

# **HOUSE . . . . . No. 4494**

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## The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, April 13, 2020.

The committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities, to whom was referred the petition (accompanied by resolve, House, No. 149) of Liz Miranda and others relative to establishing a special commission supported by the Department of Health and Human Services to better prepare the Commonwealth for climate change refugees, reports recommending that the accompanying resolve (House, No. 4494) ought to pass.

For the committee,

KAY KHAN.

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 4494**

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**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

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**In the One Hundred and Ninety-First General Court  
(2019-2020)**  
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Resolve to better prepare the Commonwealth for climate change refugees.

1           **Resolved**, SECTION 1. (a) The commission for climate refugees is hereby established to  
2 evaluate the commonwealth’s coordination with municipalities, school districts, and between  
3 departments and agencies of the commonwealth, due to the influx of displaced persons from  
4 Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria and to advise executive agencies and the general court on  
5 how to better prepare for the influx and welfare of climate change refugees in the future.  
6 “Climate change refugees” shall be defined as individuals who have to leave their domicile due  
7 to either sudden on-set disasters or slow on-set degradation of their natural environments related  
8 to at least one of the following impacts of climate change: flooding, extreme weather events, sea-  
9 level rise, and droughts.

10           (b) The commission shall consist of up to 13 members, including a chair. The secretary of  
11 the executive office of health and human services or their designee, the secretary of the executive  
12 office on education or their designee, who shall serve as co-chairs, the undersecretary of the  
13 department of housing and community development or their designee, the director of the  
14 Massachusetts emergency management agency or their designee, and the commissioner of the  
15 department of children and families shall each serve as members on the commission ex officio.

16           Each of the remaining 8 members shall be appointed by the governor and shall include  
17 three members all of whom are superintendents of school districts in municipalities that enrolled  
18 climate refugees from Puerto Rico following Hurricane Maria. The remaining four members  
19 shall have expertise in one or more of the following areas: public and affordable housing, federal  
20 immigration law and regulation, and emergency management. Each member, including the chair,  
21 shall serve without compensation and in an advisory capacity until the report referenced in  
22 section six is delivered, whereupon the commission shall disband.

23           (c) The commission shall, at a minimum, investigate the following topics: (i) the  
24 commonwealth's coordination and efforts following Hurricane Maria to provide, or assist  
25 climate refugees in obtaining adequate housing, healthcare, education, transfer of professional  
26 licensure and workforce development training; (ii) which department or agency of the  
27 commonwealth should be designated with oversight authority over the coordination and  
28 provision of housing, healthcare, education, professional licensure and workforce development  
29 to climate change refugees; (iii) sources of funding for housing, healthcare, education, and  
30 workforce development of climate change refugees; (iv) enrollment of climate change refugees  
31 in primary and secondary school; (v) identify existing legal and regulatory barriers to  
32 establishing a lead department or agency, and (vi) developing a policy for the commonwealth's  
33 intake of climate change refugees, taking into consideration existing federal immigration laws  
34 and regulations, affordable and public housing laws and regulations, and existing laws and  
35 regulations governing public education, healthcare, and welfare benefits, including proposed  
36 changes to existing laws and regulations.

37           (d) The commission may create committees and working groups to inform the  
38 commission's investigation of the topics referenced in section three. The commission, its

39 committees and its working groups may procure services, including consulting services, and  
40 otherwise involve experts, stakeholders, and members of the public.

41 (e) The commission shall be supported by staff from the department of health and human  
42 services.

43 (f) The commission shall provide its report and recommendations to the clerks of the  
44 senate and the house of representatives on the first anniversary of the date on which the last  
45 member has been appointed to the commission.

46 SECTION 2. This resolve shall take effect upon its passage.