

SENATE No. 1562

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Robyn K. Kennedy

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 supporting survivors through financial assistance.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:	
<i>Robyn K. Kennedy</i>	<i>First Worcester</i>	
<i>Jason M. Lewis</i>	<i>Fifth Middlesex</i>	<i>2/27/2025</i>
<i>John F. Keenan</i>	<i>Norfolk and Plymouth</i>	<i>2/27/2025</i>
<i>James B. Eldridge</i>	<i>Middlesex and Worcester</i>	<i>7/9/2025</i>
<i>Vanna Howard</i>	<i>17th Middlesex</i>	<i>7/24/2025</i>

SENATE No. 1562

By Ms. Kennedy, a petition (accompanied by bill, Senate, No. 1562) of Robyn K. Kennedy, Jason M. Lewis and John F. Keenan for legislation to support survivors of violence through financial assistance. Public Health.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

**In the One Hundred and Ninety-Fourth General Court
(2025-2026)**

An Act supporting survivors through financial assistance.

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

1 Chapter 111 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2022 official edition, is hereby
2 amended by inserting after Section 244 the following section-:

3 Section 245. Flexible Assistance for Survivors of Violence (FAS) Pilot Grant Program

4 (A) As used in this section, the following words shall, unless the context requires
5 otherwise, have the following meanings:-

6 “Community-based organization” means a nonprofit organization, or an organization
7 fiscally sponsored by a nonprofit organization, that provides direct services to survivors of
8 violence. Community-based organizations include but are not limited to social and human
9 service organizations, legal aid organizations, grassroots organizations, faith-based
10 organizations, culturally specific organizations, community development organizations, health
11 and mental health support organizations, housing assistance organizations

12 “Family member” means any of the following:

13 (a) A person related to another by blood, adoption, or marriage.

14 (b) A household member or former household member of another.

15 (c) A person who is not related by blood, adoption, or marriage to another but who
16 otherwise has a significant emotional relationship with another.

17 “Grant program” means the Flexible Assistance for Survivors of Violence (FAS) pilot
18 grant program established by this chapter.

19 “Flexible cash assistance” shall mean payments directly to recipients, that include, but are
20 not limited to:

21 (a) Prepaid cards

22 (b) Gift cards

23 (c) Checks

24 (d) Money deposited in a bank account

25 (e) Cash

26 “Department” means the Department of Public Health

27 “Survivor of violence” means any of the following:

28 (a) A person who has been a victim of stalking, domestic violence, sexual violence,
29 community violence, homicide, kidnapping, child abuse, human trafficking, or elder abuse.

30 (b) A person who has been physically injured by an act of force by another person.

31 (c) A person who has been threatened with physical injury or reasonably believes they
32 were threatened with physical injury by another person.

33 (d) A person who has suffered physical injury, as a result of a law enforcement officer's
34 inappropriate use of force.

35 (e) A person who suffers a threat of physical injury or reasonably believes they were
36 threatened with physical injury as a result of a law enforcement officer's inappropriate use of
37 force.

38 (f) A person who has witnessed an act described under paragraph (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), or (v)
39 and has experienced an emotional injury or feels threatened as a result.

40 (g) A family member of a person who is the victim of an act described under paragraph
41 (i), (ii), (iii), (iv), or (v), including, but not limited to, a family member or person of significant
42 emotional relationship of a person who is killed by the act.

43 (B) The Flexible Assistance for Survivors pilot grant program is hereby established, to be
44 administered by the department, with the goal of improving safety, healing, and financial
45 stability for survivors, and the loved ones of those violently injured or killed.

46 Flexible Assistance for Survivor grants shall be made to qualifying community-based
47 organizations pursuant to this section for the purpose of establishing assistance funds to
48 distribute in direct cash assistance to survivors.

49 (C) The department shall establish an advisory committee that includes, without
50 limitation, persons who have been impacted by violence, formerly incarcerated persons, and

51 persons with direct experience in implementing supportive services for marginalized survivors.
52 Racial, gender, and ethnic diversity, and representation of communities and identities shall be
53 considered for all appointments. Advisory board members are appointed for 2 year terms and
54 cannot serve consecutive terms. The committee shall consist of 6 members, 3 members are to be
55 appointed by the Department Of Public Health Bureau Of Community Health And Prevention
56 for their work with community-based organizations or for their expertise providing direct
57 services and recovery assistance such as housing, job placement, counseling, legal services, or
58 economic support to vulnerable survivors; 3 members are to be appointed by the Department Of
59 Public Health Bureau Of Community Health And Prevention for their work as community
60 providers or advocates with expertise in community-based or statewide violence reduction or
61 prevention programs. A person's criminal history shall not disqualify them from being appointed
62 to the advisory board.

63 The advisory committee shall establish rules for implementing this section and shall
64 make grants under this chapter on a competitive basis to community-based organizations.
65 Community-based organizations shall apply on a form prescribed by the committee, which shall
66 include, but not be limited to, (i) a description of the organization's history serving one or more
67 of the groups described in subdivision (f); (ii) a description of how the community or
68 communities the organization serves are impacted by violence and incarceration; (iii) the
69 estimated number of survivors of violence the organization or program currently serves; (iv) the
70 estimated number of survivors of violence to whom the organization or program anticipates it
71 will distribute grant funds; (v) a description of how the organization plans to distribute flexible
72 cash assistance funds to survivors to meet immediate financial needs quickly; and (vi) a

73 description of how the organization plans to minimize the burden on survivors to provide
74 documentation or submit paperwork.

75 The advisory committee shall (i) strive to minimize the paperwork burden on grant
76 applicants and grantees; (ii) strive to develop an application, awards, and reporting process that is
77 accessible to community-based organizations with smaller budgets or without past experience
78 receiving a state grant award; (iii) develop a plan to publicize the grant program in advance of an
79 application deadline; (iv) Create guidelines around effective and inclusive evidence-based direct
80 cash distribution practices for grantees; (v) provide technical assistance to applicants and
81 grantees; (vi) work with the department to develop tools to support applicants applying for an
82 award under this chapter, including, but not limited to, templates and sample applications, which
83 shall be posted prominently on the office's internet website; and (vii) work with the department
84 to publicize and host at least two webinars that are open to the public detailing how to apply for a
85 grant under this chapter prior to an application deadline.

86 (D) A community-based organization shall be eligible to apply for a grant under this
87 chapter if the organization has a history of serving survivors of violence and the majority of
88 people the organization, or a project within the organization that will administer the grant, serves
89 are survivors of violence.

90 When considering grant applications, the advisory committee shall give preference to
91 organizations that are located in, serve, and employ members of communities that experience
92 disproportionately high rates of gun violence and imprisonment.

93 When considering grant applications, the advisory committee shall give preference to
94 community-based organizations that have a history of providing services to vulnerable survivors,

95 including, but not limited to, (i) survivors of color; (ii) elderly survivors; (iii) survivors with
96 disabilities; (iv) Survivors who are transgender or gender nonconforming; (v) survivors from
97 communities that have been disproportionately criminalized/policed; (vi) survivors who are
98 formerly incarcerated or who have past arrests or convictions; (vii) survivors who are
99 undocumented/at risk of becoming undocumented; (viii) survivors who are unhoused; (ix)
100 survivors of firearm injuries; (x) Survivors who have lost a family member to homicide; (xi)
101 survivors facing mental health crises; (xii) low-income survivors; or (xiii) survivors challenged
102 by substance misuse.

103 (E) An organization receiving a grant under this chapter may use the funds as follows:

104 (a) Unrestricted cash assistance to survivors of violence to meet survivors' financial
105 needs or to cover survivors' expenses, distributed at the discretion of the organization in amounts
106 determined by the organization based on the needs of survivors and in a way that minimizes or
107 eliminates the burden on survivors to provide external documentation of their need or expenses.

108 (b) Up to 10 percent for the organization's expenses in administering the grant.

109 (F) A community-based organization receiving a grant under this chapter shall establish
110 policies and procedures for distributing funds to survivors whom the organization serves that
111 comply with all the following:

112 (a) Allow survivors to attest to their experience of violence without obtaining external
113 documentation of a violent victimization.

114 (b) Promote distribution of funds to survivors in a manner that meets the immediate needs
115 of survivors quickly.

116 (c) Do not require survivors to engage in other services or programs as a condition of
117 receiving funds.

118 (d) Do not require survivors to provide or maintain burdensome documentation of their
119 need or spending.

120 (e) Do not require survivors to report a crime to a law enforcement agency as a condition
121 of receiving cash assistance.

122 (f) Do not exclude survivors on the basis of citizenship or immigration status.

123 (g) Do not exclude survivors on the basis of an arrest or conviction record, nor on the
124 basis of a survivor's status under correctional supervision.

125 (G) Notwithstanding any other law, cash assistance received under this chapter shall be
126 treated in the same manner as the federal earned income refund for the purpose of determining
127 eligibility to receive benefits under Chapter 106 of the Code of Massachusetts Regulations or
128 amounts of those benefits.

129 Each grantee shall annually report to the department both of the following:

130 (a) The aggregate number of survivors who received cash assistance through the grant
131 program.

132 (b) The average amount of assistance each survivor received through the grant program.

133 (c) High level aggregate data on how the funds are being utilized by programs and
134 survivors.

135 The department may use up to 5 percent of the funds appropriated for the grant program
136 each year for the costs of administering the grant program, including, without limitation,
137 employing personnel, providing technical assistance to grantees or prospective grantees, and
138 issuing a report on the impacts of the grant program.

139 (H) Before July 1, 2028, the department shall post on its internet website a public report
140 on the impact of the grant program, which shall include policy recommendations to provide
141 guidance to the Legislature and Governor in fully implementing and scaling a permanent grant
142 program.