



COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
THE GENERAL COURT
STATE HOUSE, BOSTON 02133-1053

February 26, 2009

Commissioner Julia Kehoe
Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance
600 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02111

Dear Commissioner Kehoe:

We are writing to ask you to protect some of the most vulnerable members of our society – homeless children and families – by withdrawing the proposed regulatory changes to the emergency shelter eligibility requirements.

Without access to emergency shelter, these families will have no safe place to go. At a time when more and more families are in desperate need of help, these regulation changes would force hundreds of families – many with young children – onto the streets. Many of these children may have to enter state custody as a result – separating families needlessly, causing greater trauma to the children and greater expense for the state over time.

We believe that we should be supporting – not punishing – families making an effort to pull their lives together. Many of these regulation changes are punitive and counterproductive to our goals of promoting financial stability -- including safe, affordable housing -- for low-income families.

For example, one proposed regulatory change would reduce the period that families who go over the income limit can stay in shelter while trying to find housing from six months to only three months. Given the current economy and the lack of housing subsidies, three months may not be enough time for all of these families to find safe, permanent housing – which creates a disincentive for families to take jobs where they would earn just above the income limit. With these changes we would essentially be pulling the rug right out from families just as they start to get on their feet.

Another proposed regulatory change would deny access to shelter to families who have been evicted from, or who have abandoned without “good cause,” public or subsidized housing in the past three years. Many families are evicted from subsidized housing due to issues beyond their control, including situations related to domestic violence, limited English proficiency, or conduct by someone who is no longer part of the household seeking

shelter. Emergency shelter is designed to be a last resort for families in trouble – and these regulations would deny families the help they need in their most desperate times.

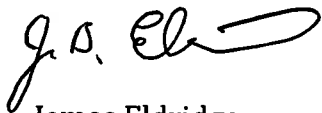
We support the administration’s “Housing First” approach to ending homelessness in our state, and believe that it will lead to a reduction in the number of families needing emergency shelter support in the first place. These proposed regulations contradict the recommendations of the Commission to End Homelessness. They do not take into account the changes that will occur with the implementation of the re-procured shelter system and the new Regional Coordinating Entities.

The state is facing a serious financial crisis, and we understand that these changes were proposed in an effort to make up a projected budget deficit. Your administration has claimed these changes would save approximately \$500,000 this year and \$11 million next year. However, the short-term “savings” that might be realized in these specific line items will cost the state more overall, when you consider the extra costs the state will incur when more families are forced onto the streets. This is a classic example of the silos in government that this Administration has committed to ending. How are you planning to account for cost increases to emergency health services, or the additional strains this will put on police and child protective services? How do you measure the value lost to the state when families find it tougher to get a job or children drop out of school because they are homeless?

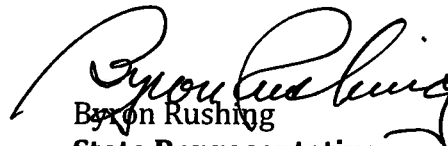
We encourage you to look at the funding our state is expected to receive from the Federal Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act, including emergency TANF funds and Emergency Shelter Grant funds that are specifically intended to help the state meet the costs of serving more low-income families in need and housing homeless families. These funds could be used to cover the shelter deficit and avoid harm to children experiencing homelessness.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,



James Eldridge
State Senator
Middlesex & Worcester




Byron Rushing
State Representative
Ninth Suffolk



Harriette Chandler
State Senator
First Worcester



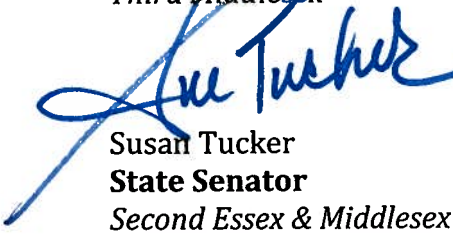
Sonia Chang-Diaz
State Senator
Second Suffolk



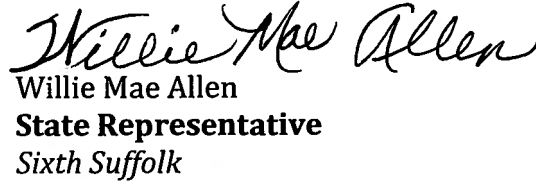
Susan Fargo
State Senator
Third Middlesex



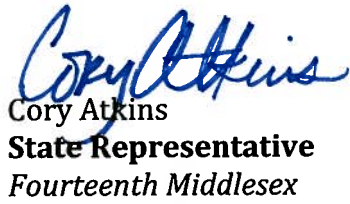
Anthony Petrucci
State Senator
First Suffolk & Middlesex



Susan Tucker
State Senator
Second Essex & Middlesex



Willie Mae Allen
State Representative
Sixth Suffolk



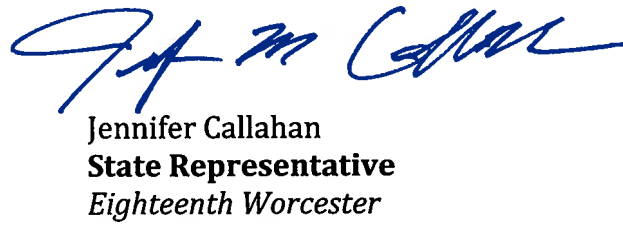
Cory Atkins
State Representative
Fourteenth Middlesex



Carlo Basile
State Representative
First Suffolk



Jennifer Benson
State Representative
Thirty-Seventh Middlesex



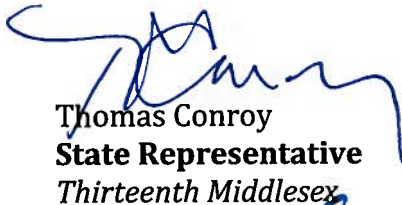
Jennifer Callahan
State Representative
Eighteenth Worcester



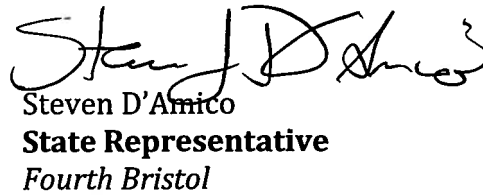
Christine E. Canavan
State Representative
Tenth Plymouth



Katherine Clark
State Representative
Thirty-Second Middlesex



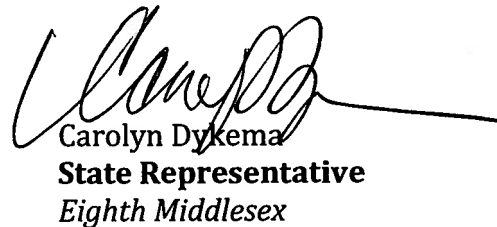
Thomas Conroy
State Representative
Thirteenth Middlesex



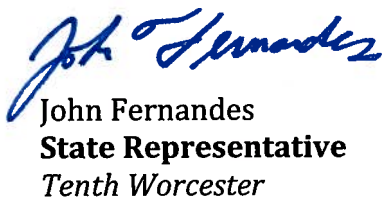
Steven D'Amico
State Representative
Fourth Bristol



James Dwyer
State Representative
Thirtieth Middlesex



Carolyn Dykema
State Representative
Eighth Middlesex



John Fernandez
State Representative
Tenth Worcester



Sean P. Garballey
State Representative
Twenty-Third Middlesex

Danielle Gregoire
State Representative
Fourth Middlesex

Patricia Haddad
State Representative
Fifth Bristol

Jonathan Hecht
State Representative
Twenty-Ninth Middlesex

Kate Hogan
State Representative
Third Middlesex

Louis Kafka
State Representative
Eighth Norfolk

Jay Kaufman
State Representative
Fifteenth Middlesex

Kay Khan
State Representative
Eleventh Middlesex

Jason Lewis
State Representative
Thirty-First Middlesex

Barbara L'Italien
State Representative
Eighteenth Essex

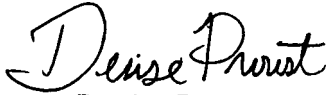
Timothy Madden
State Representative
Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket

Elizabeth Malia
State Representative
Eleventh Suffolk

Jim O'Day
State Representative
Fourteenth Worcester

Matthew Patrick
State Representative
Third Barnstable

Sarah Peake
State Representative
Fourth Barnstable



Denise Provost
State Representative
Twenty-Seventh Middlesex



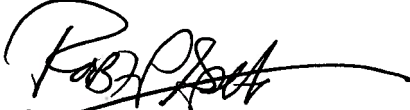
Pam Richardson
State Representative
Sixth Middlesex



Carl Sciortino
State Representative
Thirty-Fourth Middlesex



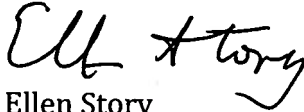
Frank Smizik
State Representative
Fifteenth Norfolk



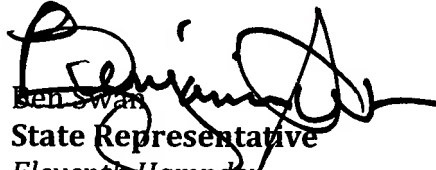
Robert Spellane
State Representative
Thirteenth Worcester



Marie St. Fleur
State Representative
Fifth Suffolk



Ellen Story
State Representative
Third Hampshire



Ben Swan
State Representative
Eleventh Hampden



Martin Walsh
State Representative
Thirteenth Suffolk



Alice Wolf
State Representative
Twenty-Fifth Middlesex

cc: Governor Deval L. Patrick
Lt. Governor Timothy Murray
Secretary Judy Ann Bigby, EOHHS