



# FY'20 Budget Testimony Day

## #BudgetToEndHomelessness



### Emergency Assistance Family Homelessness Line Item Talking Points

**The primary request:** We are asking the Legislature to include language and funding in the Emergency Assistance line item (EA, 7004-0101) for FY'20 to provide shelter to children and families who are at “imminent risk of staying in a place not meant for human habitation”. Under current EA regulations, *otherwise eligible* families that are within 24 hours of staying in places not meant for human habitation can be turned away from shelter, even if the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) believes that the family will be forced to stay in a car, emergency room, transit station, or other place unfit for human habitation.

#### Why now?

- This change only would apply to otherwise eligible families: families with children under the age of 21 that have incomes below 115% of the federal poverty guidelines AND that have not been in shelter in the past year AND that have no feasible alternative housing AND did not lose their previous housing through a disqualifying eviction (such as non-payment of rent in a subsidized unit), etc. The eligibility standards are very strict.
- Massachusetts can and must do better for our most vulnerable families. Based on the state’s own data, 645 families with children had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places in FY’18 (July 2017 through June 2018) *before* they were found eligible for emergency shelter through the state’s Emergency Assistance (EA) program (17% of all families approved).
- In the first eight months of FY’19 (July-December), another 363 families were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances (16% of all families approved, for an average of 45 families/month).
- Since the policy was implemented in late 2012, almost 3,700 (3,690) families were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances.
- These numbers do not include additional families who have stayed in unsafe places and never were approved for shelter.
- While this policy is allowed to continue, families are forced to take unnecessary risks staying in unsafe locations and situations.
- Doctors from both Boston Children’s Hospital and Boston Medical Center have written articles in peer-reviewed medical journals this past year about the surge of families seeking shelter in emergency departments after the policy changed in

2012. Besides the fact that emergency departments are inappropriate places for children and families to sleep:

- Emergency departments are not equipped to provide shelter
- Medical providers should be allowed to focus on patients with medical needs
- One night in an emergency department for a family experiencing homelessness costs the state more than 4 times as much as it would to provide that same family with an EA shelter placement for the night.
- This policy is inconsistent with the Administration's claim that Massachusetts is a right-to-shelter state for families.

#### **Additional EA budget requests:**

- Provide \$180 million or adequate funding to meet the needs of all eligible families. For FY'19, the anticipated spending level is at least \$175.2 million, including a pending request for \$19.3 million in supplemental funds. The Governor has requested \$177.9 million for FY'20.
- Allow families to maintain EA eligibility until they reach 200% of the federal poverty guidelines (FPG), instead of only 115% FPG, while also maintaining the over-income grace period, which currently kicks in after a family exceeds the EA income limit for at least 90 days.
- Continue to include FY'19 budget language that the Administration must notify the Legislature at least 90 days before implementing any negative changes to the EA program and language requiring placements of up to 30 days for families that appear eligible but need some more time to get all the requested verifications ("placements pending verification"). Include additional tracking and reporting language to better understand which families are served and which are not served by the program.
- Maintain language in the related DHCD administrative line item (7004-0099) to maintain access to in-person applications for families seeking shelter. Language in the FY'19 budget requires DHCD to take applications in the 10 cities and towns where DHCD had staff as of January 1, 2018, 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 forego applying. Such language this year has meant that DHCD had to begin once again taking in-person applications from families in Lowell.

### **#BudgetToEndHomelessness**

For more information, visit <http://mahomeless.org/advocacy> or contact Kelly Turley ([kelly@mahomeless.org](mailto:kelly@mahomeless.org)), James Saucedo ([james@mahomeless.org](mailto:james@mahomeless.org)), or Molly Schulman ([molly@mahomeless.org](mailto:molly@mahomeless.org)).