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TIMOTHY P. MURRAY
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

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Dear Advocate,

Following the release of Governor Patrick's Fiscal Year 2012 Budget, the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness and the Department of Housing and Community Development have engaged in an outreach effort to gather feedback and input into the proposed reforms to the Emergency Assistance program serving homeless families. We have heard several common questions, and I am writing today to provide additional information about our vision for implementation of the reform and how we will specifically address these questions. DHCD will begin a formal regulations process shortly to address these questions, and we will welcome your feedback on the regulations when they are released later this spring.

In every instance, the Patrick-Murray Administration is committed to helping eligible families find a safe place to live, and we will continue to implement programs for homeless families that ensure children do not have to sleep in cars or on the street. The proposed programs are just one part of an overall strategy to prevent and end homelessness in the Commonwealth. We will leverage the proposed reforms to our system in order to provide additional affordable housing opportunities and supportive resources to homeless families over time.

Question 1:

Budget language limits the HomeBASE benefit to a maximum of \$8,000 for the initial 12 month period, which may not be enough to support families in higher-cost markets.

In response, DHCD is prepared to permit families to access rental units that are at or below 80% of Fair Market Rent. Experiences with administering HPRP and Flex Funds demonstrate an 80% FMR works in all communities. Further, HomeBASE participants' contribution to rent and utilities will be limited to 35% of income.

Question 2:

Current budget language does not address immediate housing needs for families that are eligible for HomeBASE, but have no alternative feasible housing while waiting for HomeBASE assistance.

The current language is open-ended in order to be as flexible as possible, including providing for temporary housing arrangements. The emphasis is intentionally a housing solution, temporary or otherwise, instead of shelter. Regional administrators may apply this flexibility in securing

apartments or any other feasible housing arrangement. Regional administering agencies have broad authority and flexibility to assure that each family's needs are met, and they will be expected to do so.

Question 3:

Some families may have additional challenges in completing program requirements, including those who are headed by people who are elderly or who have disabilities.

Families who are elderly are unlikely to be eligible for family shelter. Those who are guardians of children 18 or younger or who have disabilities represent a smaller percentage of the historical caseload, and have typically secured appropriate permanent housing in less than three years. Further, regulations will provide for good cause exceptions.

Question 4:

Current language does not specify the stabilization services HomeBASE families will receive during their tenure in the program.

The language currently requires each family receiving benefits must also receive "related case management services". DHCD has outlined a five-point economic mobility plan that each stabilization worker should address with families, including:

1. increase income;
2. enhance household budgeting and banking relationships;
3. invest in basic educational attainment;
4. advance school enrollment and attendance for all children; and
5. promote good tenancies through lease compliance.

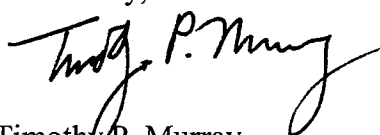
Question 5:

What happens when HomeBASE participants exceed the program's income guidelines of 115% of the federal poverty level?

HomeBASE awards are made in 12-month increments, supporting families' tenancy planning needs. Regulations will further address income limitations.

Our Administration remains committed to working with the Legislature, advocates, providers, and consumers to implement the reforms effectively and efficiently. I believe the ways in which we propose to address the concerns above will support successful outcomes for families and their children. Thank you for your commitment to supporting housing solutions for homeless and at-risk families, and for your support of our proposals. Your advocacy will ensure our shared success.

Yours truly,



Timothy P. Murray
Lieutenant Governor