



Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

May 1, 2012

## Thank You for Your Advocacy Throughout the House Budget Debate.

### Now It is Time to Focus on the Senate!

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**Join the MAFCU Federal Credit Union and the Coalition for the June 9th "Walk Home"!**

Join us on Saturday, June 9th in Dorchester for a walk to support the work of the Coalition.

**[Click here to walk with us or support a walker!](#)**

Dear friend,

Late last Wednesday night, after just three days of debate, the House voted on its version of the FY'13 budget.

At the start of the budget debate, the Coalition [released an alert](#) detailing the amendments we were following. The sections below explain the final results of the budget, including what happened to each amendment, and give you concrete ways to help ensure that the upcoming Senate budget better serves the needs of those who are at risk or experiencing homelessness in the Commonwealth.

Senate Ways and Means is slated to release its budget recommendations soon, in mid-May, with a debate to follow. In the next two weeks, please weigh in with your State Senator in support of the [Coalition's priorities](#). Before the Senate debate begins, we will be back in touch to ask you to contact your Senator again to ask her/him to support or oppose particular amendments.

In the meantime, **please call, email, or visit your State Senator** and let her or him know what you would like the Senate budget to look like. Visit [www.wheredoivotema.com](http://www.wheredoivotema.com) to find your legislator and their contact information.

To learn more about the Coalition's FY'13 budget priorities, please [click here](#). Please contact me if you have any questions or need more information.

Thanks!

-Kelly

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#### Results of the House FY'13 Budget Debate for Housing, Shelter, Homelessness Prevention, and Cash Assistance Programs

#### House Budget Results for the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Line Items

[Click here](#) to view the final results of the House budget debate for Housing and Social Services, Consolidated Amendment "C."

##### 1. EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE

The Emergency Assistance Family Shelter and Services Program in the House Ways and Means budget recommendations included language to restrict shelter only to those who are risk of domestic violence in their current housing situation, lost their home due to fire, flood, or natural disaster; are homeless due to a no-fault eviction; or who are in living situations where their health and safety are at serious risk.

In addition, House Ways and Means recommendations included a strict 8-month time limit for shelter on families. This time limit could be imposed whether or not a family has found safe alternative housing.

To rectify this dangerous language, Representatives Alice Wolf and Byron Rushing [filed an amendment](#) that would have:

- Removed the 8-month time limit.
- Added language to expand the four named categories to include "families who do not have access to any feasible alternative housing and are staying in or are at imminent risk of having to stay in a situation not meant for human habitation, such as a car, emergency room, or on the streets."
- Prohibited DHCD from moving forward with negative eligibility changes before 1/1/13, so as to allow time to see the impact of any increased prevention and housing resources (such as RAFT and MRVP) on demand for shelter.

**Results:** Unfortunately, this amendment was mostly rejected. However, we were able to expand the time limit to 9 months instead of 8 months. We are very disappointed that the categorical eligibility limits and time limit were not eliminated.

**Next steps:** Call your Senator and tell him or her that you want a Senate budget that does not impose a time limit or narrow eligibility requirements on accessing shelter. [Click here](#) for a fact sheet.

## 2. HOMEBASE SHORT-TERM HOUSING PROGRAM

The HomeBASE program provides short-term transitional subsidies, diversion, and moving assistance for certain EA-eligible families. The House budget proposed funding the program at \$83.4 million.

Representative Sciortino [filed an amendment](#) to the DHCD administrative line item that clarified language requiring the Department to ensure that households in HomeBASE and other short-term subsidy programs retain any existing priorities for long-term affordable housing resources.

**Results:** This amendment was accepted!

Representative Gloria Fox [filed an amendment](#) to increase funding for HomeBASE to \$94.2 million.

**Results:** The HomeBASE program did not receive additional funding.

**Next Steps:** Ask your Senator to support adequate HomeBASE 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. FURNITURE BANK PROGRAMS

The Coalition is working with other furniture bank programs around the state to secure \$200,000 in funding to help support a statewide network of furniture banks to assist low-income households transitioning from homelessness into housing.

Because the funding for these programs was not included in the House budget, Representative O'Day [filed an amendment](#), #275, to insert the funding into the budget.

**Results:** Unfortunately, this amendment was not accepted.

**Next Steps:** Call your Senator and tell her or him that you would like to see a Senate budget that includes funding for critical furniture bank programs! [Click here](#) for a fact sheet.

## 4. MASSACHUSETTS RENTAL VOUCHER PROGRAM

The House budget proposes positive language that targets the 923 vouchers to be created for families living in motels through the EA program as of 1/1/12. Targeting MRVP subsidies to families in motels (and shelters) will provide much needed exit strategies for families in need of long-term affordable housing options.

Unfortunately, two proposed amendments, #414 and #660, would do away with this crucial language.

Both [Amendment 414](#) and [Amendment 660](#), which the Coalition opposed, would strike this targeting language and re-insert language from the Governor's budget.

**Results:** These amendments were rejected!

Representative Donato [sponsored an amendment](#) that positively impacts families by allowing vouchers to be targeted to families who are living in motels and shelters, as opposed to allowing vouchers only to be used by families living in motels. This proposal increases the ability of families in the EA program to access stable housing.

**Results:** The language in the final House budget increases access to vouchers for families in shelter. The language stipulates that families living in shelters may access the vouchers after it has

been determined that families in motels--who remain first priority for vouchers-- are not able to use them at that point in time.

**Next Steps:** Ask your Senator to advocate for matching the House's proposed appropriation level of \$46 million and the final House language in the Senate budget recommendations.

#### 5. RESIDENTIAL ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILIES IN TRANSITION

Representative Reinstein [filed an amendment](#) that would provide community action agencies with \$3.8 million to provide services such as housing search and stabilization and eviction prevention. This funding would give communities greater access to the tools they need to prevent homelessness amongst families.

**Results:** The House adopted language calling for a study to see if community agencies should be included in prevention methods.

**Next Steps:** Ask your Senator to support funding RAFT at \$8.75 million, with similar language to the Governor and House so that the bulk of resources are targeted to the lowest income families and new language that will allow broader community-based access to the resources and services.

#### 6. PUBLIC HOUSING

Representative Honan filed two amendments, [#540](#) and [#822](#) that would increase funding for public housing subsidies from \$62.5 million to \$66.5 million, allowing public housing authorities to continue to provide service to as many people as possible.

**Results:** Funding for public funding housing subsidies was increased to \$64.5 million.

**Next Steps:** Ask your Senator to support an increase in state-funded public housing operating subsidies up to \$71 million.

### House Budget Results for the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) Line Items

[Click here](#) to view the final results of the House budget debate for Housing and Social Services, Consolidated Amendment "C."

#### 1. TAFDC

The House Ways and Means budget proposal would have eliminated or reduced critical programs in the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children grants that allow families to get to work or school, provide their children with clothes, and afford their rent.

Representative Kay Khan [sponsored an amendment](#) that:

- Restores a \$40/month rent allowance that the House Ways and Means budget eliminated.
- Provides for a \$40/month transportation allowance for work-related activities that was included in the Governor's budget but not the HWM budget.
- Restores the children's clothing allowance to \$150/child /year, which the HWM budget reduced to \$75/child.

**Results:** The final House budget added back in the \$40/month rental allowance and restored the clothing allowance to \$150/child.

**Next Steps:** Ask your Senator to support the final House language for rental and clothing allowances! Please [click here](#) for the House version fact sheet on TAFDC.

#### 2. ELECTRONIC BENEFIT TRANSFER (EBT) CARD USE

[Outside Section 35](#) of the HWM budget is related to the current debate about the use of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards by participants in DTA's cash assistance and food stamps programs.

Section 35 is extremely restrictive and punitive. Among other unreasonable restrictions, Section 35 would bar Transitional Assistance recipients from using their cash assistance benefits to pay for a haircut for their child or to purchase items such as deodorant, shampoo, and toothpaste; violating Section 35 would mean program participants could be subjected to jail time, fines, and/or loss of benefits.

**Results:** After a brief debate, the House adopted an amended version of Outside Section 35, with 33 House members voting against it. The amended version removed several of the most egregious proposal, still would be dehumanizing and unworkable for both program participants and businesses that accept EBT cards for purchases. Click here to see the [roll call vote results](#).

**Next Steps:** Please ask your Senator to reject the unworkable and dehumanizing restrictions on EBT card and benefits usage proposed by the House. Click here for the Senate version of the [EBT fact](#)

[sheet.](#)

### Unaccompanied Youth Homelessness

As the House budget debate moved forward, the Coalition had an opportunity to work with Representative O'Day, House leadership, and our advocacy partners to include important language in the final version of the House budget that would create a special statewide commission on unaccompanied youth homelessness! The language was included in consolidated amendment on human services, [Consolidated Amendment "H"](#).

This is an exciting development, as last year, the Senate included similar language in their version of the FY'12 budget.

**Next Steps:** Please ask your Senator to advocate for the inclusion of the House's language on creating a special commission on unaccompanied youth homelessness and support the passage of [House Bill 3838](#) this session!

### Take Action!

**Please contact your State Senator to ask her/him to support housing, homelessness prevention, and safety net programs and protect the rights of the Commonwealth's lowest income residents throughout the budget debate** (including \$11.3 million in [transportation funding for students experiencing homelessness](#), as was included in the House Ways and Means/final House budgets).

State Senators can be reached through the State House switchboard: 617-722-2000, or directly through the numbers listed here: [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 weeks and months ahead.

**For more information, please contact Kelly Turley at [kelly@mahomeless.org](mailto:kelly@mahomeless.org) or 781-595-7570 x17.**

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Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless



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