



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 27, 2023**

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**Hannah Reuter Appointed as Director of First-of-Its Kind Program Addressing Benefits Cliff; Initiative Supported by the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts**

September 27, 2023 [Chicopee, MA] – Springfield WORKS/Working Cities Challenge announced Hannah Reuter as the newly appointed Director of the Cliff Effect Pilot Program, a groundbreaking regional initiative supported by the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts, the Western Massachusetts Economic Development Council, and the Economic Pathways Coalition of Massachusetts. This innovative program, approved by the Massachusetts State Legislature in October 2022 after seven years of dedicated advocacy, aims to assist low-income workers and their families who encounter a sudden reduction in public benefits when their earnings slightly increase.

"I've worked with this dedicated team for years to launch this initiative and it's exhilarating to see this position filled and our pilot moving forward," said State Representative, Pat Duffy. "I think Hannah is an amazing choice."

The program is committed to supporting up to 100 households across the Commonwealth in their journey toward economic independence, progressively moving away from reliance on public benefits. Importantly, the program's primary goal is research-oriented and will be funded in partnership with the Department of Transitional Assistance. The amount allocated to each participating family will be contingent on family size and their current level of benefits. Enrolled participants who successfully complete the program will be eligible to receive a savings bonus of up to \$10,000.

"The launch of this pilot program is aimed at tackling the cliff effect faced by working families with the goal of creating a brighter future for them and ensuring equal opportunities for all," said State Representative Carlos Gonzalez. "This initiative holds immense value, as it will provide us with crucial insights into the positive impact that government services can have on promoting

economic mobility. Collaborating with Director Reuter and the entire Springfield WORKS/Working Cities Challenge team, we are excited to embark on this innovative approach to reinvent public benefits for the betterment of our constituents.”

Hannah Reuter, previously serving as the Policy Manager for the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J- PAL North America), will spearhead this pioneering initiative.

Reuter expressed her enthusiasm for the role: "I am excited to get started and to build on all the fantastic work of the Economic Pathways Coalition of Massachusetts. This is a major breakthrough in helping low-income workers manage the benefits cliff as they pursue new career opportunities."

Reuter expects the Pilot will begin enrolling participants by the end of this year.

“The very real fear of loss of benefits if workers earn slightly more income keeps people trapped in low-wage, no-growth jobs. This initiative represents a significant step forward in addressing the challenges faced by low-income workers striving for financial stability,” said Laura Sylvester, Public Policy Manager at the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts. “It is set to make a substantial impact on the lives of many in our community, advancing careers and reducing the need for food assistance.”

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***About the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts:*** Since 1982, the Food Bank of Western Massachusetts has been a community partner to end hunger. We provide healthy and culturally responsive food directly through our own programs (Mobile Food Banks and Brown Bag: Food for Elders), and through the food assistance network in Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire counties. These independent pantries, meal sites and shelters are on the front lines providing food and resources to individuals, families, seniors, children, veterans, and people with disabilities, so they may lead healthy and meaningful lives. The Food Bank partners on public education and advocacy to address systemic issues that lead to hunger, operating with the belief that everyone has a right to healthy food.



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