

Legislative Testimony

To: Members of the Joint Committee on Children,
Families, and Persons with Disabilities
From: Judith Whitmarsh, Director of Programs and Policy
Catholic Charities of Boston
Re: Proposed Regulatory Changes to the Emergency Assistance Program
Date: March 9, 2009

Good Morning, my name is Judy Whitmarsh and I am the Director of Programs and Policy for Catholic Charities of Boston. I appreciate being able to speak with you today.

As part of our mission of building a just and compassionate society rooted in the dignity of all people, Catholic Charities offers shelter and supportive services to homeless families who are EA eligible. As such, we see first hand the egregious effects that the proposed regulatory changes will have on already struggling families. Here are a few examples:

DTA is proposing to reduce the period that families who go over the income limit can stay in shelter while trying to find housing from the six months set by the Legislature to only three months.

A single father with a 10-year-old daughter was living in our St. Ambrose Family Shelter in Dorchester. Upon receiving SSI, the father became over the income limit. When the young family had just two weeks to go before they could move into their new apartment, we were told by DTA that they had to go. We, of course, allowed them to stay in the shelter but we were not reimbursed by DTA, which is a hardship for any private non-profit agency. Cutting in half the time that a family has to find housing would put a family in this type of situation in serious jeopardy.

Another St. Ambrose shelter resident, a single mother with a 2-year-old child, was able to find housing in the allotted time frame. As soon as she received her lease and keys to their new apartment, we were told by DTA that they must leave our shelter. The problem was, that she had no furniture, including no bed for her 2-year-old child to sleep in. We allowed her to remain housed with us until she was able to get furniture. Again, we were not reimbursed by DTA.

DTA is proposing to deny access to shelter to families who are experiencing homelessness because they have been evicted from, or abandoned without good cause, public or subsidized housing in the past three years

One of our current shelter residents is a 60-year-old grandmother caring for her 10 year old grandchild. This family was evicted from public housing because the grandmother's

nephew was selling drugs out of the apartment without her knowledge. They were evicted even though the nephew moved out. They have been in our shelter for the past two years. With this proposed change, the only way they can leave shelter is to pay market value rent for an apartment, which this grandmother will not be able to do.

These are just a few examples of how these proposed regulations will hurt families. Please do not adopt them.

Thank you.