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MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

June 30, 2014

Looking Ahead to Fiscal Year 2015: The Conference Committee Has Released Its Recommendations for the FY'15 State Budget

**The House and Senate will vote soon before the budget is sent to Governor
Patrick for his signature and vetoes**

Youth Homelessness Bill Action

Thank you for all of your calls and emails to legislators in support of House Bill 135! We are continuing our [online petition campaign](#), so please take this one-minute action today and share this link with friends, colleagues, and family members (oh, and strangers, too!)

In addition to hundreds of handwritten letters, legislators have received over 500 online petitions so far. Help us exceed 700 petitions in the weeks ahead!

Quick Links

[Coalition's home page](#)

[Budget Report from the Conference Committee.](#)

Greetings!

Happy New Year's Eve... fiscal year 2015 New Year's Eve, that is!

Yesterday, the Conference Committee released its recommendations for the FY'15 state budget as House Bill 4242. This compromise budget will be brought quickly to the House and Senate members for a final vote before being sent to the Governor.

This year's House Conference Committee members were 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 were 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).

Please look below to see the conferees' recommendations for key housing and homelessness issues.

The Coalition's language and funding level requests to the Conference Committee and to Leadership can be found [in this letter](#).

For program fact sheets and additional materials, please go to our [Present Policy Campaigns page](#).

[House Bill 4242](#)

[Coalition's letter to
Conference Committee
members](#)

[Coalition's letter to
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Thank you for your advocacy and your continued support of housing and homelessness issues!

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FY'15 Budget Recommendations for Housing, Shelter, Homelessness Prevention, and Cash Assistance Programs

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

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](#).

Overview and Outcomes for 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.

Outcome: The Conference Committee has adopted the House funding and language!

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 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.

Outcome: The Conference Committee has adopted the House's higher appropriation of \$140.1 million, as well as the House's Healthy Food Pilot recommendation. As anticipated, the Conference Committee did not address the needs of families at imminent risk of staying in places not meant for human habitation.

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.

Outcome: The Conference Committee has included \$65 million in direct appropriations for MRVP, and would allow DHCD to transfer surplus FY'14 funds into the account for FY'15 ("prior appropriation continued", or "PAC language". The PAC language will lead to a substantial increase in funding for the program (potentially another \$11 million - \$12 million.) The Conference Committee also included \$2.5 million to create the centralized waiting list and online application process, as well as the Senate language barring DHCD from targeting vouchers based on participation in the Emergency Assistance program.

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.

Outcome: The Conference Committee has adopted the House's higher proposed funding level of \$26.0 million for HomeBASE, and raised the per family cap to at least \$6,000/year. The committee included the modification on the Senate language so that the statewide cap on HomeBASE is no less than \$6,000/family after DHCD develops a plan. Unfortunately, as expected, the committee retained the 24 month bar on 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.

Outcome: The Conference Committee has adopted the House funding level of \$11 million, and language so that families can receive a combination of RAFT and HomeBASE up to the cap that will be set for HomeBASE. As anticipated, the committee did not include our requested SDTEA language.

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.

Outcome: The Conference Committee has adopted a slightly higher appropriation of \$42.9 million.

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.

Outcome: The Conference Committee has adopted the House's funding level of \$64.04 million.

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.

Outcome: The Conference Committee has adopted the House's funding level of \$1.8 million and the LGBTQ young adult pilot's language and earmark of at least \$200,000.

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.

Outcome: The Conference Committee has included \$87.6 million for EAEDC.

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.

Outcome: The Conference Committee adopted the House's higher funding level of \$255.7 million for TAFDC.

11. School Transportation for Students Experiencing Homelessness (McKinney-Vento transportation program, line item 7035-0008; formerly 7035-0005)

Both the House and Senate had proposed level funding of \$7.35 million.

Outcome: The Conference Committee included \$7.35 million for school transportation for students experiencing homelessness.

Action Steps

Please thank your State Representative and State Senator for their work to secure the language and funding levels for housing, homelessness, and safety net programs.

Please also encourage the Governor to not veto the positive changes in the budget once it reaches his desk.

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. The Governor's office contact information can be found [here](#).

Thank you for your commitment and advocacy that helped to get us to this point. Please continue to advocate with us on budget issues, as well as House Bill 135, An Act providing housing and support services to unaccompanied homeless youth.

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

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