MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home.

Fiscal Year 2018 Budget Priorities: Working to Prevent and End Homelessness by Increasing Funding for Housing and Homelessness Prevention Resources and Protecting Safety Net Programs

Updated 3-27-17

1. Increase funding for homelessness prevention, diversion, and re-housing programs.

- **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, Line Item 7004-9316):** Increase overall funding to $18.5 million, and maintain the FY'17 expanded definition of family that covers households of all sizes and configurations so as to allow families with dependent children, unaccompanied youth and adults, and families without children in the household to access homelessness prevention resources. At this 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 and was funded at $12.5 million for FY'16. According to the 2015-2016 RAFT report published by the Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts, the state's FY'16 RAFT investment saved the Commonwealth an estimated $137 million.
- **HomeBASE (a.k.a. Massachusetts Short Term Housing Transition Program, Line Item 7004-0108)**:
  - Provide at least $39.2 million for the HomeBASE program so that the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is able to offer HomeBASE household assistance and moving assistance in FY'18 to help families already in the Emergency Assistance (EA) program to exit shelter quicker and to help other families avoid the need to enter shelter ("diversion"). The program is funded at $31.9 million for FY'17.
  - Allow families who are in compliance with HomeBASE requirements to renew their HomeBASE benefits at the end of the first 12-month period, if otherwise facing a return to homelessness. Allow families who have been terminated from the program to receive benefits again after 12 months, instead of the current, excessive 24-month bar on receiving further assistance.
  - Build on the FY'17 pilot to expand access to HomeBASE to families in non-Emergency Assistance shelters, including shelters for domestic violence survivors and for families needing substance abuse treatment.

2. Adequately fund and protect emergency shelter and service programs for families and individuals experiencing homelessness and support key line item provisions.

- **Emergency Assistance Family Shelter and Services (EA, Line Item 7004-0101)**:
  - Provide adequate funding to meet the needs of all eligible families. For FY'17, the anticipated spending level is at least $176.5 million. (The Governor has requested $164.7 million for FY'18.)
  - Include language and funding to provide shelter to families who are at "imminent risk of staying 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 eight months of FY'17, 432 families first stayed in places not meant for human habitation before being approved for shelter (16% of all families approved, an average of 54 families/month).**
  - Continue to include FY'17 budget language that the Administration must 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"). Include additional tracking and reporting language to better understand which families are served and which are not served by the program.
- **Homelessness Assistance for Individuals (Line Item 7004-0102):** Expand funding to $50 million to address increased demand for shelter, housing, and services for unaccompanied adults, an increase over the FY'17 funding level of $45.5 million.

3. Address the needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness by increasing funding to $4 million for housing/wraparound support services under the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) youth homelessness program, Line Item 4000-0007.

This would be a $2 million over the FY'17 funding level of $2 million ($1 million in direct appropriations and $1 million carried over from FY'16). These investments 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 consortiums in April 2016, and just released an initial analysis of the impact of the funds that were awarded to eight regions of the state. Additional funds will help to ensure statewide coverage.

4. Increase funding for housing programs serving extremely low-income households.

- **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, Line Item 7004-9024):** Increase funding to $120 million to maintain existing services and benefits to households currently served by the program and to significantly increase the number of low-income households (including families, elders, and persons with disabilities) struggling with housing instability who could be served by the program. Include language to tie rent subsidy levels to current fair market rents to make the subsidies more useful to households. Currently, households without waivers only can rent units at or below the 2005 FMR. Also include Prior Appropriation Continued (PAC) language to carryover any unspent FY'17 funds. (The Governor has requested an $11 million increase over the final FY'17 funding level of $86.5 million.)
- **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, Line Item 7004-9030):** Increase funding to $7.5 million to provide much-need housing subsidies to over 800 individuals under the age of 60 who are living with disabilities. For FY'17, the program is funded at $4.6 million.
- **Public Housing Operating Subsidies (Line Item 7004-9005):** Fund state public housing operating subsidies at $72 million to improve affordable housing opportunities for an estimated 45,600 households, including extremely low-income families, elders, and persons with disabilities. This would be a $7 million increase over the FY'17 appropriation of $65 million to preserve access to public housing. The Coalition also supports $2 million for public housing reform (line item 7004-9007), so as to fund capital improvements, launch a centralized waiting list, help housing authorities manage unit turnover, increase tenant participation, and promote cross-agency partnerships.
- **Home and Healthy for Good Program for Individuals (Line Item 7004-0104):** Level fund at the FY'17 appropriation level of $2 million, and continue to provide support to LGBTQ young adults experiencing homelessness.

5. Adequately fund and protect key support programs for low-income families and individuals.

- **Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program (EAEDC, Line Item 4408-1000):** Appropriate at least level funding of $79.2 million to improve eligibility and benefit standards to also provide full benefits for participants experiencing homelessness. (Currently, EAEDC participants experiencing homelessness have their monthly grants reduced from an average of $303.70/month to only $92.80/month. Based on data received from DTA, there are an estimated 700 households each year that are subject to the "homelessness penalty".) Maintain the 75-day advance notice language to allow time for the Legislature to take action to prevent eligibility restrictions and benefit reductions. The program was serving 20,660 households in December 2016, down from 21,106 households at the end of December 2015.
- **Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC, Line Item 4403-2000):** As the number of families participating in the TAFDC program goes down, resources dedicated to the program in FY'17 should be retained in the program for FY'18 so as to provide level or increased benefits to program participants. Reject the Governor's proposal to count parents' SSI income when calculating TAFDC benefits, which would lead to an estimated 4,400 families losing all of their TAFDC benefits and another 1,400 families having their TAFDC benefits drastically reduced. Maintain the 75-day advance notice language to allow time for the Legislature to take action to prevent eligibility restrictions and benefit reductions. The program was serving 31,377 households at the end of December 2016, down from 35,843 households at the end of December 2015. For FY'17, the program is funded at $191.2 million.

5. Increase funding for the transportation of children and youth experiencing homelessness to decrease the costs to cities and towns (ESE Line Item 7035-0008).

Increase funding—or a least provide level funding of $8.35 million—in line item 7035-0008 under the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to reimburse cities and towns for the transportation of students experiencing homelessness. This would match the FY'16 and FY'17 partial reimbursement rate, but fall far short of the 2015-2016 academic year reimbursement request total of $24 million. Provisions in the federal McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act 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. This line item has helped to mitigate the substantial costs to communities while protecting educational opportunities for children and youth. This year, school districts have an expanded transportation mandates under the newly implemented federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), so additional costs will be incurred by the districts.

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