



Budget Priority for Ending Family Homelessness

10/06/08

Protect the Safety Net: Emergency Assistance (4403-2120)

The Commonwealth has designated the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to provide emergency shelter, housing assistance and other services to families who become homeless in Massachusetts and who fall below certain income eligibility guidelines. Approximately 2,500 families are currently in shelter, seeking affordable housing. Nearly 600 of these homeless families are residing in hotels and motels across the state.

What Does the Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter Program Do?

Emergency shelter provides homeless families with a safe place to stay and an opportunity to access resources for permanent housing. The EA family shelter program is a closed referral system whereby DTA determines eligibility. Families are placed in motels, congregate shelters, or scattered site apartments. Each family is assigned a case manager and housing search worker. Specific services offered also include children's services, landlord negotiation, health care, development of life skills, job training, education, and financial and budgeting training.

What Is the Need?

The number of families accessing shelter has grown to an all time high. We must maintain adequate funding to ensure that children and their parents who are homeless have a safe and adequate place to stay. Since 1989, there has been only one small 2.4% increase to family shelter's operating budgets (A 5% increase in 1999 was offset by a 5% decrease in 2003; a \$6.6 million increase in last year's budget and a \$2.8 million supplemental allocation was spent to offset to costs associated with capacity expansion to provide for the increased number of families entering the system during FY08). During that same time, the Consumer Price Index has risen by 61% in the Northeast.¹ Shelters have experienced sharp increases in the costs of fuel² for both heating and transportation, health insurance, building maintenance, food and liability insurance. These increasing costs not only make maintaining shelter difficult, also but training and retaining qualified staff. DTA will be re-procuring the shelter system during FY09. In addition to the operating increases, shelter providers will be required to better track data and outcomes. In addition to the current levels of services, shelters will be asked to increase efforts in assessment, stabilization, and in rapid re-housing. In FY06, a 10% operating budget increase was provided for individual shelter providers. Family shelters are seeking the same consideration from the state for FY09. *To maintain current operating standards and evolve services to a "housing first" model, shelters providers and advocates are seeking a 15% increase to their operating budgets for FY09.*

Recommendation

Insert into line item 4403-2120 the following language: "for the purpose of providing an increase to the operating budgets of family shelters" and **increase the line item to \$92.7 million.**

¹U.S. Department of Labor. (2006). Bureau of Labor Statistics data, 1989-2005. Nationally, the CPI has increased by 56%.

²According to the U.S. Department of Labor, between 1989 and 2005, the cost of electricity has increased by 31% and fuel oil has increased by 146%.

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