



Board of Directors June 16, 2021

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Representative Todd Smola

Chairman Michael Rodrigues
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RE: CHAPA FY2022 Budget Recommendations for Affordable Housing, Eviction Prevention, and Economic Recovery

Vice Presidents
Andrew DeFranza
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Dear Chairman Michlewitz, Chairman Rodrigues, Representative Ferrante, Senator Friedman, Representative Smola, and Senator O'Connor,

Treasurer
Angie Liou

On behalf of Citizens' Housing and Planning Association (CHAPA), thanks to both the House and Senate for expanding investments in permanent affordable housing solutions, including our state's rental assistance programs and public housing, as well as housing assistance in the FY2022 budget.

Clerk
Naomi Sweitzer

As we continue to recover from the pandemic, these investments will help thousands of households in Massachusetts find or stay in their homes, avoid evictions and homelessness, and help prevent the spread of the virus.

Andrea Aldana
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Although the health crisis from the COVID-19 pandemic may be coming under control, the housing crisis is far from over. During the ongoing pandemic, the Legislature prioritized housing stability which helped protect public health, and supported economic recovery. We now have a chance to act on equitable housing policies that can ensure long-term stability and prosperity for Massachusetts residents.

Chief Executive Officer
Rachel Heller

CHAPA is a non-profit organization that advocates for the resources and policies needed to support renters, homeowners, and landlords and to preserve and expand the state's affordable housing stock to make sure everyone in the Commonwealth has a safe, healthy, and affordable place to call home.

Below are funding and language recommendations supported by CHAPA that will help bridge the key differences between the House and Senate budgets and provide the strongest support for these critical resources to help many residents stay housed and recover during this pandemic.

MASSACHUSETTS RENTAL VOUCHER PROGRAM (MRVP) (7004-9024)

- *Adopt \$150 million appropriation in Senate budget*
- *Adopt Senate language to cap tenant rent share at 30% of their income for all vouchers*

Thank you to the House and Senate for increasing allocations for MRVP in FY2022. This funding increase can help support many new rental vouchers to help thousands of people find a stable home that they can afford during the pandemic. Increasing investments in long-term affordable housing solutions like our MRVP and public housing will help protect individuals, families, and our communities through the pandemic recovery.

CHAPA asks that you adopt the higher appropriation in Senate budget of \$150 million to enable new vouchers to be issued to households who are currently rent burdened.

In order to ensure that MRVP allocation is fully utilized effectively and timely, CHAPA asks that you adopt the Senate language on lowering the tenant rent share to 30% of a household's income. Currently, most MRVP voucher holders pay 40% of their income towards rent. Households paying more than 30% of their income towards rent are 'housing cost burdened,' which leaves less income to pay other necessities like food, healthcare, and childcare. Families that are cost burdened have increased over time in Massachusetts¹. Lowering the tenant rent share to 30% of income will reduce the housing cost burden on many households with vouchers.

Requested language change regarding tenant payment for MRVP:

“provided further, that notwithstanding any general or special law to the contrary, each household holding a voucher shall not pay more than 30 per cent of its income as rent; provided further, that the department shall establish the amounts of the mobile and project-based vouchers so that the appropriation in this item shall not be exceeded by payments for rental assistance and administration;”

We respectfully request that you omit any language in MRVP that would allow mobile voucher holders to pay more than 30% of their income towards rent, at the tenant's option. This would not provide households with additional flexibility to find or stay in homes with higher rents. At this time, we would not want to see these language changes that could leave households at risk of becoming overly burdened by housing costs.

¹ Greater Boston Housing Report Card. The Boston Foundation. 2020 Series. <https://www.tbf.org/news-and-insights/reports/2020/september/greater-boston-housing-report-card-equity-and-resilience-20200923>

RESIDENTIAL ASSISTANCE FOR FAMILIES IN TRANSITION (RAFT) (7004-9316)

- *Adopt \$26,725,768 total appropriation from House budget, which includes a transfer of \$4,725,768 from the Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund*
- *Adopt House language to keep \$10,000 maximum benefit cap for RAFT beyond the end of emergency*
- *Adopt House language to permanently de-link RAFT*

Thanks to both the House and Senate for demonstrating support for RAFT. CHAPA asks that you adopt the \$26.7 million total appropriation for RAFT provided in the House budget, which includes a \$4.7 million transfer from the Housing Preservation and Stabilization Trust Fund. These additional funds will help provide emergency rental assistance program for many households that may not qualify for federal relief – for example, if the housing emergency was not related to COVID-19. These funds will also help support homeowners facing foreclosure with emergency mortgage assistance. Unfortunately, the federal emergency rental assistance funds are not able to be use for mortgage payments.

We also request that you adopt the language the House uses to allow the maximum benefit of \$10,000 and the ability to access both RAFT and HomeBASE beyond the end of the state of emergency. Unfortunately, the housing challenges facing thousands of Massachusetts residents will not end with the state of emergency on June 15 as families continue to recover from lost incomes. Extending the maximum RAFT benefits will help households catch up on missed rent or mortgage payments. It will also allow the program to better serve those facing a housing emergency, even if the emergency is not related to the virus.

HOMEBASE (7004-0108)

- *Adopt language change in House budget that would allow eligible households to maximize both HomeBASE and RAFT benefits, even if the COVID-19 state of emergency is lifted*

Thanks to both the House and Senate for supporting HomeBASE. CHAPA respectfully asks that you adopt the House version of this language that would de-link HomeBASE and RAFT benefits, allowing families with children at risk of homelessness to access the maximum benefits from both programs, even after the COVID-19 state of emergency is lifted. This will help families who would otherwise become homeless access as many resources as they can to remain stably housed.

PUBLIC HOUSING OPERATING SUBSIDY (7004-9005)

Adopt \$85 million appropriation provided in the Senate budget.

Thanks to both the House and Senate for providing increased support for local housing authorities and their residents in your respective budgets. CHAPA respectfully asks that you adopt the \$85 million appropriation provided in the House budget. This program supports more than 45,000 state public housing units in Massachusetts. Over three-

quarters of public housing residents are elderly or persons with disabilities. Unfortunately, years of underfunding before the pandemic have left many housing authorities struggling to operate and keep apartments in good repair. With the pandemic, housing authorities have incurred significant additional expenses to implement social distancing and intensive cleaning measures to keep residents safe. The additional funds will help housing authorities operate and preserve this valuable resource while ensuring health and safety of their tenants, many of whom are at increased risk of the virus because they are elderly or have a disability.

TENANCY PRESERVATION PROGRAM (TPP) (7004-3045)

Adopt the \$1.8 million appropriation in the House budget

CHAPA requests that you adopt the \$1.8 million appropriation in the House budget. TPP is a homelessness prevention program that works with households with disabilities facing eviction because of behavior related to that disability. In consultation with the Housing Court, TPP works with residents and property owners to determine if the disability can be reasonably accommodated and the tenancy preserved. Additional funds for the program will help prevent more evictions of persons with disabilities during the ongoing pandemic.

Finally, CHAPA thanks the House and Senate for both agreeing to critical funding for our other affordable housing and homelessness prevention priorities, including **Alternative Housing Voucher Program, Housing Consumer Education Centers, Foreclosure & Housing Counseling, Home and Healthy for Good, the MassAccess Housing Registry, Unaccompanied Homeless Youth, New Lease for Homeless Families, and the Department of Mental Health Rental Subsidy Program.**

All these programs will help thousands of residents find an affordable home, remain stably housed, or prevent homelessness.

Thank you for your consideration and for your leadership in helping everyone in Massachusetts have a safe, healthy, and affordable place to call home.

Sincerely,



Rachel Heller
Chief Executive Officer

cc: House Speaker Ronald Mariano
Senate President Karen Spilka