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**MASSACHUSETTS LAW REFORM INSTITUTE FILES SUIT TO STOP PATRICK
ADMINISTRATION FROM ILLEGALLY RESTRICTING ACCESS TO
EMERGENCY SHELTER**

***Administration's New Rules Governing Access to Emergency Shelter Would Leave
Thousands of Homeless Children and Families with No Safe Place to Go***

Boston, MA – July 31, 2012 - Today the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI) filed a lawsuit against the Patrick Administration in Suffolk Superior Court to stop implementation of harsh new restrictions to emergency shelter access that are to take effect Thursday, August 2. In the suit, *Arise for Social Justice, et al. v. Department of Housing and Community Development*, MLRI is representing four organizations - Arise for Social Justice, Coalition for Social Justice, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless and Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts – that provide assistance, advice and support to homeless families with children applying for shelter through the state's Emergency Assistance program (EA).

The EA program provides emergency shelter to very low-income homeless families with children who have no other feasible housing. The proposed new regulations to this program are so restrictive that more than half of the homeless families who are now in EA shelter would be ineligible under the new rules. "If the Administration's planned restrictions take effect," said Rachel Mulroy, a Board Member of the Coalition for Social Justice, "families who are denied shelter will then have nowhere else safe to go. EA is and has always been the program of last resort."

Examples of families who would be denied shelter under the Administration's new restrictions include:

Families who are doubled up with hosts whose lease is being violated by their presence, which will lead to the eviction of BOTH families;

Families with children who have nowhere to sleep but a bus station, emergency room, a car, or the streets, unless their children have first spent at least one night in such a place -- one not meant for human habitation;

Families subject to extremely unsafe conditions in housing in which they are tenants;

Some victims of domestic violence.

The lawsuit seeks a court order to stop the Administration from putting these eligibility restrictions into effect because, among other reasons, they violate the Administration's legal duty to assure fair, just and equitable administration of the EA program in the best interest of needy families. In addition, implementation of these new rules would violate an express mandate by the Legislature in the recently-passed annual budget that the Administration provide 60 days' notice before imposing EA restrictions so that the Legislature can consider alternatives.

"Governor Patrick once said that the state had a 'moral obligation' to provide a safe home for families who are struggling," said Kelly Turley, Director of Legislative Advocacy, of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless. "It is difficult to imagine a policy more inconsistent with that goal than these new restrictions. We call on Governor Patrick to work with advocates, providers, families, and legislators to truly move closer to ending homelessness."

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About the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute:

The Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI) is a statewide non-profit legal services organization whose mission is to advance economic, racial and social justice through legal action, policy advocacy and education. It specializes in large-scale legal initiatives and systemic reforms that address the root causes of poverty, remove barriers to opportunity, and advance economic stability for low-income individuals and families. www.mlri.org

About the plaintiff organizations:

Arise for Social Justice is a low-income rights membership organization based in Springfield, Massachusetts. Its members are poor, homeless, at-risk, working and unemployed people who are pushed to the side by society. The organization's core principle is that its members have a right to speak for themselves. Addressing homelessness is a central focus of the organization.

The **Coalition for Social Justice** is a membership organization based in southeastern Massachusetts that seeks to empower current and former welfare recipients and low income working people to address economic survival issues, build grassroots power, and hold elected officials accountable.

The **Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless** was the first advocacy organization in the Commonwealth with a mission dedicated exclusively to ending homelessness. The Coalition was founded by a group of concerned citizens who recognized that homelessness was a complex and widespread problem that was affecting individuals and families across the state. Because emergency services alone cannot solve homelessness, the Coalition's mission is to address the broader factors that contribute to homelessness. Since its inception in 1981, the Coalition has realized its mission through legislative and public policy advocacy, public education, and direct services

Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts is a progressive organization of working class, multi-racial, and multi-ethnic people working together to build political and economic power to improve the quality of lives in their communities.