

HOMES FOR FAMILIES: Initial Update of Key Housing and Family Homelessness Line Items in the FY18 Senate Ways and Means (SWM) Budget

The Senate Way and Means Committee released its FY18 (fiscal year 2018) state budget on May 16th. The committee proposed some positive policy changes and investments in housing and homelessness prevention. The Chairwoman of Senate Ways and Means Karen Spilka highlighted housing and homelessness prevention as a priority in her [message](#).

MRVP (7004-9024): The Senate matched the House proposal of \$100M (\$2.5 higher than the Governor and a \$14M increase) and followed suit with the higher income cap. They also included allowance for spending on a data/voucher management system and a mandate for faster distribution of vouchers.

Emergency Assistance (7004-0101): The Senate proposed adequate funding at \$166M. This could provide for 12 month contracts. It also includes an expansion of eligibility to include those at imminent risk of homelessness. There were earmarks included for a new HomeWorks program, transportation benefits, playspaces operated by Horizons, and Homes for Families technical assistance.

HomeBASE (7004-0108): We did not see this coming...the Senate has proposed increasing the HomeBASE (HB) benefit to \$10,000 per household and proposed \$32.5M to cover the cost of the change. They also mandate that the HB/Emergency Assistance regulations be modified so that the 24 month bar on households terminated from HB be reduced to 12 months. The proposal includes Sober Living Programs as part of the expansion of HB to DV and recovery programs.

Other Items of Note:

- The EOHHS (Executive Office of Health and Human Services) consortium funding was not included
- Residential Assistance for Families in Transition was funded at \$18.5M and includes the expansion to households without dependents under the age of 21
- \$1M was included for the expansion of Housing Courts
- The “Learn to Earn” program proposed by the Governor at \$4M was included at \$1M

Here is more from the SWM [Budget Summary](#):

“The Committee’s budget reflects the Senate’s strongly held priority to support housing and homelessness prevention services, with a focus on preventative and supportive resources to connect people with affordable, stable housing, as well as assistance for those in crisis.

Increase Access. The Committee’s budget expands access to housing and homelessness prevention resources by: increasing the income threshold for rental vouchers from 50% of the area median income to 80%; expanding eligibility for the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program to include persons with disabilities, elders, unaccompanied youth and individuals; and increasing the HomeBASE re-housing subsidy cap to \$10,000 per year to better divert families and provide access to housing in high cost markets. This budget also reaffirms existing rules that ensure families legally eligible for emergency shelter are never forced to stay in an unsafe place not meant for human habitation before accessing shelter.

Increase Funding. This budget makes a substantial investment of \$464.1M in low income housing and homelessness services to connect individuals, families and vulnerable populations with housing and supportive services.

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- \$165.9M for Emergency Assistance Family Shelters, funding critical services for families experiencing housing crises.
- \$100M for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program, providing funding for 350 to 400 new rental assistance vouchers.
- \$46.2M for assistance for homeless individuals.
- \$32.6M for the HomeBASE diversion and rapid re-housing program.
- \$18.5M for RAFT, providing short-term financial assistance to low income families who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless, key for stabilization and long-term self-sufficiency.
- \$5.5M for the Alternative Housing Voucher Program to provide over 100 new rental assistance vouchers for low-income people with disabilities.
- \$2.5M for housing and supportive services for unaccompanied homeless youth.
- \$1M for the Home Works Program to provide out-of-school time and summer programming for children in the Emergency Assistance Shelter program.”