



**Fiscal Year 2024 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 \$250 million for RAFT in FY24.
- Remove the notice to quit requirement that DHCD implemented in August 2022, which pushes households deeper into an eviction process before becoming eligible for RAFT assistance.
- Allow eligible households to access up to 12 months of assistance/year (with flexible combinations of assistance with rental arrearages and forward rent), removing the flat cap of \$10,000.
- Streamline the application process and allow renters to access funds even if their landlord is not cooperative with the RAFT application process, as was the practice under the related federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP).
- Continue the existing budget provision that allows eligible families to combine funds from RAFT and the HomeBASE program, if needed.
- Continue to 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 and the related administrative account, Line Item 7004-0099).

- Provide at least \$325 million in FY24, above the estimated FY23 spending level of \$264 million, to serve the increasing number of children and parents, including newly arrived immigrant families, facing homelessness.
- Increase the income eligibility limit from 115% of the Federal Poverty Guidelines (FPG) to 200% FPG for Emergency Assistance applicants, and increase the income limit for families already in EA shelter from 200% FPG to 285% FPG (while also maintaining the over-income grace period).
- Continue to include language from the FY23 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 DHCD properly implements this language in FY24.
- Add new language to ensure that each family approved for Emergency Assistance family shelter is placed in their own room(s), separate from other families, with their own private sleeping area with a door and the ability to turn the lights on and off. While this generally is the case, DHCD has begun placing families in a barracks-style shelter in Devens, in which families are given cots instead of beds and sleep with other families in a shared room, without privacy and adequate public health precautions.
- Maintain the requirement that the Administration give the Legislature 90-days advance notice before reducing benefits or imposing new limits on program eligibility.
- Restore FY22 language 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.
- Retain FY23 language in the related Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) administrative line item (7004-0099) to maintain access to in-person applications for families seeking shelter. Language in the FY23 budget requires DHCD to take applications in the ten cities and towns where DHCD had staff as of January 1, 2022, 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. DHCD still has not fully restored in-person access to the EA application process since the March 2020 COVID-19 state of emergency declaration.

3. Establish a bridge subsidy program for older adults facing housing instability while awaiting longer term housing supports.

- Provide \$10 million in FY24 to create bridge subsidies for up to 1,000 older adults facing housing instability to allow them to remain in place while they await approval for state-funded public housing or a subsidy through the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program.
- Low-income older adults participating in the bridge subsidy program would pay 30% of their income towards rent, with the bridge subsidy making up the difference in the total rent, up to 110% of the fair market rent.

- The bridge subsidy program would be administered by the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD).

4. Address the needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness by increasing funding to at least \$12 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 to at least \$12 million for FY23, up from \$9.5 million in FY22. A \$12 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 aged twenty-four and younger who are without homes.
- Funds would be available for EOHHS to use flexibly for housing, wraparound services, educational resources, and supports for young people experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian; continuing the work to build up regional Youth Action Boards; and expanding access to underserved young people, especially young people who identify as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and/or LGBTQ+.

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

- Increase funding to \$250 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 served by the program.
- Maintain language that puts the required tenant share of rent at 30% of income, instead of the previous range of 30-40% of income.

6. Increase funding and provide easy renewals for families participating in the HomeBASE Program (a.k.a. Massachusetts Short-Term Housing Transition Program, Line Item 7004-0108).

- Provide at least \$60 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.
- Continue FY23 language that allow eligible families to receive at least two years of HomeBASE benefits, with additional language to explicitly allow families to further extend HomeBASE in twelve-month increments to avoid a return to homelessness.
- Increase HomeBASE payments from \$20,000 over two years to \$30,000 over two years plus \$15,000 for each additional year, with additional flexibility for DHCD to address the needs of larger families and families in higher cost areas.
- Include clear language to lift the income eligibility and asset limits for families once enroll in HomeBASE to allow families to maximize their income.
- Maintain FY23 language to require DHCD to provide the Legislature 90 days advance notice before reducing eligibility or benefits.
- Allow households to maximize resources from RAFT, ERAP, and HomeBASE programs.
- Include prior appropriation continued (PAC) language to carry over any unspent FY23 funds into FY24.

Additional Key Budget Priorities

7. 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 by 20% in FY24, building on the FY21–FY23 monthly grant increases; maintain FY23 budget language to provide full grants to program participants while they are experiencing homelessness, instead of imposing the pre-FY21 homelessness penalty; and maintain the requirement that the Administration give the Legislature 75-days advance notice before reducing benefits or imposing new limits on program eligibility. We also request an Outside Section that would increase grants by 20% each year until they reach half of the federal poverty level.
- **Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC, Line Item 4403-2000)**: Increase monthly payments by 20% in FY24, building on the FY21–FY23 monthly grant increases; provide adequate funding to increase grants 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 to benefit more low-income households; and maintain the elimination of the family cap rule and the removal of the homelessness penalty. We also request an Outside Section that would increase grants by 20% each year until they reach half of the federal poverty level.

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

- **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, Line Item 7004-9030)**: Increase funding to \$26 million in FY24 to provide additional housing subsidies to individuals under the age of sixty who are living with disabilities.
- **Public Housing Operating Subsidies (Line Item 7004-9005)**: Increase funding to \$184 million for state public housing operating subsidies in FY24 to improve and preserve affordable housing opportunities for an estimated 45,600 households, including extremely low-income families, elders, and persons with disabilities, and to serve additional households. The Coalition also supports increasing the funding for public housing reform (line item 7004-9007) to \$7.7 million to fund capital improvements, support the maintenance and improvement of 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 \$110 million for shelter, rehousing resources, and services for unaccompanied adults experiencing homelessness.
- **Home and Healthy for Good Program for Individuals (Line Item 7004-0104)**: Provide at least \$8.39 million for HHG in FY24 and continue to provide dedicated support to LGBTQ+ young adults experiencing homelessness.

9. Provide \$7 million to establish an access to counsel program for low-income renters and homeowners in the eviction process.

- Establish an access to counsel program for low-income tenants facing eviction and certain low-income owner-occupants of 1 to 3-family homes seeking possession of a unit in their only home.
- Eligible households would receive full legal representation in court or through their administrative proceedings.
- As noted by the Access to Counsel Coalition, only 11.5% of tenants have legal representation in housing court, as compared to 86% of landlords, leading to housing loss and poorer outcomes for tenants.

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

- Increase 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 above the FY23 level of almost \$23 million.

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.

- Updated March 1, 2023 (b)