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July 20, 2018

The Honorable Charlie Baker
Governor of the Commonwealth
The State House, Room 280
Boston, MA 02133

RE: FY2019 Budget Recommendations for Affordable Housing, Homelessness Prevention, and Community Development Programs

Dear Governor Baker,

On behalf of Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA), I am writing to request your support for affordable housing, homelessness prevention, and community development programs in the FY2019 budget as approved by the Legislature.

CHAPA's mission is to encourage the production and preservation of housing that is affordable to low and moderate income families and individuals and to foster diverse and sustainable communities through planning and community development. We advocate for the resources and policies that will help everyone in the Commonwealth have a safe, healthy, and affordable place to call home.

Specifically, we ask that you approve FY2019 budget investments in the following programs that will help address the housing challenges facing working families, seniors, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable households. These resources will also help achieve your Administration's priority of preventing and reducing homelessness.

- Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (7004-9024).....\$ 100,000,000
- Alternative Housing Voucher Program (7004-9030).....\$ 6,150,000
- Public Housing Operating Subsidy (7004-9005).....\$ 65,650,000
- Public Housing Reform (7004-9007).....\$ 1,000,000
- Housing Consumer Education Centers (HCECs) (7004-3036).....\$ 3,000,000
- Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (7004-9316)....\$ 20,000,000
- HomeBASE (7004-0108).....\$ 32,000,000
- Foreclosure Prevention & Housing Counseling (7006-0011).....\$ 2,050,000



- Housing Court Expansion (0336-0003).....\$ 2,600 813
- Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP) (7004-3045).....\$ 1,300,000
- Home and Healthy for Good (7004-0104).....\$ 2,390,000
- Mass. Accessible Housing Registry (4120-4001).....\$ 80,000
- Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (4000-0007).....\$ 3,300,000
- New Lease for Homeless Families (7004-0106).....\$ 250,000

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

Thanks to you and the Legislature for increasing support for MRVP. CHAPA asks you to approve the funding level of \$100 million. These additional funds will help support over 200 new vouchers in the next year. These additional vouchers will help assist more extremely low-income families, seniors, and persons with disabilities find affordable homes. Keeping funding at \$97.5 million will only support the current number of MRVP vouchers. Although no vouchers would be lost, no new vouchers would be made available in FY2019.

Also, we ask that you support language added to MRVP that directs DHCD to continue working on implementing a voucher management system. This will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the program.

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

CHAPA asks that you support the increased appropriation of \$6.15 million for AHVP. These funds will create additional rental vouchers to help more persons with disabilities find affordable and accessible homes.

Public Housing Operating Subsidy (7004-9005)

CHAPA asks you to approve the funding level of \$65.65 million for public housing operating subsidy. 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 funding will help provide an increase to local housing authority operating budgets so these homes remain available for some of the lowest-income households in the Commonwealth.

Public Housing Reform (7004-9007)

CHAPA asks you to support the increased support of \$1 million for public housing reform. These additional funds will help further implement public housing reforms signed into law in 2014. These reforms improve governance and operation of local housing authorities by assisting with capital improvements, unit turn over, and help support a centralized waitlist. The increased funding will also help strengthen tenant participation in the governance of housing authorities by sponsoring trainings and technical assistance.

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

CHAPA thanks you and the Legislature for restoring full support for HCECs. HCECs are the front line for those facing housing challenges, providing information to help people make essential connections to housing and related supports including first-time homebuyer courses and foreclosure counseling. We ask you to support the increased funding of \$3 million so that HCECs can continue to offer critical housing and homelessness prevention resources.

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

CHAPA asks you to support the \$20 million appropriation for RAFT in order to allow households of all types to access this homelessness prevention resource. The conference budget continues to allow the elderly, persons with disabilities, and unaccompanied homeless youth, as well as families with children, to access the program. This investment in RAFT is also a cost-effective program for helping families. For example, in FY 2017, the Commonwealth spent an average of \$3,084 in RAFT to ensure continued housing for 4,215 households. By contrast, the state spent an average of \$41,990 for each household that entered the state's family shelter program.¹ By increasing our investment in the program, we help families in a cost-effective way while reducing reliance on the emergency shelter system.

HomeBASE (7004-0108)

CHAPA asks you to support the increased appropriation of \$32 million for HomeBASE to help more homeless families avoid or leave emergency shelters.

CHAPA also asks you to support the language in the conference budget that makes several important changes to the program. First, the budget allows families to access up to \$10,000 to help avoid or end homelessness. These additional funds will make the program more effective as families work to find stable homes.

Second, the conference language improves data collection and reporting requirements for HomeBASE. Specifically, the language requires DHCD to report on the number of families receiving both Emergency Assistance and HomeBASE benefits in the previous three years. This will allow a better understanding of HomeBASE, how the resource is used, and its success in helping families achieve long-term housing stability.

Third, the Conference budget language removes the \$300,000 cap on the program within HomeBASE that allows survivors of domestic violence or families in substance abuse and sober living programs access to the resource. This program, in place for the last two years, has helped all families facing homelessness, regardless of the cause, find an affordable home. Removing the cap on the program will ensure that all families in these shelters will be able to access HomeBASE if they are eligible.

¹ The Massachusetts Raft Program Preventing Homelessness, Providing Family Stability: A Report On the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program in Fiscal Year 2017. Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts, February 2018.

Foreclosure Prevention & Housing Counseling (7006-0011)

CHAPA asks you to support the \$2.05 million appropriation for foreclosure prevention and housing counseling grants administered by the Division of Banks (DOB). This program is revenue neutral as it is funded through licensing fees for mortgage loan originators in Massachusetts. The conference budget would allow the DOB to retain additional funds from these licensing fees to support more first-time homebuyers and families facing foreclosure.

Housing Court Expansion (0336-0003)

Thank you for your continued leadership in helping expand Housing Court statewide. We are grateful that the Legislature included the \$2.6 million authorization as originally proposed in your budget. These funds will support the expansion of the court, including the new Housing Court judges.

Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP) (7004-3045)

CHAPA asks you to support the \$1.3 million appropriation for TPP, an effective homelessness prevention resource. TPP works with households with disabilities facing eviction to determine whether a disability can be reasonably accommodated in order to preserve the tenancy. In FY2017, TPP stabilized 93% of households served. The increased funding for TPP will allow the program to serve the additional cities and towns covered by the Housing Court's statewide expansion as well as to continue an upstream early intervention pilot designed to keep at-risk households out of Housing Court.

Home and Healthy for Good (7004-0104)

CHAPA asks you to support the \$2.39 million appropriation for Home and Healthy for Good. The program provides additional housing and support services to chronically homeless individual. The increased funding will allow more people to access this housing-first program that provides permanent supportive housing for the chronically homeless, including a program for LGBTQ unaccompanied homeless youth. Since 2006, 973 chronically homeless adults have been placed into permanent homes with supportive services. The program saves the Commonwealth an estimated annual average of \$12,428 per person because of a decreased reliance on other expensive public services once an individual is in a permanent home.

Massachusetts Accessible Housing Registry (MassAccess) (4120-4001)

Thanks to you and the Legislature for including \$80,000 funding, as originally proposed in your budget, for MassAccess, www.massaccesshousingregistry.org. The website is a searchable database of available affordable and accessible housing opportunities in Massachusetts. We ask that you maintain this funding amount in the final FY2019 to allow MassAccess to continue to be available.

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (4000-0007)

CHAPA asks that you support the \$3.3 million appropriation for housing and wraparound services for unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness. Thank you for demonstrating strong support for the program in your original budget proposal. We hope that you will support the increased appropriation to allow the program to serve more homeless youth.

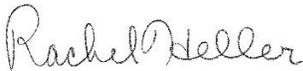
New Lease for Homeless Families (7004-0106)

CHAPA asks you to support the new \$250,000 line-item for New Lease for Homeless Families. New Lease houses families residing in state-funded shelters and hotels by implementing a preference for these families in properties 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. This appropriation will allow the program to continue serving the nearly 300 families that New Lease works with to help find and maintain homes.

Finally, thanks to you and the Legislature for including an increase to the **Massachusetts Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC)**, which will raise the match for the state EITC from 23% to 30% of the federal credit. This will benefit working families in the state as the EITC has been proven to increase economic mobility and reduce inequality.

Thank you for your consideration of these budget recommendations and for your continued leadership in making sure everyone in the Commonwealth has a safe, healthy, and affordable place to call home. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Rachel Heller
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Secretary Michael Heffernan, Executive Office of Administration and Finance
Secretary Jay Ash, Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development
Undersecretary Janelle Chan, Department of Housing and Community
Development
Speaker of the House Robert DeLeo
Senate President Harriette Chandler
Rep. Jeffrey Sánchez, Chair, House Committee on Ways and Means
Sen. Karen Spilka, Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means
Rep. Kevin Honan, Chair, Joint Committee on Housing
Sen. Joseph Boncore, Chair, Joint Committee on Housing