Across Massachusetts, the combination of high housing costs, inadequate housing supply, stagnant wages, and inequitable access to economic opportunities means many families are unable to afford a stable, safe home. This reality is felt most deeply in households with the fewest resources, as the cost of housing often consumes an outsized portion of a family's budget. As a result, families can too easily experience housing instability — falling behind on rent, moving multiple times in a year, becoming homeless or experiencing eviction - all of which pose a profound threat to child and family health.

We see this when caring for our patients. When housing is unstable or unsafe, children are more likely to experience chronic stress, poor nutrition, and increased exposure to environmental hazards like mold, pests, or lead - factors that worsen asthma, impair growth, and affect brain development. Research from Children's HealthWatch at Boston Medical Center shows that families who experience housing instability are roughly **18 times more likely to be food insecure**, more than **3 times as likely to be energy insecure**, and more than **6 times as likely to experience difficulties affording health care** compared to families with stable housing.¹⁻³ Additionally, young children who live in unstable housing are nearly **20 percent more likely to be hospitalized and more than 40 percent more likely to be in poor health**, compared to their stably housed peers.⁴

Like a prescription for a chronic illness or acute health condition, MRVP provides a dose of housing support for thousands of families across Massachusetts, many of whom are our patients.

We work hard every day to give our patients and their families the care and resources they need to not only heal but thrive. And yet we know that the factors that shape our patient's health the most are found outside the four walls of our offices, including access to housing that is safe, stable, and affordable.

MRVP helps provide access to much-needed housing support for thousands of families across Massachusetts, including many of our patients. Without access to this program, our patients would be sicker, their families less stable, and ultimately less able to achieve their dreams and goals—something we believe all children have the right to pursue. Codifying MRVP ensures access to affordable, safe, and healthy housing is foundational for the health and well-being of children and families.

Sincerely,



Dr. Elijah Paintsil
Chief of Pediatrics, Boston Medical Center
Chair of Pediatrics at Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine



Dr. Megan Sandel
Pediatrician and Co-Director of Grow Clinic for Children, Boston Medical Center
Co-Lead PI, Children's HealthWatch
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Citations

1. Cook J, March E, Ettinger de Cuba S. *Even Very Low Levels of Food Insecurity Found to Harm Children's Health*. Children's HealthWatch; 2009. https://childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/lowlevelsfi_brief_may09.pdf
2. Cook JT, Frank DA, Meyers AF, et al. Food Insecurity Is Associated with Adverse Health Outcomes among Human Infants and Toddlers. *The Journal of Nutrition*. 2004;134(6):1432-1438. doi:10.1093/jn/134.6.1432
3. Cook J, Ettinger de Cuba S, March E, Gayman A, Coleman S. *Energy Insecurity Is a Major Threat to Child Health*. 2010. https://childrenshealthwatch.org/wp-content/uploads/EnergyInsecurity_brief_February2010.pdf