



Fiscal Year 2022 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 expand access to upstream homelessness prevention resources.

- Increase funding to at least \$55 million in FY22 from the Legislature to address the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing needs, with additional requests anticipated as the scale of the need becomes clearer. These funds would be combined with federal emergency rental assistance and other relief resources. The Governor has recommended \$18.9 million for RAFT (\$16.3 million in direct funding and \$2.6 million in retained revenues.)
- Raise the annual benefit cap beyond \$10,000, continue to allow eligible households to access funds earlier in a housing or utility crisis, and make permanent the FY21 budget provision that allows eligible households to combine funds from RAFT and the HomeBASE program (see below) if needed. Mandate detailed tracking and reporting on households applying, approved, denied, demographics, 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).

- Provide at least \$196,000,000 or adequate funding, based on the anticipated dramatic increase in family homelessness due to COVID-19 and the ongoing eviction crisis. The Governor has recommended \$195.9 million.
- Continue to include language from the FY21 budget to provide shelter to otherwise eligible families who are at imminent risk of staying in a place not meant for human habitation, and provide further guidance and oversight to ensure that this language is implemented properly in FY22; continue to allow families to maintain EA eligibility until they reach 200% of the federal poverty guidelines (while also maintaining the over-income grace period); maintain the requirement that the Administration give the Legislature 90-days advance notice before reducing benefits or imposing new limits on program eligibility.
- In addition, we are working to establish funding to create an ombudsperson unit under the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development (EOHED) with dedicated staff to address issues and concerns from families applying for and participating in the EA and HomeBASE programs.
- We also are working to 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 FY21 budget requires DHCD to take applications in the 10 cities and towns where DHCD had staff as of January 1, 2020 and to maintain adequate staffing levels, 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 maintaining funding of at least \$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).

- Maintain funding of at least \$8 million for FY22. A sustained \$8 million investment would provide needed ongoing funding for the unaccompanied youth homelessness law, M.G.L. Chapter 6A, Sections 16W and 16X, to better serve and partner with youth and young adults age 24 and younger who are without homes. The Governor has recommended \$5 million in funding.
- Funds would be used for housing, wraparound services, and supports for young people experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian; continuing the work to build up regional Youth Action Boards; and expand access to underserved young people, especially young people who identify as Black, Latinx, indigenous, and/or LGBTQ.

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

- Increase funding to \$160 million to maintain existing services and benefits to 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 could be served by the program. The Governor has recommended \$122.6 million in direct appropriations, which he said would be combined with additional funds from outside the operating budget.
- Decrease the required tenant share of rent to 30% of income from the current range of 30-40% of income.

5. Increase funding and provide easy renewals families participating in the HomeBASE Program (a.k.a.

Massachusetts Short-Term Housing Transition Program, Line Item 7004-0108).

- Provide at least \$45 million to continue payments to households currently enrolled in HomeBASE that need an extension and to enroll new households in both the diversion and shelter exit components of HomeBASE. We have been working for language to allow otherwise eligible households timing out of HomeBASE to receive easy 12-month renewals of HomeBASE benefits to avoid a return to homelessness. The Governor has recommended just under \$26 million for FY22. The Governor did not include language in his budget proposal to provide additional benefits for families timing out of HomeBASE before securing permanent housing.

Additional Key Budget Priorities

6. 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)**: Increase monthly payments, and, at a minimum, maintain the FY21 10% monthly grant increases. Provide adequate funding to increase funding to raise the asset limit from \$250/person to \$2,500 for households of 1 person and \$5,000 for households of 2 or more people, plus adequate funding based on caseload projections; maintain FY21 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 75-days advance notice before reducing benefits or imposing new limits on program eligibility. Based on data from the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) on the number of households denied or terminated from EAEDC, and taking into consideration that some households do not start and/or complete applications due to the low asset limit, we estimate that increasing the asset limit would cost less than \$100,000/year. The Governor has recommended \$83.4 million (with federal grant spending of \$7.9 million) for FY22, and proposed reversing the 10% monthly grant increase instituted by the Legislature for FY21. This much-needed grant increase was just implemented in January 2021, and was the first grant increase for participants since 1988.
- **Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC, Line Item 4403-2000)**: Increase monthly payments, and, at a minimum, maintain the FY21 10% monthly grant increases. Provide adequate funding based on caseload projections; maintain the requirement that the Administration give the Legislature 75-days advance notice before reducing benefits or imposing new limits on program eligibility; maintain the \$350/child annual clothing allowance and increase the standard of need in the month(s) the clothing allowance is issued so as to benefit more low-income households; maintain the elimination of the family cap rule and the removal of the homelessness penalty. The Governor has recommended \$254.6 million for FY22. The Governor would reverse the 10% monthly grant increase instituted by the Legislature for FY21. This much-needed grant increase was just implemented in January 2021, and was the first grant increase for participants since 2000.

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

- **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, Line Item 7004-9030)**: Increase funding beyond the FY21 level of \$12.5 million to provide additional housing subsidies to individuals under the age of 60 who are living with disabilities. The Governor has recommended reducing the funding to \$5.6 million for FY22.
- **Public Housing Operating Subsidies (Line Item 7004-9005)**: Fund state public housing operating subsidies at \$88 million to improve and preserve affordable housing opportunities for extremely low-income families, elders, and persons with disabilities. The Governor has recommended funding the program at \$75 million for FY22. The Coalition also supports maintaining the \$1 million annual investment for public housing reform (line item 7004-9007), so as 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 at least level funding of \$56.4 million for shelter, rehousing resources, and services for unaccompanied adults experiencing homelessness. The Governor has recommended \$53.4 million for FY22.
- **Home and Healthy for Good Program for Individuals (Line Item 7004-0104)**: Provide at least level funding of \$3.89 million and continue to provide support to LGBTQ young adults experiencing homelessness. The Governor has recommended \$2.89 million for FY22.

8. Maintain funding for the transportation of children and youth experiencing homelessness to decrease the costs to cities and towns (ESE Line Item 7035-0008).

- Maintain funding 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 at no less than the FY21 level of \$13.45 million. The Governor has recommended \$11.1 million for FY22.

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley, Associate Director, at 781-595-7570 x17 or kelly@mahomeless.org. Please also go to www.mahomeless.org/advocacy.