



July 12, 2017

Governor Charlie Baker
Massachusetts State House
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Dear Governor Baker:

As you review the compromise fiscal year 2018 budget sent to you by the Legislature, the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless respectfully asks you to support legislative language and funding for key housing and homelessness line items, most notably for the **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition homelessness prevention program (RAFT, line item 7004-9316)**. For the second year in a row, the Legislature included important language that would grant access to RAFT for elders, people with disabilities, unaccompanied youth, and other households without minor children. The Legislature also provided \$15 million in funding for RAFT, \$2 million above the FY'17 appropriation and above your FY'18 recommendation of \$13 million.

Without a doubt, RAFT has been a highly effective program for over a decade for families with children under the age of 21. RAFT has helped thousands of families avoid or exit homelessness by providing flexible funds for needs such as rent, mortgage or utility arrears, first and last month's rent, utility startup costs, other household related expenses, and/or employment-related transportation costs. Before FY'17, though, households without minor children were excluded from RAFT and have had very limited access to alternative prevention resources from the state. This led to increased evictions and foreclosures, heightened housing instability, and longer stays in homelessness. This past year, RAFT was able to serve 124 households under the expanded eligibility criteria by using the \$500,000 earmarked for those populations. Based on last year's numbers, we estimate that the \$2 million earmarked by the Legislature will be able to serve almost 500 households without minor children in FY'18. Please retain the RAFT language and funding to help more households avoid homelessness altogether when possible, and greatly decrease how long families of all types spend without safe, permanent housing.

To briefly highlight a few additional priorities, we also ask you to please:

- **Do all you can to provide midyear supplemental funding for the unaccompanied youth homelessness line item (4000-0007), to restore funding that is critical for the safety and well-being of youth and young adults ages 24 and under who are experiencing homelessness outside the custody and care of a parent or guardian.** The planned funding cut from \$2 million to \$675,000 will have a deeply negative impact on young people without homes.
- Retain the Legislature's proposed funding of the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, 7004-9024) at \$92.7 million. While this figure is below the amounts initially recommended by you and the Legislature, given the revised revenue figures, this more moderate increase over the FY'17 appropriation will keep the MRVP program moving in the right direction.
- Retain language in the Emergency Assistance family shelter and services line item (EA, 7004-0101), Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children line item (EAEDC, 4408-1000), and Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children line item (TAFDC, 4403-2000) to allow for adequate advanced notice to the Legislature of proposed eligibility restrictions and benefits reductions in the face of projected budget deficiencies.
- Retain tracking and reporting language in the EA line item and the unaccompanied youth homelessness line item (4000-0007), so that the Legislature, advocates, providers, and your Administration can better understand who these programs serve, where the gaps are, and how we can work together to increase the programs' impact.
- Retain the increase to the TAFDC annual clothing allowance so as to provide \$300 per eligible child.
- Continue the dialogue to ensure that families already experiencing homelessness no longer have to stay in places not meant for human habitation before accessing EA shelter and services.

Thank you for your commitment to addressing homelessness here in the Commonwealth! We look forward to continuing to work with your Administration to move forward toward our shared goals.

Sincerely,

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