



Danna E. Mauch, PhD  
President and CEO

Ambassador (ret.) Barry B. White  
Chairperson of MAMH Board of Directors

October 12, 2023

The Honorable Jay D. Livingstone  
Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities  
24 Beacon Street, Room 146  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Robyn K. Kennedy  
Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities  
24 Beacon Street, Room 507  
Boston, MA 02133

By email to [JointCommittee.Children&Families@malegislature.gov](mailto:JointCommittee.Children&Families@malegislature.gov)

Dear Chair Livingstone, Chair Kennedy, and Members of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities:

**Re: Testimony in support of H.144/S.75, *An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty***

On behalf of the Massachusetts Association for Mental Health (MAMH), I write to respectfully submit this testimony in support of H.144/S.75, *An Act to lift kids out of deep poverty*, heard by your Committee on September 12, 2023.

Formed over a century ago, MAMH is dedicated to promoting mental health and well being, while preventing behavioral health conditions and associated disability. We are committed to advancing prevention, early intervention, effective treatment, and research for people of all ages. We seek to eliminate stigma and discrimination and advance full inclusion in all aspects of community life. This includes discrimination affecting not only people with behavioral health conditions, but also people who face unequal burdens and barriers to the protections and benefits of citizenship due to their race, ethnicity, gender identity, or disability status. MAMH has a demonstrated record of furthering its mission by convening stakeholders across the behavioral health and public health communities; disseminating emerging knowledge; and providing subject matter expertise to inform public policy, service delivery, and payment methodologies.

***An act to lift kids out of deep poverty helps families afford necessities for their children by setting a floor for cash assistance at 50% of the federal poverty level, then adjusting grants annually for inflation so that they do not lose their value over time.*** The cash will help families buy dinner at the end of the month when the foods stamps have run out, give them money to do laundry so that they can have clean clothes for school, give them access to a computer to complete homework, pay for activities to enrich their children's social and emotional well being, and pay for rent so that they can have a stable place to live.



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**The relationship between deep poverty and mental health is well-established.**<sup>1</sup> Families living below 50% of the federal poverty level (FPL) are in “deep poverty.” The current maximum grant of \$783 a month for a family of three with no income is less than deep poverty – currently \$1,036 a month. Living in deep poverty has long-term consequences for the whole family and affects both parents’ and children’s mental health. According to a study released by the National Center for Children in Poverty (NCCP) at Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, young children in deep poverty (below 50% FPL), compared to young children in poverty (50% to 99% FPL), have a higher percentage of parents who are experiencing poor mental health, frequent parenting stress, and a lack of perceived social support and security in the family’s neighborhood.<sup>2</sup> These family adversities have been shown to predict poor health and development outcomes in young children.<sup>3,4,5</sup> In addition, a lower percentage of children in deep poverty, compared to other children in poverty, were judged by parents to be “flourishing,” a composite measure that reflects parents’ view of the child’s curiosity, resilience, affection, and positive mood.<sup>6</sup> Children who grow up desperately poor may deal with poverty-related cognitive challenges, bullying, and negative self-image, making school more of a struggle. All children deserve access to necessities and to thrive.

The incremental grant increases passed in the FY21-FY24 budgets are impactful and greatly appreciated. We ask you to consider favorably the bills’ provisions to raise cash assistance grants annually, so this is not a new question every year. As the bills provide, grants should be increased to the current deep poverty level (50% of the federal poverty level) and then adjusted each year to keep up with increases in the cost of living.

Please give your full support to these bills. It is long past time for Massachusetts to make a commitment to our state’s future by lifting our children out of deep poverty.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Danna Mauch". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Danna Mauch, Ph.D.  
President and CEO

cc: Representative Marjorie Decker and Senator Sal N. DiDomenico

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<sup>1</sup> Alegría M, NeMoyer A, Falgàs Bagué I, Wang Y, Alvarez K. Social Determinants of Mental Health: Where We Are and Where We Need to Go. *Curr Psychiatry Rep.* 2018 Sep 17;20(11):95. doi: 10.1007/s11920-018-0969-9. PMID: 30221308; PMCID: PMC6181118.

<sup>2</sup> Ekono, M., et al., Fact Sheet: [Young Children in Deep Poverty](#), 2016

<sup>3</sup> Yoshikawa, H., Aber, J. L., & Beardslee, W. R. (2012). The effects of poverty on the mental, emotional, and behavioral health of children and youth: implications for prevention. *American Psychologist*, 67(4), 272.

<sup>4</sup> Manuel, J. I., Martinson, M. L., Bledsoe-Mansori, S. E., & Bellamy, J. L. (2012). The influence of stress and social support on depressive symptoms in mothers with young children. *Social science & medicine*, 75(11), 2013-2020

<sup>5</sup> Lima, J., Caughy, M., Nettles, S. M., & O’Campo, P. J. (2010). Effects of cumulative risk on behavioral and psychological well-being in first grade: Moderation by neighborhood context. *Social Science & Medicine*, 71(8), 1447-1454

<sup>6</sup> Ekono, M., et al., Fact Sheet: [Young Children in Deep Poverty](#), 2016