



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

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

July 19, 2018

Governor Charlie Baker
Massachusetts State House
Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Re: Please preserve key legislative language and funding for homelessness, housing, and benefits program line items in the FY'19 budget

Dear Governor Baker:

As you review the compromise fiscal year 2019 budget sent to you by the Legislature, the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless respectfully asks you to not veto key legislative language and funding for housing and homelessness line items. In particular, we ask you to preserve the:

- Language and funding on eliminating the homelessness penalty in the **Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children program (EAEDC, line item 4408-1000)**, so that participants experiencing homelessness can receive the full EAEDC grant: \$303.70/month for a household of one, instead of the reduced grant of \$92.80/month for a household of one.
 - Each month, DTA is penalizing an average of 542 EAEDC participants experiencing homelessness (FY'18 data as of May). By allowing EAEDC participants experiencing homelessness to receive the full EAEDC grant, their lives will not be further financially disrupted, and they might be able to transition into a more stable living arrangement sooner.
- Funding level of \$3.3 million for **housing and wraparound services for unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness (line item 4000-0007)**.
 - This increased funding would help to support young people age 24 and younger statewide, and allow the Executive Office of Health and Human Services to procure housing and supports in every region of the Commonwealth. (The South Shore, Cape Cod, and the Islands never have received funds from this line item, in spite of unmet needs in those regions.)
- Overall funding level of \$20 million and the language maintaining the expanded definition of family for the **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition homelessness prevention program (RAFT, line item 7004-9316)**, so that elders, people with disabilities, and unaccompanied youth can access at least \$3 million in RAFT funds.
 - Retaining the RAFT language and funding will allow the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to help more households avoid homelessness altogether when possible, and greatly decrease how long families of all types spend without safe, permanent housing.
 - With a minimum of \$3 million dedicated to elders, people with disabilities, and unaccompanied youth, the state would be able to prevent homelessness for at least 1,135 single households. This is based on the average FY'17 RAFT expenditure of \$3,084 per household, including all program administrative costs.
- Language in the **DHCD administrative line item (7004-0099) regarding the Emergency Assistance (EA) family shelter and services program** to ensure that DHCD continues to take in-person applications in the ten cities and towns with offices as of January 1, 2018.
 - The legislative language would continue the current system of offering both in-person and telephonic applications. Given the complexity of the EA application process, many families prefer to apply in person, if geographically and logistically feasible. This is especially true for families that have limited

cell phone minutes, lack a reliable cell phone, speak a primary language other than English, and/or lack access to a computer, scanner, and fax machine to submit necessary verification documents.

- Language directly in the **Emergency Assistance family shelter and services program line item (7004-0101)** to protect families that exceed the income eligibility limit for fewer than 90 days from being terminated for being over-income.
 - This language will help ensure that parents and children that only temporarily exceed the income eligibility limits for EA do not lose vital shelter and rehousing resources.
- Funding level of \$100 million for the **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, line item 7004-9024)**.
 - At \$100 million, DHCD could maintain existing services and benefits to households currently served by the program and increase the number of low-income households (including families, elders, and persons with disabilities) struggling with housing instability that could be served by the program.
- Language to increase the maximum benefit under the **HomeBASE short-term housing assistance program (line item 7004-0108)** from \$8,000 per year up to \$10,000 per year for families.
 - This increase in maximum HomeBASE benefits is necessary to make the program more viable, especially for families in high-rent areas and for larger families.
- Family-focused improvements to the **Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children program (TAFDC, line item 403-2000 and Outside Sections)** eliminating the harmful family cap rule, implementing the family cap repeal by January 1, 2019, increasing the annual children's clothing allowance to \$350/child, and increasing the TAFDC asset limit from \$2,500 to \$5,000.
- Language in the **Emergency Assistance line item (7004-0101), Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children line item (4408-1000), and Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children line item (4403-2000)** to allow for adequate advanced notice to the Legislature of proposed eligibility restrictions and benefits reductions in the face of any projected budget deficiencies.
- Tracking and reporting language in the **EA line item (7004-0101) and the unaccompanied youth homelessness line item (4000-0007)**, so that the Legislature, advocates, providers, and your Administration can better understand who these programs serve, where the gaps are, and how we can work together to increase the programs' impacts.

We also ask you to please renew the dialogue to ensure that families already experiencing homelessness (and otherwise eligible) no longer have to stay in places not meant for human habitation before accessing Emergency Assistance shelter and services. Since 2012, over 3,200 families with children have been forced to stay in unsafe, untenable situations to prove that they were "homeless enough" to qualify for EA shelter. In the first 11 months of FY'18, 588 families with children had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places before they were found eligible for emergency shelter. By allowing families who otherwise would be forced to stay in a place not meant for human habitation to access shelter before actually having to stay in such conditions, we can protect the safety and dignity of our most vulnerable families before they are put even closer to harm's way.

Thank you for your commitment to addressing homelessness here in the Commonwealth! We look forward to continuing to work with your Administration to move forward toward our shared goals.

Sincerely,



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