



## Protect Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness from Having to Sleep in Unsafe Places:

Actively Support Representative Decker's Amendment to the Emergency Assistance Program, Line Item 7004-0101, in the House FY'18 Budget (Amendment #85)

### The Problem:

Many families with children experiencing homelessness are forced to sleep in cars, bus stations, and other unsafe places before they are admitted into shelter.

- Based on the state's own data, **628 families with children** had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places in FY'16 (July 2015 through June 2016) *before* they were found eligible for emergency shelter through the state's Emergency Assistance (EA) program. In the first 8 months of FY'17, another **432 families** were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances (16% of all families approved, for an average of 54 families/month).
- Families are showing up at hospital clinics and emergency rooms **with no other safe place to sleep**, which in turn drives up health care costs. Educators across the state are expressing concern about the fate of their students whose educations are being disrupted as their families search for a safe place to sleep.
- This crisis is due to onerous shelter eligibility restrictions imposed by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in September 2012. Under these regulations, in the first eight months of FY'17, at least 47% of the families who applied for shelter were denied (2,994 out of 6,306 families that completed applications, as reported by DHCD). For FY'16, the denial rate was 46% (4,410 out of 10,019 families).

**The Simple Solution:** Amend the language in line item 7004-0101 to allow otherwise eligible families to be placed in shelter when they are heading to stay in a place not meant for human habitation, not just *after* they have stayed there. (See over).

### The Cost:

Less than \$300,000 per year.

- Based on DHCD's own numbers, we estimate that approximately **700-1,000 families** per year will first have to stay in places not meant for human habitation before getting shelter if this new language is not adopted.
- If each of these families got placed in shelter one night earlier to avoid this fate, **the cost to the Commonwealth would be only about \$70,000-\$100,000 per year**. Even if each family received shelter three nights earlier, the cost would be less than **\$300,000 per year**.
- DHCD's own data shows that many of these families are getting into shelter now – but only after sleeping in unfit places. It's gone too far.

**Protect Children Experiencing Homelessness in the FY'18 State Budget: Cosponsor and Actively Support Representative Decker's Budget Amendment #85 to Line Item 7004-0101 to Provide Shelter to Families with Children That Otherwise Would Be Forced to Stay in Places Not Meant for Human Habitation**

For more information, contact the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless (Kelly Turley, [kelly@mahomeless.org](mailto:kelly@mahomeless.org) or 781-595-7570 x17) or Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (Andrea Park, [apark@mlri.org](mailto:apark@mlri.org) or 617-357-0700).

# Amend Line Item 7004-0101 in the FY'18 Budget to Protect Children Experiencing Homelessness

## Amendment #85 to H.3600

Representative Decker of Cambridge moves to amend the bill in section 2, item 7004-0101, by inserting after the words “(d) families who are in a housing situation where they are not the primary lease holder or who are in a housing situation not meant for human habitation and where there is a substantial health and safety risk to the family that is likely to result in significant harm should the family remain in such housing situation;” the following:

“provided further, that temporary emergency assistance shall be provided to families who on the date of application for emergency assistance have no other feasible alternative housing, as defined in 760 CMR 67.06.1(b), and who, but for not having spent 1 night in a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings, including but not limited to a car, park, abandoned building, medical facility, bus or train station, airport or camping ground, would be eligible for emergency assistance under clauses (a), (b), (c) or (d);”

### Organizational Endorsers:

Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness
Allston-Brighton Health Collaborative
Arise for Social Justice
Coalition for Social Justice
EMPath
Greater Boston Legal Services
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
MetroWest Legal Services
National Association of Social Workers, MA Chapter
Northeast Justice Center
Out Now
Partners HealthCare