



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts  
MASSACHUSETTS SENATE

SENATOR CINDY F. FRIEDMAN

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*Chair*

JOINT COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE FINANCING

*Chair*

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STEERING AND POLICY

September 22, 2025

Senator Robyn K. Kennedy

Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities

24 Beacon St., Room 312-D

Boston, MA 02133

Representative Jay D. Livingstone

Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities

24 Beacon St., Room 146

Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Kennedy and Chair Livingstone,

I write in support of a bill I filed that is before your committee, S.130, *An Act relative to a livable wage for human services workers*.

S.130 seeks to eliminate the pay disparity between the rate of pay for human services workers employed directly by the state and those employed by community-based organizations with which the state contracts. The Commonwealth is the largest purchaser of human services from private, community-based human services nonprofits. However, the contracts the state enters into with these community-based organizations include human service worker salaries that are far lower than the salaries the state pays its own employees for similar work.

This disparity and low rate of pay for organization-employed workers creates two problems. First, the disparity makes it difficult for community-based organizations to recruit and retain workers. The human services sector has been experiencing a workforce crisis since before the COVID-19 pandemic. A 2023 report showed that after more than a decade of steady growth, human services employment in Massachusetts declined by 10 percent between 2016 and 2020.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, this

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<sup>1</sup> Essential or Not? The Critical Need for Human Services Workers. May 3, 2023.

<https://providers.org/report/essential-or-not-the-critical-need-for-human-services-workers/>

decline happened while the number of other businesses was growing. To get more up to date data we included a study in the Fiscal Year 2025 budget to determine the size of the present wage disparity. The report, released on July 2, 2025, confirms that the state pays more to human services workers directly employed by the state compared to those employed by community-based organizations, with some positions with far greater pay disparities than others.<sup>2</sup>

Second, the low pay rate means that essential, front-line workers are struggling. More than one in six human services workers earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. They earn a meager median income of \$34,273, which is \$15,000 less than the median income for the state overall. Furthermore, many of these workers are women and people of color, meaning this low pay rate contributes to existing inequity.

This bill would address these issues by addressing the pay disparity. Specifically, S.130 would require the state to increase the reimbursement rate for human services providers over four years. The legislation aims to fully eliminate the pay disparity between state workers and those at community-based human services organizations no later than July 1, 2027.

Without a solution to this workforce crisis, an increasing number of jobs will go unfilled, leading to a deterioration in the quality of services delivered to Massachusetts' most vulnerable residents. S.130 is a fair and effective step we can take to recruit and retain our valuable human services workforce. Therefore, I respectfully request the committee to report the bill favorably.

Thank you in advance for your consideration and please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cynthia F. Friedman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Cindy F. Friedman

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<sup>2</sup> Shark, Dan. Letter to Chair Rodrigues, Chair Michlewitz, and Secretary Gorzkowicz. 2 July 2025.