



September 20, 2023

The Honorable John Lawn, Chair
Joint Committee on Health Care Financing
State House, Room 445
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Cindy Friedman, Chair
Joint Committee on Health Care Financing
State House, Room 208
Boston, MA 02133

Submitted via email

RE: Support for **H.1250/S.799, *An Act to Advance Health Equity***

Dear Chairs Lawn and Friedman,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to convey our strong support for *An Act to Advance Health Equity* (H.1250/S.799) by Representatives Williams and Garcia and Senators Payano and Miranda. As a nonprofit organization that has been working for nearly 30 years to advance health equity and racial justice in Western Massachusetts, we are thrilled that you are considering the important statewide strategies and tools put forth in this legislation.

Please know that we support all sections of H.1250/S.799, *An Act to Advance Health Equity*, but in this letter will focus on just two components: the need for an **Executive Office of Equity** and the need for **standardized data collection and reporting**.

We Need More State Leaders Dedicated to Equity

Of the 50 US states, Massachusetts ranks sixth in income inequality. On average, the top 1% of earners here make *31 times* more income than the bottom 99%.¹ Given that growing numbers of us in “the 99%” struggle to pay for housing, food, and higher education—key ingredients for good health—it is increasingly inaccurate to call ourselves a ‘Commonwealth.’ To make matters worse, people with low incomes and low wealth are disproportionately Black, African American, Latinx, and/or Hispanic when compared to White people.^{2 3} The stark financial inequity in our state makes it no surprise that life expectancy varies significantly by geography, which is closely tied with income and race. The average life expectancy for a Black person in Hampden County Massachusetts is 3.5 years shorter than that of a White person in the same county, and 7.5

¹ Economic Policy Institute, <https://www.epi.org/multimedia/unequal-states-of-america/#/Massachusetts>

² Annie E. Casey Kids Count Data Center and U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey Table S1903 1-Year Estimates. Updated November 2022 with 2021 data, <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/10408-median-income-by-race-and-ethnicity-not-adjusted-for-inflation#detailed/2/any/false/2048,574,1729,37/6788,9,172,185,6449,217/20095>

³ The Color of Wealth in Boston, <https://www.bostonfed.org/publications/one-time-pubs/color-of-wealth.aspx>



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years shorter than a White person in Middlesex County.⁴ Given this, the Commonwealth desperately needs an **Executive Office of Equity** with an appointed Secretary reporting to the Governor, and Undersecretaries of Equity for each of the current 11 Executive Offices, as outlined in H.1250/S.799. We need these high-level leaders in state government so that every day, there are professionals who are continually asking and striving to answer these hard questions:

**Who* among us is being underserved, overlooked, or left behind?

**How* do we (re)design our systems and resources to equitably serve and support all Massachusetts residents?

Standardize Data Collection and Reporting

As an organization that has been conducting community health and health equity assessments since 2014, we know it is difficult—if not impossible—to find quality, timely health data that is disaggregated by race/ethnicity, age, gender, etc. In order to better identify and help address health inequities, we must have more complete and standardized data as outlined in H.1250/S.799. The Center for Health Information & Analysis (CHIA), an independent state agency, is well positioned to collect and report this data because its mission is to be a “*steward of Massachusetts health information to promote a more transparent and equitable health care system...*”.

Creating equitable systems is challenging work, mainly because equitable is not the same thing as equal. We will not be able to create an equitable Commonwealth overnight, but implementing the best practices outlined in the Health Equity bill would be a critical step forward.

We respectfully ask you to support and favorably report *An Act to Advance Health Equity* (H.1250/S.799) from your committee. If you have questions or would like to discuss our request, please contact me (jcollins@publichealthwm.org, 413.794.7739) or our Policy Director Andrea Freeman (afreeman@publichealthwm.org, 978-895-0960) Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Collins
Executive Director

Cc: Members, Joint Committee on Health Care Financing and the Western MA delegation

⁴ County Health Rankings & Roadmaps, <https://www.countyhealthrankings.org/explore-health-rankings/county-health-rankings-model/health-outcomes/length-of-life/life-expectancy?year=2023&state=25&tab=1>