



Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Priorities: Working to Prevent and End Homelessness by Increasing Funding for Housing and Homelessness Prevention Resources and Protecting Safety Net Programs

Top Budget Priorities

1. Increase funding for the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, Line Item 7004-9316) and make permanent the Upstream RAFT homelessness prevention initiative to help households pay off rent and mortgage arrearages:

- Increase overall funding to at least \$27 million. This would be \$6 million more than the initial FY'20 funding level from the RAFT line item and the Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund (HPSTF), and \$3.97 million more than the total currently available for RAFT in FY'20. (The December 2019 supplemental budget language increased funding for Upstream RAFT by \$2.03 million, with those funds available to DHCD in FY'20 and FY'21.) The Governor has recommended funding the program at \$21 million for FY'21, with some of the funds once again coming from HPSTF. For increased transparency, we recommend full funding from the state's operating budget.
- Provide no less than \$7 million for Upstream RAFT benefits for households that have fallen behind on rent or mortgage payments, but are not yet in an official eviction or foreclosure process. (See House Bill 1264, An Act to further provide a rental arrearage program.) The current FY'20 Upstream RAFT pilot program has allowed individuals and families to access RAFT funds earlier in a housing crisis, without requiring a summary process summons and complaint (for renters) or a letter of intent to foreclose from the lender (for homeowners).
- Implement clarifying language that says that Upstream RAFT payments can be made for up to 4 months of back rent or back mortgage payments, even if the amount exceeds the cap in effect for Traditional RAFT, and raise the cap for Traditional RAFT (currently \$4,000 per household per year).
- Continue to require that no less than \$3 million be used to serve households under the expanded definition of family, so that elders, people with disabilities, unaccompanied youth, and other households without children can have fair access to RAFT.
- Mandate more detailed tracking and reporting on households applying, approved, denied, funding requests, and funding uses.

2. Adequately fund and protect emergency shelter and service programs for children and families experiencing homelessness and support key provisions in the Emergency Assistance program line item (EA, Line Item 7004-0101) and related line items:

- Provide \$185 million or adequate funding to meet the needs of all eligible families. For FY'20, the initial appropriation is \$178.7 million, with a supplemental budget request from the Governor still pending in the Legislature as of February 24, 2020. The Governor has requested \$184.4 million for FY'21.
- Continue to include language from the FY'20 budget to provide shelter to otherwise eligible families who are at imminent risk of staying in a place not meant for human habitation, and further guidance and oversight to ensure that this language is implemented properly in FY'21.
- Establish funding to create an ombudsperson unit of at least 2 people to have dedicated staff address issues and concerns from families applying for and participating in the EA program. This funding could be included in the DHCD administrative line item (7004-0099) or elsewhere under the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED).
- Continue to allow families to maintain EA eligibility until they reach 200% of the federal poverty guidelines (FPG), instead of only 115% FPG, while also maintaining the over-income grace period, which currently kicks in after a family exceeds the EA income limit for at least 90 days.
- Continue to include FY'20 budget language that the Administration must notify the Legislature at least 90 days before implementing any negative changes to the EA program and language requiring placements of up to 30 days for families that appear eligible but need some more time to get all the requested verifications ("placements pending verification"). Include additional tracking and reporting language to better understand which families are served and which are not served by EA.
- Retain language in the related DHCD administrative line item (7004-0099) to maintain access to in-person applications for families seeking shelter. Language in the FY'20 budget requires DHCD to take applications in the 10 cities and towns where DHCD had staff as of January 1, 2019, and prohibits DHCD from shifting to a remote-access only system, in which families would have to use a phone, computer, or other technology to apply or otherwise forego applying.

3. Address the needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness by increasing funding to \$8 million for housing/wraparound support services under the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) youth and young adult homelessness program (Line Item 4000-0007).

- Increase funding from \$5 million to \$8 million for FY'21. An \$8 million investment would provide deeper funding for the unaccompanied youth homelessness law, M.G.L. Chapter 6A, Sections 16W and 16X, and better serve and partner with youth and young adults age 24 and younger who are without homes. This would be a \$3 million increase over both the FY'20 funding level and the Governor's FY'21 request.
- Funds would be used for housing, wraparound services, and supports for young people experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian, and to continue the work to build up regional Youth Action Boards, comprised of young people with lived experience of homelessness.
- For FY'20, EOHHS is contracting with 10 regional agencies, covering the entire state. The lead regional agencies are Barnstable County Department of Human Services, Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Catholic Social Services, City of Springfield, Community Action Pioneer Valley, Community Teamwork, Father Bill's & MainSpring, L.U.K. Crisis Center, Inc., Lynn Housing

4. Increase funding for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, Line Item 7004-9024).

- Increase funding to \$135 million to maintain existing services and benefits to households currently served by this housing program and to significantly increase the number of low-income households (including families, elders, and persons with disabilities) struggling with housing instability who could be served by MRVP. This would be a \$19 million increase over the FY'20 funding level, and \$15 million above the Governor's proposed FY'21 funding level (directly in the line item and from the Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund).
- Continue to include language to tie rent subsidy levels to current fair market rents (FMR) to make the subsidies more useful to households. Before FY'20, households with tenant-based subsidies and without waivers only could rent units at or below the 2005 FMR for their area.

Additional Key Budget Priorities

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

- **Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program (EAEDC, Line Item 4408-1000):** Provide at least \$76 million or adequate funding based on caseload projections. Increase the asset limit from \$250 to \$2,500 to allow more households to access and maintain EAEDC benefits. Maintain FY'20 budget language to provide full grants to program participants while they are experiencing homelessness, instead of imposing the previous homelessness penalty. Maintain the requirement that the Administration give the Legislature at least 75-days advanced notice before reducing benefits or imposing new limits on program eligibility. The program was serving 19,199 households in January 2020, up from 18,995 households in January 2019. The Governor has recommended funding the program at \$74.1 million for FY'21.
- **Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC, Line Item 4403-2000):** Provide at least \$218.5 million or adequate funding for FY'21. Maintain the elimination of the family cap rule. Maintain the 75-day advance notice language to allow time for the Legislature to take action to prevent eligibility restrictions and benefit reductions, and the \$350/child annual clothing allowance. The program was serving 30,767 households in January 2020, up from 29,359 households in January 2019. For FY'20, the program is funded at \$201.6 million. The Governor has recommended \$218.5 million in funding for FY'21.

6. Increase funding for other important housing programs serving extremely low-income households.

- **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, Line Item 7004-9030):** Increase funding to \$12 million to provide additional housing subsidies to individuals under the age of 60 who are living with disabilities. This would be an increase of \$4 million over both the FY'20 appropriation and the FY'21 recommendation from the Governor of \$8 million.
- **Public Housing Operating Subsidies (Line Item 7004-9005):** Fund state public housing operating subsidies at \$78 million to improve and preserve affordable housing opportunities for an estimated 45,600 households, including extremely low-income families, elders, and persons with disabilities. This would be a \$6 million increase over the FY'20 appropriation of \$72 million. The Governor has recommended funding the program at \$72 million for FY'21. The Coalition also supports \$1 million for public housing reform (line item 7004-9007), to fund capital improvements, support the centralized waiting list, help housing authorities manage unit turnover, increase tenant participation, and promote cross-agency partnerships.
- **Shelter and Services for Unaccompanied Adults (Line Item 7004-0102):** Provide \$58 million for shelter, rehousing resources, and services for unaccompanied adults experiencing homelessness. This would be an increase of \$4.6 million over both the FY'20 appropriation and FY'21 recommendation from the Governor of \$53.4 million.
- **Home and Healthy for Good Program for Individuals (Line Item 7004-0104):** Provide \$3.89 million to serve individuals experiencing chronic homelessness, and continue to provide support to LGBTQ young adults experiencing homelessness. The Governor has recommended level funding the program at \$2.89 million for FY'21.
- **HomeBASE (a.k.a. Massachusetts Short Term Housing Transition Program, Line Item 7004-0108):** Provide at least \$28 million or adequate funding based on caseloads for the HomeBASE program so that DHCD will be able to offer HomeBASE household assistance and moving assistance in FY'21 to help families already in the Emergency Assistance program to exit shelter quicker and to help other families avoid the need to enter shelter ("diversion"). Allow families in compliance with HomeBASE requirements to renew their HomeBASE benefits at the end of the first 12-month period, if otherwise facing a return to homelessness. Continue to include language that allows families who have been terminated from the program to receive benefits again after 12 months, instead of the previous, excessive 24-month bar on receiving further assistance, as well as language to provide access to HomeBASE for families in non-EA shelters, including shelters for domestic violence survivors and for families needing substance use treatment. For the first 6 months of FY'20, 425 families received HomeBASE funds to avoid entering shelter and 1,180 families received HomeBASE funds to exit shelter. The program is funded at \$25.8 million for FY'20. The Governor has recommended funding the program at \$27.2 million for FY'21.

7. Continue to provide funding for the transportation of children and youth experiencing homelessness to offset the costs to cities and towns (ESE Line Item 7035-0008).

- Provide at least level funding of \$11.1 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. The Governor has recommended level funding the program at \$11.1 million for FY'21.

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