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LEGISLATIVE TESTIMONY

To: Members of the Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
From: Edward F. Saunders, Jr., Esq., Executive Director
Re: House 171/Senate 82, "An Act to Protect and Improve Emergency Aid to Elderly Disabled and Children (EAEDC) Program"
Date: September 15, 2009

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference ("Conference") respectfully submits this testimony in support of House 171/Senate 82, *"An Act to Protect and Improve Emergency Aid to Elderly Disabled and Children (EAEDC) Program."*

House 171/Senate 82 propose to match the amount of the monthly grant through the Commonwealth's Emergency Aid to Elders, Disabled and Children program (EAEDC) to the amount authorized under the Transitional Aide to Families with Dependent Children, the state's income support program for families through regular cost of living adjustments (COLAs). The monthly grant has remained at the same level since 1988 while it is common knowledge that the cost for meeting one's daily individual needs, including housing, has increased dramatically during this same 21 year period.

House 171/Senate 82 would also improve delivery of legal assistance currently provided to EAEDC recipients seeking to qualify for the federal SSI/SSDI program by requiring the Department of Transitional Assistance ("DTA") to "implement a program to provide legal advice and representation" to EAEDC recipients. This requirement would provide much needed legal assistance and support in filing SSI applications and appeals. All EAEDC recipients are required to apply for SSI. This application process is especially difficult for those struggling with mental health issues or combinations of other disabilities. This enhanced legal assistance will quicken the process and help to raise the number of successful SSI conversions. This will help increase benefits to these individuals as well as increasing federal reimbursements to the Commonwealth.

Additionally, House 171/Senate 82 would require the DTA to restore EAEDC payments to homeless full-time students under the age of 21 who regularly attend grade school, high school, technical or vocational school. Currently, these payments are stopped at age 18. The legislation places a special focus on "unaccompanied homeless youth". These are young adults who are not in the custody of their parents, a guardian or the state. Reaching out to homeless full-time students before they complete high school level coursework would help keep them in school. Keeping such youth in school should not only improve their learning but would connect them with additional services, such as counseling, medical care, nutritional assistance and other resources, to help improve their over-all well-being.

Increased individual assistance of any amount could make an invaluable difference in the lives of persons confronted by poverty, homelessness, old age or disability.

As Pope Benedict XVI wrote in his encyclical *God is Love*, “Despite the great advances made in science and technology, each day we see how much suffering there is in the world on account of different kinds of poverty, both material and spiritual. Our times call for a new readiness to assist our neighbors in need.” Benedict XVI, *God is Love*, no. 30 (2005).

For these reasons, the Conference urges the Committee to report favorably a bill based upon the provisions of House 171 and Senate 82 that addresses the aforementioned needs.

The Massachusetts Catholic Conference is the public policy office of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, representing the Archdiocese of Boston and the Dioceses of Fall River, Springfield, and Worcester.