



It's Gone Too Far

Ask House and Senate Leadership to Amend the Emergency Assistance Line Item (EA, 7004-0101) to Protect Children from Having to Sleep in Unsafe Places and to Reject the Administration's Attempts to Further Limit EA Eligibility

The Problem:

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, **607 families with children** had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places in FY'14 (July 2013 and June 2014) *before* they were found eligible for emergency shelter through the state's Emergency Assistance (EA) program. In the first 6 months of FY'15, 293 families were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances.
- 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.
- This is due to onerous shelter eligibility restrictions imposed by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in September 2012. Under these regulations, 48% of families that applied for shelter between July-December 2014 were turned away.
- In his FY'16 budget proposal, Governor Baker has proposed even harsher limits on EA access. Therefore, we also ask you to **reject the proposal to eliminate the irregular housing and units unfit for human habitation sub-categories and continue to allow certain families in highly unstable and unsafe doubled-up situations to access shelter.** (Currently, 30-35% of families approved each month for EA fall into these categories.)

The Simple Solution:

Amend the language in line item 7004-0101 to allow otherwise eligible families who are experiencing homelessness to be placed in shelter when they are "within 24 hours of staying 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 numbers, we estimate that approximately **600-700 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 per year.** Even if they received shelter three nights earlier, the cost would be only **\$210,000 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 Homeless Children in the FY'16 State Budget:
Ask House and Senate Leadership to
Shelter Children and Families Who Are Within 24 Hours of Staying in
Places Not Meant for Human Habitation;
Reject Proposals to Further Limit EA Access**

For more information, please contact the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless: Kelly Turley, 781-595-7570 x17 or kelly@mahomeless.org or the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute: Ruth Bourquin, 617-357-0700 x333 or rbourquin@mlri.org.

Line Item Language to Protect Children Experiencing Homelessness

Requested new language in bold:

7004-0101 (d) families who are in a housing situation where they are not the primary lease holder or who are in **or within 24 hours of being in** a housing situation not meant for human habitation and where there is **or would be** a substantial health and safety risk to the family that is likely to result in significant harm should the family remain in **or enter** such housing situation; provided further, that the health and safety risk shall be determined by the department of children and families through risk assessments;....