

## The Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness Legislative Priorities for Fiscal Year 2014

### Investment and Tax Reform

The Leadership of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (see attachment for membership list) voted to support Governor Patrick's investment and tax proposal for Fiscal Year 2014. The investments outlined in Governor Patrick's plan align with the Network's priorities to increase access to quality early education and public transportation, two of the most frequently identified barriers to ending homelessness and sustaining permanent housing. We urge the legislature to either adopt the Governor's progressive tax proposal or to enact an alternative proposal that will generate sufficient revenue to support these critical investments.

### Family Homelessness

The Network's Family Homelessness Committee urges the Legislature to:

- **Protect families from sleeping in places “not meant for human habitation.”** DHCD recently amended regulations have made many families ineligible for shelter unless and until their children have first slept in places “not meant for human habitation.” Western Massachusetts Network partners can attest to how this regulation, as currently applied, is placing some families in unsafe situations. We urge our legislators to either amend this regulation or enact an alternative solution to protect families from this unintended consequence.
- **Provide assistance to 6,057 families statewide and 1,009 families in Western Massachusetts who will face a substantial risk of homelessness when their HomeBASE short-term subsidies expire,** beginning in August, 2013. Right now, these families stand to lose a substantial rent subsidy without having alternative sources of income available. This crisis can be averted with legislative intervention, providing some degree of transitional support when the subsidy terminates.
- **Extend the 32 week limit for utilizing HomeBASE household assistance (\$4,000).** This limit was intended to provide incentive for families to move out of shelter; instead, it has created an unintended barrier to exiting shelter since with the loss of this resource, many families have no possibility of entering permanent housing.

### Individual Homelessness

The Network's Individual Services Committee urges the Legislature to:

**Amend Individual Services line item 7004-0102 so that “no shelter shall receive less than a \$30 per night minimum unit rate.”** It is well known that the shelters serving individuals across the Commonwealth are funded at very different rates and are not based necessarily on services provided. While DHCD continues to sort through that issue, we think it is vital that the line item be adjusted to the \$30 per night minimum rate to help keep the programs safe, at a minimum, as well as to work towards reducing the numbers of individuals who are homeless overall.

## **Family and Individual Homelessness**

The Network urges the Legislature to **adopt budget line-item 7004-3045 to allocate \$750,000 to the Tenancy Preservation Project**. This effective program works with individuals and families who are facing eviction as a result of behavior related to a disability, as well as rental property owners, and the Massachusetts Housing Court Department to prevent homelessness and ensure ongoing housing stability.

## **Unaccompanied Homeless Youth**

The Network's Work Group for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth urges the legislature to:

- **Allocate \$500,000 for the work of the Massachusetts Unaccompanied Homeless Youth Commission** to determine the scope of need among unaccompanied youth and young adults ages 24 and younger who are experiencing homelessness, and to identify and implement potential models for appropriate service delivery to unaccompanied homeless youth in urban, suburban, and rural areas of the Commonwealth.”
- **Adopt An Act Providing Housing and Support Services to Unaccompanied Homeless Youth** (House Docket #364, filed by Representative Jim O’Day and Senator Katherine Clark) which will address the critical need for housing and support services geared specifically for unaccompanied homeless youth.

## **Public Safety and Housing Sex Offenders**

The mission of the Work Group for People with Sex Offense Histories is *to maximize the safety of the community by minimizing the potential for re-offense through the identification and development of stable, supportive housing options for registered sex offenders who are committed to an offense-free life.*

Towards the goal of greater access to housing, stability and community safety, this Work Group urges the legislature to:

- **Adopt “An Act relative to the creation of a sex offender management board” (HD782)** (sponsored by Representative Kahn): This legislation creates an interagency council that ensures that all of the work with sex offenders within the state of MA is based upon the current research in this field. It moves beyond the “one size fits all approach” to utilize different assessments and treatment protocols for adult sex offenders than for children.
- **Adopt “An Act to protect our communities (SD1613)**, sponsored by Senator Clark. (Representatives Brodeur and Wong filed corresponding legislation, HD 3309, in the House). This comprehensive legislation will:
  - Empower the Sex Offender Registry Board (SORB) to reclassify offenders on its own initiative or upon written request by a District Attorney or police department.
  - Ensure that the Board has access to all relevant information necessary to determine an offender’s level of risk and clarify what types of incidents are to be reported.
  - Strengthen interagency communication by providing direct access to registry information for agencies responsible for ensuring child safety.
  - Make Level 1 sex offender information publicly available via an in-person request at local police departments.
  - Make information about licensing history of childcare facilities publically available online.