



Board of Directors

July 22, 2022

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

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RE: FY2023 Budget Recommendations for Affordable Housing, Homelessness Prevention, and Community Development

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 FY2023 budget as approved by the Legislature.

Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA), thanks the Governor for making investments in permanent affordable housing solutions, including our state's rental assistance programs and public housing.

Although the health crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic may be coming under control, our housing challenges remain. During the ongoing pandemic, the Legislature prioritized housing stability, which helped protect public health, and supported economic recovery. We now have a chance to act on equitable housing policies that can ensure long-term stability and prosperity for Massachusetts residents.

CHAPA is a non-profit organization that advocates for the resources and policies needed to support renters, homeowners, and landlords and to preserve and expand the state's affordable housing stock to make sure everyone in the Commonwealth has a safe, healthy, and affordable place to call home.

Specifically, we ask that you approve FY2023 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 and increasing housing stability.

- Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (7004-9024).....\$ 154,000,000
- Alternative Housing Voucher Program (7004-9030).....\$ 13,685,355
- Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (7004-9316).....\$ 150,000,000
- Housing Consumer Education Centers (HCECs) (7004-3036).....\$ 9,700,000
- Public Housing Operating Subsidy (7004-9005).....\$ 92,000,000
- Public Housing Reform (7004-9007).....\$ 1,000,000
- Home and Healthy for Good (7004-0104).....\$6,390,000
- HomeBASE (7004-0108).....\$ 59,411,201
- Foreclosure Prevention & Housing Counseling (7006-0011).....\$ 3,050,000
- Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP) (7004-3045).....\$ 1,800,000
- Mass. Accessible Housing Registry (4120-4001).....\$ 150,000
- Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (4000-0007).....\$ 9,500,000
- 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 \$154 million allocated through the FY2023 budget as well as the language to allow \$20 million in prior appropriations from FY2022 to continue into FY2023. This total funding of ~\$175 million for MRVP will help create new rental vouchers to serve more families, produce new affordable homes, and preserve existing affordable housing critical to recover from the pandemic.

CHAPA requests you to keep the language on establishing a payment standard, lowering tenant rent share to 30% of the household income and allowing utilities as a part of the tenant rent payment in the budget. These changes will better align the state MRVP program with federal Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program making MRVP vouchers more competitive and effective to use in a tight housing market.

Currently, most MRVP voucher holders pay 40% of their income towards rent. Households paying more than 30% of their income towards rent are ‘housing cost burdened, which leaves less income to pay other necessities like food, healthcare, and childcare. Families that are cost burdened have increased over time in Massachusetts. Lowering the tenant rent share to 30% of income and including utilities will reduce the housing cost burden on many households with vouchers.

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

CHAPA asks that you support the increased appropriation of \$13,600,000 allocated through the FY2023 budget as well as the language to allow \$5.6 million in prior appropriations from FY2022 to continue into FY2023 for AHVP. This total funding of \$19.2 million will create new rental vouchers for persons with disabilities. This could help hundreds of new persons with disabilities find an apartment they can afford and avoid potentially entering a nursing home or other skilled-care facility where there is a larger threat of contracting COVID-19.

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

CHAPA asks you to support the \$150 million in total appropriations for RAFT, including \$60 million leftover funds from the FY2022 Supplemental budget to be carried over. This will help thousands of households in Massachusetts avoid eviction and stabilize property owners, especially as the federal emergency rental assistance has ended.

We also request that you keep the language allowing the \$10,000 maximum RAFT benefit to be in place until the next year and lowering to \$7,000 after. CHAPA also requests you to support the language to de-link RAFT and HomeBASE to allow eligible households to receive maximum RAFT benefit for both RAFT and HomeBASE through June 2022.

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

CHAPA requests you to support the increased funding of \$9.7 million for the HCECs so they can continue to offer critical housing and eviction prevention resources. These are the frontline agencies for delivering housing resources for critical programs like RAFT and HomeBASE.

Public Housing Operating Subsidy (7004-9005)

CHAPA asks you to approve the increased funding level of \$92 million for public housing operating subsidy. Unfortunately, years of underfunding before the pandemic have left many housing authorities struggling to operate and keep apartments in good repair. The additional funds will help housing authorities operate and preserve this valuable resource while ensuring health and safety of their tenants, many of whom are at increased risk of the virus because they are elderly or have a disability.

Public Housing Reform (7004-9007)

CHAPA asks you to support the funding level of \$1 million for public housing reform. 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.

Home and Healthy for Good (7004-0104)

CHAPA asks that you allow for \$6.3 million appropriation and language for Home and Healthy for Good (HHG) program from the Conference budget. This program helps reduce homelessness, promote housing stability, and reduce costly utilization of emergency care.

HomeBASE (7004-0108)

CHAPA requests that you adopt the total appropriation of \$59,411,201 allocated through the FY2023 budget. This will offer more families an alternative to emergency shelter by providing stabilization services and up to \$20,000 in financial assistance to pay rent, utilities, security deposits, and other expenses that would allow them to stay in their homes, move, or live with another family over a period of two years.

Foreclosure Prevention & Housing Counseling (7006-0011)

CHAPA asks you to support the \$3.05 million appropriation for foreclosure prevention and housing counseling grants administered by the Division of Banks (DOB). These funds will help thousands of residents in Massachusetts purchase their first home. The grants will also provide foreclosure counseling to help owners who are at risk of losing their home. These resources will become even more important as the pandemic continues and more homeowners fall behind on mortgage payments.

Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP) (7004-3045)

CHAPA asks you to support the \$1.8 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. Additional funds for the program will help prevent more evictions during the ongoing pandemic.

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

Thanks to you and the Legislature for including \$150,000 funding, for MassAccess, www.massaccesshousingregistry.org. The website is a searchable database of available affordable and accessible housing opportunities in Massachusetts.

The \$70,000 increase will help support the replacement of MassAccess with two technologically modern websites for rentals ([Housing Navigator](#) – which already up and running) and homeownership opportunities (MyMassHome – which needs additional funding to go live). The modest increase in funding will ensure that people can find the affordable housing that has been developed throughout the Commonwealth. In order for people to have opportunities to live in the communities they choose, it is critical that they know where affordable homes are located

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (4000-0007)

CHAPA asks that you support the \$9.5 million appropriation for housing and wraparound services for unaccompanied youth and young adults experiencing homelessness. 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 \$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.

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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rachel Heller".

Rachel Heller
Chief Executive Officer

cc: Secretary Michael Heffernan, Executive Office of Administration and Finance
Secretary Michael Kennealy, Executive Office of Housing and Economic
Development
Undersecretary Jennifer Maddox, Department of Housing and Community Development