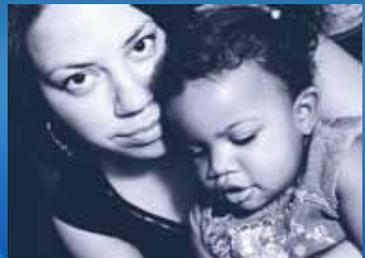




**MASSACHUSETTS  
COALITION  
FOR THE HOMELESS**

**COMMITTED TO ENSURING  
EVERYONE HAS A PLACE TO CALL HOME**





## **MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS: A LEADER WITH A PROVEN TRACK RECORD**

The mission of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless is to eradicate homelessness from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Our work as a coalition to find common ground and to seek essential solutions has enabled us to fulfill our role as an organizer, coordinator and resource. At the same time, our organizational philosophy has compelled us to take action, rather than merely observe, react or study. We seek to fulfill our mission as a voice with people experiencing homelessness in their struggle for decent housing, adequate income and accessible services.

The Coalition's early intervention and direct service work, along with our commitment to finding long-term solutions to homelessness, has allowed us to develop innovative programming and realistic solutions to ending homelessness. The Coalition's approach has increasingly focused on homelessness prevention. Prevention is cost effective, supports the ability for households to maintain economic stability, and gives children the stability needed to receive a solid education. We also run a furniture bank that has helped thousands of households transitioning out of homelessness obtain the essentials they need to make their new house a home.

The Coalition has worked to embed homelessness prevention resources in community health centers, public schools and in our in-home early intervention programs. The prevention programs have had impressive results with helping at-risk households to retain or secure housing. A pioneer in homelessness prevention, the Coalition is called upon by both state agencies and school districts to share our knowledge and expertise.

The Coalition's comprehensive approach allows us to address the root causes of homelessness, while also ensuring that services are provided to those in immediate need.

# ADVOCACY

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The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless is one of the nation's oldest public policy organizations advocating for children, youth, families, and individuals who are at-risk and experiencing homelessness. Since 1981, the Coalition has been dedicated to the principle of ensuring that everyone has a place to call home. Our public policy advocacy efforts are shaped to prevent and end homelessness in the Commonwealth. Through our statewide advocacy work on the legislative and administrative levels, we advocate for permanent affordable housing, homelessness prevention resources, the educational rights of homeless children and unaccompanied youth, access to emergency shelter when there is no other safe place to turn, and critical income, benefit, job training, and childcare programs.

Through our on-the-ground experiences, we understand what works and what doesn't work. Our unique position allows us to craft innovative and responsive policy initiatives and to advocate effectively on behalf Massachusetts most vulnerable citizens. The Coalition is considered a valuable statewide resource for people experiencing homelessness, at-risk populations, advocates and service providers, policymakers, and the public at large. We have earned the reputation as a leader in the fight to end homelessness in Massachusetts.

## HOMELINK INITIATIVE

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Reaching households early in the housing and income crisis is often the one key that can halt or delay the spiral into homelessness. Over the past eight years, the Coalition has challenged itself to find innovative ways to reach at-risk households very early on in their housing crisis, by embedding its homeless prevention services into non-traditional settings.

By partnering with community health centers, public schools and early intervention home visiting programs, we have been able to bring prevention resources to low-income families and individuals where they are already receiving services.

The HomeLink Initiative is designed to work with community health centers, public school districts and early intervention workers to help identify households that are having a housing crisis and then offer quick assistance to ensure that they remain stably housed. HomeLink offers comprehensive homelessness prevention and housing assistance through intensified case management, housing search and landlord-tenant mediation services to at-risk families and individuals. By embedding these prevention services in the health care centers, public schools and early intervention home visiting programs used by low-income households on a daily basis, the HomeLink Initiative has created a seamless entry point to link at-risk households with existing service systems and mainstream resources that can help them stabilize their housing situations, avoiding homelessness.



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION

Commitment

## ROOM TO BREATHE

Annually, thousands of men, women and children have breathing problems because of chronic respiratory diseases including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, emphysema, chronic bronchitis, cancer, and lung disease related to HIV/AIDS. For low-income families and individuals living with some form of chronic respiratory diseases, making the necessary changes and adaptations to their homes is economically out of reach for them. The results for these households are often devastating, making it difficult to carry out daily tasks, go to work and attend school. For elders, this can mean no longer being able remain in their home.

The Coalition has focused its work with a lens on how it can assist those that are living in poverty. With a disproportion of this population being affected by some form of chronic respiratory disease, we created the Room to Breathe Initiative which focuses on giving low-income households cost-free resources to remove environmental triggers as a means to controlling respiratory attacks. The Coalition has received a five year grant from Partners HealthCare and North Shore Medical Center to launch Room to Breathe on the North Shore.

The Initiative will provide low-income households living with some form of chronic respiratory diagnosis cost-free help to improve their home environment by lessening environmental triggers with a goal of improving their quality of life.

A major component for the Room to Breathe Initiative is to collect data to support that home intervention and education can improve quality of life for those living with chronic respiratory diseases. Each household participating in the Initiative will be required to sign a release allowing their primary doctors/nurses to share health information regarding the number of hospital visits they have had in the prior 12 to 24 months.



## ON FOR THE HOMELESS

ded to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

### THE HIGHLAND KIDS INITIATIVE

The effects of the high rate of families becoming homeless and then being forced to move from their communities has a significant impact on their children's education. The relationship between residential mobility and school performance has been identified as a greater source of concern by educators and school districts as more students and their families are falling into homelessness. Children of low-income families are at particular risk of school performance problems related to housing instability. Low-income families have higher rates of moving from one apartment to another than do middle and upper income families, and moves by these families are less likely to be for positive reasons. Often the reasons these families are forced to move are due to domestic violence, eviction, foreclosure, and during these uncertain economic times, more families have lost their employment or have had their hours reduced, making it impossible to maintain their housing.

The effects of the high rate of families becoming homeless and then being forced to move from their communities it is having a significant impact on their children's education.

At the beginning of the academic year 2009-2010, the Coalition partnered with the Lynn Public Schools, Lynn Housing Authority and the Department of Housing and Community Development to launch the Highland Kids Initiative with the goal of preventing students and their families from becoming homeless.

Over a 48 month period, the Initiative will work with each of the families on an individual basis, offering critical housing support through housing subsidies that allows these low-income families to only pay 30% of their income towards the rent. This time limited subsidy, along with wraparound case management is what makes it possible for these families and their children to thrive.

## A BED FOR EVERY CHILD

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Through our HomeLink Initiative, advocates learned that many students do not have a bed, and are sleeping on the floor or with a parent or sibling. Many of the students' families have had an infestation of bed bugs – a growing epidemic in many urban areas, forcing them to throw out their beds without being able to afford to buy new ones. Even more families are living in poverty and can not afford to buy a bed at all. Although a bed may not seem like the most pressing social issue, it does have a major affect on a child's ability to come to school prepared to learn, which can have long term consequences on their education. In Massachusetts, statistics indicate that 23% of students have the potential of not graduating.

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Over the next 12 months, our goal is to distribute 1,500 new beds to school age children living poverty. As funds become available, we hope to expand this initiative to cities in need.

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To break the cycle of poverty, we know we have to give children in need the tools to succeed in their education. One of these is a bed. To meet this goal, the agency launched A Bed for Every Child Initiative, where we are raising funds to purchase a twin mattress, frame and linens for each student referred to us by our partners.



## THE FURNITURE BANK

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A bed, a table, a chair, a sofa. These material elements could change a family's life. All of us would agree that these elements are what make a house a home. Yet, for thousands of extremely low-income households, these elements are unaffordable.

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Each year over \$3.5 million dollars worth of furniture and household goods are collected and distributed to thousands of households making the transition out of homelessness.

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For the past twenty years, it has been the mission of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless' Furniture Bank to work to ensure that families and individuals living in poverty and those transitioning from homeless into permanent housing, have a cost-free option to furnish their new apartments. By offering assistance with the most basic of essentials that make up the fabric of a home, we are ensuring that families and individuals will have a solid foundation as they rebuild their homes and their lives.

Since its inception in 1985 as one of the first furniture banks in the nation, the Furniture Bank has assisted in furnishing thousands of households. Its approach is simple take other people's castaway furniture and household goods and give them new life in the home of someone in need.

The Furniture Bank works very similarly to the food bank concept. It solicits donations of beds, couches, chairs, tables, and other household essentials; picks them up at no charge to the donor; and distributes them free of cost to those in need. The Coalition's Furniture Bank is one of the largest programs of its kind in the nation and in Massachusetts. The program operates from its 40,000 square foot warehouse 20 minutes outside of metropolitan Boston.

## GET INVOLVED!

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The Coalition offers rewarding volunteer opportunities for groups and individuals that want to assist families and individuals who are experiencing homelessness. Join us in helping those that are in need throughout the state. Volunteer to organize a fundraising event or furniture drive, roll up your sleeves to paint furniture or assist in organizing and stocking household items.

There are many opportunities to make a difference.  
Please contact the Coalition at [volunteer@mahomeless.org](mailto:volunteer@mahomeless.org)  
to learn how you can help!



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