



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

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

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

June 5, 2017

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

□ Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, Line Item 7004-9316):

Adopt the Senate's proposed 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.

□ HomeBASE (a.k.a. Massachusetts Short Term Housing Transition Program, Line Item 7004-0108):

- **Adopt the Senate's higher funding level of \$32.6 million for the HomeBASE program** so that the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) would be able to offer more 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, and the House recommended FY'18 funding of \$31.1 million.
- **Adopt Senate language so that families that have been terminated from the program could receive benefits again after 12 months, instead of the current, excessive 24-month bar on receiving further assistance.**
- **Adopt Senate language to lift the \$300,000 cap on funding available 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):

- **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").

- **Homelessness Assistance for Individuals (Line Item 7004-0102):** Adopt the Senate's higher funding level of **\$46.4 million**, which is slightly more than the House's recommended funding level of \$46.2 million. Additional funding is needed to address increased demand for shelter, housing, and services for unaccompanied adults. The FY'17 funding level is \$45.5 million.

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).

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.

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

- **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, Line Item 7004-9024):**
 - **Maintain the House/Senate recommended funding level of \$100 million** so as to retain existing housing supports for households currently served by the program and to increase the number of low-income households (including families, elders, and persons with disabilities) struggling with housing instability participating in the program. This would be a substantial increase over the final FY'17 funding level of \$86.5 million.
 - **Adopt Senate language that would require that at least 75% of new subsidies go to extremely low income households** (with incomes at or below 30% of area median income), instead of House language that says that up to 75% of the new subsidies "may" go to households at or below 30% of area median income.
 - **Adopt Senate language that would require the Department of Housing and Community Development to issue new subsidies no later than August 1, 2017**, so as to maximize the subsidies usefulness for households in FY'18.
- **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, Line Item 7004-9030):** Adopt the Senate's higher funding level of **\$5.5 million**, a \$500,000 increase over the House's recommendation. Additional funds will provide much-needed housing subsidies to more 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):** Maintain the House/Senate recommended funding level of **\$64.5 million**. The Coalition also supports the House's recommended funding level of almost \$1.2 million for public housing reform (line item 7004-9007), so that DHCD could 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):** Adopt the House's higher funding level of **\$2.2 million**, which is \$200,000 above the current FY'17 funding level and the Senate's FY'18 recommendation. Both the House and Senate included language to 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):** Provide the House and Senate recommended funding level of **\$78.6 million** for EAEDC. Adopt the Senate's recommended **90-day advance notice language to allow time for the Legislature to take action to prevent eligibility restrictions and benefit reductions**. We hope that in the year ahead the Legislature can 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 were an estimated 600 households in April 2017 that were subject to the "homelessness penalty". The program was serving 20,339 households in April 2017, down from 20,660 households in December 2016.
- **Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC, Line Item 4403-2000):** We are grateful that both the House and Senate rejected the Governor's proposal to count parents' SSI income when calculating TAFDC benefits, which would have led to an estimated 4,400 families losing all of their TAFDC benefits and another 1,400 families having their TAFDC benefits drastically reduced. **Adopt the Senate's proposed funding level of \$166.7 million**, which is almost \$5.8 million higher than the House's recommendation. **Adopt the Senate's recommended 90-day advance notice language** to allow time for the Legislature to take action to prevent eligibility restrictions and benefit reductions. **Adopt the Senate language to provide at least \$1 million**

for transitional benefits for TAFDC participants who are newly employed to assist with "short-term self-sufficiency". The program was serving 29,639 households in April 2017, down from 31,377 households in December 2016. For FY'17, the program is funded at \$191.2 million.

6. Maintain funding for the transportation of children and youth experiencing homelessness to share the costs with cities and towns (ESE Line Item 7035-0008).

Provide level funding of \$8.35 million, as recommended by the House and Senate, 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 have been incurred by the districts.

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

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