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June 13, 2017

Chairman Brian Dempsey
Representative Stephen Kulik
Representative Todd Smola

Chairwoman Karen Spilka
Senator Sal DiDomenico
Senator Vinny deMacedo

Dear Distinguished Conference Committee Members:

As a membership organization of family shelter providers and an agency dedicated to the inclusion and leadership of families overcoming homelessness, Homes for Families (HFF) extends our gratitude to the House and Senate for thoughtful budget proposals. We recognize the ongoing commitment of the legislature in addressing homelessness by investing in solutions and evolving policies that increase housing stability and economic mobility for families with low incomes across the Commonwealth. Our collective efforts are gaining results. In the past two years, the family shelter caseload has decreased by about 25%, and there are now less than 50 families in motels. Still, we have a lot more work to do: below are Homes for Families' recommendations for continuing this progress in Fiscal Year 2018.

Emergency Assistance (EA) (7004-0101)

HFF appreciates the legislature's dedication to funding the EA system to meet the Commonwealth's moral and legal obligation to provide immediate shelter to households meeting certain eligibility criteria. At the same time, the reliance on supplemental budgets, resulting in short term contracts and the complications of the eligibility policies, continue to destabilize the system and the families it intends to serve. HFF is grateful to continue our work providing technical assistance to the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). ***We ask that you adopt the Senate funding level to increase contract stability and language which addresses eligibility concern, includes funding for Playspace Programs, and adds increased data and reporting requirements to allow for more understanding about who the system serves, who it turns away, and the impact of certain policies.***

Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) (7004-9024)

We thank both chambers for the important language and administrative changes proposed for FY18, including increasing the income cap to minimize the cliff effect for voucher holders working to increase their incomes, and allowing expenditures on a voucher management system. Both the House and Senate proposed \$100 million for this critical housing program, a significant step towards full restoration of the program to \$120 million, the funding level in the early 1990's. We ask that this funding level be protected as difficult decisions are made to balance the budget. Without housing subsidies, continued progress to reduce homelessness will not be possible. Housing subsidies have proven to reduce other costs such as shelter, health care, and education. ***In addition, we suggest the Senate language that ensures that new MRVP vouchers are targeted to households with the greatest needs and mandates faster issuances of vouchers.***

HomeBASE (7004-0108)

HomeBASE has proven to be a valuable tool in advancing the Commonwealth's response to family homelessness. We appreciate the ongoing openness to making program improvements, such as broadening access to families in domestic violence, treatment and sober living programs. ***We ask that you adopt the Senate appropriation and language, which will increase the benefit amount from \$8,000 per family to \$10,000; reduce the 24 month bar to 12 months, a carried over policy from the original iteration of the program; remove the cap on program expenditures for households in domestic violence and recovery programs; and continue forward funding to program administrators.***

Additional programs:

Family homelessness results when other systems fail, therefore, we must look beyond these primary programs for solutions. Please consider the following recommendations:

- **Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP) (7004-3045):** *adopt the House appropriation of \$750,000*
- **Housing Stability and Economic Mobility Memorandum of Understanding (Outside Section 180):** *adopt the Senate language*
- **Public Housing (7004-9005 & 7004-9007):** *adopt the House appropriations for public housing operating subsidies at \$65.5 million and public housing reform at \$1,172,132*
- **New Lease for Homeless Families (new line item):** *adopt the House appropriation and new line item 7004-0106*
- **Workforce Competitive Trust Fund (7002-1075):** *adopt the Senate allocation of \$4 million*
- **Housing Court Expansion (0036-0003):** *adopt Senate Outside Sections authorizing the statewide expansion of Housing Courts and funding it at \$1.2 million.*

Thank you to both branches for your thoughtfulness in drafting the budget proposals and your ongoing efforts to understand the complications and nuances of family homelessness. We have truly made progress and Massachusetts continues to be recognized as a leader in policies and practices related to housing stability. We have an opportunity to make incremental and positive steps in the year ahead. We support initiatives to increase revenues so that the Commonwealth, and the people in it, can continue to move forward. Thank you for your consideration of this input and for your continued support of Homes for Families in ensuring that those most impacted have a role in the movement to end family homelessness. Please feel free to contact me for more information or to answer any questions.

Respectfully,

Libby Hayes
Executive Director

Cc: Senate President Stan Rosenberg
Speaker of the House Bob DeLeo
Senator Joseph Boncore, Chairman Committee on Housing
Representative Kevin Honan, Chairman Committee on Housing
Representative Byron Rushing, Assistant Majority Leader