



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: July 31, 2015

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

The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless and Partners Celebrate the Legislature's Restoration of Funding for Housing and Services for Unaccompanied Youth and for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program

BOSTON—The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, its members, allied organizations, and key legislators are celebrating this week's legislative overrides of two budget vetoes issued by Governor Charlie Baker: **\$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 now \$90.9 million Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, line item 7004-9024).**

In an uncommon display of unanimity, the Legislature voted 154-0 in the House of Representatives and 38-0 in the Senate on Wednesday to restore the \$2 million in youth homelessness funding 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. Those funds will provide the financial resources for a coordinated statewide response to unaccompanied youth homelessness. The funding will 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 new 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 extremely grateful that the Legislature swiftly overrode 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 could not wait another year for state government to respond to their urgent needs. Now that the funds have been restored, we look forward to working with the Administration to ensure that the resources reach youth as quickly as possible," said Kelly Turley, Director of Legislative Advocacy at the Coalition. "We also were excited to watch as the Legislature restored the additional \$3 million for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program, to maximize MRVP funding and access to housing subsidies for this year."

MRVP currently serves 6,873 households across the Commonwealth, and the restoration of the \$3 million in additional funds now can be used to provide long-term, subsidized housing to even more unaccompanied youth, as well as families with children, elders, individuals living with disabilities, and adults experiencing chronic homelessness.

After the vote, State Representative Jim O'Day (D-West Boylston) remarked, "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. I am incredibly delighted that my colleagues in the Massachusetts Legislature showed unanimous and bipartisan support in favor of overriding the Governor's veto of the youth homelessness line item. This \$2 million will be vital in funding housing and support services for youth 24 years of age and under who are unaccompanied and homeless. This vulnerable population needs wraparound support services and safe housing options in order to improve their situations and be a vital part of this Commonwealth's future. Today we took a huge step in that direction, and I am humbled and grateful!"

"I am thrilled by the Legislature's unanimous override of Governor Baker's veto regarding support services for unaccompanied homeless youth," said Senate Majority Leader Harriette L. Chandler (D-Worcester). "The override is a significant win that supports and affirms all the work of the Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, and I thank my colleagues and those who tirelessly advocated for this victory."

"It has been an incredible journey since I was an at-risk unaccompanied homeless youth, and it has felt like an eternity for this specific population to finally have their voices heard. Often enough we are described as the invisible population, the nomads who are simply trying to survive on their own, by any means necessary. Now, those same 'any means' finally

have become our human rights: the right to have a safe place to call home, the right to obtain the services to help heal the pain many of the victimized youth have faced, and the right to have our faith and hope in the Commonwealth restored," said Tina Giarla, Community Organizer/Legislative Advocate at the Coalition.

U.S. Congresswoman Katherine Clark (D-Melrose), a champion for unaccompanied youth and former member of the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, commented, "I applaud our state legislature for standing firm on our commitment to ensure opportunity for every child in the Commonwealth. Thousands of teens in our communities are cut off from their families and are forced to survive alone. They don't know where their next meal will come from, who they can turn to for help, or how they will finish school and get a job. Massachusetts has always fought for our most vulnerable, and I'm proud that the Legislature restored this critical funding for unaccompanied youth."

"I am pleased and relieved that the Legislature has overturned Governor Charlie Baker's disappointing veto of \$2 million in funding to support the creation of housing and wraparound services for homeless young people who are outside the care and custody of a parent or legal guardian," said Senator Jason Lewis (D-Winchester). "The Commonwealth should do all it can to protect this vulnerable population, not balance the budget on the backs of these young people. I thank advocates including the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless for raising the profile of this vital priority, and I look forward to seeing this funding being used to implement a coordinated statewide response to support unaccompanied homeless youth."

"The legislative process to secure funding for the unaccompanied youth homelessness law has been quite a roller coaster ride. The Governor's veto communicated a disheartening message to homeless youth and young adults about the priority he places on supporting them. Now, the unanimous legislative override is inspiring and shows how much the stories of the young adults struggling with homelessness and housing instability have impacted legislators across the entire Commonwealth," added Ayala Livny, a long-time youth service provider and an Advisory Board Member of Y2Y Harvard Square, a new shelter for young adults scheduled to open in Cambridge this November.

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 in both the House and Senate, 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 are thankful that the Legislature shared our sense of urgency to immediately override the youth homelessness and Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program vetoes, as we know that youth and other people who are without homes right now deserved that immediate action to help them secure housing and support services. The Legislature's actions help to affirm that housing is a basic human right," said Turley.

Synthia Kennedy, one of the young adults active in the campaign, cheered the Legislature's actions: "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. With a unanimous vote, it means we now have the solidarity and momentum to get and keep things moving. I can't wait until we can start putting this money to work, and changing lives and the communities we live in. Thank you to everyone for their continued love and support!"

In the year ahead, the Coalition and its partners will work to continue to strengthen and expand access to housing, homelessness prevention resources, income supports, and emergency services for families, unaccompanied youth, and adults who are experiencing homelessness and housing instability. The Coalition also is focused on passage of a bill of rights for people experiencing homelessness (Massachusetts House Bill 1129), and dramatically improving the state's Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children cash assistance program (Massachusetts House Bill 529).

Additional Partners Weigh in to Celebrate the Victories

"The unanimous vote from the House and Senate to override Governor Baker's veto is truly extraordinary. It tells us that our legislators care about young people and their futures. It tells us that young people are important and their voices can create true change." - Sarah Rosenkrantz, Co-Director of Y2Y Harvard Square, Cambridge

"Esther, Hannah, Sophie, Zack, and I are all feeling both very proud and excited after yesterday's legislative victory. When we were looking for a social action project a few years ago, we discovered that there are over 6,000 youth in Massachusetts public high schools who were homeless and without a parent or guardian. That averages to seventeen youth in every city and town in Massachusetts. We knew that we needed to do something to help. 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 issue, so we decided to work together to help those legislators get the bill passed. We have been working for a few years to bring housing and support to unaccompanied youth. The Legislature passing \$2 million to create programs is a great start. We are kids helping kids." - Max Davis, age 13 of Stoneham, who has been leading a youth group at Temple Israel in Boston focused on advocacy towards ending youth homelessness

"The Legislature's bipartisan decision to fund \$2 million for wraparound services and housing for unaccompanied youth in the Commonwealth is to be commended. Having the resources to provide young people the right level of support at the right time is essential for creating a more stable and sustaining community." - Phil Ringwood, Executive Director of DIAL/SELF Youth & Community Services, Greenfield

"ABCD is very grateful for the Legislature's support of homeless youth and young adults. Unfortunately, we see many homeless youth in ABCD's year-round youth activities, including our summer jobs program and our alternative high schools. We can now look forward, thanks to the Legislature, to working with everyone to solve the challenging problems that the youths face." - John Drew, President/CEO for Action for Boston Community Development, Boston

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