

JOINT COMMITTEE ON HOUSING

**TESTIMONY OF YWCA CAMBRIDGE IN SUPPORT OF
H.1428 / S.898: *An Act Codifying the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program*
March 29, 2022**

Chair Keenan, Chair Arciero, and members of the Joint Committee on Housing, my name is Cassandra Ling, and I am honored to offer this testimony on behalf of YWCA Cambridge, a non-profit organization with a mission to eliminate racism and empower women, where I am the Interim Executive Director. We are the city's largest residential provider of housing for women through our 103 single room occupancy (SRO) rental units in the Tanner building. We also provide emergency shelter to ten families. Legislation that directly impacts our residents and families is core to our mission, and therefore **YWCA Cambridge would like to go on the record IN SUPPORT OF H.1428 / S.898: *An Act Codifying the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program*.**

As an organization that aims to prioritize the needs of communities of color, supporting low-income individuals is paramount to our mission. In Massachusetts 27% of Black children and 34% of Latinx children were living below the poverty line in 2018¹ - this has likely only been exacerbated during the current COVID-19 pandemic.² On any given night in the Commonwealth, 18,471 people experience homelessness, a number that has more than doubled since 1990, and over 12,000 of them are part of families with children. Since 2007 no other state in America has seen a larger increase in family homelessness,³ and this is occurring in tandem with the increase of the cost of living in the state. Massachusetts is currently the 5th most expensive state in the country to live in.⁴

H.1428 / S.898: *An Act Codifying the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program* would put the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) into state statute, ensure that 75% of units will be set aside for people and families making under 30% of area median income (AMI), reduce the tenant share of rent from 40% to 30% of income, and make several other changes to make the program more

¹ U.S. Census Bureau (2018). *Number of Children Living in Poverty by Race/Ethnicity, 2014-18*.

² World Bank. COVID-19 to Add as Many as 150 Million Extreme Poor by 2021.

<https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/10/07/covid-19-to-add-as-many-as-150-million-extreme-poor-by-2021>

³ Spare Change News (2020).

<http://sparechangenews.net/2020/03/family-homelessness-rises-faster-in-mass-than-any-other-state/>

⁴ Missouri Economic Research and Information Center (2021). *Cost of Living Data Series*.

<https://meric.mo.gov/data/cost-living-data-series>.

efficient, e.g. ensuring that all available funds allocated for MRVP are spent, which did not happen in fiscal year 2022.⁵

Furthermore, the MRVP program as it currently stands does not require unit inspections. 17.3% of occupied housing units in Massachusetts have at least one of the following problems: lack of complete kitchen facilities, lack of plumbing facilities, overcrowding, or severely cost-burdened occupants (paying more than half of income towards rent),⁶ and these problems disproportionately impact Indigenous (for whom 32% of occupied units have at least one of these problems), Latinx (30%), and Black residents (27%). Passing this Act would require initial and biennial inspections, ensuring that all Massachusetts residents getting MRVP benefits have access to safe, clean housing. Supporting low income individuals and families is paramount to both increasing racial equity and working to end the housing crisis in Massachusetts.

By passing H.1428 / S.898: *An Act Codifying the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program*, the Commonwealth will take strides in protecting its economically vulnerable residents and allow all people the opportunity to grow and thrive in our state, without being burdened by housing costs and inadequate conditions.

YWCA Cambridge requests that you give a favorable report to H.1428 / S.898: *An Act Codifying the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program*.



Cassandra Ling

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⁵ Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (2022). *The Governor's FY 2023 Budget Proposal: Preliminary Analysis of Key Issues Affecting Low-Income Massachusetts Residents*.

https://www.masslegalservices.org/system/files/library/MLRI_House_2_Analysis_1.28.22.pdf

⁶ United Health Foundation (2021). *America's Health Rankings analysis of U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development*.

https://www.americashealthrankings.org/explore/annual/measure/severe_housing_problems/state/MA.