



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: July 22, 2015

Contact: Kelly Turley, Director of Legislative Advocacy, 781-595-7570 x17, kelly@mahomeless.org

The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless Encourages the Legislature to Override Governor Baker's Vetoes to Restore Funding for Housing and Services for Unaccompanied Youth and the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program

BOSTON—The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, its members, allied organizations, and key legislators are advocating for the Legislature to override two budget vetoes issued by Governor Charlie Baker last Friday: **\$2 million to support the creation of housing and wraparound supportive services for youth and young adults age 24 and younger who are experiencing homelessness outside the care and custody of a parent or legal guardian** (via line item 4000-0007), and **\$3 million from the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP)**. MRVP currently serves 6,873 households across the Commonwealth, and the restoration of the \$3 million in additional FY'16 funds could be used to serve even more unaccompanied youth, as well as families with children, elders, individuals living with disabilities, and adults experiencing chronic homelessness (via line item 7004-9024).

If restored, the \$2 million in youth homelessness funding recommended by the Legislature would be used to implement Chapter 450 of the Acts of 2014, the groundbreaking youth homelessness legislation signed into law by former Governor Deval Patrick in January 2015. It would provide the financial resources for a coordinated statewide response to unaccompanied youth homelessness. The funding would be given to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to enter into performance-based contracts with organizations and agencies to provide a continuum of housing and wraparound support services to unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness. The types of resources that could be funded under the line item include "kinship" home placements, short-term housing, Transition to Independent Living programs, shelter, counseling, access to medical/dental/mental health care, education, employment services, case management, advocacy/referral services, and the provision of resources to meet basic needs.

"We are committed to do all that we can so that the Legislature swiftly will override Governor Baker's disappointing veto of the much-needed, highly anticipated \$2 million for housing and services for unaccompanied youth and young adults. As the youth and young adults we work with who are experiencing homelessness know all too well—and as most people can imagine, youth without homes can't wait another year for state government to respond to their urgent needs," said Kelly Turley, Director of Legislative Advocacy at the Coalition. "We also are advocating strongly alongside key housing, homelessness, and community groups for the Legislature to restore the additional \$3 million for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program, to maximize MRVP funding by bringing it up to \$90.9 million for this year."

"I am disappointed that Governor Baker vetoed funding for necessary housing and support services for unaccompanied homeless youth," noted Senate Majority Leader Harriette L. Chandler (D-Worcester). "I am hopeful that the Legislature will override this veto, thus bringing us one step closer to the goal that we had in mind, and affirming the work of the Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth."

State Representative Jim O'Day (D-West Boylston) said, "Since late 2010, I have been working with the Coalition and others on this campaign to elevate the needs of unaccompanied youth and work towards solutions. To build upon the momentum of the youth homelessness bill becoming law earlier this year, I will advocate with Legislative Leadership and my colleagues in strong support of overriding the Governor's harmful vetoes of the \$2 million for the new youth homelessness line item and the \$3 million for additional MRVP housing subsidies. By restoring this funding, we can begin to address this pervasive issue."

Max Davis of Stoneham, age 13, has been leading a youth group at Temple Israel in Boston focused on advocacy towards ending youth homelessness: "When we were looking for a social action project, we discovered that there are over 6,000 young people in Massachusetts public schools who were homeless and without any adult to help care for them. We knew that we needed to do something to help. That averages to seventeen youth in every city and town in Massachusetts.

We learned that State Representative Jim O'Day, State Representative (now State Senator) Jason Lewis, and State Senator (now U.S. Congresswoman) Katherine Clark were promoting legislation to help this crisis, so we decided to work together to help those legislators get the bill passed. Now we need to get the veto override through so the law can do what it is intended to do: help unaccompanied youth. We have been working for the last two years to help these kids. We are kids helping kids."

"This short-sighted decision on the part of the Governor strikes a direct blow to the youth and young adults working hard to change their lives and find homes," said Sarah Rosenkrantz, Co-Director of Y2Y Harvard Square, a new shelter for young adults scheduled to open in Cambridge this November. "Last week when the exciting news of funding was shared with our Young Adult Advisory Council [a group of 10 young adults who have experienced homelessness], it was so clear how much this mattered — how much the courage they had to repeatedly tell their stories mattered. Governor Baker's budget cut tells them otherwise."

"The youth homelessness veto is really disappointing, and sends a message to all of the young people experiencing homelessness who have worked so hard and courageously to share their stories and experiences that the Governor doesn't think they are important enough. He doesn't think they are important enough to deserve this funding, and doesn't think that their struggles are challenging enough to deserve a broader safety net. It is really disappointing and the young adults experiencing homelessness in the Commonwealth deserve better," remarked Ayala Livny, a long-time youth service provider and Y2Y Harvard Square Advisory Board Member.

Since 2008, the Coalition has organized advocacy efforts with and for unaccompanied youth, including the 2010 creation of a statewide task team on unaccompanied youth homelessness. These efforts have involved key partners such as MassEquality, DIAL/SELF Youth and Community Services, Rediscovery at JRI, AIDS Action/Youth on Fire, LUK Crisis Center, Inc., Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice, faith communities, schools, and youth themselves.

"The Coalition has been very fortunate to partner with key legislators such as Representative Jim O'Day, Senator Harriette Chandler, Senate President Stan Rosenberg, and Senate Ways and Means Chair Karen Spilka, as well as amazing young people and numerous non-profit organizations, faith communities, schools, and policymakers to push for the funding to create more housing and services for unaccompanied youth—and for housing for all populations experiencing homelessness and housing instability. We feel a great urgency to ensure that the youth homelessness and Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program vetoes are overridden right away, as we know that youth and other people who are without homes right now deserve immediate action to help them secure housing and support services. The Legislature should approve these veto overrides to affirm that housing is a basic human right," said Turley.

One of the young adults active in the campaign, Synthia Kennedy, shared her thoughts on the ups and downs of the multi-year effort to secure funding to create and expand housing and services for unaccompanied youth and young adults: "We have worked so long, with so many sleepless nights and tear-filled days, to get people to do something to support us. We have prepared speeches and wondered about all of the possible effects of our outreach, education, seminars, and presentations on both the presenters and audience. To be honest, in all of my travels, hitch hiking, and sleeping outside (I hate the word "homeless"), I have never felt more full of terror, wonder, anxiety and naked-full-frontal-in-your-face realness as when the thought 'this might all be in vain' crossed my mind. 'Things may never change and I have exposed myself to all these people' -- sometimes several hundred people -- sometimes I didn't think it was worth it."

Synthia, the Coalition, and others are determined to see the budget overrides go through, so that that work was not in vain. Working together, these groups seek to ensure that youth and young adults without homes will have greater access to a range of housing programs and needed support services, and that the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program will be able to help more households move out of homelessness into housing stability.

For more information on the Coalition's mission, public policy priorities, and direct service programs, please visit www.mahomeless.org. For more information on youth homelessness in Massachusetts, please go to our website and see the unaccompanied youth homelessness page under "Advocacy".

###

Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
15 Bubier Street, Lynn, MA 01901
Phone: 781 595-7570 Fax: 781 595-7574
www.mahomeless.org