

CHAPA Housing Stability & Economic Mobility Committee
Wednesday, June 3, 2020, 1:00–2:30 p.m.
Virtual Zoom Meeting

WELCOME

Naomi Sweitzer, Committee Chair

Sweitzer welcomed everyone to the committee meeting and began by acknowledging the challenges and systemic inequities faced by communities of color. She opened the discussion to allow members to share their thoughts and suggestions for specific actions.

Members shared about the racism and violence black and brown families face in programs like the EA system. Members also discuss the over-institutionalization of black and brown persons and the over-policing of these families and individuals in even accessing the supports meant to help—such as how this over-policing has led to higher rates of CORI records which then becomes a barrier from accessing other supports, including housing benefits. How can people learn that opposing housing—which would help to diversify communities—is part of the systemic oppression and inequity?

RAFT CAMPAIGN UPDATE & OTHER UPDATES

Eric Shupin, Director of Public Policy, CHAPA

Shupin provided an update on the campaign to expand RAFT. CHAPA and other advocates have been asking for an additional \$50M for RAFT and to make program changes to more effectively serve residents. These changes include increasing the maximum benefit from \$4,000 to \$10,000 and increasing income eligibility from 50% AMI to 80% AMI for those experiencing a housing crisis related to COVID-19. For more information on the RAFT request, [click here for CHAPA's RAFT request letter](#).

Shupin thanked everyone who has reached out to their state legislators and asked members to keep contacting their state representative and senator. Click here for [CHAPA's RAFT Action Alert](#).

The campaign is asking for additional funding to be provided in either a supplemental budget for the current fiscal year or as part of the FY2021 state budget. Although a \$1B supplemental budget is pending before the Legislature, it is unclear if there will be enough time to have RAFT included in the budget before the next fiscal year starts on July 1st.

The process for completing the FY2021 state budget also remains unclear. While we would normally be in the final stages of approving the state budget, the Legislature has delayed approving a state budget due to COVID-19. Ways & Means, the budget writing committee, is still figuring out the impact the virus is having on state revenues. Initial estimates suggest that state revenues will be down by several billions of dollars.

In order to avoid a state government shutdown on July 1 when the new state fiscal year begins, the Legislature is expected to pass a series of short term budgets. These could be budgets that continue state spending for programs on a monthly bases—also known as a

1/12th budget. We will advocate for RAFT additional RAFT funding to be included in any budget that is passed.

In addition to the campaign for additional funding, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless spoke of making sure RAFT is administered effectively. There is concerned that RAFT isn't being administered correctly by all the organizations that distribute RAFT funding. For example, there may be differences in how administering agencies are handling undocumented households or flexibility for application documentation.

Information on DHCD's RAFT policy changes during COVID-19 was shared. [Click here for the COVID-19 RAFT policy changes](#). Shupin also shared the link the recording and materials from the RAFT webinar CHAPA hosted with the Regional Housing Network on May 20. [Click here for links to the RAFT webinar recording and materials](#).

It was suggested that if there are questions about how RAFT is being administered, contact Amy Mullen, HomeBASE/RAFT Contract & Compliance Coordinator, DHCD, amy.mullen2@state.ma.us.

Raising Revenue Measures – A question was raised about supporting increased taxes or revenue measures in order to make up for budget shortfalls at this time. Shupin responded that CHAPA has supported equitable and progressive revenue measures as well as specific revenue measures to increase funding for affordable housing, such as increasing transfer fees or the deeds excise tax.

Public Process for Distributing COVID-19 Funding – A question was also raised about how decisions are being made about how federal funds are used in Massachusetts. Specifically, for example, how the \$1B+ in funding for Massachusetts from the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) was being used. It is unclear at this time who is making decisions on how CRF funds will or are being used, what process there may be for public input, or how the House committee established to oversee these funds will work. CHAPA will work to find out more information on these questions to share with the members.

A question was also raised on how community advocates can speak up for how locally controlled funds should be allocated. A challenge being that large amounts of funding are being distributed quickly with limited public process or community input.

A suggestion was to reach out directly to local municipal officials and decisions makers to asked to be engaged, to offer input, and help organizing and getting input from members of the community. A template letter on engagement to send to municipal officials was shared:

Dear [MAYOR/MUNICIPAL OFFICIAL],

We write to share an exciting new collaborative effort being coordinated by board members and staff of several organizations in [COMMUNITY]. We recognize that our staff, as well as yours, are flat out working the front lines of this pandemic.

They are responding to the unimaginable needs of [COMMUNITY'S] residents. We need to come out of our individual silos and work together to weave a safety net and save our city.

The initial meetings have included staff and board members from [ORGANIZATIONS, FAITH LEADERS, ETC.]. We want to ensure our organizations and the residents we serve have a voice at the table to help direct public, and leverage private, recovery-related resources to [COMMUNITY] where they are most needed.

We hope to serve as an advisory council to city leaders (the Mayor, City Council, Departments, etc.) to share our perspective of what's happening on the ground, identify gaps that need filling with additional resources, and to be recognized as partners in designing solutions.

To this end, we urgently request a meeting with you to discuss any upcoming allocations and prioritizing of funds to bring our community perspectives to ensure broad access and complementary coverage among agencies administering the funds.

As the scope of need in [COMMUNITY] becomes clearer, we hope to build a collaborative public/private planning space to raise and distribute additional funds and, crucially, to invest in system-change solutions.

We trust you will see our input as an important piece of what needs to happen to bring our city back. The absolute devastation is so clear through our work and the requests that reflect the very real suffering of our neighbors.

We recognize the need for expediency and streamlined processes during this extraordinary time and hope to work as a complement to the work of the city.

Thank you for your time and attention. We look forward to finding a time to meet with you very soon.

[ORGANIZATIONAL SIGNATORIES]

EMERGENCY SOLUTIONS GRANTS

Ashley Mann-McLellan, Senior Associate, Technical Assistance Collaborative
Joyce Tavon, Senior Director of Policy & Programs, Massachusetts Housing & Shelter Alliance

Mann-McLellan gave a presentation on Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funding in the CARES Act (ESG-CV). [Click here for the slides from the presentation.](#) The presentation includes:

- ESG-CV Purpose: Address COVID
- ESG-CV Flexibilities
- HUD Messaging: ESG-CV Strategies

- Concrete Planning Steps: Racial Equity
- Funding Streams & Activity Types

Mann-McLellan also shared a document [COVID-19 Homeless System Response: Developing Your Funding Strategy](#). This document includes:

- Strategic Planning – Funding Streams & Activity Types
- Strategically Funding Non-Congregate Shelter

Tavon then spoke of the [ESG funding coming to Massachusetts to respond to COVID-19](#). Nationwide, the CARES Act approved \$4B for ESG to be distributed in two phases.

In the first phase of ESG funding, Massachusetts received \$30.3M - \$16.4M went to DHCD to distribute through a [Notice of Funding Availability](#) and \$13.9M to entitlement communities.

***Note:** Following the committee meeting, on June 9, HUD announced the Phase 2 allocation. MA will receive \$73.5M - \$27.9M will be distributed by DHCD and \$45.6M will go to entitlement communities. Funds have to be distributed within 90 days.*

Phase I of ESG funding was spent almost entirely on maintaining shelter operations to ensure sanitation and cleaning to keep residents and staff healthy.

Beyond supporting the ability of shelters to operate, Tavon spoke on the critical need to de-populate congregate shelters because these already over-crowded shelters with shared living are difficult to control the spread of the virus.

Infection rates at shelter are already alarming. For example, point-in-time positive rates of 36% of the 408 guests tested at the Pine Street Inn, 37% of the 383 guests tested at the Southampton Street Shelter, 33% of the 152 guests tested at the Woods Mullen Shelter, and 43% of the guests tested at a shelter for unaccompanied adults in Worcester.

The challenge for Phase 2 of funding is balancing the needs of shelters, supporting rapid rehousing for keeping people stably housed, and preventing homelessness to keep people out of shelters.

Discussion of Recommendations for Distributing Federal Funds to Serve ELI Households – The recovery response to the virus provides an opportunity to change the model of congregate shelters. The committee began to discuss drafting and sharing recommendations to DHCD and the Baker-Polito Administration on the use of federal COVID-19 response resources to most effectively serve extremely low-income (ELI) households.

The committee discussed how we can better coordinate all available federal resources to serve ELI households, including families and individuals experiencing homelessness. These resources include ESG funds, Coronavirus Relief Funds (CRF), FEMA funds, Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, and others.

For example, FEMA funds may be used to secure hotels for non-congregate shelter for persons experiencing homelessness, regardless of COVID-19 status. [Click here for a letter legislators sent to Governor Baker advocating for expanding use of FEMA funds for non-congregate shelter.](#)

Other states have received FEMA authorization to provide non-congregate shelters for people experiencing homelessness. [An analysis by the National Low Income Housing Coalition \(NLIHC\)](#) provides recommendations and summaries of what other states have arranged broad non-congregant programs.

The Center for Supportive Housing (CSH) also prepared a [table showing recommended uses of federal COVID-19 response funds for supportive housing and homeless response.](#)

Currently, each shelter provider is implementing its own plans for shelter de-densification. The committee can ask the state to engage in a statewide coordination or planning around the de-densification of shelters, including the extent to which shelters are to de-densify; what populations should be prioritized for de-densified shelter; and identifying additional sites for de-densification.

Unfortunately, the shelter system is already over-capacity. It's estimated that just to comply with [CDC recommendations](#), shelters would need to replace 1,400–1,700 beds.

The committee also discussed how MA can use federal resources to acquire or convert sites to long-term permanent supportive housing.

Next Steps – For next steps, the committee will draft a letter to DHCD with recommendations for how to prioritize federal funds to most effectively serve ELI households and persons experiencing homelessness. The committee will also request a meeting with DHCD.