



# Budget Priorities for COVID-19 Response

## PRESERVING HOUSING STABILITY IS A PUBLIC HEALTH NECESSITY

Many Massachusetts residents were burdened by high housing costs long before the COVID-19 emergency. As the public health crisis unfolds, even more households will face challenges due to job losses and decreased incomes. The impacts will be hardest for households with the lowest incomes and those experiencing homelessness. No one should lose their home during the public health emergency. The collective health of our community depends on the ability for people to practice social distancing, self-isolate, or quarantine in their homes.

In order to help stop the spread of the virus and preserve housing stability, multiple strategies and resources are needed to support those facing housing insecurity and those providing housing and services for our most vulnerable residents. CHAPA requests urgent action on to provide critical resources that will:

- Help residents pay rent or mortgage payments in cases of financial hardship related to COVID-19;
- Expand access to essential services to those in need; and
- Increase the capacity of emergency shelter providers, housing authorities, and regional housing agencies to respond to the public health crisis.

Line Item	Program	Emergency Appropriation Request	Description
7004-9316	Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT)	<b>\$ 50 million</b>	Expand RAFT to help residents pay rent & mortgages when the moratorium is lifted
7004-3036	Housing Consumer Education Centers (HCECs)	<b>\$ 1.5 million</b>	Expand capacity of HCECs to administer housing resources like RAFT as demand for services increase
7004-9005	Public Housing Operating	<b>\$ 15 million</b>	Assist housing authorities with increased COVID-19 related expenses & decreased rent collections due to residents' loss of income
7004-0104	Permanent Supportive Housing for People Experiencing Homelessness	<b>\$ 10.8 million</b>	Increase capacity to provide permanent affordable homes & services for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness
7004-0102	Homeless Individuals Assistance & Related Programs	<b>\$ 20 million</b>	Increase capacity of emergency shelters to provide services, food, staffing & necessary health & safety equipment

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## **RESIDENTIAL ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILIES IN TRANSITION (RAFT) (7004-9316)**

### **REQUEST: \$50 MILLION EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION**

RAFT helps households with very low-incomes cover housing-related expenses to remain stably housed. As people lose jobs and incomes or face additional expenses because of COVID-19, new funding for RAFT, along with a temporary expansion of the program to allow households to access up to \$10,000 in assistance and expanding eligibility to those who earn up to 80% of the area median income, will provide a critical tool to help people pay rent and mortgages to avoid displacement or homelessness. Allowing RAFT to be accessed quickly after falling behind on housing payments will help preserve housing stability and ensure that owners can maintain properties and cover their expenses.

## **HOUSING CONSUMER EDUCATION CENTERS (HCECS) (7004-3036)**

### **REQUEST: \$1.5 MILLION EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION**

HCECs are regional housing agencies that offer anyone in the Commonwealth a wide range of housing resources. HCECs are essential to delivering housing and homelessness prevention resources, including rental vouchers, RAFT, HomeBASE, and housing counseling. The HCECs have deep experience in effectively and rapidly addressing sudden housing crises. Since the outbreak began, HCECs have already seen a 200–400% spike in calls. As the COVID-19 crisis continues, \$1.5 million will allow HCECs to expand their capacity to serve increased numbers of residents in need of programs like RAFT because of reduced or lost incomes.

## **PUBLIC HOUSING OPERATING SUBSIDY (7004-9005)**

### **REQUEST: \$15 MILLION EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION**

State-assisted public housing provides homes to more than 70,000 residents with low-incomes in Massachusetts. 65% of this population is elderly, the demographic most vulnerable to the virus. Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) face a reduction in rental income as residents experience job losses or reductions in pay and increased costs of supportive services for residents in isolation, maintenance staff hours for sanitizing common areas, and contract costs for vendors to sanitize quarantined units. The \$5 million emergency appropriation will help support LHAs with costs for purchases of protective gear, supplies, equipment for staff to work remotely. The additional appropriation will also help LHAs make up for the loss of revenue and these additional costs.

## **PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING FOR PEOPLE EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

(7004-0104)

### **REQUEST: \$10.8 MILLION EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION**

An additional \$10.8 million is needed to support organizations that provide low-threshold permanent supportive housing for vulnerable populations experiencing homelessness. The additional funds, administered through the Home and Healthy For Good program (7004-0104), will help cover the costs incurred and anticipated through June 30, 2020, as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. These additional funds will help in controlling the transmission of this illness and create the necessary chain of supplies for sanitation and services like adequate staffing to enable “shelter in place” for this population.

## **HOMELESS INDIVIDUALS ASSISTANCE & RELATED PROGRAMS (7004-0102)**

### **REQUEST: \$20 MILLION EMERGENCY APPROPRIATION**

Emergency shelter for those experiencing homelessness, including staff and those the shelter serves, are on the frontlines of the battle against the virus. This line-item provides a flexible resource for operation costs and supportive services for traditional shelter beds, transitional housing units, and permanent housing programs. The \$20 million emergency appropriation will be used for the expansion of shelter space to test and de-congregate crowded shelters, supplies, cleaning, and staffing.

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