

Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness

Arise for Social Justice

Boston Area Rape Crisis Center

Boston Medical Center

Boston Tenant Coalition

Central West Justice Center

Children's HealthWatch

Coalition for Social Justice

Crittenton Women's Union

Emmaus, Inc.

Family Economic Initiative

Greater Boston Legal Services

Homes for Families

Horizons for Homeless Children

Manos Unidas – Great Barrington

Mass Budget for All/Fund Our Communities Not War

Massachusetts Advocates for Children

Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy

Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless

Massachusetts Law Reform Institute

Medical-Legal Partnership | Boston

Neighborhood Legal Services

On The Rise, Inc.

OutNow – Springfield

Pax Christi – Beverly

Pilgrim Church

Poor People's United Fund

REACH Beyond Domestic Violence, Inc.

Rosie's Place

School on Wheels of Massachusetts

Smart from the Start, Inc.

Somerville Homeless Coalition

The Real Cost of Prisons Project

UU Mass Action

April 17, 2014

The Honorable Therese Murray  
The Honorable Stephen Brewer

The Honorable Robert DeLeo  
The Honorable Brian Dempsey

**Re: Protecting Children and Families Who Are Experiencing Homelessness and Housing Instability in the FY'15 Budget**

Dear President Murray, Speaker DeLeo, Chairman Brewer, and Chairman Dempsey:

We, the undersigned organizations, are grateful for your leadership in passing the recent mid-year funding bill that will provide an additional \$45.4 million for the Emergency Assistance program (EA, line items 7004-0101 and 7004-0103) for families experiencing homelessness. These funds will help to ensure that the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) will be able to continue to provide the safety net of shelter and basic services from now until the end of June to approximately 4,400 eligible families with children each night.

As you diligently work to prepare the state's fiscal year 2015 budget, we are writing to ask you to continue to adequately fund the Emergency Assistance program in fiscal year 2015 and to:

**- Ensure that families experiencing homelessness no longer have to stay in places not meant for human habitation before accessing EA shelter and services by amending the EA line item and by reinstating the Seven Day Temporary Emergency Accommodations Program (SDTEA, part of line item 7004-9316) for families who are deemed ineligible for EA.**

According to DHCD's own data for the current fiscal year, 398 families with children had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other unsafe places between July 2013 and January 2014 *before* they were found eligible for emergency shelter.

During the 3 ½ months that the SDTEA program had funding (September-December), this important safety net protected 539 families with children from sleeping in unsafe places. Of the families placed in SDTEA units for up to seven days, 59% then qualified for ongoing EA shelter, while another 4% qualified for relocation benefits under the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT).

**- Provide \$87.5 million for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, line item 7004-9024) to allow more than 2,000 new households (families, unaccompanied youth, and adults) to access permanent, affordable housing.**

Additional funds will help DHCD build upon the successes of this year. The infusion of \$15.5 million in new funds for FY'14 has allowed DHCD to provide 500 subsidies to families who have been living in shelter for more than one year, 500 subsidies to families timing out of the HomeBASE rental assistance program, and an additional 300 subsidies to develop new project-based MRVP units for families, adults, and youth.

(Continued on reverse)

**- Strengthen the HomeBASE program (line item 7004-0108) by providing up to \$8,000 (up from the current cap of \$4,000) for housing expenses so that eligible families can avoid entering shelter or quickly exit shelter.**

Starting in January 2014, DHCD began providing up to an additional \$2,000 to families exiting shelter through the Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund. While the data still is being collected, initial reports show that more families have been able to lease up apartments and exit shelter when funding above \$4,000 is available. In higher cost rental markets, additional funds are desperately needed to assist families at the “front door” and “back door” of shelter.

**- Increase funding for the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition program (line item 70041-9316) up to \$12 million to provide additional families with needed homelessness prevention resources and to reinstate the SDTEA program (see above).**

Thank you for your attention to these urgent requests. We look forward to continuing to work with you to serve children and families and to address homelessness and housing instability here in the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

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The Real Cost of Prisons Project

Karen Watkins, Co-Chair  
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*cc: Senator Jamie Eldridge, Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Housing  
Representative Kevin Honan, House Chair, Joint Committee on Housing  
Aaron Gornstein, Undersecretary, Department of Housing and Community Development*