

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes- 12/10/24

In attendance: Maribel Acevedo, DCF, Melissa Blissett, Square One, Tana Bloom, FCRHRA, Lomay Caban, Salasin Project, Maria Chambers, BHN, Kiirsten Cooper, Hilltown Community Health Center, Sarah Cloutier, Way Finders, Christine Zaskey Cullen, Holyoke Chicopee Family and Community Program, Luray Fladd, YWCA of Western MA, Brenda Garcia, BHN, Joscelyn Gonzalez and Ivelisse Gonzalez, New North Citizens Council, Nicky LaValley, Way Finders, Dorothy Prieto, Head Start, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Rachel Trant, DCF, Amanda Watson, FCRHRA Melissa White, VOC

Presentation on Governor's new EA shelter rules

The bulk of our meeting was spent reviewing Governor Healey's recent proposal to make changes to the EA shelter system. You can read the Administration's [press release here](#).

The State House News article on the proposed changes can be found [here](#).

We agreed that this is a time of gaining greater clarity about what this proposal will mean for families, learning the components and what is going into effect now vs. later, subject to legislative approval.

A summary from the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless is below:

On November 22nd, the [Healey-Driscoll Administration announced](#) major changes to the state's response to family homelessness, including proposed restrictions on access to family shelter.

- The Administration plans to create a two-track system for access to shelter, starting on December 10th. Without legislative or judicial intervention, the Administration plans to assign families to one of two tracks: Families either will receive up to 30 business days in Temporary Respite Centers combined with intensive case management ("Rapid Shelter Track") or access to longer-term Emergency Assistance shelter and supports for a maximum of 6 months ("Bridge Shelter Track.")
- The Administration will ask the Legislature to:
 - Restrict access to EA to 6 months, replacing the current 9-month limit
 - Narrow eligibility criteria for families seeking waivers to stay in shelter beyond 6 months
 - Increase HomeBASE benefits to \$25,000/year or \$50,000 over two years, up from the current cap of \$30,000 over two years, while eliminating the possibility for families to receive benefits beyond two years
 - Provide more than \$400 million in supplemental FY25 funding to create a new Family Shelter and Services Reserve Account to fund EA and related programs. On November 19th, the Special Commission on Emergency Housing Assistance Programs voted to approve its report on

recommended next steps for Emergency Assistance (EA) family shelters and related programs. You can read the Commission's final report [here](#).

The Coalition alongside, Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, Homes for All Massachusetts, UU Mass Action, City Life/Vida Urbana, Lynn United for Change, Greater Boston Legal Services, and other allied organizations have held actions outside of the State House, outside of Governor Healey's offices in Boston and Springfield, and at the Embrace Memorial, calling on the Governor to suspend the limitations and on the Legislature to intervene to stop these unfair and unprecedented eligibility restrictions. Learn more here: <https://www.mahomeless.org/protect-access-to-shelter>

Additional information regarding the EA Commission (with thanks to the MA Coalition for the Homeless):

On November 19th, the Special Commission on Emergency Housing Assistance Programs voted to approve its report on recommended next steps for Emergency Assistance (EA) family shelters and related programs. You can read the Commission's final report [here](#).

Additional resources:

- Data and updates on the EA family shelter system can be found [here](#).
- [Slides from the October EA Commission meeting](#)

RAFT update: From Way Finders: volume continues to be high, 709 applications in this week. Franklin County: also continuing to be high.

Next meeting: Tuesday, January 12, 12 noon