



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

LEGISLATIVE ACTION DAY



Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home.

Please Do All You Can to Prevent and End Homelessness: Actively Support Key Budget Priorities in the Fiscal Year 2025 Budget to Increase Funding for Housing and Homelessness Prevention Resources and to Strengthen Safety Net Programs

Top Budget Priorities

1. Uphold the right to shelter and adequately fund emergency shelter and service programs for children and families experiencing homelessness and support key provisions in the Emergency Assistance program line item (EA, Line Item 7004-0101 and the related administrative account, Line Item 7004-0099).

- Appropriate adequate funding in FY25 to provide traditional shelter or overflow shelter spaces to **all** eligible families (not capped at 7,500 families). The Administration has estimated that the cost for EA and related services for 7,500 families in FY25 will cost \$915 million, and has proposed funding EA through a combination of funds from the FY25 budget and an FY24 supplemental budget request.
- Continue to include language from the FY24 budget to provide shelter to otherwise eligible families who are at imminent risk of staying in a place not meant for human habitation and provide further guidance and oversight to ensure that the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) properly implements this language in FY25.
- Restore FY22 language to create an ombudsperson unit under EOHLC with a team of dedicated staff to address issues and concerns from families applying for and participating in the EA and HomeBASE programs. (EOHLC recently has named an ombudsperson.)
- Maintain the requirement that the Administration give the Legislature 90-days advance notice before reducing benefits or imposing new limits on program eligibility.
- Improve tracking and reporting language and include a requirement to report data monthly and post publicly (in addition to existing biweekly reports as required by the December 2023 supplemental budget.)

2. Increase funding for the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, Line Item 7004-9316) and expand access to upstream homelessness prevention resources.

- Increase funding to \$300 million for RAFT in FY25.
- Prohibit the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities from requiring renters to have a notice to quit from their landlord before being approved for back rent assistance. This requirement, which was implemented by the Department of Housing and Community Development (the predecessor of EOHLC) in August 2022, pushes households deeper into an eviction process before becoming eligible for RAFT assistance.
- Increase the RAFT benefit cap beyond the current limit of \$7,000/household/year.
- Streamline the application process and allow renters to access funds even if their property owner is not cooperative with the RAFT application process, as was the practice under the related federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP).
- Continue the existing budget provision that allows eligible families to combine funds from RAFT and the HomeBASE program, if needed.
- Continue to mandate detailed tracking and reporting on households applying, approved, denied, demographics, and funding uses.

3. Establish a bridge subsidy program for older adults facing housing instability while awaiting longer-term housing supports (New Line Item 9110-XXXX).

- Provide \$60 million in FY25 to create bridge subsidies for up to 6,000 older adults facing housing instability to

allow them to remain in place while they await approval for public housing or subsidy through programs such as the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program

- Low-income older adults (age 60 and over) participating in the bridge subsidy program would pay 30% of their income towards rent, with the bridge subsidy making up the difference in the total rent, up to 110% of the fair market rent.
- The Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA), in collaboration with EOHLC, would administer the program.

4. Address the needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness by increasing funding to \$15 million for housing/wraparound support services under the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) youth and young adult homelessness program (Line Item 4000-0007).

- Increase funding to \$15 million for FY25, up from \$11 million in FY24. A \$15 million investment would provide needed ongoing funding for the unaccompanied youth homelessness law, M.G.L. Chapter 6A, Sections 16W and 16X, to better serve and partner with youth and young adults who under the age of twenty-five and are without permanent housing.
- Funds would be available for EOHHS to use flexibly for housing, wraparound services, educational resources, and supports for young people experiencing homelessness without a parent or guardian; continuing the work to build up regional Youth Action Boards; and expanding access to underserved young people, especially young people who identify as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and/or LGBTQ+.

5. Increase funding and provide easy renewals for families participating in the HomeBASE Program (a.k.a. Massachusetts Short-Term Housing Transition Program, Line Item 7004-0108).

- Provide \$80 million to continue payments to households currently enrolled in HomeBASE that need an extension and to enroll new households in both the diversion and shelter exit components of HomeBASE.
- Allow families who otherwise would be eligible for Emergency Assistance to access HomeBASE "upstream", so that more families can maintain their existing apartments.
- Continue to allow eligible families to receive at least two years of HomeBASE benefits, with opportunities for families to further extend HomeBASE in twelve-month increments to avoid a return to homelessness
- Continue to provide families with at least \$30,000 over two years plus \$15,000 for each subsequent year, with additional flexibility for the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities to address the needs of larger families, families in higher cost areas, and other families with extenuating circumstances.
- Continue to allow families to maximize their incomes by not reimposing an income eligibility limit for families enrolled in HomeBASE.
- Maintain FY24 language to require EOHLC to provide the Legislature 90 days advance notice before reducing eligibility or benefits.
- Continue to include language to carry over any unspent funds into the next fiscal year.
- Include an outside section to put HomeBASE into statute.

6. Increase funding for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, Line Item 7004-9024).

- Increase funding to \$300 million to maintain existing services and benefits to households currently served by the program and to significantly increase the number of low-income households (including families, elders, and persons with disabilities) struggling with housing instability served by the program.
- Maintain language that puts the required tenant share of rent at 30% of income, instead of the previous range of 30-40% of income.
- Include an outside section to put MRVP into statute.

Additional Key Budget Priorities

7. Adequately fund and protect key support programs for low-income families and individuals.

- **Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program (EAEDC, Line Item 4408-1000)**: Increase monthly payments by 20% in FY25, building on the FY21–FY23 monthly grant increases; maintain FY24 budget language to provide full grants to program participants while they are experiencing homelessness, instead of imposing the pre-FY21 homelessness penalty; and maintain the requirement that the Administration give the Legislature 75-days advance notice before reducing benefits or imposing new limits on program eligibility. We also request an Outside Section that would increase grants by 20% each year until they reach half of the federal poverty level.

- **Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC, Line Item 4403-2000)**: Increase monthly payments by 20% in FY25, building on the FY21–FY23 monthly grant increases; provide adequate funding to increase grants based on caseload projections; maintain the requirement that the Administration give the Legislature 75-days advance notice before reducing benefits or imposing new limits on program eligibility; maintain the \$450/child annual clothing allowance and increase the standard of need in the month(s) the clothing allowance is issued to benefit more low-income households; and maintain the elimination of the family cap rule and the removal of the homelessness penalty. We also request an Outside Section that would increase grants by 20% each year until they reach half of the federal poverty level.

8. Increase funding for other important housing programs serving extremely low-income households.

- **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, Line Item 7004-9030)**: Increase funding to \$30 million in FY25 to provide additional housing subsidies to individuals under the age of sixty who are living with disabilities.
- **Public Housing Operating Subsidies (Line Item 7004-9005)**: Increase funding to \$189 million for state public housing operating subsidies in FY25 to improve and preserve affordable housing opportunities for an estimated 41,500 households, including extremely low-income families, elders, and persons with disabilities, and to serve additional households. The Coalition also supports increasing the funding for public housing reform (line item 7004-9007) to \$7.7 million to fund capital improvements, support the maintenance and improvement of the centralized waiting list, help housing authorities manage unit turnover, increase tenant participation, and promote cross-agency partnerships.
- **Shelter and Services for Unaccompanied Adults (Line Item 7004-0102)**: Provide at least \$120 million for shelter, rehousing resources, and services for unaccompanied adults experiencing homelessness.
- **Home and Healthy for Good Program for Individuals (HHG, Line Item 7004-0104)**: Provide \$11 million for HHG in FY25 and continue to provide dedicated support to LGBTQ+ young adults experiencing homelessness.

9. Provide \$3.5 million to establish an access to counsel program for low-income renters and homeowners in the eviction process (New Line Item 0321-1800).

- Establish an access to counsel program for low-income tenants facing eviction and certain low-income owner-occupants of 1 to 3-family homes seeking possession of a unit in their only home.
- Eligible households would receive full legal representation in court or through their administrative proceedings.
- As reported by the Massachusetts Trial Court in February 2024, only 3.5% of tenants have legal representation in Housing Court, as compared to 90% of landlords, leading to housing loss and poorer outcomes for tenants.

10. Provide adequate funding for the transportation of children and youth experiencing homelessness to decrease the costs to cities and towns (Line Item 7035-0008).

- Continue to provide at least \$28.7 million in line item 7035-0008 under the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to reimburse cities and towns for the transportation of students experiencing homelessness.

For more information, please contact the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless: Kelly Turley, Associate Director, at 781-595-7570 x17 or kelly@mahomeless.org. Please also go to <https://mahomeless.org/current-bill-and-budget-priorities/> to learn more.