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June 8, 2017

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**RE: CHAPA Recommendations for Affordable Housing, Homelessness Prevention, & Community Development Programs in the FY2018 Budget**

Dear Distinguished Members of the FY2018 Budget Conference Committee,

On behalf of Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA), thank you to both the House and Senate for prioritizing affordable housing, homelessness prevention, and community development programs in your FY2018 budget proposals. The level of support shown for these programs will help thousands more households in the Commonwealth find a safe, healthy, and affordable place to call home.

Below are funding and language recommendations supported by CHAPA that will help bridge the key differences between the two budgets and provide the strongest support for these critical resources.

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

*Adopt the Senate language for MRVP.*

CHAPA greatly appreciates the work of the Legislature in restoring funding for MRVP to \$100 million, which will create hundreds of new rental vouchers. Thank you also for important program changes that will help improve the administration of MRVP and address cliff effects that will help families become more economically self-sufficient.

We ask that you adopt the Senate language for MRVP which differs in two ways. First, in distributing vouchers, the Senate language requires DHCD to target 75% of new vouchers to extremely low income households. This will help ensure that MRVP serves households with the greatest needs.

Second, the Senate language requires DHCD to begin issuing new vouchers on August 1, 2017. This language will help get vouchers out faster and will allow voucher holders to look for apartments at times when more rentals are available in the fall.

**Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP) (7004-9030)**

*Adopt the Senate appropriation of \$5.5 million and the House language.*

CHAPA thanks both branches for demonstrating increased support for this program in their budget proposals. We ask that the Committee adopt the higher Senate budget appropriation of \$5.5 million. These funds will create new vouchers for persons with disabilities.

We also ask that you adopt the House language which contains a reporting requirement on the uses of AHVP. This information will help providers better administer the program by helping understand how the program is used.

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

*Adopt the House appropriation of \$65.5 million.*

CHAPA supports the House appropriation of \$65.5 million for public housing. These funds help support over 45,600 state public housing units, with over two-thirds of these homes dedicated for the elderly and persons with disabilities. The additional funds will help provide an increase to local housing authority operating budgets so they can keep units online and available for low-income households.

**Public Housing Reform (7004-9007)**

*Adopt the House appropriation of \$1,172,132.*

Thank you to both the House and Senate for providing increased support for the implementation of public housing reform as well as language authorizing funds to be spend on an online central waitlist for public housing. We ask that you adopt the House appropriation.

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

*Adopt the Senate appropriation and language for RAFT.*

CHAPA appreciates the increased support that both branches demonstrated towards RAFT. We ask that you adopt the Senate appropriation of \$18.5 million as well as the Senate’s language that maintains the expanded eligibility for the program. The expanded definition of family included in the FY2017 budget and the Senate’s FY2018 budget proposal covers households of all sizes and configurations so as to allow families with dependent children, families without children in the household, and unaccompanied youth and adults. During the last fiscal year, 124 households were able to access RAFT under the expanded definition, 56% of which were households with disabilities. At the Senate’s proposed funding level, the state would be able to prevent homelessness for over 6,000 households.

**HomeBASE (7004-0108)**

*Adopt the Senate appropriation and language for HomeBASE.*

Thank you to the House and Senate for your support for HomeBASE and for continuing and making improvements to the program within HomeBASE that allows domestic violence survivors and families in substance abuse or sober living programs to access the resource if they would otherwise be eligible.

CHAPA asks that you adopt the Senate appropriation of \$32.6 million as well as the Senate language that makes several important changes to the program. First, the Senate language allows families to access up to \$10,000 to help avoid or end homelessness. These additional funds that the family can access will make the program more effective as families work to find a stable home.

Second, the Senate allows families that have been terminated from the program to receive benefits again after 12 months, instead of the current, excessive 24-month bar on receiving further assistance.

Third, the Senate language removes the \$300,000 cap on the program within HomeBASE for domestic violence survivors or those in substance abuse and sober living programs. This will ensure that all families in these shelters will be able to access HomeBASE if they are eligible.

Finally, the Senate allows HomeBASE to continue to be forward funded, as it has been in the past two years. Forward funding has been successful, with no increased cost to the state. In addition to reducing the cash flow burden on providing agencies and more efficiently using the resource, forward funding has provided DHCD with timelier tracking of funds.

#### **Foreclosure Prevention Counseling (7006-0011)**

*Adopt the Senate appropriation and language.*

CHAPA asks that you adopt the Senate appropriation and language for the foreclosure and housing counseling program. The Senate allows the Division of Banks to retain more revenue from broker loan originator fees. The language also guarantees that at least \$1.3 million in retained revenue be spent directly for these foreclosure and housing counseling grants. This represents the level of grant funding provided by the program during the previous few fiscal years. Finally, the Senate language avoids funding Housing Consumer Education Centers (HCECs) through this line-item, which could divert funding away from the intended purpose of the line-item to support foreclosure and housing counseling grants.

#### **Housing Consumer Education Centers (HCECs) (7004-3036)**

*Adopt the Senate appropriation without earmarks for unrelated programs.*

We ask that you adopt the Senate funding levels of \$2.97 million for HCECs without earmarks for unrelated programs. HCECs are the front line for housing crisis response in the Commonwealth and provide information to help people make essential connections to housing and related supports. HCECs also provide essential support for related state resources including HomeBASE and RAFT. We urge your support for the increased funding provided for HCECs while keeping the program free of earmarks. CHAPA does not oppose funding the programs proposed in the budget and ask that the earmarks be included elsewhere in more appropriate budget line-items.

#### **Housing Court Expansion (0036-0003)**

*Adopt Senate Outside Sections authorizing the statewide expansion of Housing Court and funding it with \$1.2 million.*

CHAPA supports the Senate budget authorizing the statewide expansion of Housing Court and funding the expansion with \$1 million. Currently, over one-third of the state's population does not have access to a Housing Court, including most of Norfolk County, parts of Middlesex and Suffolk Counties, and all of Barnstable, Dukes, and Nantucket Counties. Expanding Housing Court will

protect landlords and tenants by providing a forum with expertise in housing and will provide a cost-effective way to enforce the building, fire, and sanitary codes, prevent homelessness by preserving tenancies among people with disabilities, and reduce blight.

**Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP) (7004-3045)**

*Adopt the House appropriation of \$750,000.*

We ask you to adopt the House appropriation of \$750,000 for TPP. In consultation with the Housing Court, TPP works with households with disabilities facing eviction to determine whether a disability can be reasonably accommodated in order to preserve the tenancy. The additional funds for TPP would allow the program to serve more persons with disabilities and would help grow the program if Housing Court expands statewide.

**Home and Healthy for Good (HHG) (7004-0104)**

*Adopt the House appropriation of \$2.2 million.*

We ask that you adopt the House appropriation for Home and Healthy for Good. HHG is a Housing First program that provides permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless, including a program for LGBTQ unaccompanied homeless youths. Since 2006, 948 chronically homeless adults have been placed into permanent homes with supportive services. HHG saves the Commonwealth an estimated annual average of \$13,351 per person because of a decreased reliance on other expensive public services once an individual is in a permanent home.

**Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (4000-0007)**

*Adopt the Senate Appropriation of \$2.5 million.*

CHAPA asks that you adopt the Senate's appropriation of \$2.5 million to provide increased support for housing and wrap-around support services for unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness.

**Community Preservation Trust Fund**

*Adopt the Senate Outside Section 53 to provide increased support for Community Preservation Trust Fund.*

CHAPA asks that you adopt Outside Section 53 of the Senate Budget to provide increased support for the Community Preservation Trust Fund. The Community Preservation Act (CPA) creates housing, jobs, and economic development in 172 communities across the Commonwealth. The foundation of the CPA is the promise of a strong state/local partnership for funding the program. Each CPA community voted to add a small surcharge to local property taxes with the state committing to provide matching funds through the trust fund. The partnership is in jeopardy as the state match has declined as more communities enact the CPA. Next year's match is expected to be 15 percent and could go down to 10 percent in 2018 when Boston and others get their first match. The outside section provides a \$25 increase in the deeds recording fee that funds the trust fund. This will bring the state match back to 30 percent match for all communities in 2018.

**Support New Lease for Homeless Families (7004-0106)**

*Adopt the House appropriation for New Lease in the new line-item 7004-0106.*

We ask that you adopt the House appropriation to support the ongoing work of New Lease for Homeless Families in a newly created line-item. New Lease houses homeless families residing in state-funded shelters and hotels by implementing a preference for these families in private

developments across the Commonwealth. Through New Lease, homeless families have the opportunity to live in desirable and affordable communities with the supports they need to achieve successful tenancies.

**Housing Stability and Economic Mobility Memorandum of Understanding**

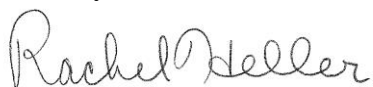
*Adopt Senate Outside Section 180 to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) among state agencies to coordinate services for low-income households.*

We ask Conference to adopt Outside Section 180 in the Senate Budget, which creates an MOU with the Secretaries of Housing and Economic Development, Health and Human Services, Labor and Workforce Development, and Education to work together to coordinate services to extremely low income households to support housing stability and economic mobility.

Finally, we would like to thank you for including funding for the **Massachusetts Access Affordable Housing Registry (4120-4001)**.

Thank you again for your leadership and continued support for providing quality, safe, and affordable homes for everyone in the Commonwealth. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,



Rachel Heller  
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Rep. Robert A. DeLeo, Speaker of the House of Representatives  
Sen. Stanley C. Rosenberg, President of the Senate  
Rep. Kevin G. Honan, Chair, Joint Committee on Housing  
Sen. Joseph Boncore, Chair, Joint Committee on Housing