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January 26, 2012

Looking Ahead to Fiscal Year 2013: Governor Patrick Has Released His Budget Recommendations for the Upcoming Year

Take Action to Support Housing, Homelessness, and Safety Net Programs!

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Dear friend,

Yesterday, Governor Deval Patrick unveiled his fiscal year 2013 budget recommendations for the Commonwealth. This budget is known as the "House 2" budget (as we are in the second year of a two-year legislative cycle), and marks the first step on the path to developing the state budget for the fiscal year that will begin on July 1st.

This \$32.3 billion budget proposal includes much-needed renewed investments in long-term housing and homelessness prevention programs, but also eligibility restrictions and benefits reductions in the family shelter and short-term housing subsidy programs.

Please see the sections below for more detailed information on the Governor's budget proposals for housing, shelter, homelessness prevention, and cash assistance programs.

As House 2 is only the first of many proposals on the way to the final FY'13 budget, your voice will 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'13 budget priorities, please [click here](#).

The Governor's FY'13 Budget Recommendations for Housing, Shelter, Homelessness Prevention, and Cash Assistance Programs

To access the Governor's complete budget recommendations, please go to [Governor's FY'13 Budget Recommendations](#).

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

1. The Governor's budget would decrease funding for the **Emergency Assistance family shelter and services program (line item 7004-0101)** from the current FY'12 appropriation level of \$118.8 million to \$100.4 million for FY'13.

As in last year's budget process, the Administration has proposed new limitations on shelter eligibility for children and families who are experiencing homelessness. House 2 would limit shelter access to only certain families that:

- Are at risk of domestic violence in their current housing situation
- Lost their housing due to fire or natural disaster
- Were "subject to eviction from their most recent housing, through no fault of the family, due to foreclosure or condemnation or nonpayment of rent caused by documented loss of income within the past 12 months directly as a result of loss of a job or documented medical condition"
- Are not primary lease holders and are living in situations (such as a double-up situation) where there are "substantial health and safety risk[s] that would likely result in a significant detriment" if the families continue to stay there.

We believe that many thousands of children and families would be excluded from accessing the safety net of shelter if this new restrictive language is adopted. As written, DHCD could deny access to shelter to families such as those who are now homeless because they had an increase in expenses or a reduction of benefits and could no longer afford the rent; families who simply have been kicked out of double-up situations and have nowhere to go; families who previously fled a domestic violence situation and are no longer in imminent danger by the abuser, but have nowhere to stay; families who have been unemployed for more than one year and now are losing their housing; families who have had a change in family composition (such as a break-up) that leads to decreased income and inability to pay the rent; and families whose private housing always has been unaffordable and have struggled with chronic housing instability before now needing shelter.

Unlike last year, families falling outside of these four categories also would be barred from accessing HomeBASE assistance (see below).

In addition, House 2 would impose a strict 8-month time limit for shelter on families, with a good cause exception only available to families with a member who has a disability. Such a time limit could be imposed whether or not a family has found safe alternative housing.

We are opposed to these proposed changes as we strongly believe that the EA program should provide immediate and ongoing shelter and services (including meaningful housing search services) to all families with nowhere else to go who meet the current eligibility standards. Simultaneously, we encourage the Commonwealth to redouble its efforts to quickly move families from shelter into permanent housing and, when possible, help families to avoid

homelessness and shelter stays by providing timely housing assistance.

Consistent with most gubernatorial budgets, the House 2 budget also eliminates critical language that would require the Administration to give the Legislature 60 days advance notice before implementing any eligibility changes in the line item.

FY'12 funding level: Currently, \$118.8 million (including supplemental appropriations)

FY'13 House 2 funding level: \$100.4 million

FY'13 MCH funding request: \$118.8 million or adequate funding so as to avoid the need for eligibility changes

2. The Governor's budget would increase funding for the HomeBASE program (line item 7004-0108) to \$83.4 million. This program provides short-term transitional subsidies, diversion, and moving assistance for certain EA-eligible families.

Under this proposal, most of the FY'13 appropriation would be used to continue funding short-term housing subsidies for families enrolled in the program in FY'12 (including families transitioning from other short-term subsidy programs such as Flex Funds). No new families would be approved for ongoing rental subsidies in FY'13 (Currently, only families who entered EA shelter before October 28, 2011 or are in another short-term subsidy program are being approved for ongoing HomeBASE rental assistance.) As is the current practice, new applicants to the EA program would be eligible for up to \$4,000 in HomeBASE funds to allow the family to avoid the need for shelter, and families already in shelter would be eligible to receive up to \$4,000 to exit shelter.

While the HomeBASE rental assistance component originally was designed as a three-year subsidy program, House 2 would limit families to two years of assistance.

FY'12 funding level: Currently, \$56.8 million (including supplemental appropriations)

FY'13 House 2 funding level: \$83.4 million line item

FY'13 MCH funding request: Adequate funding to continue serving current participants and to be able to offer rental assistance, household assistance, and moving assistance to new families in FY'13

3. The Governor's budget would increase 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 \$38.9 million.

FY'12 funding level: \$37.7 million

FY'13 House 2 funding level: \$38.9 million

FY'13 MCH funding request: \$37.7 million

4. The Governor's budget would fund the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, line item 7004-9024) at \$46 million, a \$10 million increase from the FY'12 allocation of \$36 million.

The Coalition and other advocacy and provider groups, most notably the Housing Solutions Campaign, have emphasized the need for a bold reinvestment in MRVP and other housing and homelessness prevention programs. We are thrilled that the Administration has responded positively.

The budget language also shifts income eligibility limit to 50% of the area median income, as opposed to 200% of the federal poverty guidelines. This would bring MRVP in line with other housing programs.

FY'12 funding level: \$36 million

FY'13 House 2 funding level: \$46 million

FY'13 MCH funding request: \$46 million (Supportive of Governor's recommendation; initial request was \$44.3 million)

5. The Governor's budget would provide a dramatic increase in funding for the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, line item 7004-9316), at the level of \$8.8 million.

As with MRVP, we are grateful that the Administration has responded to the call to support reinvestment in the broader spectrum of housing and homelessness programs. At the encouragement of advocacy groups, House 2 proposes a redesign of RAFT so that the lowest income families can be served by the program. The Governor proposes deep targeting of funds to lowest income families: not less than 65% of the funds would go to families with incomes at or below 15% of the area median income (AMI), not less than 25% for families with incomes above 15% but below 30% AMI, and not more than 10% for families above 30% but below 50% AMI. Families could be eligible for up to \$4,000 in RAFT assistance during a 12-month period.

FY'12 funding level: \$260,000

FY'13 House 2 funding level: \$8.8 million

FY'13 MCH funding request: \$8.8 million (Supportive of Governor's recommendation; initial request was \$5.5 million)

6. The Governor's budget would provide an additional \$4 million in funding for public housing authority operating subsidies (line item 7004-9005) at \$66.5 million.

We are pleased that the Governor has recommended this much needed reinvestment to support state-aided public housing, an important resource for the Commonwealth's lowest income residents.

FY'12 funding level: \$62.5 million

FY'13 House 2 funding level: \$66.5 million

FY'13 MCH funding request: \$71.0 million

Also of note, the Governor's budget would increase funding for the **Home and Healthy for Good Program (line item 7004-0104)** by \$1 million, bringing the appropriation up to \$2.2 million. This program employs a Housing First model to provide housing and services to unaccompanied adults who have experienced chronic homelessness.

A Quick Look at Selected Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) Line Items

1. The Governor's budget would provide \$88.3 million in funding to the Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program (EAEDC, line item 4408-1000).

This is a decrease from the final FY'12 funding level of \$89 million, but may be enough based on current DTA caseload projections. The House 2 budget also eliminates critical language that would require the Administration to give the Legislature advance notice before implementing any eligibility changes in the line item.

FY'12 funding level: \$89 million

FY'13 House 2 funding level: \$88.3 million

FY'13 MCH funding request: \$89 million

2. The Governor's budget would decrease funding for the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children grants (TAFDC, line item 4403-2000) to \$319 million for FY'13.

DTA is predicting a smaller caseload in FY'13, which may allow DTA to fully fund the program at the amount recommended by the Governor.

The House 2 budget would continue to fund the annual clothing allowance, which provides families with an extra \$150/child in September to help offset increased costs when children are heading back to school. Last year, the Governor initially proposed eliminating this benefit, but that change was rejected by the Legislature.

Through this account, House 2 also would provide a \$40/month transportation allowance to parents who are meeting their work participation requirement. This benefit currently is provided to some families through the Employment Services Program line item, 4401-1000.

As with EAEDC, the House 2 budget also eliminates critical language

that would require the Administration to give the Legislature advance notice before implementing any eligibility changes in the line item.

FY'12 funding level: \$324.2 million (with supplemental appropriation)

FY'13 House 2 funding level: \$318.9 million

MCH funding request: Adequate funding to at least maintain current eligibility standards and benefit levels

Also of note, the **Teen Living Program account (line item 4403-2119)**, which provides shelter and services to pregnant and parenting teens and their children, would see its FY'13 funding slightly increased to \$7.1 million under the Governor's proposal. According to the Department of Transitional Assistance, the program actually would need an additional \$430,000 to provide full maintenance level funding for the "97 beds and 12 emergency beds for teen parents receiving TAFDC who are unable to live at home."

Other Coalition Budget Priorities Not Reflected in the Governor's Proposed FY'13 Budget

1.) House 2 did not include language that would establish a special commission focused on the needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness.

The Coalition is asking the Governor and the Legislature to support the creation of a special commission focused on the needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness. Language that would create the special commission also is contained within [House Bill 3838](#) (formerly House Bill 1862), An Act Providing Housing and Support Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, a top priority of the Coalition.

The commission would study and make recommendations on improving access to housing and services for unaccompanied youth ages 14-22, with the goal of ensuring a comprehensive and effective response to the unique needs of this population. The members of this commission would consist of representatives from key executive branch offices/departments (such as the Departments of Children and Families, Youth Services, and Housing and Community Development), as well as members of the Legislature, youth affected by the issue, representatives of statewide non-profit agencies, and three appointees of the Governor's choice.

2.) House 2 did not include a new line item under the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to help reimburse cities and towns for the transportation of children and youth experiencing homelessness.

As homelessness rates increase, school districts across the Commonwealth are faced with more students experiencing homelessness than ever before. The educational rights of these students are protected under the federal McKinney-Vento

Homelessness Assistance Act, in which Massachusetts participates. Provisions in McKinney-Vento allow students experiencing homelessness and temporarily living outside of their original school district to either attend school in the town where they are currently residing, or to attend their original school (known as the "school-of-origin"). The municipality where the student is residing and the municipality that houses the student's school-of-origin are jointly responsible for costs associated with the transportation and education of the student.

The costs to communities can be substantial, and municipalities are unable to sustain the additional financial strain on their budgets. A small amount of federal funding is given to Massachusetts and is distributed among a handful of the school districts most affected by homelessness. The school districts that do receive the federal monies do not receive enough to offset the costs associated with educating students experiencing homelessness, and the school districts who do not receive the federal funds are left without any relief for their municipal budgets.

The Coalition is working with key stakeholders from the Administration, Legislature, the State Auditor's office, cities and towns, and advocacy groups to determine how to increase state assistance to cities and towns to reimburse them for such transportation costs, at an estimated cost of \$10 million.

3.) The Coalition also is working with other furniture bank programs around the state to secure resources to help support the statewide network of furniture banks to assist low-income households transitioning from homelessness into housing (through Line Item 7004-0099 or Line Item 7004-0101).

Furniture banks are a crucial resource in helping families and individuals achieve housing stability. Currently, none of the furniture bank programs in Massachusetts receive state funding. With limited resources, furniture banks are unable to operate at full capacity, leaving many people on the verge of achieving housing stability without the basic household necessities that make a house a home. To ensure that all furniture banks have the opportunity to benefit from state resources, we are asking that the any funding be put out for bid and distributed in grants, administered by DHCD.

Take Action!

1. Please contact the Governor's office to:

- **Thank Governor Patrick for his proposals to reinvest in the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program, Residential Assistance for Families in Transition, and state-funded public housing, and for protecting many of the core cash assistance and support programs serving families and individuals who are at-risk or experiencing homelessness.**
- **Speak out against the Administration's proposal to**

eliminate shelter eligibility for many families and to time limit access to shelter for those who remain categorically eligible. Urge the Governor to preserve shelter eligibility while also expanding housing opportunities.

The Governor's office can be reached at 617-725-4005 or 888-870-7770.

2. Please contact your State Representative and State Senator to ask for their support for the Coalition's budget priorities, in particular:

- **Maintaining the safety net of shelter for families by rejecting categorical eligibility restrictions and time limits**
- **Increasing the investment in affordable housing programs: HomeBASE, MRVP, and public housing**
- **Increasing the investment in the RAFT homelessness prevention program**
- **Protecting the EAEDC and TAFDC cash assistance programs**
- **Creating a special commission focused on the housing and service needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness**
- **Reimbursing cities and towns for the transportation of children and youth experiencing homelessness back to their schools of origin**
- **Funding a statewide network of furniture banks to assist households who are exiting homelessness**

State Representatives and Senators can be reached through the State House switchboard: 617-722-2000, or directly through the numbers listed here: [Directory of Representatives](#) and [Directory of Senators](#).

To search for your elected officials based on your address, please [click here](#).

We hope you will join us as the Coalition continues to push for the protection of housing and homelessness programs for FY'13. We will keep you informed of the progress as the state's budget makes it way through the next stages in the months ahead.

For more information, please contact [Kelly Turley](#) at 781-595-7570 x17.

Don't forget to [register](#) for our upcoming Legislative Action Day: Leap Forward to End Homelessness!



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Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless



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