

June 18, 2026

Re: Fiscal Year 2027 Budget Negotiations

Representative Aaron Michlewitz
Chair, House Ways and Means
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Michael J. Rodrigues
Chair, Senate Ways and Means
State House, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Kip Diggs
Vice Chair, House Ways and Means
State House, Room 238
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Joanne Comerford
Vice Chair, Senate Ways and Means
State House, Room 410
Boston, MA 02133

Representative Todd Smola
House Ranking Minority Member
State House, Room 124
Boston, MA 02133

Senator Patrick M. O'Connor
Senate Ranking Minority Member
State House, Room 419
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Honorable Conferees,

On behalf of Children's HealthWatch, thank you for your leadership and continued commitment to children and families throughout the fiscal year 2027 budget process. As you reconcile H.5501 and S.3001, *An Act making appropriations for the fiscal year 2027*, we appreciate the opportunity to provide input and urge you to preserve and strengthen investments that support the health and well-being of children and families. We recognize the fiscal constraints facing the Commonwealth and believe that these investments are especially important to strengthen family financial stability, improve child health, and generate long-term returns for Massachusetts.

Children's HealthWatch seeks to achieve health equity for young children and their families by advancing research to transform policy. We accomplish this mission by interviewing caregivers of young children accessing care in pediatric emergency departments and primary care clinics in four cities: Boston, MA; Minneapolis, MN; Little Rock, AR; and Philadelphia, PA and sharing our findings with policymakers, researchers, and the public, in order to drive evidence-based policy change. Headquartered at Boston Medical Center, since 1998, we have interviewed over 80,000 caregivers and analyzed data from those interviews to determine the impact of public policies on the health and development of young children and their families' well-being.

Our research demonstrates that children and families need consistent access to financial resources, safe and affordable housing, nutritious food, and comprehensive health care to thrive. As the Legislature finalizes the FY2027 budget, Massachusetts has an important opportunity to invest in programs and services that help families meet these basic needs and reflect the realities communities are facing across the Commonwealth. We write today in strong support of the following provisions in the conference FY2027 budget:

Free Tax Preparation Services:

Adopt House language to restore \$1.5 million in funding for the Volunteer Income Tax Assistance program (VITA) in line item 1201-0100. VITA provides free, high-quality tax preparation services to Massachusetts residents with low and moderate incomes. VITA helps eligible families, workers, and seniors file their taxes accurately and claim valuable state and federal tax credits, like the Earned Income Tax Credit and Child and Family Tax Credit. By helping residents access these benefits, VITA strengthens economic stability and brings millions of federal dollars into Massachusetts communities that might otherwise go unclaimed.

Mitigating the Impact of HR.1:

Adopt Senate language to level-fund the Department of Transitional Assistance at \$147.7 million, allowing the agency to maintain Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) caseworker staffing. Adequate staffing is essential to helping eligible families enroll in and retain nutrition assistance. This is especially important as HR.1 imposes new reporting requirements in SNAP, increasing the need for caseworker capacity to support families navigate the paperwork. Since HR.1 passed, more than 50,000 children in Massachusetts have lost SNAP.¹ Maintaining funding levels in FY2027 and increasing investment in any future supplemental budget is essential to protect access to SNAP, help DTA improve payment accuracy, protect access to SNAP, and reduce potential cost shifts to the state.

Support Access to Housing:

Adopt the highest levels of funding for housing assistance programs to help ensure families with children can access and maintain stable housing, a crucial foundation for health, development, and well-being.

¹ Nuñez L. Sharp drop in number of children receiving SNAP food assistance under new federal law. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. May 2026.

- **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP)** – adopt House allocation of \$281,341,728 in line item 7004-9024 and include language requiring 90 days' advance notice prior to agency changes that reduce benefits or restrict eligibility.
- **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT)** – adopt House allocation of \$210,060,000 in line item 7004-9316.
- **HomeBASE** – adopt Senate language in line item 7001-0108 allowing families whose income increases to remain eligible for assistance without a 12-month cap, keeping at least \$2,500,000 available for families whose housing crisis requires more than the standard \$30,000 cap, and expanding eligibility to families in domestic violence shelters.

Transitional Aid for Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) & Direct Cash:

Adopt Senate language in outside section 68 to repeal the outdated Learnfare law. This law unfairly cuts TAFDC for children who are struggling with school attendance, reducing access to resources without addressing barriers to attendance that children in families with very low incomes face, including homelessness and lack of transportation.

Adopt Senate language to maintain annual clothing allowance of \$500 for children participating in TAFDC in line item 4403-2000. Provided annually in September, this allowance helps families with very low incomes afford clothing and shoes for growing children.

Adopt Senate language in line item 4403-2000 to maintain non-medical verification of pregnancy for TAFDC. Access to financial resources during pregnancy is essential for parental health, healthy birth outcomes and later child development. Currently, pregnant people are eligible for cash assistance at any stage of pregnancy, recognizing that financial needs begin immediately. Requiring medical verification creates unnecessary administrative barriers and delays in access to assistance.

Adopt Senate language in line item 4400-1000 to fund the Bridge to Prosperity pilot at \$250,000. This pilot program aims to address benefit cliffs by combining temporary direct cash, personalized financial coaching, and career advancement navigation to support economic mobility of working families.

Support Access to Child Care & Early Learning

Adopt the highest levels of funding for child care and early intervention programs to help ensure families can access affordable, reliable child care – an essential support for working parents and a critical investment in child development.

- **Adopt House allocation for child care financial assistance (line item 3000-3050).** This line item includes funding that is needed to maintain existing caseloads, support/cover anticipated growth in the DCF/DTA related child care caseload, and annualize the rate increase from FY26.
- **Adopt Senate allocation for Head Start (line item 3000-500).** This includes a \$1.5 million increase in funding to support Head Start classrooms and help programs that provide high-quality care to some of the state's lowest-income, highest need children, especially amid federal funding uncertainty.
- **Adopt House outside section 34.** This would provide automatic referral to early intervention for children in shelter, so that families can work with providers to learn if their child is eligible for services that help promote healthy learning and development and prevent later deficits, including physical therapy, occupational therapy, or speech and language therapy.

Children's HealthWatch thanks House and Senate leadership for recognizing the role of tax credits, nutrition assistance, housing, direct cash, child care, and early intervention in promoting the health and financial stability of families across the Commonwealth. We urge the Conference Committee to include the above provisions in its final version of the FY2027 budget.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Ettinger de Cuba, PhD, MPH
Executive Director, Children's HealthWatch