



A few talking points to help with your Upstream RAFT bill testimony:

- Residential Assistance for Families in Transition, or RAFT, is a homelessness prevention program administered by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (HLC, formerly the Department of Housing and Community Development) and 11 regional agencies that contract with HLC.
- Through short-term financial assistance, RAFT helps families, unaccompanied youth, elders, people with disabilities, immigrants, and other Massachusetts residents achieve housing stability in the face of eviction, foreclosure, loss of utilities, and other financial emergencies.
- Currently, RAFT benefits are capped at \$10,000/year, but the House and Senate have proposed reducing the cap to \$7,000/year in fiscal year 2024, which begins on July 1st.
- *An Act providing upstream homelessness prevention assistance to families, youth, and adults* would codify and improve the RAFT program.
- The bill has been filed this session in both the House and Senate as [House Bill 1312](#) (Lead sponsor: Representative Marjorie Decker) and [Senate Bill 856](#) (Lead sponsor: Senator Brendan Crighton)
- The bill would:
 - Put the RAFT program into state statute
 - Ensure the availability of benefits to households in the early stages of a housing or utility crisis. The bill would direct HLC to remove the requirement for applicants to have a notice to quit, or be further along in the eviction process, before qualifying for back rent from the program. The current notice to quit requirement moves in the opposite direction of expanding access to upstream benefits.
 - Streamline access to RAFT, including by directing HLC to make direct-to-tenant payments
 - Improve cross-agency collaboration
 - Allow households to access needed resources without arbitrary caps on assistance levels by lifting the dollar amount cap and allowing households to access up to 12 months of assistance in a given year
 - Require HLC to track and publicly report each year on requests for referral sources, applications, completed applications, approved applications, rejected applications and the reasons for denial, demographic information, grant levels, housing status at 6, 12, and 24 months after receiving RAFT, and more
- Strengthening RAFT is vital to ensuring that families and individuals who are housed but at risk of housing loss, homelessness, and utility shut-off will be eligible to receive critical benefits.
- Passage and implementation of this legislation is urgent in the broader work to address the impact of homelessness on families and individuals and promote equity.
- If enacted, this bill would ensure more households across the Commonwealth remain stably housed, without burdensome requirements such as a notice to quit or utility shut-off notices.
- We cannot let another legislative session end without passing the Upstream RAFT bill.