

Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness Legislative Priorities Fiscal Year 2015 State Budget

The Leadership Council of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“The Network”), including 50 leaders from Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties, urge the state legislature to adopt the following provisions for the Fiscal Year 2015 state budget in order to further the Network’s mission to prevent and end homelessness in Western Massachusetts:

Family homelessness

Support Secure Jobs Connect, a workforce development initiative for homeless families. This project, initially funded by the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation, has seen extraordinary success in the employment of hundreds of homeless families across the Commonwealth. In Western Massachusetts alone, over an 11 month period, 143 parents obtained jobs averaging \$10.20 per hour, providing a new level of housing stability for these families.. The Network is committed to working in collaboration with its statewide partners to ensure the continuity and growth of this initiative. State investment is critical to reach the scale necessary to both save taxpayer dollars and protect our children’s future.

Amend the Emergency Assistance Line Item (7004-0101) to protect children from having to sleep in unsafe places. Based on state data, more than 350 families with children had to sleep in cars, bus stations, emergency rooms and other places not meant for human habitation between July and December 2013 before they were found eligible for emergency shelter. The Network supports the language change in line item 7004-0101 to allow otherwise eligible homeless families to be placed in shelter when they are “within 24 hours of staying in a place not meant for human habitation.” This standard for eligibility is consistent with the Commonwealth’s goal to ensure homeless children in Massachusetts stay safe.

Individual Homelessness

Fund the Homeless Individuals Line-Item 7004-1012 at \$48.5 million. The Network joins with the statewide Coalition for Homeless Individuals in support of the request to increase this line item by \$8 million statewide, ensuring shelters receive no lower than the state average “bed rate” of \$32 per night. This additional investment is sorely needed as demands on our area shelters continue to increase in the face of stagnant funding over the last 13 years. Every major shelter in our region – Friends of the Homeless, ServiceNet and Samaritan Inn – would gain additional resources to meet the population it serves under this proposal, and the Network is strongly united around the critical need for this investment.

Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

Adopt House Bill 135 and the related FY 15 Budget Request of \$500,000 in Line Item 4000-0300. Extremely limited resources exist for unaccompanied homeless youth in Western Massachusetts and across the Commonwealth while the number of such youth continues to grow. With the support of the Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, the Network is beginning to better understand and assess this population and its needs in our region. Continued investment in the Commission and its analysis of this population as well as funding for demonstration projects to develop successful interventions are critical to interrupting youth homelessness and preventing homelessness from becoming a lifelong challenge.

Minimum Wage Bill

Adopt Minimum Wage Bill H1701. This bill would gradually raise the minimum wage to \$11 per hour by 2016, and then be adjusted based on the annual percentage increase of the Consumer Price Index. The Network firmly believes that lasting solutions to homelessness hinge on both affordable housing and sustainable employment. Increasing the minimum wage is a linchpin for the employment piece of the equation. If full-time employment does not pay enough to meet the rent, we cannot expect families or individuals to stay securely housed. This minimum wage legislation is a key component to ending homelessness in the Commonwealth.

CHAPA Legislative Priorities

The Network endorses CHAPA's FY 15 budget priorities as key components of a comprehensive response to our housing and homelessness crisis. Please see <http://chapa.org> for more details.