November 4, 2014

Join the Campaign to Strengthen EAEDC Assistance!

After more than 25 years, it is time to improve the Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children Program.

Greetings!

When the state does not assess the effectiveness nor updates a program that began in 1988 that provides monthly cash assistance to individuals who are extremely low income and unable to work, it is bound to take a human toll in unmet needs for people who are struggling to survive. Such is the case for the state's Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children (EAEDC) program, a program funded through the Department of Transitional Assistance that serves approximately 23,800 participants.

The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless has now officially launched its Campaign to Strengthen EAEDC Assistance. Sister Linda Bessom SND, Outreach/Senior Community Organizer, interviewed a number of EAEDC participants and human service, shelter, and residential care providers who serve this population. She gave providers and EAEDC recipients a chance to respond to a brief questionnaire about the impact this program has on their lives and people they serve. It is evident from the surveys and conversations that now is the time to improve this program.

A very low-income person is eligible to receive EAEDC only if the individual is:

- An elder, 65 years of age or older, and is in the process of applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI); or
- Experiencing a mental or physical disability that inhibits their ability to work for at least 60 days; or
- A participant in the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission's programs; or
- Caring for a child who is not eligible to receive Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) or a person with a physical disability.
Closure

The City of Boston will be holding a public hearing next Wednesday, 11/12 starting at 6 p.m. at the Blackstone Community Center to talk about the closure of the Long Island Bridge and temporary relocation of some of the island's shelter beds to the South End Fitness Center.

The hearing will be coordinated by the City of Boston Office of Neighborhood Services. Boston City Councillors, the Mayor's Office, the Department of Public Works, and the Boston Public Health Commission are expected to be in attendance.

Come out to show your support for the many individuals displaced by the bridge's closure and to encourage the City and partners swiftly to develop a comprehensive plan for restoring access to shelter, detox programs, and other services.

For more information, please go to the "Don't Forget Long Island Refugees" Facebook page and the Boston Public Health Commission's blog.

A citizen or lawfully present immigrant;
A resident of Massachusetts; and
Has $250 or less in assets.

There never has been a cost of living adjustment or increase in the program's 26 years! The monthly cash benefit depends on one's living arrangement: $304.80/month if one has their own housing. This amount is $668.80 short of the 2014 federal poverty level guidelines for one person. If the individual becomes homeless and resides in emergency shelter, he/she is required to inform the Department of Transitional Assistance, which then reduces the benefit to $91.60/month. If the individual resides in a residential care facility one receives $72 (personal needs allowance).

Last year, at least 821 EAEDC participants experienced homelessness at some point. There are approximately 630 participants residing in residential care facilities.

The EAEDC program assists eligible participants who are in the process of applying for SSI – which can take as long as two years. Once the individual finally starts to receive the SSI federal benefit, the federal government will reimburse the state for just about all it paid out - but this reimbursement goes back into the state’s General Fund. In 2013 the General Fund received $13.1 million from these EAEDC reimbursements from the federal government.

Here are a few stories from EAEDC participants whom we call "Enduring Voices," because of each one's constant struggle to survive. Here are two stories of two women, Angel and Stacey.

These Enduring Voices have given the Coalition permission to share their story and photo, in order to have a critical voice in this Campaign to Strengthen EAEDC Assistance.
Angel: "I have major depressive disorder and PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder). Although I've only been on EAEDC for a month, it is hard to survive on. $92 doesn't scratch the surface...I live at a shelter and they do not cover my basic needs. One meal a day is less than basic needs. Winter is coming, and all I have is summer clothes. I'm concerned about affording clothes to keep me warm... I need more help for the cost of transportation to visit with my children ($14 roundtrip by commuter rail) and to get to the doctors. I can't help to take care of my five kids, but I really want to. Right now I have no other options until I can get back on my feet.... I just want to be able to save, I can't save, but I want to.... Medication is covered by MassHealth, and I'm grateful. Food stamps are okay; they allow me to eat."

Angel has a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, and looks forward to being a case manager when she is able to work again.
Stacey: "With EAEDC benefits of $303.80/month, I feel like I'm in a pond with lily pads all over; there are places to jump but I always wonder if the lily pad will fall through, if I'll drown with that jump. ... Asset limits seem counter-intuitive to helping me save up for a future. I try to save $10 each check, but it creeps close to the $250 limit quickly. I also have unexpected costs... I want to go to school again so badly I can taste it.... I want to be vocationally rehabilitated, I want more than my ninth grade education, but I had a perfect storm of events that happened when I was very young (child-rape). I want to be at the place that I can support myself. ... Ultimately, I'd like to be a child psychologist. First I need to get my GED, then I'd like to get an Associate's degree and work in schools with children. I had one teacher change my life once because she believed in me. I've been looking for her for years. I hope that I can do that for someone, to make them feel like that matter."

Stacey is a hard worker. However, she was fired from her waitress job because she was forced to take part of the morning off from her job to take care of her young adult son who had a severe medical emergency. Her co-workers covered for her, aware of the emergency. Her son pulled through, but her job loss led to homelessness.

Due to severe rheumatoid arthritis, Stacey had reconstructive surgery on one of her ankles. She stayed with a friend until physical abuse forced her to flee to Worcester to stay with another friend. She lost her EAEDC and food stamps for failing to report immediately to DTA that her address had changed even though it was due to domestic violence.

Just recently, Stacey was hired as a supervisor for a catering business at the DCU Center in Worcester, and hopes to pursue her dreams.

Through the Campaign to Strengthen EAEDC Assistance, the Coalition
will work with the Massachusetts Legislature, the new Administration, EAEDC program participants, providers, and concerned community advocates to advocate for the following improvements in order to strengthen EAEDC Assistance:

- Increase the monthly grant from $303.70 to $428/month (amount for an individual receiving Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children benefits with a housing allowance);
- Raise the asset limit from $250 - $2,500;
- Remove the shelter deduction that reduces benefits to $91.60/month, so that the participant who experiences homelessness, can begin to save towards first and last month's rent while in shelter;
- Provide an annual cost of living adjustment to the EAEDC program.

The Coalition is seeking a minimum of 25 organizational endorsers if not more. Please consider filling out the online endorsement form, especially if you work with EAEDC participants.

If you need further information on this Campaign, and have EAEDC recipients who would like to be an "Enduring Voice" in this campaign and would like to be interviewed, please contact Sister Linda Bessom SND at linda@mahomeless.org, 781-595-7570 x18 or Kelly Turley at kelly@mahomeless.org, 781-595-7570 x17.

Joining our voices together, we will strongly advocate for these improvements that will truly begin to make a difference in the quality of life of all EAEDC program participants.

Thank you!

mchalert
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless