



Protect Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness from Having to Sleep in Unsafe Places:

Actively Support the Adoption of Key Emergency Assistance Program Language in Line Item 7004-0101 in the FY'19 Budget

The Problem:

Many families with children experiencing homelessness are forced to sleep in cars, bus stations, and other unsafe places before they are admitted into shelter.

- Based on the state's own data, **604 families with children** had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places in FY'17 (July 2016 through June 2017) *before* they were found eligible for emergency shelter through the state's Emergency Assistance (EA) program. In the first six months of FY'18, another **338 families** were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances (18% of all families approved, for an average of 56 families/month).
- Families are showing up at hospital clinics and emergency rooms **with no other safe place to sleep**, which in turn drives up health care costs. Educators across the state are expressing concern about the fate of their students whose educations are being disrupted as their families search for a safe place to sleep.
- This crisis is due to onerous shelter eligibility restrictions imposed by the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) in September 2012. Under these regulations, in the first six months of FY'18, at least 41% of the families who applied for shelter were denied (1,723 out of 4,162 families that completed applications, as reported by DHCD). For FY'17, the denial rate was 47% (4,264 out of 9,124 families applying).

The Simple Solution: Adopt language in line item 7004-0101 to allow otherwise eligible families to be placed in shelter when they are heading to stay in a place not meant for human habitation, not just *after* they have stayed there. (See over).

The Cost:

Less than \$300,000 per year.

- Based on DHCD's own numbers, we estimate that approximately **700-1,000 families** per year will first have to stay in places not meant for human habitation before getting shelter if this new language is not adopted.
- If each of these families got placed in shelter one night earlier to avoid this fate, **the cost to the Commonwealth would be only about \$91,000-\$130,000 per year** (based on the average cost of \$130/night, as reported by DHCD in January 2018). Even if each family received shelter two nights earlier, the cost would be less than **\$300,000 per year**.
- DHCD's own data shows that many of these families are getting into shelter now – but only after sleeping in unfit places. It has gone too far.

Protect Children Experiencing Homelessness with Key FY'19 State Budget Language: Adopt Language in Line Item 7004-0101 to Provide Shelter to Families with Children That Otherwise Would Be Forced to Stay in Places Not Meant for Human Habitation

For more information, contact the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless (Kelly Turley, kelly@mahomeless.org or 781-595-7570 x17), Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (Andrea Park, apark@mlri.org or 617-357-0700), or EMPATH - Economic Mobility Pathways (Chelsea Sedani, csedani@empathways.org or 617-259-2936.)

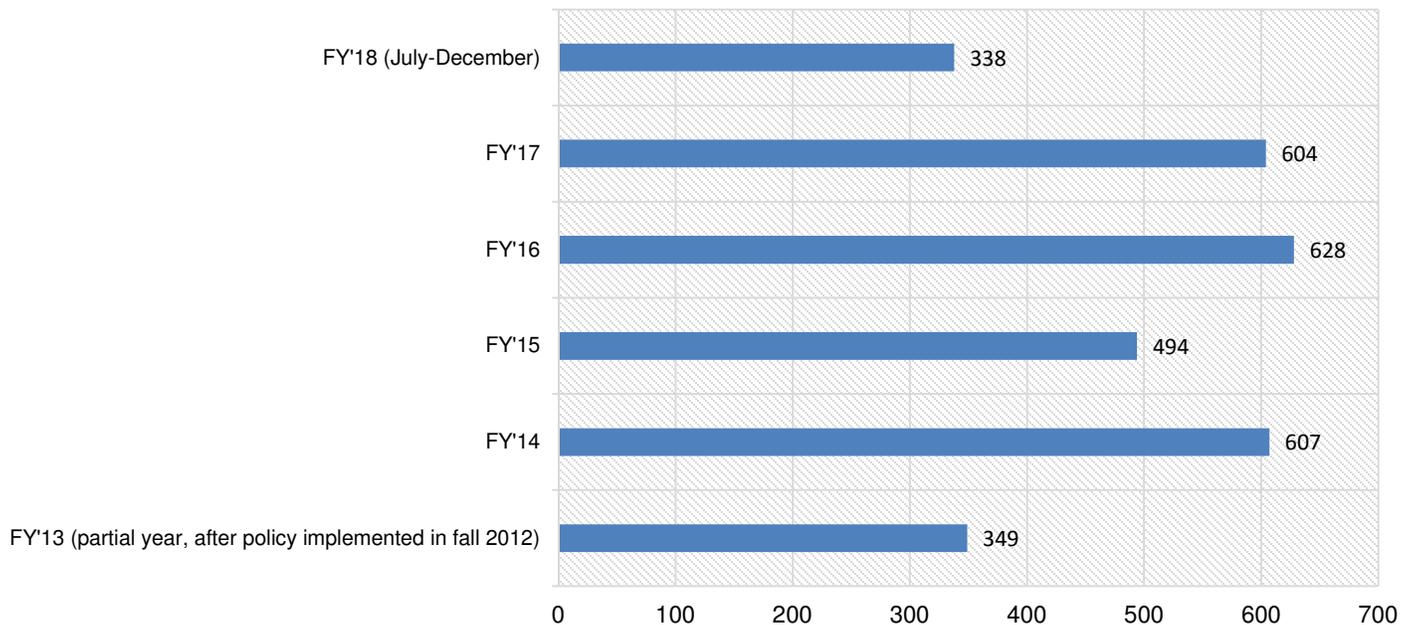
Adopt FY'19 Budget Language in Line Item 7004-0101 to Protect Children Experiencing Homelessness

(Based on language included in the Senate version of the FY'18 budget and language from House Bill 659, An Act to protect families experiencing homelessness from having to sleep in unsafe places)

“provided further, that temporary emergency assistance shall be provided to families who, on the date of application for emergency assistance, have no other feasible alternative housing as defined in 760 CMR 67.06.1(b) and who, but for not having spent 1 night in a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation for human beings including, but not limited to, a car, park, abandoned building, medical facility, bus or train station, airport or campground, would be eligible for emergency assistance under clauses (i) to (iv), inclusive; provided further, that the department shall submit a report to the house and senate committees on ways and means not later than March 1, 2019 detailing expenditures under the previous proviso, including the number of families who received emergency assistance;”

Over 3,000 Families Have Stayed in Places Not Meant for Human Habitation Before Being Able to Access State-Funded Emergency Assistance Shelter

* Data from the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development



Organizational endorsers (Alphabetical list): Action for Boston Community Development, Inc., Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness, Allston-Brighton Health Collaborative, Arise for Social Justice, Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC), Central West Justice Center, Coalition for Social Justice, EMPATH, Greater Boston Legal Services, Horizons for Homeless Children, Housing Families Inc., Massachusetts Alliance of HUD Tenants, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, MetroWest Legal Services, MLPB, National Association of Social Workers, MA Chapter, Northeast Justice Center, Out Now, Partners HealthCare, Poor People's United Fund, Project Hope, and Rosie's Place.