

EA Testimony, October 25, 2024

Good afternoon, members of the committee.

My name is Maroni Minter, and I am the Political Director for the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition, or MIRA. MIRA is the largest coalition in New England advocating for the rights and inclusion of immigrants and refugees, who number more than 1.25 million in Massachusetts.

Our coalition includes over 150 member organizations, representing community groups, community health centers, legal service providers, refugee resettlement agencies, and many other entities providing direct services to immigrants and refugees. MIRA's mission is to convene, serve, and organize alongside our members, community leaders, and allies to advance the well-being of immigrants across the Commonwealth and beyond.

We are here today to offer our strong support for ensuring that the Emergency Assistance (EA) program remains accessible to immigrants of all backgrounds, including both long-term residents and those newly seeking to make Massachusetts their home. The importance of this program cannot be overstated. As a state that has long prided itself on being a beacon of hope for newcomers, it is essential that we continue to welcome and support immigrant families, especially in times of crisis.

Immigrants in Massachusetts contribute significantly to the cultural, economic, and social fabric of the Commonwealth. However, many face significant challenges—language barriers, unfamiliar legal systems, and complex bureaucratic processes—that make accessing critical services difficult. The Emergency Assistance program is a lifeline for families facing homelessness or displacement, particularly those who are adjusting to new lives here, while navigating complex immigration systems.

At MIRA, we have seen firsthand the struggles that immigrant families face when trying to access emergency shelters and other supports. In our work, we have observed the overwhelming need for wraparound services for immigrants who are part of the EA system. These services, including access to legal assistance, workforce orientation, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes,

and housing support, all of which are crucial to helping immigrant families establish their lives.

For example, legal services are especially vital for families awaiting Employment Authorization Documents (EADs), which are essential for securing jobs and achieving self-sufficiency. Without the ability to work, many immigrant families remain trapped in cycles of poverty, unable to secure stable housing or meet their basic needs.

Additionally, workforce orientation programs that provide immigrants with the skills and knowledge necessary to navigate the job market in Massachusetts are key to ensuring their success. Similarly, housing orientation services that help families understand their rights and navigate the rental market are crucial for long-term housing stability.

Ensuring that immigrants have full access to the Emergency Assistance program and that the necessary wraparound services are in place will help build stronger, more resilient communities across the Commonwealth.

We urge you to continue to support the Emergency Assistance program and ensure that it remains accessible to all who need it, particularly our immigrant neighbors who are striving to build better lives for themselves and their families.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.