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**MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS**

Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

May 15, 2015

## **Looking Ahead to Fiscal Year 2016: The Senate Amendments Have Been Filed. Now Help Advocate for Their Inclusion in the Final Senate Budget!**

**Read Below and Take Action to Support Key Amendments for Housing,  
Homelessness, and Safety Net Programs!**

### **Quick Links**

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housing + services for youth  
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### **Greetings!**

Yesterday at 5 p.m. was the deadline for State Senators to file amendments to the \$38.01 billion [Senate Ways and Means budget](#). Senators filed [942 amendments](#), which will be taken up during the Senate budget debate, scheduled to begin next Tuesday. **Please take action right away to encourage your Senator to co-sponsor and actively support key amendments on programs such as Emergency Assistance, HomeBASE, Residential Assistance for Families in Transition, and the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program.** Until amendments are taken up on the floor, Senators can sign on as co-sponsors to key amendments.

[Click here](#) for more information on the Senate Ways and Means budget proposals for housing, shelter, homelessness prevention, and cash assistance programs, and **see below for information on relevant amendments from the full Senate.**

As we get closer and closer to the final FY'16 budget, your voice remains critical to helping to protect housing, homelessness, and safety net programs for families, individuals, and youth.

To learn more about the Coalition's FY'16 budget priorities, please [click here](#).

Thank you for advocating with us to protect and promote investment in these programs!

-Kelly

Kelly Turley  
Director of Legislative Advocacy

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## Take Action!

Please take a few minutes to ask [your State Senator](#) to co-sponsor and actively support key amendments described below, in particular Amendments #760, 404, 422, 446, 356, 467, and 492. Thank your Senator for prioritizing housing, homelessness, and benefits issues in the Senate version of the budget thus far and ask her/him to continue to actively do so during next week's debate.

Senators can be reached via the State House switchboard (617-722-2000) or directly through the links listed [here](#).

Please also thank Senate leadership for their work to make such strong investments in housing, homelessness, and benefits programs in the Senate Ways and Means version of the budget. Their contact information is available through the links below.

- [Senator Stan Rosenberg](#), Senate President
- [Senator Harriette Chandler](#), Senate Majority Leader
- [Senator Karen Spilka](#), Chair of Senate Ways and Means
- [Senator Sal DiDomenico](#), Vice Chair of SWM
- [Senator Pat Jehlen](#), Assistant Vice Chair of SWM

## Senate FY'16 Budget: SWM Recommendations for Housing, Shelter, Homelessness Prevention, and Cash Assistance Programs and Senate Amendments

To access SWM's complete budget recommendations, please go to [SWM FY'16 budget recommendations](#).

To read SWM Chair Senator Karen Spilka's "Lifting All Families" budget message, [click here](#).

To access the full list of Senate amendments, [click here](#).

## A Quick Look at Selected Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Line Items

1. The Senate Ways and Means budget would fund the **Emergency Assistance family shelter and services program (EA, line item 7004-0101)** at \$154.9 million for FY'16. We are very pleased to report that the SWM budget includes critical language that would require DHCD to provide shelter to otherwise eligible families who are at imminent risk of staying in places not meant for human habitation:

" provided further, however, that a family who has no other feasible accommodation on the date of application for assistance and who would otherwise spend the night in a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping

accommodation for human beings, including but not limited to a car, park, abandoned building, medical facility, bus or train station, airport or camping ground, shall be eligible for assistance"

SWM also would preserve existing access to Emergency Assistance by rejecting the Governor's proposed elimination of two sub-categories of eligibility that now cover ~33% of families in shelter.

Senate Ways and Means expanded the tracking and reporting requirements to direct DHCD to report on families denied access to EA and the reasons for denial, and would require 90 days advanced notice before DHCD could implement any negative eligibility or benefits changes to the program.

We are grateful for the SWM recommendation to include this powerful language to protect families with no other feasible accommodations. In the weeks ahead, we will focus our advocacy on maintaining this Senate language in the Conference Committee budget.

**Amendment Status:** Senator Joan Lovely has filed [Amendment #416](#) to ensure that families staying in motels/hotels as part of the EA program have access to the same services and resources as other guests of those motels/hotels whose stay is not being paid for by DHCD.

Senator Jason Lewis has filed [Amendment #404](#) to prohibit the imposition of new shelter eligibility restrictions in FY'16.

2. The Senate Ways and Means budget would decrease funding for the **HomeBASE program (line item 7004-0108)** from \$29 million in FY'15 (including the mid-year supplemental appropriation) to \$26.2 million, but continue to provide shallow rental subsidies, diversion, and moving assistance for certain EA-eligible families. The SWM proposal would allow families to receive up to \$8,000 in HomeBASE funds, up from the current limit of \$6,000 per household. (During FY'15, some families have been able to receive up to \$8,000 total, however, through a combination of \$6,000 in HomeBASE funds plus \$2,000 from the Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund.)

SWM improves upon the current draconian 24-month bar on families who are terminated from the program from re-accessing HomeBASE and Emergency Assistance by reducing that bar to 18 months.

**Amendment Status:** Senator Barbara L'Italien has filed [Amendment #760](#) at the request of the Coalition and Massachusetts Law Reform Institute that would direct DHCD to waive the 18-month bar for families who are in need of additional HomeBASE or shelter resources, based on a family's circumstances and if the application of the bar would not be "fair, just, and equitable". See the amendment fact sheet [here](#).

Senator Joan Lovely has filed [Amendment #422](#) to increase HomeBASE funding to \$33 million and to include language to expand access to families in domestic violence and substance abuse treatment shelters.

3. The Senate Ways and Means budget would increase funding for

the line item that provides funding for **shelter and services for unaccompanied individuals at-risk and experiencing homelessness** (line item 7004-0102) to \$44.7 million, up from the FY'15 funding level of \$42.9 million.

**Amendment Status:** Senator Linda Dorcena Forry has filed [Amendment #431](#) to further increase funding for this line item up to \$48.5 million.

4. The Senate Ways and Means budget would fund the **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, line item 7004-9024)** at \$85.4 million, a \$20.4 million increase from the FY'15 direct allocation. (This is a sizable increase, although less than the House's recommended level of \$90.9 million, which expressly authorized the carryover of some unspent funds from FY'15.) Like the House, SWM also removed language included in the FY'15 budget that prohibited DHCD from targeting new subsidies to families living in shelters.

**Amendment Status:** Senator Linda Dorcena Forry has filed [Amendment #446](#) to carry over unspent funds from FY'15 into FY'16 for MRVP ("prior appropriation continued" language).

5. The Senate Ways and Means budget would provide increased funding for the **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, line item 7004-9316)** at \$12 million. This matches the House's recommendation.

**Amendment Status:** Senator Ken Donnelly has filed [Amendment #356](#) to increase RAFT funding to \$13 million.

6. The Senate Ways and Means budget would provide \$64 million in funding for **public housing authority operating subsidies (line item 7004-9005)**, a \$100,000 decrease from the FY'15 level. This is \$500,000 less than the final FY'16 House recommendation.

**Amendment Status:** Senator Jamie Eldridge has filed [Amendment #471](#) to increase state-funded public housing operating subsidy funding by \$1 million, up to \$65 million.

7. The Senate Ways and Means budget would fund the **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, line item 7004-9030)** at \$4.55 million, a \$1 million increase over FY'15 funding and the House's recommended funding level.

**Amendment Status:** Senator Jamie Eldridge has filed [Amendment #467](#) to increase AHVP funding by an additional \$500,000 to \$5.05 million.

8. The Senate Ways and Means budget would fund the **Home and Healthy for Good Program (line item 7004-0104)** at \$1.6 million. This program employs a Housing First model and historically has provided housing and services to unaccompanied adults who have experienced chronic homelessness. SWM removed earmark language to continue a pilot program that serves lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) unaccompanied youth and young adults. In

FY'15, that pilot is funded at no less than \$200,000.

**Amendment Status:** Senator Thomas Kennedy has filed [Amendment #492](#) to restore the language and \$200,000 in funding for the LGBT young adult pilot program.

## **A Quick Look at Selected Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) Line Items**

1. We are thrilled to announce that Senate Ways and Means included a new **line item, 4000-0007, with recommended funding of \$2 million to provide housing and wraparound services to unaccompanied youth and young adults through age 24 who are experiencing homelessness.** The \$2 million would be used to implement the new unaccompanied youth homelessness law, Chapter 450 of the Acts of 2014 and to build upon the ongoing work of the Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. The House only included \$150,000 for the work of the Commission.

**Amendment Status:** We are grateful for the SWM recommendation to create this new line item, and are not seeking any amendments. In the weeks ahead, we will focus our advocacy on maintaining this Senate language/funding in the Conference Committee budget.

2. The Senate Ways and Means budget would decrease funding for the Department of Transitional Assistance's **Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program (EAEDC, line item 4408-1000)**, to \$78.9 million due to caseload decreases. For FY'15, the program is funded at \$85.5 million. (As of March 2015, there were 21,431 households served by EAEDC, a decrease in caseload over last year's figures.)

SWM included 90-day advance notice language that would require the Administration to notify the Legislature before implementing eligibility restrictions or benefit cuts, up from the current 60-day requirement.

**Amendment Status:** We are not seeking any amendments to this line item, but will continue to push for major improvements to EAEDC via House Bill 529, An Act Relative to Assisting Elders and People with Disabilities in the Commonwealth. To participate in our online action to legislators in support of this bill, please [click here](#).

3. The Senate Ways and Means budget would decrease funding for the Department of Transitional Assistance's **Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children grants (TAFDC, line item 4403-2000)** to \$231.8 million for FY'16, from the FY'15 level of \$255.7 million, due to caseload decreases. (As of March 2015, there were 38,114 households served by TAFDC. For more DTA program data, see their [April 2015 Facts and Figures report](#).)

The SWM budget would increase the annual clothing allowance to \$200/child (up from the current \$150/child), and would maintain the \$40/month rental allowance for families living in private market apartments.

In addition, SWM included 90-day advance notice language in this line item (as in EAEDC) that would require the Administration to notify the Legislature before implementing eligibility restrictions or benefit cuts.

**Amendment Status:** We are grateful for the SWM recommendations, in particular for the clothing allowance increase, and we are not seeking any amendments.

4. The Senate Ways and Means budget would set aside \$7 million for a **homelessness prevention reserve fund at EOHHS** to serve families who are experiencing homelessness or in danger of experiencing homelessness. The line item, **1599-0017**, also would require EOHHS to report to House and Senate Ways and Means on the families served, families denied, and other measures. The funds could be used for prevention, diversion, or stabilization, building upon the End Family Homelessness Reserve Fund idea recommended by Governor Baker in his budget proposal.

**Amendment Status:** Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz has filed [Amendment #849](#) to expand access to reserve fund services to families in certain non-EA programs, through line items 7004-0108, 7004-3036, 7004-9316 and to families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness through programs within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services."

### **A Quick Look at the Education Transportation Line Item**

The SWM budget would provide \$7.35 million for reimbursements to cities and towns for costs associated with **transporting students experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education line item 7035-0008)**. This would be level funding with the FY'15 appropriation, and a decrease of \$1 million from the House's recommended FY'16 spending level.

**Amendment Status:** Senator Joan Lovely has filed [Amendment #569](#) to increase McKinney-Vento transportation funding by \$1 million, to bring the funding up to \$8.35 million.

Senator Jamie Eldridge has filed [Amendment #586](#) to increase McKinney-Vento transportation funding even further, to \$20.82 million.

We hope you will join us as the Coalition continues to push for the protection of housing and homelessness programs for FY'16. We will keep you informed of the progress as the state's budget makes its way through the next stages in the weeks ahead.

**For more information, please contact Kelly Turley at [kelly@mahomeless.org](mailto:kelly@mahomeless.org) or 781-595-7570 x17.**

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Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless

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