

Abby Kelley Foster House, Inc.  
Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness  
Arise for Social Justice  
Boston Area Rape Crisis Center  
Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program  
Boston Medical Center Grow Clinic for Children  
Boston Tenant Coalition  
Bridge Over Troubled Waters  
Cambridge Cares About AIDS  
Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Boston  
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Springfield  
Catholic Charities, Diocese of Worcester  
Catholic Social Services, Diocese of Fall River  
Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance  
Children's Health Watch (Formerly C-SNAP)  
Children's League of Massachusetts  
Children's Services of Roxbury, Inc.  
Citizens for Adequate Housing, Inc.  
City Life/Vida Urbana  
Coalition Against Poverty  
Cooperative Metropolitan Ministries  
Dare Family Services  
Diocese of Western Massachusetts Episcopal Church  
Disability Law Center  
Elizabeth Freeman Center  
Emmaus, Inc.  
Episcopal Diocese of Massachusetts  
Evangelical Lutheran Church of America  
Family Economic Initiative  
Greater Boston Legal Services  
Homes for Families  
Horizons for Homeless Children  
Housing Families Inc.  
Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Worcester  
Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Boston  
Justice Resource Institute  
Latham Centers, Inc.  
Lazarus House  
Legal Assistance Corporation of Central Massachusetts  
Lutheran Social Services of New England  
Lynn Clergy and Religious Association  
MA Conference United Church of Christ- Taskforce to End Homelessness /Commission on Mission & Justice  
Massachusetts Advocates for Children  
Massachusetts Alliance on Teen Pregnancy  
Massachusetts Catholic Conference of Bishops  
Massachusetts Citizens for Children  
Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless  
Massachusetts Law Reform Institute  
Mass. Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children  
Medical-Legal Partnership | Boston  
MetroWest Legal Services  
MetroWest Outreach Connection  
Missionary Sisters of the Society of Mary  
Montachusett Veterans Outreach Center  
National Association of Social Workers – Mass. Chapter  
National Center on Family Homelessness  
National Council of Jewish Women  
National Organization for Women – Mass. Chapter  
National Student Partnerships – Somerville  
Neighbor to Neighbor Massachusetts  
Neighborhood Legal Services  
New England Conference, United Methodist Church  
New England Home for Little Wanderers  
Poor People's United Fund  
Rosie's Place  
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Boston Province  
Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, Ipswich Province  
Sisters of Saint Anne, Marlborough  
Somerville Homeless Coalition  
South Coastal Counties Legal Services  
St. Mary's Women and Children's Center  
Travelers Aid Family Services  
Tri-City Community Action Program, Inc.  
Unitarian Universalist Massachusetts Action Network  
Wayside Youth & Family Support Network  
Western Massachusetts Legal Services  
Women's Bar Association  
Women's Institute for Housing & Economic Development

March 11, 2009

The Honorable Therese Murray, Senate President  
The Honorable Robert A. DeLeo, Speaker of the House  
The Honorable Steven C. Panagiotakos, Chairman, Senate Committee on Ways & Means  
The Honorable Charles A. Murphy, Chairman, House Committee on Ways & Means  
The State House  
Boston, MA 02133

**Re: Administration's Proposals to Restrict Access to Shelter for Families Experiencing Homelessness**

Dear Senate President Murray, Speaker DeLeo, Chairman Panagiotakos, and Chairman Murphy,

As organizations from across the Commonwealth that are committed on a daily basis to ensuring the well being of low-income children and their families, we have come together to respectfully ask that you take all necessary steps to prevent the implementation of proposed, more restrictive family shelter regulations scheduled to take effect on or about April 1, 2009. These new eligibility restrictions will render hundreds of homeless children ineligible for shelter in the coming months.

Specifically, we are asking you to provide supplemental funding for the family shelter account (line item 4403-2120) prior to April 1<sup>st</sup> to close a projected \$3.4 million deficit caused by the dramatic increase in the number of families needing assistance. (The number of families has increased by 32% since the start of FY'09.) According to language contained in the line item, these eligibility restrictions cannot go forward in the absence of a projected deficit.

Families throughout Massachusetts are struggling during our nation's economic downturn, with those at the lowest income levels losing their housing in unprecedented numbers. That is why we have grave concerns over the Administration's proposal to implement new Emergency Assistance regulations that will limit homeless families' access to shelter and prevention services. We fully understand that these are very difficult fiscal times. However, at a time when the Commonwealth is committed to eradicating homelessness, we should not reduce access to the state's safety-net that keeps children and their parents out of harm's way.

Thankfully, with the passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the Commonwealth will be receiving more than \$17 million of additional funding under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) block grant for this fiscal year, as well as more than \$23 million of such funding next fiscal year. This federal funding is specifically intended to help states offset the increased cost of providing safety-net assistance to low-income children and their families. In addition, the Commonwealth will be receiving tens of millions of dollars in additional Emergency Shelter Grant funding that can be used to pay for services funded through the family shelter account that are intended to help homeless families be rapidly re-housed. Funds from both of these sources can be used to close the deficit in the EA account or to replenish funds used for that purpose if the federal funds do not flow before April 1<sup>st</sup>. These new federal funds, in combination with the upcoming implementation of new regional housing entities that will pilot innovative and positive ways to reduce homelessness and the new family shelter contract procurement that puts an emphasis on rapid re-housing and stabilization, will likely reduce the demand for emergency shelter in FY'10 without the need for harmful eligibility restrictions.

All of us look forward to the day when we no longer need family emergency shelter ... to a time when everyone has a place to call home and access to prevention programs to ensure they are able to

maintain their housing when times are difficult. But, sadly we are not yet there! Literally leaving homeless children out in the cold, or in other unsafe environments, as the proposed regulations would do, simply cannot be justified, particularly given that the Commonwealth will be receiving tens of millions of dollars in federal stimulus money specifically intended to help the Commonwealth prevent cuts in services to our neediest families.

We therefore ask for your leadership on this important issue to ensure that these eligibility restrictions do not go forward.

Sincerely,

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