**The Boston Foundation’s Report:**

**The Growing Challenge of Family Homelessness  
Homeless Assistance for Families in Massachusetts: Trends in Use FY2008-FY2016**

Released Feb. 2016

**Summary Data Points from Executive Summary**

* Since FY2008, the number of families receiving EA has more than doubled (33,000 family households, 100,000 individuals received EA))
* On average, a family staying in a MA shelter is headed by a female about 30 years old with 1 or 2 children. 56% white, 37% African American; 40% Hispanic. Western MA has highest % of white families (78%) and highest % of Hispanic families (57%).
* Family size has increased since FY2008 (from 2.59 persons to 3.23), largely due to increase in families with spouse or partner (8% to 19%).
* Data of last 2 years shows dip in number of new entries, coinciding with diversion and other prevention programs, along with change in eligibility criteria. Unclear which factors account for decrease.
* Length of stay continues to increase. For families entering in FY08, average stay of approx. 8 months; in FY13, early a year. Longer stayers are more likely to exit from scattered site shelter or co-shelter and from Boston or northern part of the State. Longer stayers also more likely to be larger family with HH head who is younger, black, Hispanic and female. Families with shorter lengths of stay are more likely to exit from hotels and central MA.
* Families returning to system have decreased from 18% for FY08 to 13% for FY13 cohort. On average, returning families came back over 2 years (788 days) after first episode. Returning families have longer lengths of cumulative stays and are more likely to be larger and have HH who are younger, black, Hispanic and female. Returning families are more likely to have stayed in a congregate shelter and to be from the southern part of the state (as opposed to the central part).
* Between FY08 and FY16, more than 31,000 families received RAFT (54%) or HomeBase (65%). The remaining 46% also received EA shelter.
* EA-sheltered families, on average, received nearly double the assistance (an $9,677 spent) provided through homeless assistance programs than families who did not have an EA shelter stay ($5,905 spent).
* Comparing NYC and Boston, in NY average length of stay is 14 months; in Boston almost a year. In Seattle, length of stay has decreased, partially attributed to new initiatives instituted since 2012 to rapid rehouse families and decrease reliance on transitional housing.
* The right to shelter in NYC and MA may account for some of the overall increase in new entrants but is unlikely to explain increases in length of stay.
* **The comparative analysis highlights the importance of trying to reduce length of stay by targeting housing resources earlier in a family’s shelter stay.**

**Summary conclusion:**

Family homelessness has increased in MA at a rate much higher than the national average. The number of new entrants has more than doubled (while last 2 years have seen a dip) and the length of stay in the system is up. Returns to shelter have been declining but are still near 13%.

“Findings suggest that focusing additional resources on larger families and those headed by younger females of color and Hispanic origin may be instrumental in helping them leave shelter earlier and avoid returning. Targeting assistance to families earlier in shelter stays may help to decrease time spent in shelter.”

The report noted continuing gaps in available data, specifically: data on income and employment status of families to better understand how additional resources are being targeted; more complete information of the demographics on non-EA families that receive other types of assistance to offer a clearer picture of the families using these resources; more complete data on the timing of RAFT and HomeBASE assistance to allow a finer grained examination of how these resources are being used in conjunction with shelter to stabilize families and help them exit the shelter system.