



Housing First  
for Hampden, Hampshire,  
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

April 10, 2023

Senator Liz Miranda  
Joint Ways and Means Committee  
State House, Room 215

Representative Ferrante  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
State House, Room 238

**Re: Testimony in Support of FY24 Homelessness and Housing Budget Priorities**

Dear Senator Miranda and Representative Ferrante:

I am pleased to submit this written testimony on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness in support of its [FY24 state budget priorities](#).

The Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”) includes hundreds of partners working across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties to prevent and end homelessness through a Housing First approach that centers racial equity.

The Homelessness Point-in Time Count that was conducted in January, 2023, counted over 3,300 people experiencing homelessness in the western four counties alone. It also counted a significant increase in both individual sheltered and unsheltered homelessness (in total an increase of 381 individuals across the region as compared to last year) and an increase in family homelessness (close to 100 more families relative to last year). We have also seen a significant rise in elder homelessness across our region.

Additionally, in our western four counties alone, over 160 households are seeking rental assistance (via the RAFT program) *every single day*.

We also know that the affordable housing shortage is so dire that dozens of households in our region are unable to use their Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program subsidies due to the allowable rent failing to meet the prevailing rent levels.

This Fiscal Year 2024 state budget offers a crucial opportunity to address some of these grave shortfalls. Thank you for considering the [Network’s priorities](#), which include:

- **Increase funding to \$250 million for the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition Program (RAFT, Line Item 7004-9316) and expand access to upstream homelessness prevention resources**

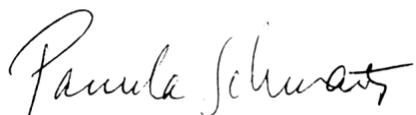
- **Increase funding to \$250 million for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program** (MRVP, Line Item 7004-9024) to create 6,000 new vouchers, implement Small Area Fair Market Rents and allowing vouchers to cover security deposits
- **Double funding to \$184 million for Public Housing Operating Subsidies** (Line Item 7004-9007) and **fund Public Housing Reform at \$7.7 million** (Line Item 7004-9007) to address chronically underfunded public housing needs
- **Increase funding for individual emergency shelter to \$120 million** (Line Item 7004-0102) to address the demand for shelter that exceeds capacity in the western region
- **Increase funding for Home and Healthy for Good to \$8.39 million (Line Item 7004-0104) and Safe Havens to \$27.6 million** (Line Item 5046-2000) to address the shelter and housing needs for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness with multiple complex mental and physical health barriers
- **Establish a new bridge subsidy program for older adults** facing housing instability while awaiting longer term housing supports (\$10 million)
- **Adequately fund and protect emergency shelter and service programs for children and families experiencing homelessness to \$325 million** (EA, Line item 7004-0101 and related administrative account, Line item 7004-0099)
- **Increase funding to \$60 million and providing easy renewals for families participating in the HomeBASE Program** (a.k.a. MA Short-Term Housing Transition Program, Line Item 7004-0108)
- **Establish the Access to Counsel Program** in order for low-income tenants to obtain representation in the face of eviction (\$7 million). Right now, only 11.5% of tenants have legal representation as compared to 86% of landlords. Access to counsel will create greater housing stability and greater justice.

Please see additional information and our [complete list of priorities here](#).

We know these investments will protect our most vulnerable residents while creating a healthier Commonwealth in every way, for each and every one of us.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Best,



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