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MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

April 23, 2012

Take Action Now! Help Support Housing, Homelessness, and Safety Net Programs During This Week's Budget Debate!

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Dear Robyn,

Today marks the first day of the House budget debate! The Massachusetts House of Representatives will spend this week debating the proposed \$32.3 billion budget; this is just one of many steps in developing the final state budget for the fiscal year that will begin on July 1st.

After the [House Ways and Means budget proposal](#) was released on April 11th, the Coalition released [our analysis](#). While the budget includes several positive proposals--such as increased funding for critically needed long-term housing and homelessness prevention programs and new funding for the transportation of students experiencing homelessness-- it also includes proposals that are very damaging to families and individuals experiencing homelessness and/or living in poverty.

Thankfully, we have many allies in the Legislature who are as committed as we are to ensuring that benefits and support systems are available to all of those in need. Several of our legislative allies have filed amendments in hopes of creating a final House budget that best serves the people who are at risk or experiencing homelessness here in the Commonwealth.

The section below contains information on the amendments we support, as well as several amendments that we oppose. **We need you to take action today on these amendments** in order to ensure that the House approves a budget that doesn't leave anyone out on the streets or without access to life's necessities.

Please call, email, or visit your State Representative and let her or him know that you expect their vote to be one that benefits those who are most in need. Visit www.wheredoivotema.com to find your legislator and her or his contact information.

To learn more about the Coalition's FY'13 budget priorities, please [click here](#). Please contact me if you have any questions or need more information.

--Kelly Turley
Director of Legislative Advocacy
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Amendments to the House Ways and Means Committee's FY'13 Budget Recommendations for Housing, Shelter, Homelessness Prevention, and Cash Assistance Programs

To access the House Ways and Means Committee's complete budget recommendations, please [click here](#).

To see the full list of amendments filed and any actions taken, please [click here](#).

Amendments Pertaining to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Line Items

1. Emergency Assistance: Ask your Representative to SUPPORT Amendment #603!

The Emergency Assistance Family Shelter and Services Program in the House Ways and Means budget includes language that would restrict shelter only to those who are risk of domestic violence in their current housing situation, lost their home due to fire, flood, or natural disaster; are homeless due to a no-fault eviction; or who are in living situations where their health and safety are at serious risk.

In addition, House Ways and Means includes a strict 8-month time limit for shelter on families. This time limit could be imposed whether or not a family has found safe alternative housing.

SUPPORT Amendment #603:

To rectify this dangerous language, Representatives Alice Wolf and Byron Rushing [filed an amendment](#) that:

- o Removes the 8-month time limit.
- o Adds language to expand the four named categories to include "families who do not have access to any feasible alternative housing and are staying in or are at imminent risk of having to stay in a situation not meant for human habitation, such as a car, emergency room, or on the streets."
- o Prohibits DHCD from moving forward with negative eligibility changes before 1/1/13, so as to allow time to see the impact of any increased prevention and housing resources (such as RAFT and MRVP) on demand for shelter.

2. Short-term Housing Programs: Ask Your Representative to SUPPORT Amendment #s 617 and 717!

The HomeBASE program provides short-term transitional subsidies, diversion, and moving assistance for certain EA-eligible families. The House budget proposed funding the program at \$83.4 million.

SUPPORT Amendment #617:

Representative Carl Sciortino [filed an amendment](#) to the DHCD administrative line item that clarifies language that requires the Department to ensure that households in HomeBASE and other short-term subsidy programs retain any existing priorities for long-term affordable housing resources.

SUPPORT Amendment #717:

Representative Gloria Fox [filed an amendment](#) to increase funding for HomeBASE to \$94.2 million.

3. Furniture Bank Programs: Ask Your Representative to SUPPORT Amendment #275.

The Coalition is working with other furniture bank programs around the state to secure \$200,000 in funding to help support a statewide network of furniture banks to assist low-income households transitioning from homelessness into housing.

SUPPORT Amendment #275

Because the funding for these programs was not included in the House budget, Representative O'Day [filed an amendment](#) to insert the funding into the budget.

4. MRVP: Ask your Representative to SUPPORT Amendment #715 and to OPPOSE Amendments #414 and #660!

The House budget proposes positive language that targets the 923 vouchers to be created for families living in motels through the EA program as of 1/1/12. Targeting MRVP subsidies to families in motels (and shelters) will provide much needed exit strategies for families in need of long-term affordable housing options.

Unfortunately, two proposed amendments would do away with this crucial language.

OPPOSE Amendments 414 and 660:

Both [Amendment 414](#) and [Amendment 660](#) would strike this targeting language and re-insert language from the Governor's budget.

SUPPORT Amendment 715:

Representative Donato [sponsored an amendment](#) that positively impacts families by allowing vouchers to be targeted to families who are living in motels and shelters, as opposed to allowing vouchers only to be used by families living in motels. This proposal increases the ability of families in the EA program to access stable housing.

5. RAFT: Ask your Representative to SUPPORT Amendment #795!

Representative Reinstein [filed an amendment](#) that would provide community action agencies with \$3.8 million to provide services such as housing search and stabilization and eviction prevention. This funding will give community agencies greater access to the tools they need to prevent homelessness amongst families.

6. Public Housing: Ask your Representative to SUPPORT Amendment #s 540 and 822!

Representative Honan filed two amendments, #540 and #822 that would increase funding for public housing subsidies from \$62.5 million to \$66.5 million, allowing public housing authorities to continue to provide service to as many people as possible.

Amendments Pertaining to the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) Line Items

1. TAFDC: Ask your Representative to SUPPORT Amendment #664!

The House budget proposal eliminates or reduces critical programs in the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children grants that allow families to get to work or school, provide their children with clothes, and afford their rent.

Please click here for a [TAFDC amendment fact sheet](#).

Support Amendment #664:

Representative Kay Khan [sponsored an amendment](#) that:

- Restores a \$40/month rent allowance that the House Ways and Means budget eliminated.
- Provides for a \$40/month transportation allowance for work-related activities that was included in the Governor's budget but not the HWM budget.
- Restores the children's clothing allowance to \$150/child /year, which the HWM budget reduced to \$75/child.

2. Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) Card Use: SUPPORT Amendment #s 842, 502, and 635 and OPPOSE Amendment #s 7 and 538.

Outside Section 35 of the HWM budget is related to the current debate about the use of Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards by participants in DTA's cash assistance and food stamps programs.

Section 35 is extremely restrictive and punitive. Among other unreasonable restrictions, Section 35 bars Transitional Assistance recipients from using their benefits to pay for a haircut for their child or to purchase items such as deodorant, shampoo, and toothpaste; violating Section 35 means recipients can be subjected to jail time, fines, and/or loss of benefits.

Click [here for an amendment fact sheet on EBT use](#).

Support Amendment #842:

Representative Conroy filed an amendment that:

- Strikes out Section 35.
- Directs the Inspector General to file a report on the results of a data match to identify possible transitional assistance fraud, as recommended by the EBT Commission created by the Legislature.
- Directs the auditor to conduct an audit to determine if the EBT system for cash assistance benefits presents opportunities for fraud and the logistical and viability of pursuing additional anti-fraud efforts.

SUPPORT Amendment # 502:

Filed by Representative Rushing, [Amendment #502](#):

- Strikes out Section 35.
- Replaces Section 35 with language included in the EBT Commission report prohibiting transitional assistance benefits from being used at two types of establishments to comply with new federal law (casinos, adult oriented entertainment) as well as nail salons, health spas and other business in addition to the current ban on using benefits for alcohol, tobacco or lottery tickets.
- Disqualifies recipients from assistance if they use their benefits to make a prohibited purchase.

SUPPORT Amendment #635

Representative Toomey [sponsored an amendment](#) that makes important edits to Section 35 to ensure that transitional assistance recipients can pay their rent and buy basic necessities.

OPPOSE Amendments #7 and #538, both of which will severely restrict EBT use.

Take Action!

Please contact your State Representative to ask her/him to co-sponsor the amendments listed above. Encourage your

Representative to support housing, homelessness prevention, and safety net programs and protect the rights of the Commonwealth's lowest income residents throughout the budget debate.

State Representatives can be reached through the State House switchboard: 617-722-2000, or directly through the numbers listed here: [Directory of Representatives](#).

To search for your elected officials based on your address, please [click here](#).

We hope you will join us as the Coalition continues to push for the protection of housing and homelessness programs for FY'13. We will keep you informed of the progress as the state's budget makes it way through the next stages in the months ahead.

For more information, please contact [Kelly Turley](#) at 781-595-7570 x17.

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Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless



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