



MASSACHUSETTS
COALITION
FOR THE HOMELESS

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**FY'12 Conference Committee Budget Advocacy:
Please Ask Your State Representative and Senator to Weigh in with Support
for These Key Housing, Homelessness Prevention, and Benefits Programs**

**Special Commission on Unaccompanied Youth Experiencing Homelessness
(Outside Section)**

Outside Section Language: The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate's outside section language that would create a special commission focused on the needs of unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness.** This special commission would study and make recommendations on improving access to housing, services and education for unaccompanied youth, with a particular emphasis on addressing barriers facing underage and non-system involved youth. As the crisis of youth homelessness worsens, the work of a special commission on these issues would not only be timely and important, but also life-changing for young people experiencing homelessness.

**Emergency Assistance Family Shelter and Services Program
(EA, Line Item 7004-0101)**

We have been heartened that both the House and Senate versions of the Emergency Assistance line item and the new HomeBASE short-term housing assistance line item (see below) include critical language regarding access to shelter, prevention, and re-housing resources for families at-risk and experiencing homelessness. We are grateful for the level of concern and attention given by the Legislature to these critical programs. With the benefit of additional time for dialogue, the Senate versions of these line items include several important clarifications and improvements over the House versions. **In general, therefore, the Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt the Senate versions of line item issues.** Please find more detailed information about particular provisos and exceptions below.

General Eligibility/Access Language: The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate version of EA access language.** While both the House and Senate rejected the Administration's proposal to limit access to emergency shelter to only three narrow categories of families (those families at-risk of domestic violence in their current housing situation, those experiencing homelessness due to fire or natural disaster, and those headed by a parent age 21 and younger), the Senate language more clearly reflects the Legislature's intent to maintain current eligibility standards for families who are experiencing homelessness and have nowhere else to go. The Senate language references the state statute on EA as well as the Department of Housing and Community Development's current EA regulations (or later versions of the regulations if amended in accordance with line item requirements). The Senate language regarding ongoing eligibility is clearer, as it states that families can maintain emergency shelter benefits until they have feasible alternative housing, not just an offer of a housing subsidy or an offer of other housing assistance.

Advanced Notice Language: As DHCD is expected to spend approximately \$161 million on EA shelter and short-term housing in FY'11, it is likely that the combined initial funding of \$136.4 million for EA and HomeBASE will be insufficient to serve all eligible families for the full fiscal year ahead. Therefore, the Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the House version of the 60-days advanced notice language for the EA account.** The House version would prevent DHCD from giving notice before December 5, 2011. This would allow more time for the family homelessness reforms to begin to be implemented before any eligibility restrictions could be put in place.

Homelessness Prevention Language: **The House version of the EA line item included language that would allow DHCD to use EA funds for homelessness prevention efforts.** Increased efforts to prevent homelessness before it starts are critical to help the Commonwealth reach our collective goal of reducing and ending homelessness. The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt this language, and asks that additional funds be appropriated to support such important efforts as funds become available.

Placements Pending Verification Language: The **House version of the EA line item would maintain current line item language that exempts from the 12-month bar on future EA assistance those families who are only placed in shelter temporarily** while they work with DHCD to gather the additional verifications necessary to receive an ongoing EA placement. The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt this House language.

Short-Term Housing Assistance for Families (HomeBASE, Line Item 7004-0108)

As with the EA line item language, we are very grateful for the many improvements made by both the House and Senate to the Administration's HomeBASE proposals, including improving access to critical housing resources and ensuring access to vital shelter for families with children.

Access Language: The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate version of HomeBASE access language**. As in the EA line item, the Senate version of this line item would more clearly ensure that EA eligible families who are referred to HomeBASE receive immediate housing or temporary shelter while waiting to access a unit using HomeBASE assistance.

Language on Due Process/Right to Appeal Denials and Terminations: The **Senate version of this line item would provide families who are facing HomeBASE denials and terminations with the right to an appeal** to the Department of Housing and Community Development's independent hearing officers. Under the current EA line item, DHCD's hearing officers already hear appeals on denials and terminations related to short-term housing assistance, and the continuation of these due process rights is critical in FY'12 and beyond.

Language on 12 and 24-Month Bars on Future Assistance: While the Coalition is disappointed that any families with children will be subject to a 24-month post-assistance bar, we are grateful that both the House and Senate have limited the scope of the bar to only those families who have been found not to have made a "good faith effort" to meet program requirements. The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate version of post-assistance bar language**, which clarifies that families receiving short-term assistance intended to last less than 12 months should only be subject to a 12-month bar before being eligible for additional assistance, if needed.

Fair Market Rent Language: While both the House and Senate included **important exceptions to the 80% fair market rent (FMR) cap, the Coalition urges the Conference Committee to adopt the Senate version**. The Senate version allows for increased flexibility in granting waivers to the FMR cap, which likely will be necessary, given the dearth of available apartments at/below 80% FMR in many areas of the state.

Reporting Language: The **Senate version of this line item includes language requiring DHCD to provide quarterly reports to the Legislature** on how many families, by local office, are subject to the 12 and 24-month restrictions on further assistance. These reports will help stakeholders assess the impact of such language, and may point to the need for policy changes.

HomeBASE Program Participation Time Limits: The **Senate version of this line item includes language clarifying that the 36-month time limit** on participation in HomeBASE should not include any time that a family spends in temporary shelter before leasing a unit with a HomeBASE subsidy.

Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children Program (EAEDC, Line Item 4408-1000)

Line Item Language: The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the House version of line item language that would require 60 days advanced notice** before the Department of Transitional Assistance could make eligibility changes to the EAEDC program. While the Senate budget also would require 60-days advanced notice, the House version of the language would prohibit DTA from giving notice before January 17, 2012, to avoid DTA prematurely anticipating a deficit early in the fiscal year.

**Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program
(TAFDC, Line Item 4403-2000)**

Appropriation: The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate's higher appropriation of \$318.7 million**. The Senate funding level takes into account funding the annual children's clothing allowance at a level of at least \$75/child in FY'12.

Line Item Language: The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the House version of line item language that would require 60 days advanced notice** before the Department of Transitional Assistance could make eligibility changes to the TAFDC program. While the Senate budget also would require 60-days advanced notice, the House version of the language would prohibit DTA from giving notice before January 17, 2012, to avoid DTA prematurely anticipating a deficit early in the fiscal year.

Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, Line Item 7004-9024)

Appropriation: The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the House's higher direct funding level of \$36 million**.

Outside Section Language: The Coalition urges the Conference Committee to **adopt the Senate's language from Outside Section 121 directing MassHousing to provide an additional \$8.4 million in funding for MRVP in FY'12**. This increase in funding would ensure that all current participants can continue to receive this assistance, allow DHCD to re-issue vouchers upon turnover, and allow DHCD to issue new vouchers to an estimated 800 and 1,200 households in desperate need of long-term affordable housing.

Take Action!

To reach your State Representative and Senator, please call the State House switchboard at 617-722-2000.

If you have time to do additional advocacy, please contact the members of the Joint Conference Committee:

- Representative Brian Dempsey, Chair of House Ways and Means: 617-722-2990, Brian.Dempsey@massmail.state.ma.us
- Representative Stephen Kulik, Vice Chair of House Ways and Means: 617-722-2380, Stephen.Kulik@mahouse.gov
- Representative Vinny deMacedo, Ranking Minority Party Member of House Ways and Means: 617-722-2100, Vinny.deMacedo@mahouse.gov
- Senator Stephen Brewer, Chair of Senate Ways and Means: 617-722-1540, Stephen.Brewer@masenate.gov
- Senator Steven Baddour, Vice Chair of Senate Ways and Means: 617-722-1604, Steven.Baddour@masenate.gov
- Senator Michael Knapik, Ranking Minority Party Member of Senate Ways and Means: 617-722-1415, Michael.Knapik@masenate.gov

For additional information or to share feedback from your legislators, please contact Kelly Turley at the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless at kelly@mahomeless.org or 781-595-7570 x17.