

***The Building Blocks Coalition  
c/o 18 Tremont Street, Suite 401  
Boston, MA 02108  
(617) 742-0820***

June 10, 2008

Honorable Steven Panagiotakos  
Honorable Stephen Brewer  
Honorable Michael Knapik

Honorable Robert DeLeo  
Honorable Marie St. Fleur  
Honorable Vinny deMacedo

State House  
Boston, MA 02133

**Re: Housing Items and the FY 09 Budget**

Dear Conference Committee Members:

The Building Blocks Coalition consists of statewide homelessness prevention and affordable housing organizations united in support of a comprehensive and coordinated approach to providing affordable housing and ending homelessness in Massachusetts. We appreciate the housing investments proposed by both the House and Senate in their respective FY'09 budgets. As the Conference Committee meets to resolve budget differences, the Building Blocks Coalition asks that you take the following action with respect to the housing items described below:

*FY '09 Operating Budget Line Items from SECTION 2*

**Public Housing Operating Subsidies (7004-9005)**

Recede to the House and fund at \$67 million

Following a statewide study of public housing, the Joint Committee on Housing's public housing subcommittee said, "While the state should be proud of its public housing stock, it has instead provided it with drastically inadequate funds for operating and capital improvements." The subcommittee also found that the "diverse populations served by the state's public housing create communities that deserve special attention and a renewed commitment from the commonwealth." Last year, the Legislature reversed the pattern of disinvestment and both branches continued to make progress towards maintaining this critical Commonwealth asset in their FY '09 budgets. However, the House funding amount is closer to the real cost of operating public housing so we ask that you support \$67 million in funding.

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

Recede to the Senate and fund at \$33 million

Rental assistance plays an important part in any comprehensive plan to reduce homelessness. Thanks to the Legislature's investments, approximately 5,100 households have stable housing that would otherwise be at-risk of homelessness. Due to cost increases, a funding increase is necessary to maintain the current number of vouchers. While \$33,000,000 will likely be insufficient to maintain that number, it is vital to adopt the higher funding amount to curtail the rise in homelessness to the greatest extent possible.

## **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (7004-9316)**

Recede to the Senate and Fund at \$5,500,000

RAFT provides families experiencing housing instability with up to \$3,000 in flexible funds to help them to stay housed or move into their next home. With this assistance, many families are able to avoid homelessness and other housing difficulties without further subsidy. The awards made in the past year have averaged \$1,700, allowing many families to maintain housing and overcome difficulty without entering shelter.

## **Housing Consumer Education Centers (within Housing Services 7004-3036)**

Recede to the Senate funding amount for HCECs at \$1,850,000

An increase in the amount for the Housing Consumer Education Centers would allow for: increased staffing for greater outreach to other locations within each region, the capacity to more fully meet the increased demand for services, and increased efforts to prevent individuals and families from becoming homeless. With the increase in people in need of foreclosure prevention strategies and homeless prevention assistance, the Centers are seeing people with more complex situations who need more in-depth assistance with their circumstances to find a solution.

### Outside Sections

#### **Affordable Housing Trust Fund**

Adopt Senate SECTION 7

This section calls for surplus funds available at the end of the fiscal year to be allocated to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund, among other important economic investments. Massachusetts' high cost of housing is one reason given by young families for leaving the state and by employers as an obstacle to recruiting and retaining workers. New money for these trust funds would allow more affordable housing to be built and could encourage municipalities to zone to allow for more housing. These steps may help persuade workers to remain in the Commonwealth and employers to locate here.

Thank you for considering these requests and for your ongoing support for affordable housing. Please do not hesitate to contact us at 617-742-0820 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Aaron Gornstein  
Citizens' Housing and Planning Association

Joe Kriesberg  
Mass. Association of CDCs

Maureen Fitzgerald  
Mass. Non-Profit Housing Association

Tom Connelly  
MassNAHRO

Robyn Frost  
Mass. Coalition for the Homeless

Libby Hayes  
Homes for Families

Chris Norris  
Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership

Bill Henning  
Boston Center for Independent Living

Paul Deare  
Action for Regional Equity

Lew Finfer  
Mass. Communities Action Network

cc: Honorable Therese Murray, Senate President  
Honorable Salvatore DiMasi, House Speaker  
Honorable Susan Tucker, Senate Housing Chairman  
Honorable Kevin Honan, House Housing Chairman