



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

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

## Fiscal Year 2017 Budget Priorities: Working to Prevent and End Homelessness by Increasing Funding for Housing and Protecting Safety Net Programs

Updated 5-6-16

1. **Adequately fund and protect emergency service programs for families and individuals experiencing homelessness and support key line item provisions.**
  - **Emergency Assistance Family Shelter and Services (EA, Line Item 7004-0101):**
    - Provide at least \$191 million, matching the estimated FY'16 spending level.
    - Include language to provide shelter to families who are at "imminent risk of staying in a place not meant for human habitation". Under current EA regulations, otherwise eligible families who are within 24 hours of staying in places not meant for human habitation can be turned away from shelter, even if DHCD believes that the family will be forced to stay in a car, emergency room, or transit station. Massachusetts can and must do better for its most vulnerable families. **Between July 1, 2014 and June 30, 2015 (all of FY'15), 494 families with children were approved for EA only after first staying in a place not meant for human habitation. For the first nine months of FY'16, 488 families first stayed in places not meant for human habitation before being approved for shelter (an average of 54 families/month).**
    - Continue to include long-standing language that the Administration must notify the Legislature at least 60 days before implementing any negative changes to the EA program and language requiring placements of up to 30 days for families who 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.
  - **HomeBASE (a.k.a. Massachusetts Short Term Housing Transition Program, Line Item 7004-0108):**
    - Provide at least \$39.2 million for the HomeBASE program so that DHCD is able to offer HomeBASE household assistance and moving assistance in FY'17, to help families already in the EA program to exit shelter quicker, and to help other families avoid the need to enter shelter ("diversion").
    - Allow families who are in compliance with HomeBASE requirements to renew their HomeBASE benefits at the end of the first 12 month period, if otherwise facing a return to homelessness. Allow families who have been terminated from the program to apply for benefits again after 12 months, instead of the current, excessive 24-month bar on receiving further assistance.
    - Expand access to HomeBASE to families in non-Emergency Assistance shelters, including shelters for domestic violence survivors and for families needing substance abuse treatment.
    - Between July 1<sup>st</sup> and November 30, 2015, 1,803 families were served by HomeBASE. This includes 611 families who were diverted from having to enter shelter (HomeBASE "front door diversion") and 1,171 families who were able to exit shelter and motel placements through the use of HomeBASE household assistance.
  - **Homelessness Assistance for Individuals (Line Item 7004-0102):** Expand funding to \$50 million to address increased demand for shelter, housing, and services for unaccompanied adults, an increase over the FY'16 funding level of \$44.8 million.
  - **Home and Healthy for Good Program for Individuals (Line Item 7004-0104):** Fund at \$3.8 million, a \$2 million increase over the FY'16 appropriation, and continue to provide support to LGBTQ young adults experiencing homelessness.
2. **Increase funding for housing programs serving extremely low-income households.**
  - **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, Line Item 7004-9316):** Increase overall funding to \$18.5 million, and expand the definition of family to cover households of all sizes and configurations so as to allow unaccompanied adults and those without children in the household to also access homelessness prevention resources. At this funding level, the state would be able to prevent

homelessness for an estimated 6,346 households, based on the average FY'15 RAFT expenditure of \$2,922/household. For FY'16, the program is funded at \$12.5 million.

- ❑ **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, Line Item 7004-9024)**: Increase funding to \$120 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 who could be served by the program. Include language to tie rent subsidy levels with current fair market rents to make the subsidies more useful to households. (Currently, households without waivers only can rent units at or below the 2005 FMR.) Also include Prior Appropriation Continued (PAC) language to carryover any unspent FY'16 funds.
- ❑ **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, Line Item 7004-9030)**: Increase funding to \$7.1 million to provide an estimated 800 individuals living with disabilities with much-needed housing subsidies. For FY'16, the program is funded at \$4.6 million.
- ❑ **Public Housing Operating Subsidies (Line Item 7004-9005)**: Fund state public housing operating subsidies at \$72 million to improve affordable housing opportunities for an estimated 45,600 households, including extremely low-income families, elders, and persons with disabilities. This would be a \$7.5 million increase over the FY'16 appropriation to preserve access to public housing. The Coalition also supports \$2 million for public housing reform (line item 7004-9007), so as to fund capital improvements, launch a centralized waiting list, help housing authorities manage unit turnover, increase tenant participation, and promote cross-agency partnerships.

### **3. Address the needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness by increasing funding to \$4 million for housing/wraparound support services in EOHHS Line Item 4000-0007.**

This would be a \$2 million over the FY'16 funding level of \$2 million. These investments would provide deeper funding for the unaccompanied youth homelessness law, Chapter 450 of the Acts of 2014 so as to provide more housing and service resources to youth and young adults age 24 and younger. On December 29, 2015, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services issued a request for responses (RFR) to award the FY'16 youth homelessness funds. Also include Prior Appropriation Continued (PAC) language to carryover any unspent FY'16 funds, so as to mitigate the negative effects of late timing of the RFR release.

### **4. 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)**: Provide at least level funding to maintain or improve eligibility and benefit standards. Maintain the 75-day advance notice language to allow time for the Legislature to take action to prevent eligibility changes and benefit reductions. The program was serving 21,106 households in December 2015, down from 22,118 households at the end of December 2014. For FY'16, the program is funded at \$76.2 million.
- ❑ **Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC, Line Item 4403-2000)**: As the number of families participating in the TAFDC program goes down, resources dedicated to the program in FY'16 should be retained in the program for FY'17 so as to provide level or increased benefits to program participants. Reject the Governor's proposal to count SSI income when calculating TAFDC benefits, which would lead to an estimated 6,900 families losing all of their TAFDC benefits and another 1,600 families having their TAFDC benefits drastically reduced. Maintain the 75-day advance notice language to allow time for the Legislature to take action to prevent eligibility changes and benefit reductions. The program was serving 35,843 households at the end of December 2015, down from 40,542 households at the end of December 2014. For FY'16, the program is funded at \$220.7 million, after a slight mid-year reduction from \$221.5 million.

### **5. Continue to fund the transportation of children and youth experiencing homelessness to decrease the costs to cities and towns (ESE Line Item 7035-0008).**

Provide a minimum of \$8.35 million 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 (previously line item 7035-0005). This would match the FY'16 partial reimbursement rate, but fall far short of the full estimated FY'16 need of \$14.9 million. Provisions in the federal McKinney-Vento Homelessness Assistance Act allow students experiencing homelessness and temporarily living outside of their original school district to either attend school in the town where they are currently residing, or to attend their original school. This line item has helped to mitigate the substantial costs to communities while protecting educational opportunities for children and youth.

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