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MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

June 4, 2014

Looking Ahead to Fiscal Year 2015: The Conference Committee is Meeting Now to Iron Out the Differences Between the House and Senate Versions of the FY'15 State Budget

**Please Ask Your State Representative and Senator to Weigh in with the
Conferees to Actively Support Housing, Homelessness, and Safety Net
Programs!**

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Greetings!

Though the Senate and House both have gone through their initial budget recommendation and debate processes for fiscal year 2015, we're not done yet! After the Senate's adoption of its version of the FY'15 budget on May 22nd, we have now moved to the next phase of the budget process: Conference Committee.

Once the House and the Senate vote on their respective budgets, each branch appoints three members to a joint committee (the "Conference Committee") to work out and resolve all differences between the two budgets. The compromise budget that comes out of Conference Committee is then brought to the House and Senate members for a final vote before being sent to the Governor.

This year's House Conference Committee members are Representatives [Brian Dempsey](#) (D-Haverhill, Chair of House Ways and Means), [Stephen Kulik](#) (D-Worthington, Vice Chair of House Ways and Means), and [Vinny deMacedo](#) (R-Plymouth, Ranking Minority Member of House Ways and Means). The Senate Conference Committee members are Senators [Stephen Brewer](#) (D-Barre, Chair of Senate Ways and Means), [Jennifer Flanagan](#) (D-Leominster, Vice Chair of Senate Ways and Mean), and [Richard Ross](#) (R-Wrentham, Ranking Minority Member of Senate Ways and Means).

In order to ensure that the Conference Committee's budget has the best

language and highest levels of funding possible for housing and homelessness issues, we need you to help urge the committee members to create a compromise budget that prioritizes these programs. **Please [contact your own Legislators](#) today and ask them to convey their support to the Conference Committee and to Leadership for the language and funding levels detailed in the sections below.**

To learn more about the Coalition's FY'15 Conference Committee budget priorities, please [click here](#). For program fact sheets and additional materials, please go to our [Present Policy Campaigns page](#).

Thank you for your advocacy and your continued support of housing and homelessness issues!

-Kelly Turley
Director of Legislative Advocacy
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House and Senate FY'15 Budget Recommendations for Housing, Shelter, Homelessness Prevention, and Cash Assistance Programs

To access the House's complete budget recommendations, please go to [House's FY'15 budget recommendations](#).

To access the Senate's complete budget recommendations, please go to [Senate's FY'15 budget recommendations](#).

Key FY'15 Budget Conference Committee Issues

1. Unaccompanied Youth Homelessness Resources (via line item 4000-0300)

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt the House's earmark to support unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness. The House budget included language and funding to continue to provide \$150,000 within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) administrative line item, 4000-0300.

We are asking the conferees to provide at least \$150,000 so that the Commission can:

- Build upon the first-in-the-nation statewide youth homelessness survey, the Massachusetts Youth Count, which was conducted between December 2013-February 2014. A 2014-2015 continuation of the count will allow the Commonwealth to better understand the scope of youth homelessness in communities around the state and the needs of youth, as well as to engage more youth ambassadors in the implementation and distribution

of the survey.

- Hire a staff person or consultant to oversee implementation, to analyze data, and to report to the Commission.
- Support demonstration projects to identify service and housing models appropriate to support unaccompanied youth in their education and successful transition from childhood to adulthood.

In the coming weeks, the Coalition will be working with the Commission to finalize our analysis of the 2014 youth surveys. This data will provide a snapshot of the experiences and circumstances of unaccompanied youth from across the Commonwealth, and underscore the need for swift action.

2. Emergency Assistance Family Shelter and Services Program (EA Shelter and Services Program, Line Item 7004-0101 + EA Motel Program, Line Item 7004-0103)

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt the House's higher combined appropriation of \$140.3 million for EA shelter and motels. (This figure is much lower than the current FY'14 appropriation of \$155 million, as well as the anticipated FY'14 spending level of \$161.2 million.)

While neither the House nor Senate included needed language that would require DHCD to provide shelter to otherwise eligible families who are at imminent risk of staying in places not meant for human habitation, we are asking the Conference Committee to once again examine this compelling issue. Between July 1, 2013 and March 30, 2014, 467 families with children had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places before they were found eligible for emergency shelter. By allowing families who otherwise would be forced to stay in a place not meant for human habitation to access shelter up to 24 hours before staying in such conditions, we can protect the safety and dignity of our most vulnerable families.

The Coalition also asks the Conference Committee to include the House language regarding establishing a Healthy Food Pilot for families living in motels in Western Massachusetts. This program and other efforts are greatly needed by children and families statewide who are often isolated in motel placements, with few or no options to prepare healthy meals and to maintain adequate nutrition.

3. Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, Line Item 7004-9024)

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt the Senate's recommended funding level of \$70.0 million for MRVP, a \$12.5 million increase over the FY'14 allocation. We also urge the committee to adopt the House language that would carry over unspent FY'14 funds directly into the program for FY'15. Substantial reinvestment in MRVP will move Massachusetts forward toward addressing homelessness and housing insecurity.

The Coalition continues to be engaged in many conversations with

legislators, DHCD, providers, and advocates regarding a voucher distribution plan for FY'15. At this point, we encourage the Conference Committee to move forward with the resources to create a centralized waiting list and online application system, but to give DHCD the time to do this well. In the meantime, we recommend that Conference Committee adopt language directing DHCD to provide new MRVP subsidies (mobile and project-based) to a variety of populations (families, unaccompanied youth, adults experiencing chronic homelessness, households who are on existing statewide housing program waiting lists, etc.) in FY'15, while not ignoring the needs of those families experiencing homelessness who did not benefit from the program's FY'14 expansion.

4. Short-Term Housing Assistance for Families (HomeBASE, Line Item 7004-0108)

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt the House's higher proposed funding level of \$26.0 million for HomeBASE, along with compromise line item language based on the Senate's proposal. While both the House and Senate proposal recommend starting FY'15 with an increased cap of \$6,000 in assistance per eligible family, the Senate language would allow DHCD to increase the cap even further, after developing a plan. We ask the Senate language be adopted after a slight modification is made to ensure that the statewide cap is no less than \$6,000 once a plan is created on/before September 1st.

We also encourage the Conference Committee to include language that would limit the bar on receiving further assistance to 12 months versus 24 months, to match the existing maximum bar in the Emergency Assistance program for families terminated from the program.

5. Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, Line Item 7004-9316)

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee House's higher recommended appropriation of \$11.0 million for RAFT, with the Senate language that would not prohibit a family from receiving more than \$6,000 in combined funding from RAFT and HomeBASE.

We also ask the Conference Committee to consider reinstating the Seven Day Transitional Emergency Accommodations (SDTEA) program under RAFT to provide a safety net of up to 7 days of shelter for families not yet eligible for EA shelter who are heading to stay in places not meant for human habitation and to fund SDTEA at \$2 million.

6. Services for Unaccompanied Adults At-Risk and Experiencing Homelessness (Line Item 7004-0102)

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt the House's recommended appropriation of \$42.6 million for shelters and services for unaccompanied adults. This would be an increase of \$2.1 million over the FY'14 appropriation.

7. Public Housing Operating Subsidies (Line Item 7004-9005)

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt the House's slightly higher recommended funding level of \$64.04 million to support state-funded public housing for extremely low-income families, elders, and people with disabilities.

8. Home and Healthy for Good (Line Item 7004-0104)

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt the House's higher recommended appropriation of \$1.8 million for this successful Housing First program for individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness. We also ask you to include the House's language that would continue to fund the pilot program started in FY'14 to provide supportive housing to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender unaccompanied young adults.

9. Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program (EAEDC, Line Item 4408-1000)

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt the Senate's higher recommended appropriation of \$88.4 million for the EAEDC program.

10. Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program (TAFDC, Line Item 4403-2000)

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt the House's higher appropriation of \$255.7 million for the TAFDC program.

Action Steps

Please contact your State Representative and State Senator to ask them to convey their support to the Conference Committee members of the above language and funding levels for housing, homelessness, and safety net programs. You can [share our letter to the Conference Committee members](#) with them.

Legislators can be reached through the State House switchboard at 617-722-2000, or you can go [here](#) to search for your elected officials based on your address.

Thank you for your continued advocacy. We are in the home stretch now!

We hope you will join us as the Coalition continues to push for the protection of housing and homelessness programs for FY'15. We will

keep you informed of the progress as the state's budget makes it way through the final stages in the weeks ahead.

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley at kelly@mahomeless.org or 781-595-7570 x17.

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