



Housing First  
for Hampden, Hampshire,  
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

March 31, 2026

Senate Chair Michael Rodrigues, Senate Vice Chair Jo Comerford  
and House Chair Aaron Michlewitz  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means  
State House  
Boston, MA 02133

**RE: Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness FY27 Budget Priorities**

Dear Chair Rodrigues, Chair Michlewitz, Vice Chair Comerford and members of the Joint Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”) to ask for your consideration of its [Fiscal Year 2027 budget priorities](#).

These priorities stem from the experience of over 150 partners from across our western region, including Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties, working to prevent and end homelessness with a Housing First approach that centers racial equity.

Similar to the entire Commonwealth, western Massachusetts is experiencing an extraordinary affordable housing gap and the ongoing threat of tenant displacement through spiraling rent increases and evictions. The priorities listed below are adopted in collaboration with our partners statewide because the challenges are similar, and the solutions are, too.

We recognize this stressful time with the looming threat of federal cuts. We appreciate the State providing a critical line of defense. One of those lines is investing in the most basic needs of our residents, needs that define our sense of decency and humanity. Additionally, that decency will save taxpayer dollars for the Commonwealth.

Please see the partial list of the Network’s FY27 budget priorities below with the entire list available [here](#):

- **Emergency Assistance Program (7004-0101):** Right now, an increasing number of children and families in western Massachusetts and across the state are required to sleep in parks, cars, and emergency rooms due to restrictions on the Emergency Assistance (EA) program. In the FY27 budget, we urge you to: **appropriate adequate funding to provide shelter spaces for all eligible families; remove length of stay limits; remove the cap on the number of families in EA shelter; and restore presumptive eligibility so families have access to shelter while gathering documents to prove ongoing eligibility.**
- **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) (7004-9024): FY27 request \$300 million.** While there are approximately 10,000 vouchers in use, in early 2025, the MRVP waitlist was 165,000. By early November, that number had grown to 215,000. In view of this immense

demand, we ask you to increase MRVP funding in FY27 to \$300 million, creating approximately 2,000 new vouchers. We also ask that FY27 budget adopts pending legislative language that would codify the program into law.

- **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) (7004-9316): FY27 Request \$300 million and removal of the notice to quit as a requirement to become eligible for assistance.** Right now, in Hampden County alone, over 200 people seek RAFT assistance *every day*. RAFT offers a lifeline for thousands of individuals and families to stay housed and prevent homelessness.
- **Housing Consumer Education Centers (HCEC) (7004-3036) FY27 Request \$8.974 million.** HCECs suffered a funding reduction in FY26 that resulted in loss of staff across our region and reduced office hours, which has a direct impact on RAFT distribution. Level funding is essential.
- **Individual Shelter Program (7004-0102) FY27 Request \$115 million.** Shelters across the western region are full beyond capacity. Temporary expanded winter shelter is ending now on April 1. Encampments will increase, threatening lives and our communities' overall health.
- **Sponsor-Based Permanent Supportive Housing (7004-0105) FY27 Request \$10.072 million.** This program provides funding for more than 330 units of low-threshold, permanent supportive housing across the Commonwealth, including in western Massachusetts, for individuals with disabilities who have experienced homelessness. In view of the federal threat of funding reductions to supportive housing, this resource is especially critical.
- **Home & Healthy for Good (7004-0104) FY27 Request \$8.89 million.** Level funding this program will allow for continued housing for individuals experiencing chronic homelessness and in particular supports several critical housing programs in western Massachusetts.
- **Access to Counsel Program (0321-1800) FY27 Request \$4 million.** The dedicated line-item for an Access to Counsel program in FY25 and FY26 is already making a meaningful impact on housing stability for low-income tenants. Western Massachusetts has one of the highest eviction rates in the state. Access to Counsel is critical to address this eviction crisis.
- **Public Housing Operating Subsidy (7004-9005) FY27 Request \$132.9 million.** Public housing is crucial to Massachusetts' affordable housing supply. In order to ensure the maximum use of this core affordable housing resource, additional funds are urgently needed to address maintenance and rising costs.

We greatly appreciate your consideration.

Best,



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