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May 20, 2013

Looking Ahead to Fiscal Year 2014: The Senate Will Debate Their Version of the FY'14 State Budget This Week

Please Ask Your State Senator to Actively Support Key Amendments for Housing, Homelessness, and Safety Net Program!

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Dear friend,

Last Wednesday, the Senate Committee on Ways and Means (SWM) unveiled its fiscal year 2014 budget recommendations for the Commonwealth. Senators filed amendments to that budget by last Friday, and their debate is scheduled to begin this Wednesday, May 22nd.

Please reach out to your State Senator today to ask her/him to actively support the amendments listed below throughout the caucus and debate processes. Senators can sign on as co-sponsors by contacting the lead sponsor's office until the start of the floor debate.

Please see the sections below for information on the Senate Ways and Means Committee's budget proposals for housing, shelter, homelessness prevention, and cash assistance programs.

As we keep getting closer to the final FY'14 budget, your voice continues to be critical to helping to protect housing, homelessness, and safety net programs for both families and individuals.

To learn more about the Coalition's FY'14 budget priorities, please click here.

Thank you for advocating with us to protect and promote investment in these programs!

Senate Ways and Means FY'14 Budget

Recommendations for Housing, Shelter, Homelessness Prevention, and Cash Assistance Programs

To access SWM's complete budget recommendations, please go to SWM FY'14 budget recommendations.

Key Amendments: Please Ask Your State Senator to Actively Support These FY'14 Budget Amendments

1. Families at Imminent Risk of Staying in Places Not Meant for Human Habitation: Amendments to the Emergency Assistance (line item 7004-0101) and Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (line item 7004-9316) Programs

Key Amendment Information:

Senator Ken Donnelly of Arlington has filed Amendment #309 to require the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to presumptively place families into the Emergency Assistance (EA) family shelter program if they provide credible proof that they otherwise would be forced to stay in place not meant for human habitation and that they otherwise would meet the EA eligibility criteria.

Senator Donnelly and Senator Karen Spilka of Ashland also have filed Amendment #247 to build upon Senate Ways and Means' plan to provide temporary accommodations to families experiencing homelessness. The amendment focuses on those families being turned away from the Emergency Assistance program because they have not yet stayed in a place not meant for human habitation.

The amendment mainly would require DHCD to refer these families to the RAFT providers for placement (while ensuring that EA eligible families still are served by the EA program), and would require DHCD to notify the Legislature 60 days before the allotted funds are anticipated to run out, so that the Legislature can take action. This amendment is needed to strengthen the new safety net proposed by SWM, so that the most vulnerable families are able to access temporary accommodations immediately. Click here for a RAFT fact sheet.

Please ask your Senator to strongly support the EA and RAFT amendments throughout the caucus and debate processes.

2. HomeBASE Program (line item 7004-0108)

Key Amendment Information:

Senator Jamie Eldridge of Acton has filed two amendments to secure improvements/protections for families timing out of the HomeBASE program.

Amendment # 282 would allow DHCD to extend HomeBASE rental assistance benefits for up to 12 more months for those families who are timing out of the program and who otherwise would be facing a return to homelessness. It also aims to allow certain families to re-enter EA shelter, if needed.

Amendment #281 would restore the homelessness preference for state-funded public housing resources for families participating in the HomeBASE rental assistance program. (Under DHCD's current regulations, families are not eligible for this preference because their subsidies were designed to last more than 12 months.) By restoring this preference, some families may be able to transition into permanent affordable housing when their HomeBASE subsidies expire.

Click here for a HomeBASE fact sheet.

Please ask your Senator to strongly support these HomeBASE amendments throughout the caucus and debate processes.

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

Key Amendment Information:

Senator Katherine Clark of Melrose has filed Amendment #657 on unaccompanied youth homelessness. This amendment seeks to add $500,000 to the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) administrative line item, 4000-0300. The funds would be used to 1.) pilot a survey of unaccompanied youth in 3-5 areas within Massachusetts and conduct youth outreach; 2.) fund 3-6 demonstration projects to identify service and housing models appropriate to support unaccompanied youth in their education and successful transition from childhood to adulthood; and 3.) fund a part-time staff person or consultant to oversee implementation, to analyze data, and to report to the Massachusetts Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Commission.

Please click here for the unaccompanied youth homelessness fact sheet.

Please ask your Senator to strongly support the unaccompanied youth amendment throughout the caucus and debate processes.

Additional Important Amendments to Support

- Senator Ken Donnelly's amendment, Amendment #246, to increase funding for state funded public housing back up to the FY'13 level
- Senator Joan Lovely's amendment, Amendment #361, to

restore McKinney-Vento funding for the transportation of students experiencing homelessness
- Senator Jamie Eldridge's amendments, Amendment #283, to increase funding for the Home and Healthy for Good Program and Amendment #284 to create a Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund
- Senator Katherine Clark's amendment, Amendment #295, to restore homelessness prevention services through the community action programs

Senate Ways and Means FY'14 Budget Recommendations for Housing, Shelter, Homelessness Prevention, and Cash Assistance Programs

To access SWM's complete budget recommendations, please go to SWM FY'14 budget recommendations.

A Quick Look at Selected Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Line Items

1. The Senate Ways and Means budget would decrease funding for the Emergency Assistance family shelter and services program (line item 7004-0101) from the current FY'13 appropriation level of $119 million to $90.4 million for FY'14, leaving eligibility the same as the current standards. SWM would markedly decrease funding for EA motel placements (line item 7004-0103) from $16.6 million to $6.3 million. Of greater concern than the funding levels is that the SWM budget does not include 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. (See RAFT below for more information on the SWM proposal to partially address this critical need.)

FY'13 funding level: Currently $135.6 million for the 2 accounts (including the mid-year $39 million supplemental budget appropriation).

FY'14 SWM funding proposal: $90.4 million for EA shelter + $6.3 million for EA motels = $93.7 million

FY'14 House funding proposal: $91.5 million for EA shelter + $15 million for EA motels = $106.5 million

FY'14 Governor's (House 1) funding proposal: $91.8 million for EA shelters + $10 million for EA motels = $101.8 million

FY'14 MCH funding request: $135.6 million, so as to restore access to families at imminent risk of having to stay in places not meant for human habitation and to avoid the need for further eligibility restrictions. We also are seeking clarifying

language regarding "irregular housing situations", so that families in such situations can more easily access shelter. See our most recent EA fact sheet for more details.

2. The Senate Ways and Means budget would decrease funding for the HomeBASE program (line item 7004-0108) to $58.8 million, reflecting the upcoming "timing out" of many families in the rental assistance portion of the program. SWM, like the House, did not restore the 3rd year of subsidies to families, which was taken away in the FY'13 budget language. The HomeBASE program provides short-term transitional subsidies, diversion, and moving assistance for certain EA-eligible families. Based on preliminary DHCD data, 98% of the estimated 5,900 families currently enrolled in the rental assistance program would have to pay more than 50% of their income towards rent without the continuation of their HomeBASE subsidy, and 78% of the families would have to pay more than 100% of their income towards rent. The SWM language would prohibit families who are timing out of the HomeBASE rental assistance program from accessing HomeBASE household assistance, but would allow some families to access subsidies through the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (see below).

FY'13 funding level: Currently $88.7 million (including the mid-year $5.3 million supplemental budget appropriation)

FY'14 SWM funding proposal: $58.8 million

FY'14 House funding proposal: $59.0 million

FY'14 Governor's funding proposal: $58.8 million

FY'14 MCH funding request: Level funding at $88.7 million to continue serving current participants and to be able to offer household assistance and moving assistance to new families in FY'14 and to be able to extend housing and services benefits to families who otherwise would be timing out of HomeBASE rental assistance who lack feasible alternative affordable housing. See the HomeBASE fact sheet for more information.

3. The Senate Ways and Means budget would slightly decrease funding for the line item that provides funding for shelter and services for unaccompanied individuals at-risk and experiencing homelessness (line item 7004-0102) to $40.3 million.

FY'13 funding level: $40.5 million

FY'14 SWM funding proposal: $40.3 million

FY'14 House funding proposal: $40.5 million

FY'14 Governor's funding proposal: $40.3 million

FY'14 MCH funding request: $40.5 million

4. The Senate Ways and Means budget would fund the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, line item 7004-9024) at $57.5 million, a dramatic $15.5 million increase from the FY'13 allocation. The increase would allow the program to serve 1,000 more households with permanent housing subsidies. The new subsidies would be targeted to families with disabilities who are timing out of the HomeBASE rental assistance program. The language also would shift income eligibility from 200% of the federal poverty guidelines to 50% area median income, a change that has been sought by advocates for several years and which would bring the program in line with other subsidized housing programs.

FY'13 funding level: $42 million

FY'14 SWM funding proposal: $57.5 million

FY'14 House funding proposal: $46.5 million

FY'14 Governor's funding proposal: $46.5 million

FY'14 MCH funding request: $60 million. See the Housing Solutions Campaign MRVP fact sheet for more details.

5. The Senate Ways and Means budget would increase funding for the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, line item 7004-9316) to $11.1 million, and includes important language that would allow families to access temporary accommodations funded by RAFT. Such accommodations could be used by families who are at imminent risk of staying in places not meant for human habitation and who are not yet eligible for Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter, as well as other families who need a safe place to stay while trying to make arrangements to use RAFT funds. Families would be eligible for up to 7 days of temporary accommodations and up to $4,000 total in assistance and/or temporary accommodations in a 12-month period. According to State House News, **"[Senate Ways and Means Chair Stephen] Brewer said he has heard stories of some citizens living in their cars before they become eligible for rental and transitional assistance. 'It's not humane or human to have that situation,' he said."** The SWM budget also would allow families exiting HomeBASE to access RAFT funds, providing a potential safety net to some of these families.

FY'13 funding level: $8.8 million

FY'14 SWM funding proposal: $11.1 million

FY'14 House funding proposal: $8.8 million

FY'14 Governor's funding proposal: $8.8 million

FY'14 MCH funding request: $8.8 million

6. The Senate Ways and Means budget would provide $62.4 million in funding for public housing authority operating subsidies (line item 7004-9005), a $2.1 million decrease from the FY'13 level.

FY'13 funding level: $64.5 million

FY'14 SWM funding proposal: $62.4 million

FY'14 House funding proposal: $64.4 million

FY'14 Governor's funding proposal: $64.4 million

FY'14 MCH funding request: $71.0 million

7. The Senate Ways and Means budget would level fund the Home and Healthy for Good Program (line item 7004-0104) at $1.4 million. This program employs a Housing First model and provides housing and services to unaccompanied adults who have experienced chronic homelessness. SWM *did not* include language that the House included to create a pilot program to serve lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) unaccompanied young adults.

FY'13 funding level: $1.4 million

FY'14 SWM funding proposal: $1.4 million

FY'14 House funding proposal: $1.8 million

FY'14 Governor's funding proposal: $1.4 million

FY'14 MCH funding request: $2.2 million

8. The SWM budget, unlike the Governor and House's budgets, *does not* incorporate a new Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund (Outside Sections 49 and 74 of the House budget). While the House and Governor advocated to create a fund to flexibly address unmet housing needs via recaptured savings from other housing line items, SWM instead made direct increased investments in several housing programs, including MRVP, RAFT, the Housing Consumer Education Centers, and the Tenancy Preservation Program.

9. The SWM budget *does not* include funding for furniture bank programs, which would help families and individuals exiting homelessness and those living in poverty to obtain furniture and basic household goods. Click here for more information about this campaign.

A Quick Look at Selected Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) Line Items

1. The Senate Ways and Means budget *does not* include the requested $500,000 in funding under the EOHHS administrative account (line item 4000-0300) to better address the needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults through age 24 who are experiencing homelessness. The requested funding would be used to fund housing and services and to conduct a count to better understand the scope of the needs of unaccompanied youth.

FY'13 funding level: $0

FY'14 SWM funding proposal: $0

FY'14 House funding proposal: $150,000

FY'14 Governor's funding proposal: $0

FY'14 MCH funding request: $500,000

2. The Senate Ways and Means budget would provide an increase in funding for the Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program (EAEDC, line item 4408-1000), bringing the funding level up to $93.1 million. [As of March 2013, there were 23,568 households served by EAEDC, a program of the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA).]

FY'13 funding level: $88.3 million

FY'14 SWM funding proposal: $93.1 million

FY'14 House funding proposal: $92.8 million

FY'14 Governor's funding proposal: $95.1 million

FY'14 MCH funding request: $95.1 million

3. The Senate Ways and Means budget would decrease funding for the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children grants (TAFDC, line item 4403-2000) to $302 million for FY'14. The SWM budget maintains the long-standing $40/month rental allowance for families living in private market apartments, which was excluded by House Ways and Means and restored in the final House budget. (As of March 2013, there were 51,281 households served by TAFDC, a DTA program.)

FY'13 funding level: $315.4 million

FY'14 SWM funding proposal: $302.0 million

FY'14 House funding proposal: $306.2 million

FY'14 Governor's funding proposal: $313.9 million

MCH FY'14 funding request: Adequate funding to at least

maintain current eligibility standards and benefit levels, including the rental allowance

Also of note, the Senate budget includes $15 million in new funding for subsidized child care to serve 2,000 low-income families that currently are on the waiting list for such care.

In addition, the SWM budget would reduce funding for the Employment Services Program (line item 4401-1000) from $7.9 million to $4.3 million.

A Quick Look at the Education Transportation Line Item

The Senate Ways and Means budget would provide $6.05 million in reimbursements to cities and towns for costs associated with transporting students experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Line Item 7035-0005). This recommendation matches the appropriation level in effect for most of FY'13, before a mid-year cut of $5.25 million was restored last Friday.

FY'13 funding level: $11.3 million (after mid-year 9C cut was restored)

FY'14 SWM funding proposal: $6.05 million

FY'14 Governor's funding proposal: $6.05 million

FY'14 MCH funding request: At least $11.3 million

We hope you will join us as the Coalition continues to push for the protection of housing and homelessness programs for FY'14. We will keep you informed of the progress as the state's budget makes it way through the next stages in the month ahead.

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

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Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless

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