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HARVARD MEDICAL SCHOOL
TEACHING HOSPITAL

June 6, 2016

The Honorable Karen Spilka
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Brian Dempsey
Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Fiscal Year 2017 State Budget – Emergency Shelter Access for Children and Families

Dear Chairwoman Spilka and Chairman Dempsey:

As a group of pediatric providers, human service providers, advocates for children and parents across the Commonwealth, we thank you for your historic support of children in the state budget and for allowing us this opportunity to provide additional input into the development of the FY 2017 State Budget.

We are writing to you today to urge you to include in the final conference committee budget, the following language:

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 camping ground, would be eligible for emergency assistance under clauses (i), (ii), (iii) or (iv);

Including this language from the Senate Ways and Means Budget in the final budget is critical to supporting children and families facing homelessness so that they are not spending a night a place unfit for human habitation before becoming eligible for emergency shelter services. Statewide from July 1, 2015 through April 30, 2016, there were 535 families who stayed in a place for unfit for human habitation.

The current regulation that requires some families to face unsafe, precarious situations before being deemed eligible for emergency shelter is an unsound policy. In addition, this regulation has created a cost shift to the health care system, as we have seen firsthand that many of these families resort to sleeping in hospital emergency rooms in order to meet the requirements needed to obtain emergency shelter. For example, Boston Children's Hospital and Boston Medical Center are both estimating that

We view this as a human rights crisis. Having homeless families sleeping in an emergency department creates situations that are not only a physically uncomfortable place for children and families to stay, but their presence takes away the attention of social workers, nurses and pediatric physicians taking care of other children in the department with medical needs. Therefore, we support this budget language, which would approve families for shelter if they have no other feasible alternative housing options.

We believe that including this language in the FY17 budget is an important step in addressing both health and healthcare challenges resulting from the increase in housing instability we are experiencing in Boston and across the Commonwealth. Without the changes to Massachusetts law which addresses shelter eligibility, families experiencing homelessness in Massachusetts will continue to suffer without the proper tools in place to help them out of homelessness and ensure their health and safety.

We look forward to continuing to work with you to ensure that children across the Commonwealth have access to the resources that they need to reach their full potential. Should you have any questions, please contact Kate Audette, Director of State Government Relations at 617.919.3062 or Kathryn.audette@childrens.harvard.edu. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



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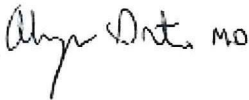
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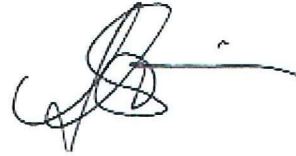
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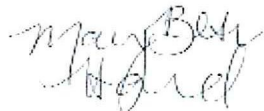
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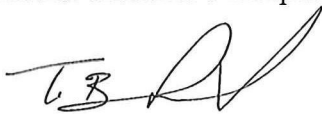
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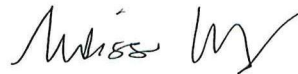
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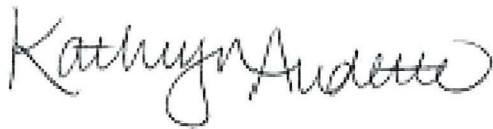
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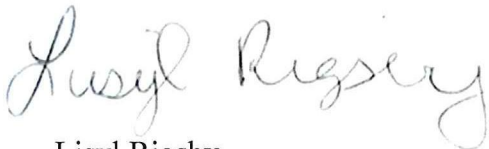
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