



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Priorities: Working to Prevent and End Homelessness by Increasing Funding for Housing and Protecting Safety Net Programs

Updated 4-15-15

1. **Adequately fund and protect emergency 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 at least \$186.1 million, matching the updated anticipated FY'15 spending level.
 - Include language 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 who 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, 2013 and June 30, 2014 (all of FY'14), 607 families with children were approved for EA only after first staying in a place not meant for human habitation. For the first half of FY'15, 293 families first stayed in places not meant for human habitation before being approved for shelter.**
 - Reject the Governor's proposals to eliminate eligibility for families experiencing homelessness who are highly mobile and moving through various unstable double-up situations ("irregular housing") and those who are doubled up in housing units unfit for human habitation.
 - Continue to include long-standing language that the Administration must notify the Legislature at least 60 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").
 - **HomeBASE (a.k.a. Massachusetts Short Term Housing Transition Program, Line Item 7004-0108):**
 - Provide at least \$31.25 million for the HomeBASE program so that DHCD is able to offer HomeBASE household assistance and moving assistance in FY'16, to help families already in the EA program to exit shelter quicker and to help other families avoid the need to enter shelter ("diversion").
 - Allow DHCD to provide up to \$8,000 per eligible family, if the additional funds beyond the initial \$6,000 grant would allow a family to obtain or retain safe housing.
 - Allow families who have been terminated from the program to apply for benefits again after 12 months, instead of the current, excessive 24-month bar on receiving further assistance.
 - Between July 1st and December 31, 2014, 1,801 families were served by HomeBASE. This includes 488 families who were diverted from having to enter shelter (HomeBASE "front door diversion") and 1,313 families who were able to exit shelter and motel placements through the use of HomeBASE household assistance.
 - **Homelessness Assistance for Individuals (Line Item 7004-0102):** Fund at a minimum of \$42.9 million to at least match FY'15 funding.
 - **Home and Healthy for Good Program for Individuals (Line Item 7004-0104):** Fund at a minimum of \$1.8 million (at least level funding with the FY'15 appropriation) and continue to provide support to LGBT young adults experiencing homelessness.
2. **Increase funding for housing programs serving extremely low-income households.**
 - **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, Line item 7004-9024):** Increase funding to \$100 million to maintain existing services and benefits to the approximately 6,700 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 will be served by the program. According to updated figures from DHCD, at least \$83.4 million will be needed in FY'16 just to level fund existing subsidies.

- ❑ **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, Line Item 7004-9030)**: Increase funding to \$7.1 million to provide an additional 400 individuals with disabilities with much-needed housing subsidies. For FY'15, the program is funded at \$3.55 million.
- ❑ **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, Line Item 7004-9316)**: Increase overall funding to \$15 million, and expand the definition of family to cover households of all sizes and configurations so as to allow unaccompanied adults and those without children in the household to also access homelessness prevention resources. For FY'15, the program is funded at \$11 million.
- ❑ **Public Housing Operating Subsidies (Line Item 7004-9005)**: Fund state public housing operating subsidies at \$69 million to increase affordable housing opportunities for extremely low-income families, elders, and persons with disabilities. This would be an almost \$5 million increase over the FY'15 appropriation, and could provide increased resources for housing as well as support services for tenants.

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

- ❑ **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'15 should be retained in the program for FY'16 so as to provide level or increased benefits to program participants. Maintain the 67-day advance notice language to allow time for the Legislature to take action to prevent eligibility changes and benefit reductions. The program was serving 40,542 households at the end of December 2014, down from 46,546 households in December 2013. For FY'15, the program is funded at \$250.6 million.
- ❑ **Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program (EAEDC, Line Item 4408-1000)**: Provide at least level funding to maintain or improve eligibility and benefit standards. Maintain the 60-day advance notice language to allow time for the Legislature to take action to prevent eligibility changes and benefit reductions. The program was serving 22,118 households at the end of December 2014, down from 23,162 in December 2013. For FY'15, the program is funded at \$85.5 million.

4. Address the needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness by funding housing and wraparound support services (DHCD Line Item 7004-XXXX and EOHHS Line Item 4000-0300).

Include \$2.5 million for housing for unaccompanied youth under the Department of Housing and Community Development (new line item, 7004-xxxx) and \$1.5 million for wraparound services for unaccompanied youth under the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (current EOHHS Administrative line item, 4000-0300 or a new line item, 4000-xxxx). These investments would provide funding for the unaccompanied youth homelessness law, Chapter 450 of the Acts of 2014. The new housing and service resources would be targeted to youth and young adults age 24 and younger.

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

Provide \$14.9 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 (previously line item 7035-0005). This is above the FY'15 partial reimbursement rate of \$7.35 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 (known as the "school-of-origin"). The municipality where the student is residing and the municipality that houses the student's school-of-origin are jointly responsible for costs associated with the transportation of the student. This line item has helped to mitigate the substantial costs to communities while protecting educational opportunities for children and youth experiencing homelessness.

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley, Director of Legislative Advocacy, at 781-595-7570 x17 or kelly@mahomeless.org.