



It's Gone Too Far

Amend the Emergency Assistance Line Item (7004-0101) to Protect Children and Families Experiencing Homelessness from Having to Sleep in Unsafe Places

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, almost **500 families with children** had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places in FY15 (July 2014 and June 2015) *before* they were found eligible for emergency shelter through the state's Emergency Assistance (EA) program. In just the first 7 months of FY16, another **364 families** were approved for EA only after staying in such dire circumstances.
- 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 December 2015, at least 50% of the families who applied for shelter were denied.

The Simple Solution: Amend the language in line item 7004-0101 to allow otherwise eligible families to be placed in shelter when they are "within 24 hours of staying 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 **600-700 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 \$70,000 per year**. Even if they received shelter three nights earlier, the cost would be only **\$210,000 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's gone too far.

**Protect Homeless Children in the FY17 State Budget:
Include Vital Language to Provide
Shelter to Children and Families Who Are Within 24 Hours of Staying in
Places Not Meant for Human Habitation**

For more information, contact the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless (Kelly Turley, 781-595-7570 x17 or kelly@mahomeless.org), the Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (Ruth Bourquin, 617-357-0700 x333 or rbourquin@mlri.org), or Boston Children's Hospital (Kate Audette, 617-919-3062 or Kathryn.Audette@childrens.harvard.edu.)

Line Item Language to Protect Children Experiencing Homelessness

Requested new language in bold:

7004-0101 (d) families who are in a housing situation where they are not the primary lease holder or who are in **or within 24 hours of being in** a housing situation not meant for human habitation and where there is **or would be** a substantial health and safety risk to the family that is likely to result in significant harm should the family remain in **or enter** such housing situation; provided further, that the health and safety risk shall be determined by the department of children and families through risk assessments;....