



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

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

June 9, 2023

Chairperson Michael Rodrigues
Vice Chairperson Cindy Friedman
Ranking Minority Member Patrick O'Connor

Chairperson Aaron Michlewitz
Vice Chairperson Ann-Margaret Ferrante
Ranking Minority Member Todd Smola

Re: Please do all you can to advance the strongest possible FY24 budget on housing stability, homelessness prevention, and benefits issues

Dear Esteemed Members of the FY24 Budget Conference Committee:

We respectfully ask you to please join the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless in supporting the strongest possible FY24 budget that centers the needs of children, youth, and adults experiencing homelessness, housing instability, and poverty. With your leadership, the FY24 budget can be a vehicle to take concrete, positive action to promote housing stability, equity, dignity, and hope.

Please do all you can to make sure that the final FY24 budget incorporates key language and maximum funding, drawing on the strengths of both the House and Senate proposals.

- **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT, Line Item 7004-9316):**
 - **Funding request:** At least match the higher Senate funding level of \$195,000,000 in direct appropriations.
 - **Language requests:** We ask the Conference Committee and the full Legislature to take action to restore upstream access to RAFT by prohibiting the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (HLC) from requiring a notice to quit, a summary process summons and complaint, or utility shut-off notice before families and individuals can access RAFT. While this upstream language was not in the FY24 House or Senate proposals, we are reiterating our request to take swift action given the negative impacts on families and individuals to have at least a notice to quit before being eligible to access resources for back rent since the Department of Housing and Community Development implemented the requirement in August 2022. We also ask the committee to reconsider the planned reduction of RAFT benefits from \$10,000/year to \$7,000/year, which will negatively impact households across the Commonwealth, especially families and individuals in higher cost areas, larger households, and families and individuals with increased expenses related to disabilities and health concerns.

- **Chapter 257 Eviction Protections (Outside Section 28 of the House Budget/Outside Section 35 of the Senate Budget):**
 - **Language requests:** We are extremely grateful to both the House and Senate for taking steps to restore critical Chapter 257 eviction protections, which expired on March 31st. We ask the Conference Committee to adopt the House's overarching Chapter 257 restoration language, which would not require the court to determine that a tenant filed their rental assistance application in good faith. We believe that such a requirement (as adopted by the Senate) would inject unnecessary subjectivity

and delays into the process. We also ask the committee to adopt Senate language that would provide a pathway to eviction record sealing for certain tenants who have received Chapter 257 eviction protections.

- **Emergency Assistance family shelter and services (EA, Line Item 7004-0101):**
 - **Funding request:** Include at least \$324,051,902, as recommended by both the House and Senate.
 - **Language requests:** Adopt the Senate's more extensive tracking and reporting language, as well as related Senate language from Outside Section 6 on electronic filing and public posting of reports.

- **Housing and Services for Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness (Line Item 4000-0007):**
 - **Funding request:** Include higher Senate funding level of \$11,000,000.

- **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, Line Item 7004-9024):**
 - **Funding request:** Include higher Senate funding level of \$179,597,023, with language to carry over unspent FY23 funds.
 - **Language request:** Adopt Senate language to shift the payment standard to 110% of the small-area fair market rent (SAFMR).

- **HomeBASE Rehousing Program for Children and Families (Line Item 7004-0108):**
 - **Funding request:** Include higher House funding level of \$42,070,445.
 - **Language requests:** Adopt House language that would increase the HomeBASE cap to \$30,000 over 24 months, allow eligible families to access up to \$15,000 in subsequent years, eliminate the income eligibility limits for families once they are enrolled in HomeBASE, and allow families to maximize their incomes without fear of the cliff effect. Adopt Senate language that would direct HLC to use at least \$10 million to flexibly support families that need more funding beyond the general cap to address housing crises.

- **Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children Program (EAEDC, Line Item 4408-1000):**
 - **Funding request:** Include higher Senate funding level of \$201,409,929.
 - **Language request:** Adopt Senate language to implement a 10% grant increase. We encourage the Conference Committee to modify the language to implement the grant increase at the start of the fiscal year, instead of April 2024.

- **Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Grant Payments (TAFDC, Line Item 4403-2000):**
 - **Funding request:** Include higher Senate funding level of \$444,655,605.
 - **Language request:** Adopt Senate language to implement a 10% grant increase. We encourage the Conference Committee to modify the language to implement the grant increase at the start of the fiscal year, instead of April 2024.

- **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, Line Item 7004-9030):**
 - **Funding request:** Include higher Senate funding level of \$16,863,078, with language to carry over unspent FY23 funds (estimated to be \$9.1 million).

- **Subsidies to Public Housing Authorities (Line Item 7004-9005):**
 - **Funding request:** Include higher Senate funding level of \$107,000,000.

- **Shelter and Services for Adults Experiencing Homelessness (Line Item 7004-0102):**
 - **Funding request:** Include at least \$110,752,398, as recommended by both the House and Senate (before additional earmarks were adopted).

- **Home and Healthy for Good Program (Line Item 7004-0104):**
 - **Funding request:** Include higher House funding level of \$8,390,000.
- **Transportation for Students Experiencing Homelessness (Line Item 7035-0008):**
 - **Funding request:** Include \$28,671,815, as recommended by both the House and Senate.
- **Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities Administrative Account (Line Item 7004-0099):**
 - **Language requests:** Adopt the Senate's more detailed version of language on data collection related to access to Emergency Assistance (EA) applications, as well as related Senate language from Outside Section 6 on electronic filing and public posting of reports.

Our full list of recommendations can be found here: <https://tinyurl.com/mchFY24>.

Your active support for these investments and initiatives will be critical in the days and weeks ahead as you finalize the budget.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and leadership. We appreciate your work to address widespread inequities and to ensure that everyone has a safe, affordable, and healthy place to call home. Please do not hesitate to reach out with any questions.

With gratitude and hope,



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cc: Senate President Karen Spilka and Speaker Ronald Mariano