



Housing First
for Hampden, Hampshire,
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

June 11, 2025

Via Electronic Mail

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz
Chair, House Ways & Means

The Honorable Michael Rodrigues
Chair, Senate Ways & Means

The Honorable Ann-Margaret Ferrante
Vice Chair, House Ways & Means

The Honorable Jo Comerford
Vice Chair, Senate Ways & Means

The Honorable Todd Smola
Ranking Member, House Ways & Means

The Honorable Patrick O'Connor
Ranking Member, Senate Ways & Means

Dear Chair Michlewitz, Chair Rodrigues and Members of the Conference Committee:

On behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness, I am writing first to thank you for your leadership in the face of the ongoing housing and homelessness crisis in western Massachusetts and across the entire Commonwealth, and to ask for your consideration of our priority budget requests for the final FY26 budget.

The Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness ("Network") seeks to prevent and end homelessness in Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties with a Housing First approach that centers racial equity. This mission is more important than ever in light of recent alarming data:

- **3,560 people were counted as homeless** in western Massachusetts in January, 2025.
- The number of people sleeping **unsheltered rose from 80 in 2021 to 318 in 2025**, a fourfold increase.
- **Blacks comprised 33% of the homeless population while making up 8% of the general population; Latinos comprised 29% of the homeless population while making up 18% of the general population.** The grossly disproportionate representation of people of color experiencing homelessness continues unabated.
- The number of **eviction filings increased 66%** from 2022 to 2024, from 3,837 to 5,833 in the western region.
- The **demand for RAFT has risen 46%** since 2023 with first quarter RAFT applications rising from 5,850 in 2023 to 8,532 in 2025, and **well over 100 households seeking assistance daily right now** in western Massachusetts.

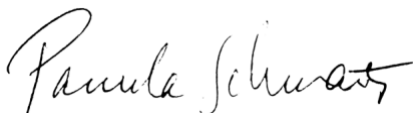
We appreciate the opportunity the FY26 budget presents to address this crisis in the most strategic and impactful way possible. The Network's final Conference Committee budget requests outlined below reflect a strategic analysis of western Massachusetts' needs in collaboration with our statewide partners, including CHAPA, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance and the Supportive Housing Pipeline Coalition. We recognize that investing in and strengthening proven state solutions are what western Massachusetts needs most.

We ask you to include in the final FY26 budget:

- **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP)** (7004-9024): Adopt the \$258,111,840 funding level included in the House budget.
- **Housing Consumer Education Centers (HCECs)** (7004-3036): Adopt the \$5,700,000 funding level included in the Senate budget.
- **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT)** (7004-9316): Adopt the \$225,000,000 funding level included in the Senate budget and preserve the Senate language making improvements in the program.
- **Access to Counsel** (0321-1800): Adopt the \$3,000,000 funding level included in the House budget.
- **Fair Housing Centers** (7004-0099 and 7004-0107): Adopt \$200,000 for the Massachusetts Fair Housing Center and \$75,00 for SouthCoast Fair Housing included in the Senate budget.
- **Sponsor-based Permanent Supportive Housing** (7004-0105): Adopt \$11,922,87 included in the House budget.
- **Department of Mental Health (DMH) Rental Subsidy Program** (7004-9033): Adopt the \$17,048,125 funding level included in the Senate budget.
- **DMH Adult Services and Supports** (5046-0000): Adopt the \$693,855,438 funding level included in the Senate budget.
- **HomeBASE** (7004-0108): Adopt Senate language to strengthen access, expand eligibility and support long-term housing stability.
- **Housing Assistance for Reentry Transition** (7004-9034): Adopt the \$3,120,000 funding level included in the Senate budget.
- **Public Housing Operating Subsidies** (7004-9007): Adopt the \$116,000,000 funding level included in the Senate budget.
- **Public Housing Reform**: Adopt the \$1,312,000 included in the House budget.

Thank you once again for your consideration and above all for your commitment to ensure a safe and decent place to live for our most vulnerable residents.

Best,



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