



November 25, 2020

Chairperson Michael Rodrigues
Vice Chairperson Cindy Friedman
Ranking Minority Member Patrick O'Connor

Chairperson Aaron Michlewitz
Vice Chairperson Denise Garlick
Ranking Minority Member Todd Smola

Re: Please take action to develop the strongest possible budget on homelessness, housing, and benefits issues

Dear Esteemed Members of the FY21 Budget Conference Committee:

With evictions rapidly rising and more households across the Commonwealth facing homelessness, we would like to thank you for all you did this month to address homelessness, housing, and benefits in each iteration of the FY21 state budget. **Now, we respectfully ask you to please join the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless in supporting the strongest possible budget that centers the needs of people experiencing homelessness, housing instability, and poverty in the midst of a pandemic and widespread inequities.** With your leadership, the FY21 budget can be a vehicle to take concrete, positive action to promote stability, equity, dignity, and hope.

Please do all you can to make sure that the final budget incorporates key language and maximum funding, including:

- **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT, line item 7004-9316)**
 - **Funding:** House and Senate funding level of \$54.7 million in total funds allocated through the budget process (with additional funds from the Governor's Eviction Diversion Initiative)
 - **Language:** House version of language that would raise the maximum RAFT benefit to \$10,00/household over a 12-month period and remove language that currently prohibits eligible households from maximizing RAFT and HomeBASE benefits, plus Senate language incorporated from [Amendment #336](#) that would streamline the RAFT application process. [That amendment language also would create a task force focused on the Eviction Diversion Initiative (now Senate Outside Section 85), and protect certain COVID-19-related eviction records from being made public (now Senate Outside Section 84).]
- **Emergency Assistance Family Shelters and Services (EA, line item 7004-0101)**
 - **Funding:** Senate funding level of \$184,785,750
 - **Language:** Senate tracking and reporting language. The Senate language would require the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) to track and report additional, vital data on the Emergency Assistance (EA) family shelter program and related HomeBASE program, including data on families that request Emergency Assistance, but are not ultimately approved or denied. This is important to better understand the extent of the need in our communities and across the state, as the number of families able to complete the burdensome application process for EA is much lower than the number of families requesting services.

We also hear frequently about families discouraged by DHCD from completing applications. Whether or not these families ultimately would have qualified for shelter and services, we want to know more about the volume and nature of these inquiries, especially as the Commonwealth faces an anticipated surge in applications as the eviction crisis intensifies.

At a time when homelessness and lack of access to safe places to practice social distancing put families at greater risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19, insights into denials is especially important so that we can reexamine the narrow eligibility criteria established for this safety net program and provide access to alternative resources when needed. DHCD already tracks data from their triage process, but does not report out this information regularly to the Legislature.

The Senate language also explicitly would require DHCD to track and report race and ethnicity data on families requesting access to EA, not just those that complete applications, and more explicitly require race and ethnicity data across more categories within the reports. We know that homelessness disproportionately impacts Black and Latinx families with children across the Commonwealth, and this data could shed more light on the experiences of those families. This data is needed as we push to transform the EA system to be anti-racist and to foster equity.

All of this additional information is critical for better serving children and parents who are experiencing homelessness, examining racial and ethnic inequities in the program, and addressing the unmet needs of families during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Housing and Services for Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness (line item 4000-0007)**
 - **Funding:** House and Senate funding level of \$8,000,000
- **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, line item 7004-9024)**
 - **Funding:** Senate funding level of \$135,000,000
 - **Language:** House and Senate language to maximize and improve data tracking
- **HomeBASE (line item 7004-0108)**
 - **Funding:** Senate funding level of \$29,058,618
 - **Language:** House removal of language that currently prohibits eligible households from maximizing RAFT and HomeBASE benefits, so as to decouple RAFT and HomeBASE for the full fiscal year, even if the COVID-19 state of emergency is lifted, plus expanded Senate tracking and reporting language
- **Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children Program (EAEDC, line item 4408-1000)**
 - **Funding:** House funding level of \$89,983,226
 - **Language:** House language to provide a 10% increase in monthly benefits until June 2021. Grants for the EAEDC program have been losing value since 1988.
- **Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Grant Payments (TAFDC, line item 4403-2000)**
 - **Funding:** House funding level of \$240,967,007
 - **Language:** House language to provide a 10% increase in monthly benefits for January-June 2021
- **Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP, line item 7004-9030)**

- **Funding:** Senate funding level of \$12,526,596
- **Subsidies to Public Housing Authorities (line item 7004-9005)**
 - **Funding:** House funding level of \$80,000,000
- **Shelter and Services for Adults Experiencing Homelessness (line item 7004-0102)**
 - **Funding:** House funding level of \$56,425,000
- **Home and Healthy for Good Program (line item 7004-0104)**
 - **Funding:** House and Senate funding level of \$3,890,000
- **Transportation for Students Experiencing Homelessness (line item 7035-0008)**
 - **Funding:** House funding level of \$13,449,605
- **SNAP Gap (via line item 4000-0300)**
 - **Language:** Include Senate language adopted from [Amendment #271](#) to eliminate the SNAP Gap by creating a common application for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and MassHealth
- **Outside Section Language**
 - Include language from these Senate Outside Sections: Outside Section 81 on Notices to Quit during the coronavirus pandemic; Outside Section 82 on eviction continuances during the pandemic; Outside Section 83 on Eviction Diversion Initiative data collection; and Outside Section 80 on creating a website to track the state's uses of federal Coronavirus Relief Funds.

Your active support for these investments and initiatives will be critical in the days ahead as the budget is finalized. As we continue to face the coronavirus crucible, the choices you make at this critical juncture not only will make a difference for children, youth, and adults for the remaining months of this fiscal year, but also, in many cases, for the years ahead.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and leadership, and for your work to ensure that everyone has a place to call home during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

With gratitude,



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cc: Senate President Karen Spilka and Speaker Robert DeLeo