Key Budget Priorities for Addressing Family Homelessness, FY2020 (2/2019)

Address the Need for Housing

MASSACHUSETTS RENTAL VOUCHER PROGRAM (7004-9024)
The Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) provides housing stability to more than 9,000 extremely low-income households in Massachusetts, including elders, disabled individuals, and families with children. Vouchers can be both mobile and project based, and used to develop supportive housing and preserve affordability in units impacted by expiring use and at risk of converting to market rate.

FY2020 RECOMMENDATION:
- Fund MRVP at $130M to maintain current vouchers and provide for over 700 new vouchers; and
- Improve MRVP’s effectiveness and better align the program with the current rental market.

Protect the Safety Net of Shelter

EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE SHELTER (7004-0101)
The state’s Emergency Assistance (EA) family shelter system currently provides shelter, housing search, and stabilization services to families that meet strict eligibility criteria. The program is currently serving approximately 3,700 families, including over 7,000 children.

FY2020 RECOMMENDATION:
- Fund EA at $178M, allowing for 12-month contracts with shelter providers, reducing the likelihood of requiring supplemental funding during the fiscal year;
- Protect children by ensuring fair “front door” policies;
- Support work and address the cliff effect by increasing the income cap for families once in shelter; and
- Ensure program efficiencies including rapid housing search assistance, data and reporting improvements and maintained technical assistance.

Improve Tools for Diversion/Rapid Re-housing

HOMEBASE (7004-0108)
HomeBASE is a tool to assist certain families in avoiding having to enter shelter at all and provides a pathway for some families to exit shelter. HomeBASE provides up to $10,000 of financial support per household and stabilization services over a 12 month period. HomeBASE is limited to families who are eligible for or receiving Emergency Assistance (EA), and to families in state funded domestic violence, substance abuse treatment, and sober living programs.

FY2020 RECOMMENDATION:
- Fund HB at $28M to provide alternatives to shelter and allow greater investments in permanent housing;
- Prevent more families from becoming homeless by allowing access to HomeBASE at the judgment of possession rather than the 48 hour notice
- Prevent returns to homelessness by allowing families to renew HomeBASE if they would otherwise need to re-enter shelter and de-linking from the RAFT program; and
- Continue to ensure access to families residing in domestic violence shelters, residential treatment, and sober living programs.

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