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On Solid Ground Coalition Report Outlines Critical Components to Preventing Family Homelessness in Massachusetts

Boston, MA – The On Solid Ground coalition today released its first report on family homelessness. The report, *On Solid Ground: Building Opportunity, Preventing Homelessness*, documents the impact of the Commonwealth’s housing shortage on families with extremely low incomes, and outlines the critical components of a preventative approach to family homelessness.

The report makes the following recommendations to increase stability and reduce family homelessness:

- **Systems Change:** Appoint a Special Secretary to build a coordinated service delivery system across governmental departments. The coordinated system will support homelessness prevention, minimize cliff effects, and provide integrated case management services.
- **Housing:** Expand the affordable housing stock and rental assistance vouchers for extremely low-income households; preserve existing privately and publicly subsidized homes; and improve public housing.
- **Supportive Services:** Invest in services that provide a path to increased incomes and economic mobility for extremely low-income families.
- **Tracking Progress:** Collect and analyze data, and track progress – at state agencies and their nonprofit partners – toward an agreed upon set of goals related to housing stability and economic mobility.

On Solid Ground is a cross-sector group of more than 30 partners committed to a research-based approach to increasing housing stability and economic mobility. In preparing this report, On Solid Ground partners looked at factors that contribute to family instability, the gaps in programs meant to serve families with low incomes, the role of federal and state rental subsidy programs, and the interconnectedness of rental assistance, childcare, and employment assistance in increasing family incomes. The paper also looks at how stagnant wages, rising numbers of low wage jobs, and declining supports leave more than 60,000 families living in unstable housing situations and at risk of homelessness. The report demonstrates ways in which the Commonwealth’s service delivery system unintentionally limits the ability of families to increase their incomes and economic mobility, keeping people in poverty.

"If we continue to focus only on reducing shelter numbers, family homelessness will continue to rise," said Rachel Heller, director of public policy at Citizens' Housing and Planning Association. "Shifting our focus to housing stability and economic mobility will result in better outcomes for children, families, and communities,"

"All I needed to save my family from the trauma of homelessness was enough financial help for a deposit on an apartment and to retain my CNA license," said Christina [last name withheld], a homeless mother and survivor of domestic violence. "With a housing subsidy to offset some of the high cost of rent I could have transitioned into an apartment. What I needed was nowhere near as costly as the alternative; just a little bit to keep me from falling off the cliff. Instead we lost it all."

"Housing insecurity has a detrimental impact on the health and educational prospects for young children," said Marie St. Fleur, president and CEO, Bessie Tartt Wilson Initiative for Children. "Low wages are one indicator of the structural trends that perpetuate these inequities. We need greater systemically aligned solutions to tackle the root of the problem and *On Solid Ground* begins to do just that."

"Together, we can do more to reduce and prevent homelessness than any one person or organization can do alone," said Michael K. Durkin, president and chief executive officer at United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley. "Too many families are one financial disaster away from homelessness. Ensuring they have access to services that can help them increase their savings, build net worth and get better jobs will not only increase their household's financial stability, but will strengthen the economic stability of communities across our Commonwealth."

Visit www.chapa.org/OnSolidGround for the full report. To view research that informed the paper, visit: <http://www.umb.edu/csp/publications/reports>.

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