



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

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



Support and Protect Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness:

Cosponsor and Actively Support the Adoption of Representative Decker's Emergency Assistance Amendments to Line Item 7004-0101 in the FY'19 Budget, Amendments #1301 and #1308

Amendment #1301 would create a \$300,000 pilot to allow otherwise eligible families to access Emergency Assistance family shelter (EA) before having to prove that they have stayed in places not meant for human habitation. Amendment #1308 would ensure that the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) does not further restrict families' rights to apply for EA in person by maintaining in-person application sites (in addition to telephonic options.)

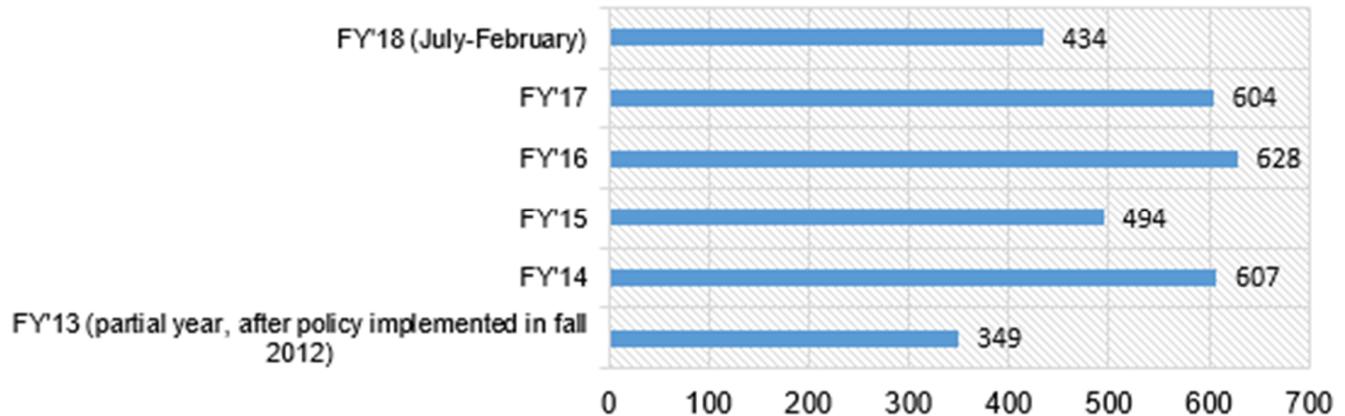
Amendment #1301:

- Amendment language: "provided further, that not more than \$300,000 shall be expended to establish and administer a pilot program to provide temporary emergency assistance to families who on the date of application for emergency assistance have no other feasible alternative housing, as defined in 760 CMR 67.06.1(b), and who, but for not having spent 1 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, would be eligible for emergency assistance under clauses (a), (b), (c) or (d);" and by striking out the figures "148,607,614" and inserting in place thereof the figures "\$148,907,614"
- Amendments cosponsors as of April 18th: Representatives Decker (lead sponsor), Ashe, Atkins, Barber, Connolly, Crocker, DiZoglio, Dykema, Farley-Bouvier, Galvin, Garballey, González, Hecht, Higgins, Khan, Lewis, Linsky, Madaro, Miceli, O'Day, D. Rogers, Tosado, Tucker, and Ultrino
- Based on the state's own data, **604 families with children** had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places in FY'17 *before* they were found eligible for emergency shelter through the state's Emergency Assistance (EA) program. In the first eight months of FY'18, another **434 families** were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances (17% of all families entering shelter, for an average of 54 families/month).
- Families are showing up at hospital clinics and emergency rooms **with no other safe place to sleep**, which in turn drives up health care costs. Educators across the state are expressing concern about the fate of their students whose educations are being disrupted as their families search for a safe place to sleep.
- This crisis is due to onerous shelter eligibility restrictions imposed by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in September 2012. Under these regulations, in the first eight months of FY'18, at least 40% of the families who applied for shelter were denied (2,209 out of 5,503 families that completed applications, as reported by DHCD). For FY'17, the denial rate was 47% (4,264 out of 9,124 families applying).
- Based on DHCD's own numbers, we estimate that approximately **700-1,000 families** per year will first have to stay in places not meant for human habitation before getting shelter if this new language is not adopted.
- If each of these families got placed in shelter one night earlier to avoid this fate, **the cost to the Commonwealth would be only about \$91,000-\$130,000 per year** (based on the average cost of \$130/night, as reported by DHCD in January 2018). Even if each family received shelter two nights earlier, the cost would be less than **\$300,000 per year**.

- DHCD's own data shows that many of these families are getting into shelter now – but only after sleeping in unfit places. It has gone too far.

Over 3,100 Families Have Stayed in Places Not Meant for Human Habitation Before Being Able to Access State-Funded Emergency Assistance Shelter

* Data from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development



Amendment #1308:

- Amendment language: "provided further, department staff shall continue to accept in-person applications in the ten cities and towns with department office locations in use as of January 1, 2018. The department may add additional intake sites geographically convenient to families who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness;"
- Amendments cosponsors as of April 18th: Decker (lead sponsor) Barber, Connolly, Garballey, González, Higgins, Khan, Lewis, Linsky, Miceli, Nangle, O'Connell, O'Day, D. Rogers, Stanley, and Ultrino
- This amendment seeks to ensure that families experiencing homelessness will be able to apply in-person for Emergency Assistance and HomeBASE resources in at least the 10 cities and towns across the Commonwealth where applications currently are taken: Boston, Brockton, Chelsea, Hyannis, Lawrence, Lowell, New Bedford, Salem, Springfield, and Worcester.
- Over the years, the list of local offices taking applications has decreased dramatically, leaving families to have to travel long distances, apply telephonically, or stay in unsafe places until they can get the resources to travel to an office. As a point of comparison, there were 25 in-person application sites in 2005.
- While telephonic applications should remain an option, that process can be very challenging for families without phones/without unlimited minutes on their phones, with limited English proficiency, without access to email, scanners, and fax machines to send the verification documents necessary to complete the application.

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For more information, please contact Kelly Turley of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless at kelly@mahomeless.org or 781-595-7570 x17.



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