



# RAAP Campaign

*Prevent homelessness by funding the  
Rent Arrearage Assistance Program*

Good afternoon, Chairmen Rodrigues and Michlewitz, and Members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is James Saucedo, and I am a Community Organizer at the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless (MCH).

MCH has worked to prevent and end homelessness across the Commonwealth since 1981, by advocating for the needs of children, youth, families, and individuals who are either experiencing homelessness today or at-risk of experiencing homelessness. We believe that all people should have a place to call home, and that a stable, affordable home is a requirement of human dignity.

MCH recently launched the RAAP Campaign, which seeks to restore a statewide rent arrearage assistance program. The campaign includes 113 endorsing organizations and commissions from all regions of Massachusetts; together we believe we can prevent homelessness by helping low-income people remain stably housed and catch up on back rent when they fall behind, prior to experiencing an eviction.

We ask the Committee to appropriate \$7 million in funding for the rent arrearage assistance program, as proposed in House Bill 1264, within the FY'20 state budget. We ask that the Committee appropriate this funding as a pilot within the existing Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program (line item #7004-9316).

Led by Representative Marjorie Decker, H.1264 establishes a rent arrearage assistance program that would provide cash assistance to cover the cost of up to four months of back rent or mortgage payments for families, individuals, and unaccompanied youth with incomes up to 50% of Area Median Income (AMI), prior to the start of an eviction or foreclosure proceeding. H.1264 is cosponsored by 71 members of the State Legislature, including Assistant Vice Chair Senator Lewis, Assistant Vice Chair Representative Malia; Committee Member Senators Barrett, Collins, Gobi, Jehlen, and Rush; and Committee Member Representatives Stanley, Ashe, Garballey, Holmes, Keefe, Hunt, Barber, Gonzalez, Tosado, Cassidy, Higgins, Tyler, Williams, and Vargas.

Among the 113 endorsers of the RAAP campaign are:

- Legal services organizations, which represent low-income tenants in eviction proceedings, and understand just how traumatic and disorienting an eviction can be;
- Homeless shelter providers, which know that the increasing number of individuals and families arriving at their doors is a symptom of a larger, systemic crisis of housing affordability and wage stagnation;
- Faith-based organizations, which are drawn to the campaign by the moral calling for investing as much as we can in public resources for improving the lives and dignity of people living in poverty;

- Regional Commissions on the Status of Women, which know that households headed by single mothers are disproportionately likely to be among the lowest income households, thus disproportionately likely to face the threat of an eviction; and
- Centers for Independent Living, which know that people with disabilities face the difficulty of securing housing that is not only affordable, but also accessible, thus making them especially vulnerable to having no place to go if they lose their homes due to an eviction.

Together we know that good public policy can solve our deepest challenges. Households with the lowest incomes cannot wait any longer for rent arrearage assistance as a crucial support for preventing both eviction and loss of housing. Please join us by funding the rent arrearage assistance program at \$7 million in the FY'20 state budget, and help vulnerable families and individuals remain in their homes and communities.

Thank you very much for your time this afternoon, and for your service in the State Legislature.

Respectfully submitted.

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