



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

May 18, 2016

Looking Ahead to Fiscal Year 2017: The Senate Ways and Means Committee Has Released Its Budget Recommendations for the Upcoming Year

**Read Below and Stay Tuned to Learn How You Can Take Action to Support Key
Amendments for Housing, Homelessness, and Safety Net Programs!**

Quick Links

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[Online action in support of
the Coalition's FY'17
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[Online action in support of
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highlight of family shelter
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Greetings!

Yesterday, the Senate Committee on Ways and Means ("SWM" or "Senate Ways and Means") unveiled its fiscal year 2017 budget recommendations for the Commonwealth. This \$39.5 billion budget is \$11 million less than the final House budget approved last month and marks the next step on the path to developing the state budget for the fiscal year that will begin on July 1st. Tomorrow (Thursday, May 19th) at 5 p.m. will be the deadline for Senate members to file amendments to the SWM budget, with the Senate budget debate scheduled for next week.

Below we have included preliminary information on the Senate Ways and Means budget proposals for housing, shelter, homelessness prevention, and cash assistance programs-- including many positive proposals. We also have included details on key amendments that will be filed.

Please call your State Senator today to ask her/him to co-sponsor these amendments and actively support them in conversations, caucuses, and debates next week.

You can find your State Senator's contact information by going to www.malegislature.gov/People/Senate or www.wheredoivotema.com, or by calling the State House switchboard: 617-722-2000.

Please stay tuned in the days and week ahead for a more detailed analysis

[Governor's FY'17 budget proposal](#)

[Coalition's FY'17 budget priorities](#)

[Coalition's Present Policy Campaigns page](#)

[Overview of budget process](#)

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and additional information about amendments. You also can keep up with the next steps of the budget debate by following the Coalition on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#). For more details on the Senate budget, see below and this [Senate page](#) that will be updated with amendment and floor action details.

As we get closer and closer to the final FY'17 budget, your voice remains critical to helping to protect housing, homelessness, and safety net programs with and for families, individuals, and youth.

Thank you for advocating with us to protect and promote investment in these key programs and people experiencing housing instability!

-Kelly

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Senate Ways and Means Committee's FY'17 Budget Recommendations for Housing, Shelter, Homelessness Prevention, and Cash Assistance Programs

To access SWM's complete budget recommendations, please go to [SWM FY'17 budget recommendations](#).

A Preliminary Look at Selected Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) Line Items

1. The Senate Ways and Means budget would provide level funding for the **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition program (RAFT, line item 7004-9316)** at \$12.5 million. Unfortunately, SWM did not include language and funding requested by the Coalition to expand access to RAFT to elders, people with disabilities, unaccompanied youth, and other households without children.

Key Amendment Information: We are working with Senator Jamie Eldridge and Senator Linda Dorcena Forry to file an amendment to expand access to RAFT, increase funding to serve new populations, and to try to ensure that RAFT is a year-round program for families. See the [RAFT amendment fact sheet](#).

Please send an online letter of support for the RAFT expansion amendment to your State Senator today: [Take action!](#)

2. The Senate Ways and Means budget would fund the **Emergency Assistance family shelter and services program (EA, line item 7004-0101)** at \$155.1 million for FY'17. This amount is below the anticipated FY'16 spending level of \$197.9 million.

The SWM budget includes important language that would require DHCD to provide shelter to otherwise eligible families who have no other feasible, alternative housing but have not yet stayed in a place not meant for human habitation. Under current EA regulations, families who are within 24 hours of staying in places not meant for human habitation can be turned away from shelter, even if DHCD believes that the family will be forced to stay in a car, emergency room, or transit station. Last year, SWM included similar language, but it did not make it into the final FY'16 budget.

Between July 1, 2014, and June 30, 2015 (all of the FY'15), 494 families with children were approved for EA only after first staying in a place not meant for human habitation. For the first nine months of FY'16, 488 families first stayed in places not meant for human habitation before being approved for shelter (an average of 54 families/month).

The Senate Committee on Ways and Means also included important language that would require the Administration to give the Legislature 90 days advanced notice before implementing restrictions or benefits reductions.

Key Amendment Information: We are working with Senator Michael Barrett to file an amendment to expand the tracking and reporting requirements on the EA program, directing DHCD to provide more robust quarterly and monthly information on terminations, denials, demographics, etc. for families seeking and/or receiving Emergency Assistance.

Senator Barbara L'Italien will be filing an amendment to clarify that EA funds should be spent in a way that accommodates the needs of applicants and participants who have disabilities and/or limited English proficiency.

3. The Senate Ways and Means budget would fund the **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, line item 7004-9024)** at \$100.1 million, an important increase of \$9.1 million from the FY'16 allocation and the same level as the House. This includes up to \$14.7 million that can be carried over from FY'16 (of the estimated \$18.5 million in unspent funds). SWM estimates that the increase would allow for an additional 350-400 subsidies.

Key Amendment Information: Senator Linda Dorcena Forry will be filing an amendment to increase MRVP funding to \$120 million and to bring MRVP allowable fair market rents up to current standards (versus the

2005 FMR standards).

4. The Senate Ways and Means budget would decrease funding for the **HomeBASE program (line item 7004-0108)** from \$33.75 million in FY'16 (including the recent \$2.5 million mid-year supplemental appropriation) to \$31.9 million. SWM would continue to provide up to \$8,000/year in shallow rental subsidies, diversion, and moving assistance for certain EA-eligible families. The language maintains the draconian 24-month bar on families who are terminated from the program from re-accessing HomeBASE and Emergency Assistance.

SWM included language in the EA line item (7004-0101) to expand access to HomeBASE to certain families in domestic violence shelters and substance abuse treatment programs, with a cap of \$300,000. This funding cap matches the recommendations from the Governor and the House.

Key Amendment Information: Stay tuned.

5. The Senate Ways and Means budget would provide a much-needed increase for the **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, line item 7004-9030)** from \$4.6 million to \$6.2 million. The final House budget included \$5.1 million for AHVP. AHVP provides housing subsidies to individuals with disabilities who are under the age of 60.

Key Amendment Information: Senator Jamie Eldridge will be filing an amendment to increase AHVP funding to \$7.1 million, the level requested by the Coalition and our allies, and to make needed language changes.

6. The Senate Ways and Means budget would slightly decrease funding for the line item that provides funding for **shelter and services for unaccompanied individuals at-risk and experiencing homelessness (line item 7004-0102)** to just over \$44 million. This falls short of the FY'16 funding level of \$44.8 million, the final FY'17 House budget recommendation of \$44.5 million, and the \$50 million requested by the Coalition and our allies.

Key Amendment Information: Stay tuned.

7. The Senate Ways and Means budget would provide \$64.5 million in funding for **public housing authority operating subsidies (line item 7004-9005)**, level funded with the FY'16 level, less than the \$72 million requested by the Coalition and our allies. The final House budget included a \$1 million increase for public housing.

Key Amendment Information: Senator Linda Dorcena Forry will be filing

an amendment to increase public housing operating subsidy funding to \$72 million.

8. The Senate Ways and Means budget would level fund the **Home and Healthy for Good Program (HHG, line item 7004-0104)** at \$1.8 million. This program employs a Housing First model and historically has provided housing and services to unaccompanied adults who have experienced chronic homelessness. SWM did not include earmark language to continue a pilot program that serves lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) unaccompanied youth and young adults, funded at no less than \$200,000. The final House budget included \$2.3 million for this line item.

Key Amendment Information: Senator Linda Dorcena Forry plans to file an amendment to bring HHG funding up to \$2.3 million.

9. The Senate Ways and Means budget did not propose any new direct funding for the **Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund (HPSTF, line item 7004-4778)**, which offers affordable housing for low-income families and individuals. For FY'16, the fund received an \$11.5 million in direct appropriations and transfers. Funding still could be transferred to HPSTF from surpluses from other housing accounts.

Key Amendment Information: n/a

A Preliminary Look at Selected Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) Line Items

1. The Senate Ways and Means budget included level funding at \$2 million for **housing and services for unaccompanied youth and young adults through age 24 who are experiencing homelessness via line item 4000-0007**. This line item was first funded in FY'16. The final House budget included \$1 million for line item 4000-0007.

The SWM budget did not explicitly include language and funding in the EOHHS administrative line item regarding the Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. The FY'16 budget included an earmark of \$150,000 for the Commission and the annual Youth Count survey. EOHHS and DHCD already have an agreement, however, that EOHHS will provide \$150,000 for the work of the commission and to conduct the annual youth count in FY'17, but explicit language as in the current year would provide greater transparency and accountability.

Please [click here](#) to have your organization endorse our youth homelessness campaign

Key Amendment Information: We are working with Senator Jason Lewis to file an amendment to secure \$4 million for line item 4000-0007 to provide much needed housing and services for youth and young adults.

The youth homelessness amendment fact sheet is [here](#).

2. The Senate Ways and Means budget would increase funding for the Department of Transitional Assistance's Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program (EAEDC, line item 4408-1000) to just under \$80 million. This is up from the FY'16 funding level of \$76.2 million. SWM would include 90-day advance notice language that would require the Administration to notify the Legislature before implementing eligibility restrictions or benefit cuts (up from the current 75-day advanced notice language).

As of February 2016, there were 21,044 households served by EAEDC, a decrease in caseload over last year's figures.

To help move forward House Bill 529 to make major improvements to the EAEDC program, please click here for our [online action](#) and here for our [bill fact sheet](#).

Key Amendment Information: n/a

3. The Senate Ways and Means budget would decrease funding for the Department of Transitional Assistance's Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children grants (TAFDC, line item 4403-2000) to \$198.2 million, which is \$10 million less than the House's recommendation of \$209.9 million for FY'17. With a recent dramatic decrease in the caseload, it is anticipated that this funding level would allow DTA to maintain benefits for the anticipated number of families who would be enrolled in TAFDC during FY'17.

SWM would prohibit DTA from counting SSI benefits toward the calculation of TAFDC benefits. This matches the House recommendation, and is in contrast to the Governor's proposal which would have rendered an estimated 6,900 families ineligible for TAFDC and leave another 1,600 families with drastically reduced TAFDC benefits.

The SWM budget would provide an increased annual clothing allowance of \$250/child (up from \$200) for September 2016 and a \$40/month rental allowance for families living in private market apartments.

SWM included 90-day advanced notice language that would require the Administration to notify the Legislature before implementing eligibility restrictions or benefit cuts.

As of February 2016, there were 33,692 households served by TAFDC. For

more DTA program data, see their most recent Facts and Figures report.

Key Amendment Information: See the [fact sheet here](#) for details on three TAFDC amendments related to maintaining the state standard for determining disabilities, timing of job search requirements, and work requirements and time limits on parents who are caretakers for other family members in addition to their children.

A Preliminary Look at the Education Transportation Line Item

The SWM budget would provide \$8.35 million for reimbursements to cities and towns for costs associated with **transporting students experiencing homelessness under the McKinney-Vento Act (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education line item 7035-0008)**. This would be level funding with the FY'16 appropriation and the FY'17 House recommendation.

Key Amendment Information: Stay tuned.

A Preliminary Look at the Housing Memorandum of Understanding Outside Section

The SWM budget also includes [Outside Section 54](#), which would create a memorandum of understanding among the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness, the Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development, and the Executive Office of Education to coordinate efforts to prevent homelessness and promote economic stability.

Action Step for Today (and Early Tomorrow)

Please call your State Senator today to ask her/him to co-sponsor these amendments and actively support them in conversations, caucuses, and debates next week.

You can find your State Senator's contact information by going to www.malegislature.gov/People/Senate or www.wheredoivotema.com, or by calling the State House switchboard: 617-722-2000.

We hope you will join us as the Coalition continues to push for the protection of housing and homelessness programs for FY'17. We will keep you informed of the progress as the state's budget makes it way through the next stages in the weeks ahead.

For more information, please contact Kelly Turley

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Thank you!

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Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless