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August 20, 2012

August Updates: RAFT Homelessness Prevention Program Is Back and First Phase of Family Shelter Restrictions Are in Effect

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Dear friend,

Please see below for updates on the relaunching of the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) homelessness prevention program and new eligibility restrictions on families' access to Emergency Assistance family shelter.

We encourage you to get the word out about RAFT to families who may be eligible. We also still need your concerted effort to push back against the Emergency Assistance regulation changes by weighing in today with Governor Patrick.

Below you will find more details about RAFT and EA and EA action steps. Your advocacy is needed now more than ever!

Thank you!

-Kelly Turley
Director of Legislative Advocacy
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Good News! The Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program is Back!

The Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) homelessness prevention program is back! After several years of minimal funding (\$260,000 statewide), RAFT has been funded by the Legislature at \$8.76 million for fiscal year 2013. This means that RAFT is once again a statewide program! RAFT is run by the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), in collaboration with ten partner agencies.

Eligible families may receive up to \$4,000 to pay for expenses to avoid homelessness or rapidly exit homelessness. The program now is targeted to families with incomes at or below 50% of area median income, with at least 90% of the funds for families at or below 30% of area median income.

To see the RAFT income limits, based on 30% of area median income (AMI) and 50% AMI, [click here](#).

To see the FY'13 RAFT administrative plan/program guidance, [click here](#).

To see DHCD's RAFT update page, including a list of this year's 10 administering agencies, [click here](#).

To see helpful RAFT information from Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership (MBHP), [click here](#).

DHCD Has Begun Implementing Phase I of Regulation Changes to Limit Families' Access to Shelter

Since August 6th, the Department of Housing and Community Development has been using more restrictive health and safety standards to determine families' eligibility for Emergency Assistance (EA) family shelter. These changes were made with only 15 days' advance notice to the Legislature. Additional changes related to eligibility for families experiencing homelessness due to domestic violence, fire, flood, natural disasters, and certain no fault evictions are set to take effect in September, after 60 days' advance notice to the Legislature.

The changes already implemented focus on families who are experiencing homelessness and are facing substantial health and safety risks while staying in a double-up situation or in a place not meant for human habitation. DHCD's emergency regulations and other documents related to these changes are [posted here](#) on the Coalition's website.

Based on the experiences the past few weeks of families seeking shelter, the documents released by DHCD, and our conversations with DHCD to date, DHCD already has been excluding or can exclude from shelter families who:

- Are at very imminent risk of having to stay in a place not meant for human habitation, but have not *yet* stayed in such a place
- Are living in unsafe double-up situations, but are unable to meet the new overly burdensome verification requirements
- Have no place to go after being kicked out by a former host/family member if the conditions in that unit did not pose significant health and safety risks
- Are currently separated from one another in order to find temporary shelter, if the child could continue to find alternative housing without the parent or guardian
- And many, many others

Emergency Assistance Advocacy Next Steps

The Coalition is very concerned about these restrictions and the additional changes planned for September. We have been meeting with legislators, members of the Administration, providers, advocates, and families. We hope that the regulations are changed before they are finalized this fall, but need your help.

If you have not had a chance yet, please call Governor Deval Patrick to:

- 1.) Let him know that you are disturbed that DHCD is choosing to deny shelter to so many children and families who are experiencing homelessness.
- 2.) Ask him to re-examine the proposed regulations, and use his power to amend them to better protect children and families truly in need of Emergency Assistance.
- 3.) Let him know that you believe Massachusetts must simultaneously invest in housing, homelessness prevention, and safety net resources.

The Governor's office can be reached by phone at 1-888-870-7770. Additional contact information can be found [here](#).

We encourage you to share information with us about any responses you receive from the Administration and what is happening to families you know who are told that they are no longer eligible for shelter: kelly@mahomeless.org.

DHCD also will hold a public hearing about the new regulations in

early October, which we hope you will attend. In the meantime, DHCD has opened a 90-day public comment period. Comments can be addressed to Undersecretary Aaron Gornstein and sent to:

Aaron Gornstein, Undersecretary
Department of Housing and Community Development
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 300
Boston, MA 02114
aaron.gornstein@state.ma.us

Please also share a copy of your comments with the [Coalition](#).

Additional updates and advocacy steps will be sent shortly. Please also check out the [EA regulation change page](#) on our website for frequent updates.

Thank you for your advocacy and support!

mchalert
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless



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GoodSearch for the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless by following this link:
<http://www.goodsearch.com/?charityid=849550>.

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