

**SENATE . . . . . No. 155**

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**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

PRESENTED BY:

***Michael O. Moore***

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:*

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act to address inequality, promote opportunity and end poverty.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	
<i>Michael O. Moore</i>	<i>Second Worcester</i>	
<i>Joanne M. Comerford</i>	<i>Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester</i>	<i>2/16/2021</i>
<i>Tami L. Gouveia</i>	<i>14th Middlesex</i>	<i>3/1/2021</i>
<i>John Cronin</i>	<i>Worcester and Middlesex</i>	<i>3/3/2021</i>
<i>John Barrett, III</i>	<i>1st Berkshire</i>	<i>3/3/2021</i>
<i>Bruce E. Tarr</i>	<i>First Essex and Middlesex</i>	<i>3/11/2021</i>
<i>Anne M. Gobi</i>	<i>Worcester, Hampden, Hampshire and Middlesex</i>	<i>3/11/2021</i>
<i>Susan L. Moran</i>	<i>Plymouth and Barnstable</i>	<i>4/6/2021</i>
<i>Patrick M. O'Connor</i>	<i>Plymouth and Norfolk</i>	<i>4/6/2021</i>

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By Mr. Moore, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 155) of Michael O. Moore, Joanne M. Comerford, Tami L. Gouveia, John Cronin and other members of the General Court for legislation to address inequality, promote opportunity and end poverty. Community Development and Small Businesses.

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[SIMILAR MATTER FILED IN PREVIOUS SESSION  
SEE SENATE, NO. 91 OF 2019-2020.]

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

—————  
**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Second General Court  
(2021-2022)**  
—————

An Act to address inequality, promote opportunity and end poverty.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

1           SECTION 1. Chapter 23B of the Massachusetts General Laws, as appearing in the 2018  
2 Official Edition, is hereby amended by striking section 24 in its entirety, and inserting in place  
3 thereof the following:

4           Section 24. As used in this section the following words, unless the context requires  
5 otherwise, shall have the following meaning:

6           “Community action agency”, a nonprofit agency which has previously been designated  
7 and authorized to accept funds from the federal Community Services Administration for  
8 community action agencies under the federal Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, unless such  
9 designation is rescinded by the director in accordance with the provisions of this section, or any

10 agency formed as may be designated as a community action agency by the director to succeed  
11 any agency that the director determines fails to meet federal requirements, or fair and reasonable  
12 requirements established by the director, or any agency designated as a community action agency  
13 by the director to serve previously unserved areas in accordance with the provisions of this  
14 section; community action agencies are the federally mandated antipoverty agencies in the  
15 Commonwealth of Massachusetts and the network of community based organizations they  
16 comprise shall be considered the federally mandated antipoverty network operating in the  
17 Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

18 “Department”, the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development.

19 “Committee”, the advisory committee established by this section.

20 “Fund”, The Community Action Trust Fund to Address Inequality, Promote Opportunity,  
21 and End Poverty established by this section.

22 “MASSCAP”, Massachusetts Association for Community Action.

23 “Community services block grant”, funds designated to ameliorate the causes of poverty  
24 in communities within the commonwealth, distributed by the federal government to the  
25 commonwealth pursuant to section 672(a) et. seq. of the Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of  
26 1981, or its successor.

27 “Density of poverty”, percentage of total population in area to be served representing  
28 persons at one hundred per cent of poverty as defined by the United States Office of  
29 Management and Budget.

30 A community action agency shall maintain a board structure where one-third of the  
31 members shall be elected public officials, currently, holding office, or their representatives,  
32 except that if the number of elected officials reasonably available and willing to serve is less than  
33 one-third of the membership on the board, membership on the board of appointive public  
34 officials may be counted in meeting such one-third requirement; at least one-third of the  
35 members shall be persons chosen in accordance with democratic selection procedures adequate  
36 to assure that they are representative of the poor in the area served; and the remainder of the  
37 members shall be officials or members of the business, industry, labor, religious, welfare,  
38 education, or other major groups and interests in the community.

39 In order to qualify as a community action agency, such agency must be one which is  
40 community based and operated as set forth in this section which: -

41 (a) is designed to provide a comprehensive range of services and activities having a  
42 measurable and potentially major impact on causes of poverty in the community or those areas of  
43 the community where poverty is a particularly acute problem; plan systematically for an  
44 effective community action program; develop information as to the problems and causes of  
45 poverty in the community; determine how much and how effectively assistance is being provided  
46 to deal with those problems and causes; and establish priorities among projects, activities and  
47 areas as needed for the best and most efficient use of resources; in cooperation with community  
48 agencies and officials, undertake actions to improve existing efforts to reduce poverty, such as  
49 community agencies and officials are responsible; Initiate and sponsor projects responsive to  
50 needs of the poor which are not otherwise being met, with particular emphasis on providing  
51 central or common services that can be drawn upon by a variety of related programs, developing  
52 new approaches or new types of services that can be incorporated into other programs, and filling

53 gaps pending the expansion or modification of those programs; establish effective procedures by  
54 which the poor and area residents concerned will be enabled to influence the character of  
55 programs affecting their interests, provide for their regular participation in the implementation of  
56 those programs, and provide technical and other support needed to enable the poor and  
57 neighborhood groups to secure on their own behalf available assistance from public and private  
58 sources; build collaborations and coalitions and join with and encourage business, labor and  
59 other private groups and organizations to undertake, together with public officials and agencies,  
60 activities in support of the community action program which will result in the additional use of  
61 private resources and capabilities, with a view to developing new employment opportunities,  
62 stimulating investment that will have a measurable impact on reducing poverty among residents  
63 of areas of concentrated poverty, and providing methods by which residents of those areas can  
64 work with private groups, firms, and institutions in seeking solutions to problems of common  
65 concern.

66 (b) has been developed and has organized and combined projects and has integrated and  
67 arranged and blended services, also known as “wrap around” services, so called, and has  
68 employed comprehensive case management as a fundamental component of its service approach  
69 and activities undertaken by the agency in a manner appropriate to carry out all the purposes of  
70 this section; and

71 (c) includes, but is not limited to, programs to assist low income participants, including  
72 the elderly poor, such as programs to: secure and maintain meaningful employment, attain an  
73 adequate education; provide and maintain adequate housing and a suitable living environment;  
74 receive energy assistance and weatherization services; obtain financial education; avoid  
75 homelessness; develop assets; obtain emergency assistance through loans or grants to meet

76 immediate and urgent individual and family needs, including the need for health services,  
77 nutritious food, housing and employment-related assistance; remove obstacles and solve personal  
78 and family problems which block the achievement of self-sufficiency; and achieve greater  
79 participation in the affairs of the community.

80           The commonwealth, acting by and through the director, may enter into contracts with  
81 community action agencies, and such other organizations as the director determines, to provide  
82 services consistent with the purposes of this section. Any such agency shall comply with such  
83 requirements as the director may establish by regulation or otherwise, including, but not limited  
84 to, reporting and monitoring requirements, and evaluation procedures, and, in the case of  
85 community action agencies, procedures for the designation and the suspension or rescision of  
86 designation as a community action agency. Procedures for the suspension or rescision of  
87 designation as a community action agency shall include adequate notice and an opportunity for a  
88 hearing.

89           The director may designate an agency as a community action agency to serve a  
90 previously unserved area, if the director finds that: there are sufficient additional community  
91 services block grant funds appropriated to provide for the addition and continuing operation of  
92 such agency, and that such agency will serve an area having a population in excess of seventy-  
93 five thousand and a density of poverty which exceeds seven per cent.

94           The provisions of this section shall be applicable to the awarding of contracts by the  
95 director under the federal community services block grant program. Not less than ninety per cent  
96 of the total of any such community services block grant funds received by the commonwealth  
97 during any fiscal federal year shall be contracted directly with community action agencies in

98 existence at the beginning of such fiscal year. Not more than five per cent of the total of any such  
99 community services block grant funds received by the commonwealth shall be allocated to the  
100 director for administrative expenses. Not more than five per cent of the total of any such  
101 community services block grant funds received by the commonwealth, at least fifty percent of  
102 which, shall be awarded by the director for innovative anti-poverty projects or programs operated  
103 by MASSCAP or community action agencies.

104           The commonwealth, acting by and through the director, may, subject to appropriation,  
105 provide supplementary funds to community action agencies in accordance with the provisions of  
106 this section.

107           Recognition of a community action agency by the director shall not preclude the agency  
108 from receiving other grants or contracts from federal or local agencies, private organizations, or  
109 individuals or state agencies to pay the cost of providing services to the poor.

110           From time to time, community action agencies, as represented by their association known  
111 as the Massachusetts Association for Community Action, shall convene with elected and  
112 appointed officials, allied organizations, low-income residents, and others, regional and  
113 statewide sessions on addressing poverty, the findings and information from which shall  
114 contribute to the adjustment and improvement of existing policies and programs and practices  
115 and the development of new policies and programs and practices to address inequality in the  
116 Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

117           SECTION 2. A special commission shall be established for the purpose of investigating,  
118 developing, and recommending statewide strategies to address inequality, promote equity and  
119 inclusion, and create and expand opportunity for people living with low incomes and end poverty

120 including but not limited to support and enhancement of the social safety net, analyzing  
121 structural barriers that cause poverty such as racism, the wage gap, and the cliff effect, so called.  
122 The commission shall consist of: 2 members of the senate, one of whom shall be appointed by  
123 the senate president and one to be appointed by the senate minority leader; 2 members of the  
124 house of representatives, one of whom shall be appointed by the speaker and one of whom to be  
125 appointed by the house minority leader; the secretary of administration and finance or her  
126 designee; the secretary for health and human services or her designee; the commissioner of the  
127 department of public health or her designee; the undersecretary of the department of housing and  
128 community development or her designee; the commissioner of the department of transitional  
129 assistance or her designee; the secretary of labor and workforce development or her designee; the  
130 secretary of education or his designee; the secretary of transportation or her designee, the  
131 commissioner of the department of early education and care or her designee; a representative  
132 from the Institute on Assets and Social Policy, the Heller School, Brandeis University; a  
133 representative from the McCormick Graduate School, University of Massachusetts, Boston; a  
134 representative from each of the following organizations: the Massachusetts Association for  
135 Community Action, the Massachusetts Municipal Association, the Massachusetts Association of  
136 Community Development Associations, the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, the  
137 Massachusetts Association for Early Education and Care, Citizens Housing and Planning  
138 Association, the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, the Massachusetts Workforce  
139 Association, the Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Association, Children’s Health Watch,  
140 the United Way of Mass Bay, the Alliance for Business Leadership, Massachusetts Business  
141 Roundtable; 4 persons to be appointed by the governor including one from a community  
142 foundation, two from community based organizations including, but not limited to community



143 action agencies, and one from a city or town including, but not limited to a mayor,  
144 selectman/woman/or town manager. The governor shall designate a member of the commission  
145 to serve as one co-chairperson and the members of the commission shall elect a member of the  
146 commission to serve as one co-chairperson.

147 The commission's activities shall include but not be limited to performing research,  
148 conducting listening sessions and/or hearings, organizing expert panels and presentations which  
149 will support its development of a comprehensive set of public policy, program, and practice  
150 recommendations, including a consensus budget proposal, to address inequality, promote  
151 opportunity, and reduce poverty in Massachusetts by 50 percent over 10 years and develop a  
152 comprehensive strategy to be implemented over a 5 year period.

153 The commission shall file its strategic plan, including a timeline for implementation, cost  
154 estimates and finance mechanisms, its recommendations, and its budget proposals together with  
155 drafts of legislation and regulations, if any, necessary to carry out its recommendations with the  
156 clerks of the senate and the house of representatives, the joint committee on children and  
157 families, the joint committee on housing, the joint committee on education, the joint committee  
158 on community development and small business, and the senate and house committees on ways  
159 and means not later than June 30, 2023. The Commission may report preliminary findings and  
160 recommendations on a variety of topics related to its research and deliberations, including but  
161 not limited to the cliff effect, before June 30, 2023. The Commission shall remain in operation  
162 for a 10 year period, will monitor and report on the progress of its recommendations each year,  
163 and may issue report cards, so called, on an annual basis summarizing the progress of its  
164 recommendations.

165           The commission may request from all state agencies such information and assistance as  
166 the commission may require.

167           The commission may accept and solicit funds, including any gifts, donations, grants or  
168 bequests or any federal funds, for any of the purposes of this section. Such funds shall be  
169 deposited in a separate account with the state treasurer, be received by said treasurer on behalf of  
170 the commonwealth, and be expended by the commission in accordance with law.