



Outcomes for Key Fiscal Year 2018 Conference Committee Budget Priorities to Prevent and End Homelessness

July 10, 2017

1. Increase funding for homelessness prevention, diversion, and re-housing programs like the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, Line Item 7004-9316).

Conference Committee Requests: Adopt the Senate's proposed RAFT funding level of \$18.5 million and line item language that would continue to allow households without children to access RAFT. The expanded definition of family included in the FY'17 final budget and the FY'18 Senate budget covers households of all sizes and configurations so as to allow families with dependent children, families without children in the household, and unaccompanied youth and adults to access homelessness prevention resources. During FY'17, 3,850 households were served by RAFT as of April 30th. This includes 124 households who previously were ineligible under the more limited definition of family, 56% of which were households with disabilities. At the Senate's proposed funding level, the state would be able to prevent homelessness for an estimated 6,016 households, based on the average FY'16 RAFT expenditure of \$3,075/household (including the \$539 administrative fee for each household approved). The program is funded at \$13 million for FY'17. According to the 2015-2016 RAFT report published by the Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts, the state's FY'16 RAFT investment of \$12.5 million saved the Commonwealth an estimated \$137 million.

Conference Committee Outcomes: The Conference Committee adopted the House's funding recommendation of \$15 million and the Senate's language to continue to serve households of all sizes and configurations. We are pleased to report that the Conference Committee budget earmarks up to \$2 million to serve households without children under the age of 21. Please ask Governor Baker to retain this additional funding and eligibility language.

2. Adequately fund and protect emergency shelter and service programs for families and individuals experiencing homelessness and support key line item provisions. In particular, please support the following language and funding for Emergency Assistance Family Shelter and Services (EA, Line Item 7004-0101):

Conference Committee Requests:

- **Adopt the Senate's important language to ensure that otherwise eligible families are able to access shelter before having to stay in a place not meant for human habitation.** Under current EA regulations, otherwise eligible families that are within 24 hours of staying in places not meant for human habitation can be turned away from shelter, even if DHCD believes that the family will be forced to stay in a car, emergency room, or transit station. Massachusetts can and must do better for its most vulnerable families. Between July 1, 2015 and June 30, 2016 (all of FY'16), 628 families with children were approved for EA only after first staying in a place not meant for human habitation. For the first ten months of FY'17, 501 families first stayed in places not meant for human habitation before being approved for shelter (16% of all families approved, an average of just over 50 families/month).
- **Adopt the Senate's higher funding level of \$166.1 million.** The House's recommendation was \$155.5 million for FY'18, and the anticipated spending level for FY'17 is at least \$176.5 million.
- **Adopt the Senate's additional tracking and reporting language** to better understand which families are served and which are not served by the program, family demographics, and other key data points.
- We are grateful that both the House and Senate included language that would require the Administration to notify the Legislature at least 90 days before implementing any negative changes to the EA program and language requiring placements of up to 30 days for families who appear eligible but need some more time to get all the requested verifications ("placements pending verification").

Conference Committee Outcomes: Unfortunately, the Conference Committee did not include the Senate's language that would allow certain otherwise eligible families to access shelter before having to stay in a place not meant for human habitation. The committee also adopted an appropriation of \$155.9 million, just above the House's lower funding recommendation of \$155.5 million. Stay tuned for advocacy efforts to change this policy during FY'18.

3. Address the needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness by increasing funding for housing/wraparound support services under the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) youth homelessness program (Line Item 4000-0007).

Conference Committee Requests: Adopt the Senate's higher proposed funding level of \$2.5 million, \$500,000 more than the total FY'17 spending and \$1.96 million above the House FY'18 recommendation. This investment would provide deeper funding for the unaccompanied youth homelessness law, M.G.L. Chapter 6A, Sections 16W and 16X, so as to provide more housing and service resources to youth and young adults age 24 and younger. EOHHS first

signed performance-based contracts with regional consortia in April 2016, and released an initial analysis in February 2018 of the impact of the funds that were awarded to eight regions of the state. The analysis showed that 834 youth and young adults were served in the first nine months the programs were operational. Additional funds will help to ensure that more young people can be served.

Conference Committee Outcomes: Unfortunately, the Conference Committee included a compromise appropriation of only \$675,000 for the unaccompanied youth homelessness line item (\$635,000 for the general programs funded by the line item and an earmark of \$40,000 for Y2Y Harvard Square). This dramatic decrease in funding from the \$2 million FY'17 level will mean that many programs will lose funding. Stay tuned for advocacy next steps for midyear supplemental funding.

Thank you for your work to ensure that everyone has a place to call home!

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley, Associate Director, at 781-595-7570 x17 or kelly@mahomeless.org. Please also go to www.mahomeless.org/advocacy.