

## **Statement on Legislative Update at the end of the 190<sup>th</sup> General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Fall 2018**

In the 190<sup>th</sup> session of the Massachusetts General Court, we at The Home for Little Wanderers endorsed twenty pieces of legislation on behalf of children and families. These twenty bills ranged from benefits for children and families, to child welfare and juvenile justice reforms. We are happy and proud to report that our advocacy efforts paid off in a big way this year, especially when it came to juvenile justice reforms. Of the twenty bills we endorsed, fourteen were on the subject of juvenile justice reforms, and eleven were incorporated in an omnibus juvenile reform package that was signed into law by Governor Baker on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2018. This omnibus juvenile justice reform package has been an advocacy priority for The Home since 2013. We are proud to have played a role in its passage and anticipate this positive result will have an impact on the children and families we serve. The enactment of this omnibus bill advanced many of The Home's juvenile justice goals, including:

- Raising the lower age of juvenile jurisdiction from 7 years to 12 years.
- Creating a task force on childhood trauma
- Creating a task force on young adults (18-24)
- Creating a Juvenile Justice Policy and Data board
- Creating "Civil Infraction" category of offenses for children
- Creating parent-child privilege
- Authorizing pre-arraignment diversion in juvenile court
- Decriminalizing public order offenses by students
- Decriminalizing certain low-level offenses for all kids
- Enabling records of Youthful offenders to be treated as juvenile records and not CORI records
- Allowing expungement of juvenile and criminal records for offenses committed before age 21 (*certain conditions apply*)
- Limiting shackling of children in court proceedings
- Creating written memorandums of understanding (MOU) between Superintendents and Chiefs of Police in every school district about the role, responsibilities, and selection of School Resource Officers
  - The Home is on the committee which is tasked to create the regulations and implementation plan for these MOUs

Over the past year, The Home also endorsed 4 bills concerning child welfare issues. Those issues included: online mandated reporter training; creation of a child abuse and neglect expert review panel; the educational rights of children; improving child and family input in kinship placement; improving permanency and placement stability; limiting and reporting the use of APPLA as permanency plan; and providing protections against the unregulated rehoming of children. Unfortunately, none of these endorsed bills were enacted, most of which failing to be

brought up to the floor after entering committee. When the 191<sup>st</sup> session of the Massachusetts General Court commences on January 2nd, we expect to refile an Act Relative to the Re-homing of Children (S.41/H.2798). As for the other bills, the way forward is unknown at this point. The advocacy team will spend the fall meeting with coalition members and legislators to reevaluate the purpose and justification of these bills and decide on advocacy priorities for the year to come.

In addition to focusing our attention on juvenile justice and child welfare, our advocacy efforts also included bills that relate to benefits for children and families. Under this theme, two bills we endorsed were An Act to Lift the Cap on Kids, which was aimed at repealing the welfare family cap, and an Act Ensuring Continuous Health Care Coverage, specifically as it relates to youth who age out of the care of the Department of Children and Families. From a policy perspective, both these bills are highly congruent with our advocacy goals here at The Home of advancing the welfare and positive development of children, youth and families. Unfortunately, while both bills had great sponsors and support, neither bill made it out of committee before the end of the session which means they were not enacted. An Act to Lift the Cap on Kids was included as an outside section in the FY19 budget but was ultimately vetoed by Governor Baker. We expect both bills will be refiled at the beginning of the 191<sup>st</sup> session of the Massachusetts General Court.

## **Welfare and Shelter Changes in FY2019 Budget**

Over the last year, changes were also made in the FY19 Budget which impact the work we do with the children and families we serve. Below is an outline of those changes.

### **TAFDC (Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children)**

- Children's clothing allowance in September increased to \$350 per year
- Eliminates 2.75% reduction in grants for work-required families
  - Equalizes grants for all families with a given household size
  - Increase of \$15 per month for a family of 3
- Asset limit raised from \$2,500 to \$5,000
- Disregard of all earned income for 6 months after start of employment
  - Total income cannot exceed 200% of the federal poverty level
  - Implementation starting 9/25/18 per *Edward v/ McCue*
- Family cap repeal NOT included because Governor Baker vetoed after formal Legislative session ended

### **EAEDC (Emergency Aid to Elders, Disabled and Children)**

- Eliminates homelessness penalty
  - Increase from \$93 to \$303 per month for recipients who don't pay rent

### **Emergency Assistance (shelter for homeless families)**

- Protects families from termination for exceeding income limit if the income doesn't last for 90 days