Adequately Fund Shelter, Prevention, Rapid Re-Housing, and Stabilization Programs for Families and Individuals Experiencing Homelessness

Emergency Assistance Family Shelter, Re-housing, and Stabilization Services (EA - Line Item 7004-0101) and a New Massachusetts Short Term Housing Transition Program (Line Item 7004-0108):

Final FY’11 Appropriation: $159.6 million for line item 7004-0101
Governor’s FY’12 Request: $136.4 million in combined funding for line items 7004-0101 and 7004-0108
MCH’s FY’12 Request: A minimum of $136.4 million in combined funding for line items 7004-0101 and 7004-0108

◆ Who the Program Serves: The Department of Housing and Community Development’s (DHCD) Emergency Assistance Program provides families with children and pregnant women who are experiencing homelessness with critical emergency shelter, diversion services, rapid re-housing resources, and housing stabilization supports for families exiting homelessness into housing. Currently, there are approximately 3,300 families living in EA shelter placements, and more than 2,000 additional families in temporary housing placements through the Flex Funds short-term subsidy program.

◆ Appropriation Request: A minimum of $136.4 million is needed in FY’12 to improve housing opportunities and protect the shelter safety net.

◆ Retain Current Eligibility Standards for Emergency Family Shelter While Enhancing the State’s Housing Response to the Crisis of Family Homelessness: The Legislature should maintain current eligibility standards for EA, rejecting the Governor’s proposal to restrict access to safety-net resources to only those families at risk of domestic abuse in their current housing situation, families experiencing homelessness due to fire or natural disaster, and families headed by a parent age 21 and younger. If DHCD’s enhanced housing resources are effective, then more restrictive shelter rules are unnecessary. If the success of these efforts is in doubt, then it is critical that the safety net remain intact for the well-being of vulnerable families. The Legislature also should include new line item provisions that would:
  o Require that families be provided with housing instead of shelter whenever possible;
  o Create specialized placements in supportive congregate settings for parents age 21 and younger;
  o Provide families in shelter, including motels, with housing search services within 14 days of placement; and
  o Protect families from being forced to take housing for which they would have to pay more than 35% of their very low incomes for rent and utilities.

◆ House Families through a Short-Term Subsidy Program that Bridges Families to Permanent Housing: The Coalition supports the creation of a separate line item, 7004-0108, to fund the continuation of a Flex Funds/short-term housing subsidy program to bridge families to permanent housing and provide robust housing stabilization services. This new line item should include important improvements and protections. The Legislature should:
  o Reject language that would bar families that receive assistance from further help for 2 full years;
  o Include language that would cap how much families can be charged for rent and utilities at 35% of their incomes
  o Allow flexibility in determining maximum subsidy level (beyond $8,000/year) so that the subsidies work in higher cost rent areas and for lower income families;
  o Designate $5 million to fund homelessness prevention efforts to prevent families from losing their

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housing in the first place; and
  o Require that there be governing regulations and fair hearings for families denied assistance.

♦ **Maintain Key EA Line Item Provisions from the FY’11 Budget:** The Coalition is looking to maintain key line item provisions, including language requiring the Administration to give the Legislature advanced notice before changing program eligibility in the face of an anticipated deficit; provide provisional shelter placements for up to 30 days to families who are experiencing homelessness and appear to be eligible but do not have all of the required documents at the time of application; place families as close as possible to their home community; and track and report on the families who apply for and/or participate in the EA program and related housing initiatives.

Shelter and Services for Unaccompanied Individuals At-risk and Experiencing Homelessness (Line Item 7004-0102):

**Final FY’11 Appropriation:** $37.2 million  
**Governor’s FY’12 Request:** $37.2 million  
**MCH’s FY’12 Request:** $37.2 million

♦ **Who the Program Serves:** This line item provides unaccompanied adults with critical emergency shelter services, rapid re-housing resources, and housing stabilization supports for those individuals exiting homelessness into housing.

♦ **Appropriation Request:** $37.2 million is needed to level fund the program and maintain existing services.