

May 28, 2015



MASSACHUSETTS  
COALITION  
FOR THE HOMELESS

The Honorable Karen Spilka  
The Honorable Sal DiDomenico  
The Honorable Viriato deMacedo

The Honorable Brian Dempsey  
The Honorable Stephen Kulik  
The Honorable Todd Smola

**Re: Support for key housing, homelessness prevention, and benefits programs in the FY'16 Conference Committee budget**

Dear Members of the FY'16 Budget Conference Committee:

Thank you for your leadership in developing the state's fiscal year 2016 budget recommendations. I am writing on behalf of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless to ask for your continued support for key budget items related to housing and homelessness as the Conference Committee prepares to make its final recommendations. We ask you to please ensure that the critical programs outlined below receive adequate funding and that key line item language is included so as to better support and protect families, youth, and adults who are at-risk or experiencing homelessness. Your work to sustain and create these programs will help the Commonwealth move closer towards our common goal of ending homelessness.

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Specifically, the Coalition is asking for your strong support on the following items:

**Housing and Services for Unaccompanied Youth Experiencing Homelessness  
(Line Items 4000-0007 and 4000-0300)**

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate's language and funding under new line item 4000-0007 for housing and wraparound services for unaccompanied youth and young adults through age 24 who are experiencing homelessness out on their own**, without a parent or guardian. The \$2 million in funding would be used to implement the new landmark 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.

We also encourage the committee to **adopt the House's earmark to continue to explicitly provide \$150,000 within the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) administrative line item, 4000-0300, to support the ongoing work of the Commission**, including the implementation of the 2016 statewide youth homelessness survey. The 2016 continuation of the survey will allow the Commonwealth to better understand the scope of youth homelessness in communities around the state and the needs of youth, as well as to engage more youth ambassadors in the implementation and distribution of the survey.

Currently, the Coalition is working with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the Commission to enter and analyze the 2015 youth surveys. Once that is complete, we will provide an overview to your offices. This data will provide a snapshot of the experiences and circumstances of unaccompanied youth from across the Commonwealth, and underscore the need for swift and coordinated action.

**Emergency Assistance Family Shelter and Services Program  
(EA Shelter and Services Program, Line Item 7004-0101)**

The Coalition strongly urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate's 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**. Since 2012, thousands of families with children have been forced to stay in unsafe, untenable situations to prove that they were "homeless enough" to qualify for EA shelter.

Between July 1, 2014 and March 31, 2015, 365 families with children had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places *before* they were found eligible for emergency shelter. For the entirety of FY'14, there were at least 607 families in such situations before being approved for shelter. By allowing families who otherwise would be forced to stay in a place not meant for human habitation to access shelter before actually

having to stay in such conditions, we can protect the safety and dignity of our most vulnerable families before they are put even closer to harm's way.

We also ask you to **adopt the Senate language that would require the Administration to notify the Legislature 90 days before implementing eligibility restrictions or benefit cuts**, up from the current 60-day requirement.

Thank you to both the House and Senate for your ongoing commitment to adequately funding this program, through the annual budget process and needed mid-year supplemental budgets. We also are very grateful for the Legislature's rejection of Governor Baker's proposed eligibility restrictions that would have denied access to shelter to an estimated 32% of currently eligible families.

#### **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, Line Item 7004-9024)**

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the House's recommended funding level of \$90.9 million for MRVP, an incredible and much-needed \$25.9 million increase over the FY'15 allocation. We also urge the committee to adopt the House language that would carry over up to \$8 million in unspent FY'15 funds to reach this level.** Substantial reinvestment in MRVP will move Massachusetts forward toward addressing homelessness and housing insecurity.

The Coalition will continue to be engaged in conversations with DHCD, legislators, providers, and advocates regarding a voucher distribution plan for FY'16 so that DHCD can provide new MRVP subsidies (mobile and project-based) to a variety of populations (families, unaccompanied youth, adults experiencing chronic homelessness, households who are on existing statewide housing program waiting lists, etc.) in FY'16.

#### **Short-Term Housing Assistance for Families (HomeBASE, Line Item 7004-0108)**

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the House's higher proposed funding level of \$31.25 million for HomeBASE.** We also encourage the Conference Committee to adopt the **Senate language that would limit the bar on receiving further assistance to 18 months** versus the current 24 months.

#### **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, Line Item 7004-9316)**

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate's higher recommended appropriation of \$13.0 million for the RAFT homelessness prevention program.** This increase of \$2 million over the FY'15 appropriation would allow DHCD to serve more families who are at imminent risk or currently experiencing homelessness.

#### **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, Line Item 7004-9030)**

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate's recommended funding level of \$4.75 million for MRVP, a \$1.2 million increase over the FY'15 allocation.** This increase would help the Commonwealth serve more individuals under the age of 60 who are experiencing homelessness or housing instability.

#### **Shelter and Services for Unaccompanied Adults At-Risk and Experiencing Homelessness (Line Item 7004-0102)**

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate's higher recommended appropriation of \$44.7 million for shelters and services for unaccompanied adults.** This would be an increase of \$1.8 million over the FY'15 appropriation.

#### **Home and Healthy for Good (Line Item 7004-0104)**

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the House's higher recommended appropriation of \$1.8 million for this successful Housing First program for individuals who have experienced chronic homelessness.** We also ask you to **include the House's language that would continue to fund the pilot program started in FY'14 to provide supportive housing to lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender unaccompanied young adults.**

**Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program  
(EAEDC, Line Item 4408-1000)**

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the House's higher recommended appropriation of \$81 million for the EAEDC program** and the **Senate language that would require the Administration to notify the Legislature 90 days before implementing eligibility restrictions or benefit cuts**, up from the current 60-day requirement.

We also look forward to working with you as the session progresses to move forward major improvements to EAEDC via House Bill 529, An Act relative to assisting elders and people with disabilities in the Commonwealth.

**Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program  
(TAFDC, Line Item 4403-2000)**

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate's higher appropriation of \$231.8 million for the TAFDC program**. We also ask you to **adopt the Senate language that would increase the annual clothing allowance to \$200/eligible child**, up from the current \$150/child, **and require the Administration to notify the Legislature 90 days before implementing eligibility restrictions or benefit cuts**, up from the current 60-day requirement.

**Housing Preservation and Stabilization Reserve Fund**

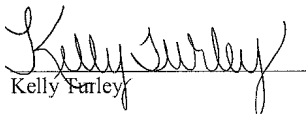
The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the House's recommended language and \$11.5 million in funding for "the depleted Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund to offer affordable housing for low-income families and individuals"**. (The trust fund first was established in 2013 pursuant to Chapter 121B, Section 60 of the General Laws.)

**Homelessness Prevention Reserve Fund  
(Line Item 1599-0017)**

The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate's recommendation to create a \$7 million homelessness prevention reserve fund at EOHHHS to serve families who are experiencing homelessness or in danger of experiencing homelessness**. The line item, 1599-0017, also would require EOHHHS 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. These funds could be used for families participating in the Emergency Assistance program, as well as families being served by 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."

In closing, I want to thank you and your colleagues for all of your hard work. We trust you will keep these concerns in mind as you finalize your decisions regarding the FY'16 budget. I also thank you in advance for your consideration of these requests. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns.

With gratitude and hope,



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cc: The Honorable Stanley Rosenberg  
The Honorable Robert DeLeo