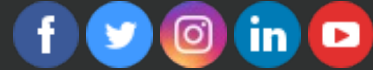


[View our advocacy page](#)



MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

Committed to ensuring that everyone has a place to call home

July 24, 2019

Greetings!

While we await the Governor's decisions on budget signing and vetoes (see below), we wanted to let you know that the [Joint Committee on Housing](#) has [announced a new hearing for next Tuesday, July 30th](#). The hearing will be at the State House in Room B-2 (in the basement, near the Ashburton Entrance) and is scheduled from 10 a.m. - 1 p.m.

Among the bills to be heard that day by the Housing Committee is [House Bill 1265, An Act to protect families experiencing homelessness from having to sleep in unsafe places](#) (lead sponsor: Representative Marjorie Decker). The bill would add language into state statute to ensure that otherwise eligible families can access Emergency Assistance (EA) family shelter without having to prove that they already have stayed in places not meant for human habitation ([building upon the progress we are making with the FY'20 budget](#), in a way that would have a longer life than this one-year budget cycle). The [bill language is here](#) and a [version of bill fact sheet is here](#).

Since the Department of Housing and Community Development first changed their eligibility criteria in 2012, over 3,700 families were placed in state-funded shelter only after being able to prove that they had spent at least one night in an emergency room, car, campground, Laundromat, or other unsafe location (3,774 families as of April 30th). We adamantly believe that the state should not be in the business of putting families experiencing homelessness further into harm's way. The bill would allow families to access shelter and rehousing services in a more timely, safe, and dignified way.

**How you can be involved:**

[Please let us know by completing this simple form](#) or by [emailing us](#) if you are able to do one or more of the following:

- **Provide brief oral testimony to the committee in support of the bill** (no more than 3 minutes in length).
- **Provide written testimony to the committee in support of the bill**
- **Be in the hearing room to show solidarity**
- **Sign on your organization as an endorser of the bill by**

completing this simple [endorsement form](#)

- **Share the hearing invitation with families that have experienced this policy firsthand and other stakeholders**

Another bill on the docket for that hearing is from the Coalition's priority list: [Senate Bill 797](#), An Act relative to the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program/[House Bill 1305](#), An Act codifying the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program.

The bill would improve the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) by making important program changes, including allowing tenants to use their subsidies in units at the current fair market rent instead of 2005 fair market rent level, and establishing the program in state statute and not just the annual state budget. Here is a [fact sheet from Citizens' Housing and Planning Association](#) (PDF).

Thank you to everyone who has been in touch and shared testimony already. We hope to see you on Tuesday!

With gratitude,

Kelly Turley  
Associate Director  
[kelly@mahomeless.org](mailto:kelly@mahomeless.org)

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 1265**

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

PRESENTED BY:

***Marjorie C. Decker***

*To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:*

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the adoption of the accompanying bill:

An Act to protect families experiencing homelessness from having to sleep in unsafe places.

PETITION OF:

NAME:	DISTRICT/ADDRESS:
<i>Marjorie C. Decker</i>	<i>25th Middlesex</i>
<i>Louis L. Kafka</i>	<i>8th Norfolk</i>
<i>Joseph A. Boncore</i>	<i>First Suffolk and Middlesex</i>
<i>Carlos González</i>	<i>10th Hampden</i>
<i>Brian M. Ashe</i>	<i>2nd Hampden</i>
<i>Bruce J. Ayers</i>	<i>1st Norfolk</i>
<i>Christine P. Barber</i>	<i>34th Middlesex</i>
<i>Natalie M. Blais</i>	<i>1st Franklin</i>
<i>Michael D. Brady</i>	<i>Second Plymouth and Bristol</i>
<i>Paul Brodeur</i>	<i>32nd Middlesex</i>
<i>Peter Capano</i>	<i>11th Essex</i>
<i>Harriette L. Chandler</i>	<i>First Worcester</i>
<i>Sonia Chang-Diaz</i>	<i>Second Suffolk</i>
<i>Nick Collins</i>	<i>First Suffolk</i>
<i>Joanne M. Comerford</i>	<i>Hampshire, Franklin and Worcester</i>
<i>Mike Connolly</i>	<i>26th Middlesex</i>
<i>Daniel R. Cullinane</i>	<i>12th Suffolk</i>
<i>Sal N. DiDomenico</i>	<i>Middlesex and Suffolk</i>

<i>Mindy Domb</i>	<i>3rd Hampshire</i>
<i>Daniel M. Donahue</i>	<i>16th Worcester</i>
<i>Michelle M. DuBois</i>	<i>10th Plymouth</i>
<i>Carolyn C. Dykema</i>	<i>8th Middlesex</i>
<i>Lori A. Ehrlich</i>	<i>8th Essex</i>
<i>James B. Eldridge</i>	<i>Middlesex and Worcester</i>
<i>Nika C. Ehugardo</i>	<i>15th Suffolk</i>
<i>Tricia Farley-Bouvier</i>	<i>3rd Berkshire</i>
<i>Dylan A. Fernandes</i>	<i>Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket</i>
<i>William C. Galvin</i>	<i>6th Norfolk</i>
<i>Sean Garballey</i>	<i>23rd Middlesex</i>
<i>Carmine Lawrence Gentile</i>	<i>13th Middlesex</i>
<i>Kenneth I. Gordon</i>	<i>21st Middlesex</i>
<i>Tami L. Gouveia</i>	<i>14th Middlesex</i>
<i>James K. Hawkins</i>	<i>2nd Bristol</i>
<i>Jonathan Hecht</i>	<i>29th Middlesex</i>
<i>Natalie M. Higgins</i>	<i>4th Worcester</i>
<i>Kate Hogan</i>	<i>3rd Middlesex</i>
<i>Kevin G. Honan</i>	<i>17th Suffolk</i>
<i>Daniel J. Hunt</i>	<i>13th Suffolk</i>
<i>Patricia D. Jehlen</i>	<i>Second Middlesex</i>
<i>Mary S. Keefe</i>	<i>15th Worcester</i>
<i>Edward J. Kennedy</i>	<i>First Middlesex</i>
<i>Kay Khan</i>	<i>11th Middlesex</i>
<i>Jack Patrick Lewis</i>	<i>7th Middlesex</i>
<i>Jason M. Lewis</i>	<i>Fifth Middlesex</i>
<i>David Paul Linsky</i>	<i>5th Middlesex</i>
<i>Jay D. Livingstone</i>	<i>8th Suffolk</i>
<i>Adrian C. Madaro</i>	<i>1st Suffolk</i>
<i>Elizabeth A. Malia</i>	<i>11th Suffolk</i>
<i>Paul McMurtry</i>	<i>11th Norfolk</i>
<i>Liz Miranda</i>	<i>5th Suffolk</i>
<i>Brian W. Murray</i>	<i>10th Worcester</i>
<i>Tram T. Nguyen</i>	<i>18th Essex</i>
<i>Shaunna L. O'Connell</i>	<i>3rd Bristol</i>
<i>James J. O'Day</i>	<i>14th Worcester</i>
<i>Elizabeth A. Poirier</i>	<i>14th Bristol</i>
<i>Denise Provost</i>	<i>27th Middlesex</i>
<i>Rebecca L. Rausch</i>	<i>Norfolk, Bristol and Middlesex</i>

<i>David Allen Robertson</i>	<i>19th Middlesex</i>
<i>David M. Rogers</i>	<i>24th Middlesex</i>
<i>Lindsay N. Sabadosa</i>	<i>1st Hampshire</i>
<i>José F. Tosado</i>	<i>9th Hampden</i>
<i>Paul F. Tucker</i>	<i>7th Essex</i>
<i>Tommy Vitolo</i>	<i>15th Norfolk</i>

**HOUSE . . . . . No. 1265**

By Ms. Decker of Cambridge, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 1265) of Marjorie C. Decker and others relative to emergency housing assistance for certain eligible families.  
Housing.

**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**

In the One Hundred and Ninety-First General Court  
(2019-2020)

An Act to protect families experiencing homelessness from having to sleep in unsafe places.

*Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:*

1           SECTION 1. Section 30 of chapter 23B of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2016  
2 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after the first sentence the following sentence:-  
3 The department shall provide emergency housing assistance to eligible families including but not  
4 limited to families who on the date of application for emergency assistance have no other  
5 feasible alternative housing, as defined in 760 CMR 67.06.1(b), and who, but for not having  
6 spent 1 night in a public or private place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping  
7 accommodation for human beings, including but not limited to a car, park, abandoned building,  
8 medical facility, bus or train station, airport or camping ground, would be eligible for emergency  
9 assistance under clauses (i), (ii), (iii) or (iv).

**In Case You Missed It: Monday's Action Alert on the FY'20 State Budget with Action Steps**

As the old saying goes, good things come to those who wait. Yesterday, the FY'20 Budget Conference Committee members\* [released their budget recommendations](#), three weeks into FY'20. Today, the House voted 159-0 to accept the committee's \$43.1 billion in recommendations. The Senate also is scheduled to vote on the budget today. The budget then [will head to Governor Charlie Baker's desk for him to sign the budget and issue vetoes](#).

We are grateful for all of your collaboration and advocacy to ensure the Conference Committee budget was as strong as possible on homelessness, housing, and benefits issues. See Chairperson Michlewitz's [Twitter post](#).

noting the historic investments in housing and homelessness programs.

***Highlights from the Conference Committee's budget:***

- The Conference Committee adopted language similar to that proposed by the Senate for the Emergency Assistance family shelter program to ensure that children and families do not have to stay in places not meant for human habitation before accessing shelter. **After nearly seven years, this failed policy is on course to be repealed!**

The committee also adopted the Senate-proposed funding level of \$178.7 million, which is \$13 million more than the House-proposed level (EA, line item 7004-0101).

As noted previously, both the House and Senate budgets would allow families to retain shelter benefits while increasing their incomes up to 200% of the federal poverty guidelines (before the existing grace period would begin). As anticipated, this language remained in the Conference Committee budget.

- The Conference Committee adopted Senate-proposed funding of \$5 million for housing and wraparound services for unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness (line item 4000-0007), which is \$1.7 million more than both the House-proposed level and the FY'19 appropriation.

- The Conference Committee adopted Senate-proposed funding of \$21 million for the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition homelessness prevention program (RAFT, line item 7004-9316), which is \$1 million more than the House-proposed level and the FY'19 appropriation.

**While it is not spelled out in the budget language, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has agreed to pilot an upstream rent arrearage program through the RAFT line item, very similar to what we have been pushing for in our budget and bill campaigns.** \$4.7 million has been set aside this year to help households who have fallen behind on their rent, but have not yet gone to court for eviction. See page 4 of [DHCD's new RAFT administrative plan for FY'20](#) (PDF).

- The Conference Committee adopted House-proposed direct funding of \$110 million for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, line item 7004-9024), which is \$6 million more than the Senate-proposed direct appropriation, and Senate-proposed language that would update the allowable monthly rent levels to match current fair market rents for mobile subsidies issued or renewed on or after August 1st and that would carry over up to \$6,000,000 in unspent FY'19 funds.

Here is our [FY'20 budget chart](#), updated with the Conference Committee details and our preliminary analysis of these key line items and others related to homelessness, housing, and benefits (see column P).

**\*\*\* Budget action steps:**

**Please join the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless today in thanking the conferees and your State Representative and State Senator for supporting key items in the fiscal year 2020 budget so as to prevent and end homelessness among families, unaccompanied youth, and adults.** Unsure who your legislators are? You can look them up via [www.wheredoivotema.com](http://www.wheredoivotema.com).

**Please also ask the Governor to retain key homelessness, housing, and benefits language and funding** (noted above and in the [budget chart](#)) **by signing these line items into law.** The Governor's contact

information can be found on the bottom of this page:  
<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-the-governor>.

Thanks for your collaboration!

\* The six conferees were Senate Ways and Means Chair [Michael Rodrigues](#), Senate Ways and Means Vice Chair [Cindy Friedman](#), Senate Ways and Means Ranking Minority Member [Vriato \(Vinny\) deMacedo](#), House Ways and Means Chair [Aaron Michlewitz](#), House Ways and Means Vice Chair [Denise Garlick](#), and House Ways and Means Ranking Minority Member [Todd Smola](#).