



Access to Affordable Housing: MRVP

The Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP, line item 7004-9024) is the state's rental assistance program. MRVP helps low-income households pay their rent in private apartments by providing them with a monthly housing subsidy like Section 8. Tenants must have incomes that are not more than 200% of the federal poverty level to be eligible for the program (\$35,200 for a family of three; \$20,800 for an individual). Given the lack of affordable housing in the Commonwealth, and the lack of Section 8 vouchers, this program is an essential tool in addressing the immediate needs of the unprecedented number of families residing in the state's shelter system. Without housing subsidies like Section 8 and MRVP, many families are residing in shelters for longer periods of time, living in unsafe conditions or are doubled and tripled-up in apartments because they cannot afford the high cost of housing. For these families, their only hope of safe, permanent housing for their children is a housing subsidy.

Win in FY09: Funding for MRVP saw a mild restoration of \$3.1 million in funding for. Total funding for the program is now \$33 million. Voucher holders will continue to pay no more than 40% of their income for rent. This is a huge win considering that the state was facing such a tight budget year. While the money allocated for MRVP will not be enough to cover vouchers currently in use, advocates will continue to push for supplemental funding to bridge the gap.

Systems Change: Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH) Reserve Account

The Commission to End Homelessness was established for the purpose of devising a statewide strategy to end homelessness in the Commonwealth and recommended funding a reserve account (line item 1599-1004) for the implementation of this purpose. The Commission consisted of members of the legislature, state agency players, local and other state officials and advocates from across the state. The result is a five year plan to end homelessness; the ICHH will carry out the plan.

Win in FY09: Funding for the reserve fund recommended by the Commission was supported by both the Governor and the legislature. Again, in a time of difficult budget conditions, the creation of this account shows the commitment of the state to implement new ways of addressing its affordable housing crisis. \$8.25 million will be committed to piloting programs and providing technical assistance to providers leading the way toward this necessary change. An additional \$1.75 million has been committed through Mass Housing, a quasi-public agency.

Access to Shelter: EA

The Emergency Assistance Program (EA, line item 4403-2120), provides shelter placement and housing search assistance to thousands of homeless children and their parents across the state. For these families, shelter is a last resort. They utilize shelter when all their other housing options have been exhausted. Our past advocacy efforts have helped to change the system, and now, more families in need of services can access shelter.

Win in FY09: Funding for shelter increased to \$86.6 million. The income eligibility limit for shelter remains at 130% of the federal poverty limit (\$22,880 for a family of three). Still, once in shelter, if a family goes over the income eligibility limit, they will be able to stay in shelter for six months to save for housing, instead of being terminated immediately. Presumptive eligibility also remains in tact. DTA must continue to track and report on families applying for and using the shelter system.