

## FY'13 and FY'14 Supplemental Budgets

At the same time Governor Patrick signed the FY'14 budget, he also signed a [\\$125 million FY'13 supplemental budget](#). Of note, this budget includes \$1.2 million for the Emergency Assistance motel account, which provides shelter in motel settings for families experiencing homelessness (line item 7004-0103).

Unfortunately, the supplemental budget also includes language requiring the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to issue electronic benefits transfer (EBT) cards with photos for many program participants. As we have noted in previous alerts, we believe that such a plan will be stigmatizing, difficult to implement, and expensive for the state. (Fortunately, there will be exemptions for elders, people with disabilities, and individuals who are survivors of domestic violence.) In signing off on these sections, the Governor [sent back an amendment](#) that would require the Legislature to study the impact of such changes over the course of the next three years to assess the effectiveness. As the implementation of a photo ID requirement will be costly for DTA, the Governor also proposed \$2.5 million in additional funds for implementation in a new [FY'14 supplemental budget request](#).

The need for additional supplemental funding in many key accounts (including Emergency Assistance shelters, EA motels, and HomeBASE) is anticipated for FY'14. Stay tuned in the months ahead for more updates.

## FY'14 Budget Implementation: Preliminary Information

We will be sending out a more detailed alert very soon about the Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) FY'14 implementation of changes to the HomeBASE, Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP), Residential Assistance to Families in Transition (RAFT), and Emergency Assistance (EA) programs. **In the meantime, here are some *preliminary* updates that are subject to change (but are based on our conversations with DHCD senior staff):**

**HomeBASE (line item 7004-0108):** DHCD is finalizing its FY'14 plans for the HomeBASE program.

The Legislature's budget language requires DHCD to make every effort to ensure that the estimated 5,400 families timing out of the two-year HomeBASE rental assistance program do not return to homelessness, so an array of resources will be used by DHCD and its partner agencies to accomplish that critical goal. We know that this is a very difficult time for families in the program, as there still are many unknowns. Based on currently available information, families timing out of HomeBASE *may* be able to access:

- HomeBASE household assistance (likely with a cap of \$4,000 per family)
- RAFT funds, in addition to HomeBASE household assistance if HomeBASE household assistance is not enough and the family is otherwise eligible for RAFT. (Note that this possibility is a positive change from what was anticipated when we sent out our previous alert.)
- A long-term voucher through the MRVP program. DHCD currently intends to target 500 of the new FY'14 MRVP subsidies to HomeBASE families with disabilities. See below for more details.
- Access back into Emergency Assistance shelter. While shelter re-entry is far from ideal for both families and DHCD, this is an important protection so that HomeBASE families do not end up in very precarious situations. DHCD is working with HomeBASE providers and families to streamline the process for families needing to re-enter shelter so that families do not have to go back to the local DHCD offices for placement. In general, families who meet the categorical and financial eligibility for shelter, who lack feasible alternative housing, and who have not been terminated from the HomeBASE rental assistance program should be able to access EA if needed.

DHCD has established a special HomeBASE hotline to answer questions and address concerns from families, advocates, property owners, and other stakeholders: [617-573-1123](tel:617-573-1123). (Families are encouraged to first contact their HomeBASE stabilization worker, but can use this number as a back-up.)

In general, families are encouraged not to sign a new lease in their units if they will not be able to afford the rent without the HomeBASE rental assistance going forward. If families try to use alternative resources to maintain the unit on a month-to-month basis, but they ultimately are unable to maintain the unit, we believe that families still should be able to access EA shelter at a later date.

Also of note, the FY'14 budget lifts the 32-week time limit on access to HomeBASE household assistance by families in EA shelter. Families in shelter for longer than 32 weeks now will be eligible for HomeBASE household assistance to access funds to transition out of shelter into housing.

**Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (line item 7004-9024):** Currently, DHCD is working on a plan to disburse the anticipated 1,000 new MRVP subsidies that will become available due to the \$15.5 million increase in the program for FY'14. As the budget language calls on DHCD to prioritize families timing out of HomeBASE rental assistance, at least 500 of these subsidies likely will go to them. DHCD also is hoping to use 300 of the subsidies for families who have long lengths of stay in the EA shelter program and barriers to accessing affordable housing. The remaining 200 subsidies likely will be targeted to unaccompanied adults and unaccompanied youth. (Additional MRVP resources are anticipated from the carryover of surplus FY'13 funds, as well!)

All families in the HomeBASE rental assistance program will be notified shortly of the MRVP set-aside for families with disabilities. Families may be eligible if either the head of household or another household member has a disability that interferes with the family's ability to maintain market-rate housing. Families will be given an estimated 45 days to provide proof of disability, such as a letter from a doctor or through documentation of receipt of disability-based benefit. Eligible families will be placed in a lottery for the available units. More details are anticipated next week.

**Temporary Accommodations via the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (line item 7004-9316):** The FY'14 budget language calls for the creation of a new temporary accommodations program within the larger RAFT homelessness prevention program, primarily to provide a safety net for families who are no longer eligible for EA until they have engaged in "irregular housing" or have stayed in a place not meant for human habitation. This system will be funded through an earmark of \$500,000 in the RAFT line item. Temporary accommodations (a.k.a. emergency shelter) of up to seven days will be targeted to families who are:

- Experiencing homelessness and have nowhere else to stay
- Are not immediately eligible for the EA program (neither on a "regular" nor "presumptive" basis)
- Have incomes at or below 150% of the federal poverty guidelines (\$35,325/year for a family of 4). Please note that this limit is slightly higher than the EA income limit of 115% FPL.

The system is based on a model used in Western Massachusetts this past year that was developed in response to the increasing number of families who were determined ineligible for EA shelter based on the new restrictions introduced during FY'13 and who otherwise would be forced to stay in places not meant for human habitation.

DHCD still is working with RAFT providers to determine which agencies will participate in this program and which will enter into subcontracts with other community-based programs to administer the program in their region. Even though many of the details are still up in the air, DHCD anticipates that the system will begin operating shortly. DHCD has said that families can be referred by the DHCD Homeless Coordinators in the local offices where families apply for EA or by staff from DHCD's Central Office directly to the administering agencies. In addition, once the program is running, families, advocates, and providers will be able to contact a designated staff in the Central Office to make referrals.

Families who are approved for temporary accommodations will receive transportation to their placement, and will work with the provider to quickly see if RAFT financial assistance will be enough to help a family exit homelessness, if there are alternative resources available to assist the family, or if the family should be transferred to a longer term EA shelter placement. Families who are otherwise eligible for EA can be placed from the temporary accommodations into EA shelter, as their RAFT stay will be considered an "irregular housing situation" under the EA eligibility guidelines. **This means that eligible families who are at imminent risk of having to stay in a place not meant for human habitation can be placed in a RAFT temporary accommodation and then transition into an EA placement without actually having to stay in such conditions.**