



Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, and Citizens' Housing and Planning Association Call on the Healey-Driscoll Administration and Legislature to Protect the Right to Shelter and Urgently Expand Housing Opportunities

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The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless (MCH), Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (MLRI), and Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA) are deeply concerned about Monday's announcement from the Healey-Driscoll Administration that they plan to curtail access to the state's Emergency Assistance (EA) family shelter program. For four decades, Massachusetts has honored the right to shelter for eligible families with children who are experiencing homelessness. We must continue to uphold that right as the Commonwealth navigates the ongoing housing crisis and the arrival of many immigrant families fleeing political upheaval, gang violence, natural disasters, and extreme poverty.

While affirming her commitment to leaving the right to shelter law intact, Governor Healey also indicated that the EA shelter system would reach "capacity" in a matter of weeks, after which the Administration would cease efforts to expand capacity and begin to limit shelter entries. We are grateful for the Administration's all-hands-on-deck approach to the EA shelter crisis since taking office, but fear that the announced changes may result in children and families being unable to access shelter when it is needed the most.

We are particularly worried that the Healey-Driscoll Administration's plan to create a waiting list for Emergency Assistance shelter will limit the right to shelter, leave families with children with no safe alternatives, and place additional pressure on service providers, nonprofit agencies, and municipalities. We look forward to learning more details in the days and weeks ahead, and urge the Administration to take immediate steps to continue to expand EA capacity so that the creation of a waiting list will not become necessary.

We know that shelter expansion cannot be the only response. Next week, we will share a broad set of recommendations that we believe can ease the current crisis, uphold the safety and dignity of people in the greatest need, and provide long-term housing solutions to alleviate the housing crisis. These recommendations will focus on:

- Helping families swiftly move out of Emergency Assistance and other temporary shelter programs into permanent, affordable housing

- Strengthening homelessness prevention resources to ensure that more families and individuals can maintain housing stability
- Expanding available services for newly arrived immigrant families and improve service coordination for all families experiencing homelessness
- Continuing to bring key stakeholders to the table and uplift the experiences and expertise of families and communities most affected by the crisis

We call on the Legislature to swiftly approve adequate supplemental funding for EA and related resources as well as budget language to ensure that the Commonwealth upholds the right to shelter while simultaneously scaling up the homelessness prevention, housing, and services responses.

We stand ready to partner with the Administration and the Legislature to move beyond the state of emergency and ensure that everyone in Massachusetts, including both longer-term residents and newly arrived immigrant families, have safe and permanent places to call home.

Sincerely,

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