

2/7/2023

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz
House Ways & Means Chair
State House
24 Beacon Street, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chair Michlewitz,

The Commonwealth faces several challenges for your consideration over the coming months and years, but none as urgent as the issue of homelessness among families with children. Most recently, an influx of thousands of migrants from Central and South America, Afghanistan, Haiti, and Ukraine has collided with an already unmanageable number of long-term residents pushed out by skyrocketing rents and other rising costs. This has contributed to a crisis that has left many families in facilities that [lack indoor showers and other safe accommodations](#).

Our organizations know from experience in direct service and advocacy that Massachusetts has long been a difficult place to find secure housing that meets the needs of our diverse community members. In the Greater Boston area, there are just 47 affordable rental homes for every 100 low-income renters, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. Even in healthy economic times, high housing costs and low vacancy rates lock many households out of the housing market. The onset of the pandemic, a spike in inflation, and a series of domestic and global crises have stretched our traditional Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter system beyond capacity. This system—the organizations on the front lines of the housing crisis—works over-capacity and sits downstream of all other human service systems.

This Committee has shown bold action throughout the global pandemic over the last few years, and we reach out to you as ready partners in what we see as a crucial time to reconceive how the Commonwealth secures housing, health, and opportunity for all our children and families. Over the past year alone, this Committee has directed significant funding towards housing and critical child-centric sectors such as early education through the [COVID relief bill](#), [FY2023 budget](#), and [economic development bill](#). These investments have set the stage not just for pandemic recovery, but for new ways of thinking about how the Commonwealth solves longstanding problems.

The immediate issue of the EA shelter system's crisis this winter is of great concern to our organizations. We are heartened by the [Healey administration's recent request](#) for funding—supplemental funding is no doubt

needed to forestall further tragedy and trauma making its way into the lives of migrants and other homeless families. While we're asking for the House Ways and Means Committee to quickly advance the bill, we invite you to share in our vision that the current moment in our Commonwealth's history is a powerful opportunity for achieving sustainable change. Bold ideas have been put forward by advocates in and outside the State House to tackle family housing insecurity holistically, including an [expansions of rental vouchers](#) and [supportive housing](#), which has demonstrated efficacy in generating multiple positive outcomes for those with the most complex challenges. The incoming Healey administration also stands poised to think big on these issues. These proposals present opportunities to relieve the over-burdened emergency response system so it can be more effective. We gladly offer our longstanding expertise in homelessness policy as a resource to this Committee as you plan new investments, and we look forward to productive collaboration on behalf of children and families in crisis.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christi Staples". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christi Staples, Vice President, Policy and Government Relations

United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Eric Shupin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eric Shupin, Director of Public Policy

Citizens' Housing and Planning Association