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Please Actively Support the Inclusion of the Senate's Language to Ensure that Families Experiencing Homelessness Can Apply In-Person for Emergency Assistance Family Shelter in the FY'19 Conference Committee Budget

Language Change to the DHCD Administrative Line Item 7004-0099



What is the issue?

Families seeking Emergency Assistance (EA) family shelter and services (line item 7004-0101) currently can apply in-person with Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) staff in nine local DHCD offices, or over the phone with staff in DHCD's central office. Given the complexity of the EA application process, many families prefer to apply in person, if geographically and logistically feasible. This is especially true for families that have limited cell phone minutes, lack a reliable cell phone, speak a primary language other than English, and/or lack access to a computer, scanner, and fax machine to submit necessary verification documents.

DHCD recently stopped taking in-person applications in Lowell*, and advocates and the DHCD workers' union are trying to ensure that further office closures do not occur.

What would this language do?

The Senate's language would:

- Make sure that DHCD has sufficient staff available to accept in-person EA application in the 10 cities and towns where DHCD had staff as of January 1, 2018
- Allow DHCD to accept in-person applications in additional cities and towns that are geographically convenient for families experiencing homelessness
- Require DHCD to report to House and Senate Committees on Ways and Means on their plans, financially and operationally, for maintaining these local offices and on any plans to increase the use of phones in the EA application process

Which cities/towns had local offices as of January 1, 2018?

Boston, Brockton, Chelsea, Hyannis, Lawrence, Lowell*, New Bedford, Salem, Springfield, and Worcester.

By contrast, in 2009 when DHCD took over administration of the EA system from the Department of Transitional Assistance, families also could apply in Fall River, Fitchburg, Framingham, Greenfield, Holyoke, Malden, Milford,

Pittsfield, Plymouth, Revere, Southbridge, and Taunton. This reduction already has caused great hardship for families in many parts of the state.

What is the text of the language added by the Senate, via Senator L'Italien's amendment (Amendment #533)?

"provided further, that the department shall operate local offices in the ten cities and towns in which the department maintained office locations as of January 1, 2018 in order to continue to accept in-person applications and provide other services related to the emergency assistance housing program funded by item 7004-0101; provided further, that such offices shall have sufficient staffing promptly to determine eligibility and provide other program services to families; provided further, that the department may operate additional local offices in other cities or towns that are geographically convenient to those families who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness; provided further, that on or before September 1, 2018, the department shall submit a report to the house and senate committee on ways and means with a spending and operational plan for maintaining such in-person offices and detailing any plans the department may have to make greater use of telephonic service delivery to augment in-person services;"

Please actively support the inclusion of the Senate's language in the Conference Committee budget to preserve access to critical family shelter resources for families with children!

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley, kelly@mahomeless.org, 781-595-7570 x17, at the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, or Andrea Park, apark@mlri.org, 617-357-0700 x341 at Massachusetts Law Reform Institute.