

# **The Senate Ways & Means FY 2015 Budget Proposal: Preliminary Analysis of Selected Cash and Nutrition Assistance, Child Care, Child Welfare, Health Care, Homelessness Services and Housing Items**

May 15, 2014

On May 14, 2014, the Senate Committee on Ways and Means released its budget proposal for fiscal year 2015 (FY 15). MLRI offers this preliminary analysis of selected budget topics impacting low-income residents of the Commonwealth.

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## **Cash Assistance, SNAP, Related Items Administered by DTA and Nutrition**

- 1. Transitional Assistance for Families**
  - TAFDC (Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children, item 4403-2000) would be funded at \$253.2 million, nearly \$49 million less than the FY 14 appropriation.** The caseload is dropping dramatically: about 6,000 fewer families are receiving TAFDC now compared with last year. Some of the decline may be due to the improving economy, but the economy has not improved enough to account for such a steep drop. Low income families report increasing denials and terminations of assistance for bureaucratic reasons: some advocates and community groups describe a “culture of deterrence” at DTA which is depriving needy families of critical subsistence benefits.

Like the Governor and the House, Senate Ways and Means does not propose to invest any of the savings from the declining caseload in a long-overdue grant increase. TAFDC grants were last raised in July 2000. Grants have lost nearly half their value to inflation over the last 25 years. The maximum grant for a family of three with no income (including the rent allowance) is \$618 a month, only 37% of the federal poverty level. Such low grant levels are a factor in the increasing numbers of homeless families. In addition, some domestic violence victims stay with or return to their abusers because they cannot otherwise afford to feed and house their children. Most recipients of TAFDC are children; the extreme poverty they experience puts them at real risk of permanent harm, including negative health effects and developmental delays.

Investing \$36 million of the “savings from the decline in the caseload in a grant increase would provide sufficient funds to cash assistance benefits by about \$70 per month per family. In addition to helping our communities by helping our neediest families, Transitional Assistance – which is spent locally on rent, food and other necessities – helps our local economies. Because of the “multiplier effect,” the proposed grant increase would generate an estimated \$64 million per year in economic activity.

- **Clothing allowance amount set at \$150 per child.** Unlike the Governor, Senate Ways and Means, like the House, includes the clothing allowance in the standard of need in September.
- **The Senate Ways and Means line item includes language requiring the Governor to give 75 days’ advance notice to the Legislature before cutting benefits, making changes in eligibility, or revising the disability standard.** The House budget would give 60 days’ advance notice. The Governor did not provide for advance notice. The advance notice language prevented the Governor from eliminating the clothing allowance in September 2010. In FY 10, the advance notice provision was critical to giving the Legislature time to work with the Governor to come up with a solution so that children in 9,100 families headed by a severely disabled parent would not lose their TAFDC benefits.

## 2. Other cash assistance

- **EAEDC (Emergency Aid to Elders, Disabled and Children, item 4408-1000) would be funded at \$88.4 million,** nearly \$5 million less than the FY 14 appropriation. The EAEDC caseload is going down, but not as dramatically as the TAFDC caseload. An increase in EAEDC benefits is long overdue: grants were last raised in the 1980s. EAEDC benefits paid while a recipient is applying for SSI are reimbursed to the state once SSI is approved, so the state would recover the cost of any grant increase for some EAEDC recipients. Senate Ways and Means, like the House, provides for 60 days’ advance notice before the Administration adopts benefit or eligibility changes; the Governor had omitted this language.

- **The state supplement for SSI (Supplemental Security Income, item 4405-2000) would be funded at \$234.3 million, slightly more than the FY 14 appropriation for this account.**

### 3. Other DTA programs and benefits

- **The Employment Services Program (ESP, item 4401-1000) would be funded at only \$4.4 million, compared with \$7.7 million appropriated in FY 14.** The proposed amount is also less than half of FY 11 funding and only one-eighth of the \$36 million appropriated in FY 02. Senate Ways and Means' earmarks would provide level-funding for the Young Parents Program (\$3.5 million); transportation assistance (maximum \$40 a month) for recipients in education, training or job search (\$460,966); learning disability assessments (\$50,000); and the DTA Works Program, which provides paid internships at state agencies (\$50,000). Senate Ways and Means would not provide any funding for education and training for adults (earmarked at \$3 million for FY 14). Job readiness and job search services provided for immigrant and refugee parents would be funded at \$130,000, rather than the \$530,000 earmarked for FY 14. The House increased the line item to \$10.8 million and earmarked no less than \$264,000 for services for immigrant and refugee parents.

The elimination of funding for education and training is striking. The pending welfare bills would add additional funds for job placement for TAFDC recipients, but no funding to help recipients get the education and training they need to get jobs and no funding for transportation or other work supports other than child care.

- **The Supplemental Nutrition Program (item 4403-2007), which provides a small state food SNAP supplement to thousands of low income working families who receive federal food SNAP benefits, would be funded at \$1.2 million, the same as FY 14.**
- **Teen Living Programs (item 4403-2119) would be funded at \$9.2 million, the same as FY 14.** More money is needed to maintain the current number of beds because of provider rate increases. The pending welfare bills would increase this funding by a small amount so that teens could access these programs during any stage of pregnancy, instead of having to wait until their last trimester as they do currently.

### 4. DTA administration

- **The DTA worker account (item 4400-1100) would be funded at \$63.3 million, about \$1 million more than FY 14 funding (including a supplemental appropriation) of \$62.2 million.** Community-based organizations have reported an increase in benefit delays and increased difficulties reaching caseworkers because front line workers' caseloads are too high. The shortage of workers is likely a factor in the dramatic decline in the caseload.
- **DTA central administration (item 4400-1000) would be funded at \$65.6 million, a \$1 million increase over FY 14 funding (including a supplemental appropriation), but**

a separate line item (4400-1001) to increase SNAP participation would be eliminated. The proposed DTA central line item directs that an unspecified amount be spent on a grant for Project Bread that was previously paid out of the SNAP participation line item. The House would provide \$ \$3 million in a separate line item to increase SNAP participation.

- **DTA domestic violence workers (item 4400-1025) would receive a small increase to \$920,000**, the same as the Governor and the House.

## 5. Other Nutrition Programs (Not Administered by DTA)

- **DTA administrative funding to process SNAP applications:** The SNAP program is fully federally funded, but states are required to fund administrative costs, up to half of which are federally reimbursed by USDA. State administrative funding is necessary for both case managers (line item 4400-1100) who process the SNAP and cash assistance applications and re-certifications, as well as for funding DTA Central Office (4400-1000) for management, training and operations. The Senate Ways and Means appropriations for DTA administrative costs are detailed above.
- **The state subsidy for Elder Nutrition Programs (item 9110-1900)** continues to be level funded at \$6.37 million, identical to the House FY 15 budget and FY 14 appropriation. This program is administered by the Executive Office of Elder Affairs (EOEA) which distributes grants to provide free or subsidized lunches for low income seniors provided through the local Councils on Aging.
- **The state subsidy for the Women, Infant and Children's (WIC) program (item 4513-1002)** funded at \$12.5 million, same as the House FY 15 budget, but \$100K lower than FY 14. The state WIC funding supplements the federal WIC program administered by the Department of Public (DPH).
- **The Massachusetts Emergency Food (MEFAP) program (item 2511-0105)**, which supplements the federal TEFAP program funding, is level-funded at \$14M, the same as final FY2014 budget. The Senate budget, however, is \$1M less than the House FY2015 budget request of \$15M. Food Banks have been seeking an additional funding to meet the growing demand on food pantries and community feeding programs.

## Child Care

- **Child care for current and recent recipients of TAFDC (item 3000-4050) would be funded at \$130.8 million**, \$2.7 million more than the FY 14 appropriation, but less than the Governor or the House. Some of the increase may reflect rate increases for providers rather than an increase in the number of children who will be served. In fact, with the drop in the TAFDC caseload and no evidence that families are leaving TAFDC because they have jobs, it is quite possible that less will be needed for this account in FY 15. The account is running a surplus in FY 14. The proposed line item, like the House, includes a longstanding provision, omitted by the Governor, that

TAFDC recipients – whose incomes are far below the poverty level – will not be charged fees.

- **Income Eligible Child Care (item 3000-4060) would be funded at \$241.9 million, almost \$20 million more than projected FY 14 spending,** the same as the Governor’s proposal and the House. There are currently 41,000 children on the income eligible waitlist. Some of the increase may be funding to maintain 3,100 waitlisted children who got child care this year thanks to the FY 14 waitlist remediation account (3000-4070). It is also possible that some of the increase reflects rate increases for providers. In either case, the increase to this account would not further reduce the waitlist.
- **A new line item (3000-4040) would provide \$17.5 million to reduce the income-eligible wait list,** compared with \$10 million in the House Budget. The Governor would have provided \$15 million for child care geared to school readiness for infants, toddlers, and pre-school children on the income eligible waitlist. The \$17.5 million in the Senate Ways and Means budget would fund child care for about 2,000 children.
- **Supportive Child Care (item 3000-3050) for children referred by the Department of Children and Families would be funded at \$80.6 million** compared with the FY 14 appropriation of \$77 million. Like the House and unlike the Governor, Senate Ways and Means includes current budget language that all children eligible for child care through this account shall receive it; the Governor would require EEC and DCF to develop a waitlist. Many families are denied child care despite the current budget language.
- **Head Start (item 3000-5000) would be level-funded at \$8.1 million.**
- **Funding to improve the quality of pre-kindergarten programs and expand access (item 3000-5075) would be reduced to \$6.5 million.** The House and the Governor proposed level-funding at \$7.5 million.

## **Child Welfare: Department of Children and Families, Office of the Child Advocate and Other Children’s Services Issues**

1. **DCF would be funded at \$813.8 million, an increase of \$27.6 million over the current DCF budget, and \$5.2 million less than the Governor proposed.** However, Senate Ways and Means would also allocate \$6.3 million to Family Resource Centers under the EOHHS budget (in item 4000-0051). **Taking the DCF and the Family Resource Center allocations together, Senate Ways and Means would increase the child welfare budget by \$33.8 over the current level.**
- **This increase is greatly needed, but still represents a substantial decrease in purchasing power from that of the FY 2009 budget and is likely not enough to ensure the safety and support of the children that DCF serves.**

2. **\$527.4 million would be allocated to the department's four services accounts** (items 4800-0030, 4800-0038, 4800-0040 and 4800-0041).
  - Language in the Administrative line item (4800-0015) would allow DCF to transfer limited funds between these accounts.
  - Services for Children and Families (item 4800-0038) would be funded at \$260.2 million. Although this is \$6.5 million less than the House and \$5.2m less than the Governor proposed, approximately this same amount would be allocated to Family Resource Centers.
  - The Group Care Account (item 4000-0041) would be funded at \$216.4 million
3. **Family Stabilization and Support Services (item 4800-0040) would be level funded at \$44.6 million. This seriously underfunded account pays for the essential services needed to keep children safely at home.** These services are proven to keep children safe at home which in turn prevents the trauma of separating children from their families and sending them into the far costlier and already overburdened foster care system.
  - Of the over 34,000 children in DCF's caseload, 79% remain at home and another 8% are in foster care and need these services to safely reunify with their families. **Despite the fact that 88% of the children in DCF's caseload need family stabilization and support services to remain or reunify safely with their families, Senate Ways and Means would allocate only 8.4% of DCF's services budget to these services.** Potentially sound policies such as DCF's differential response system, under which the less serious cases are assessed for services rather than investigated, depend on DCF's ability to deliver the services identified as needed.
  - **The vast majority -- more than 76% -- of the families in DCF's caseload became involved with DCF because of neglect, not abuse.** Studies have established that risk to children caused by neglect, which is highly correlated with poverty, can be effectively addressed by family stabilization and support services, and that children whose families receive those services have better long term outcomes than their counterparts in foster care.
4. **Family Resource Centers would be funded under the EOHHS budget (in item 4000-0051) at \$6.3 million.**
  - Family Resource Centers are community based programs designed to offer families a convenient, culturally-appropriate and accessible location which offers a range of services.
  - The Senate Ways and Means allocation is intended to fund new family resource centers around the state in order to implement the Children Requiring Assistance legislation, Chapter 240 of the Acts of 2012. Each site will cost between \$700K-1M to operate. Both the Governor's and the House budgets allocated some funds to

family resource centers in the DCF services for Families and children line item (4800-0038); however, these funds were not specifically allocated for Family Resource Centers.

**5. The Social Worker account (4800-1100) would be funded at \$180.3 million, the level the Governor proposed. The House adopted an amendment increasing funding in this line item to \$185.3 due to the fact that caseloads have increased substantially since Jeremiah Oliver was reported missing in December of 2013.**

- It was hoped the increase the Governor proposed would be sufficient to fund the hiring of enough new social worker to bring caseload ratios to 15:1, as DCF negotiated with its union, and to more closely align DCF caseloads with national caseload standards promulgated by the Child Welfare League of America. However, this would not be possible with the funding allocated in the Senate Ways and Means budget.
- Given substantial increases between December 2013 and January 2014 in screen-in rates, substantiation rates and Care and Protection case filings, **the number of caseworkers with caseloads over 20 has skyrocketed from 277 in December to 899 currently** according to SEIU Local 509, the DCF social workers' union.
- In order to keep children safe, whether at home or in foster care, social workers need the time to adequately monitor families, intensively manage those that present risk factors, and make sound decisions about whether a child can remain safely at home or needs to be removed.
- **In addition, the Child Welfare Training Institute (item 4800-0091) which is responsible for training the many new social worker due to be hired, would receive an increase of less than \$18,000 over its current allocation.** The raises concerns about whether newly hired social workers can be adequately trained, and whether current social workers will receive the training they need on the many new policies and practices that recently have been, and will continue to be, instituted at DCF.

**6. DCF's administrative account (item 4800-0015) would be increased by \$3.5 million to \$74.6 million as the House and the Governor proposed.**

- **At least \$1 million would be earmarked for mobile technology solutions for social workers and other efforts to improve IT capability and accessibility for staff**
- **Senate Ways and Means would maintain language requiring DCF to ensure that its high stakes administrative hearing system (known as the "fair hearing system") is timely, independent and fair.** It would also maintain the requirement that DCF report to the Legislature on its enormous fair hearing backlog, **a requirement which DCF completely failed to comply with in FY 14.**
- **DCF's fair hearing system has been plagued by enormous backlogs and other problems as a result of which families are routinely denied their due process**

**rights to challenge DCF's decisions regarding their children.** As of its last report to the legislature, DCF has a hearing backlog of over 1300 cases. Although the department has finally complied with the legislature's mandate to revise its fair hearing regulations, **DCF's failure to report on the results of these changes, as required by the FY 14 budget, raises serious questions as to whether these revisions have brought about meaningful improvement.**

- **Senate Ways and Means maintains current and longstanding reporting requirements which the legislature requires to fulfill its oversight responsibilities.** This includes reports on each area office's spending on services to keep children safely at home, on its provision of domestic violence shelter, the number of kinship subsidies each area office provided, on what requests for voluntary services each area office received and where DCF referred people it couldn't help. **This data is critical in assessing DCF's effectiveness in meeting its core functions.**
- 7. **The lead agency account (item 4800-0030) would be level funded at \$6 million. The House did not fund that line item.** Lead agencies are regional nonprofits that contract for services but do not provide services themselves.
- 8. **Services to victims of domestic violence (item 4800-1400) would be increased by \$296,000 to \$23.2 million.** This account provides beds for domestic violence shelter, visitation services, and supports to victims of domestic violence, and pays for DCF domestic violence staff. These preventive services are not restricted to DCF involved families, but are available to all individuals who are served by these provider programs. **Currently, the domestic violence shelter system is full and must turn away many domestic violence survivors who then turn to the Emergency Assistance system for shelter for themselves and their children.**
- 9. **Funding for the Office of the Child Advocate (item 0411-1005), would be increased from \$304,100 to \$500,000 as the Governor proposed.**
- 10. **Senate Ways and Means does not include language that the House introduced in outside sections which would unnecessarily restrict DCF's discretion to approve potential adoptive or foster parents whose record includes any of a wide range of crimes, some of which do not bear on their ability to safely care for a child.** DCF's current background check process is designed to ensure that kin not be precluded from stepping up to care for relative children by old criminal records that can be shown to have no bearing on their ability to safely to care for these children.
- 11. **Senate Ways and Means would increase funding for a number of vital programs that serve children and families but do not fall within DCF's budget. These programs provide the preventive services that families need so that their problems don't put their children at risk and drive them into the child welfare system.** In addition to additional resources for substance abuse and mental health services, **funding for neonatal and postnatal home visiting programs (in item 3000-7000) would be increased by \$4 million to \$14.5.** This funding is intended to provide home

visiting to more than 1,000 new families. It would be contingent upon adequate revenue from the children's health insurance program.

## **Selected Health Issues in MassHealth, the Connector and the Health Safety Net**

### **1. Senate Ways and Means restores dentures no later than April 1, 2015. Line Item 4000-0700.**

- MassHealth reduced adult dental services to just preventive and emergency services in FY 11. In FY 13, fillings were restored but only for the two front teeth. In FY 14, the budget authorized a mid-year restoration of fillings for all teeth which MassHealth began implementing in March 2014. The Governor had proposed in his budget to restore dentures mid-year in FY 15. The House budget froze dental benefits at their present level, preventing denture restoration, but Senate Ways and Means now requires dentures to be available by April 1<sup>st</sup> at the latest.

### **2. MassHealth expansion for 345,000 adults would be fully funded (item 4000-0940).**

Under the federal Affordable Care Act (ACA) adults with income up to 133 percent of the poverty level became eligible for MassHealth on January 1, 2014 with an enhanced federal matching rate. Most of the 345,000 members projected for FY 15 were eligible for subsidized coverage under the state's Section 1115 Medicaid demonstration waiver before the ACA expansion took effect, many through CommonwealthCare. The Governor's budget estimated that an additional 58,000 members would become eligible under this expansion.

### **3. Necessary language omitted from Family Assistance line item 4000-0880**

- Senate Ways and Means omits language that was included in House 2 that is needed to authorize spending from the MassHealth Family Assistance account for certain lawful immigrants who are eligible for state-funded medical coverage pursuant to the General Laws. This language had also been accidentally omitted by House Ways and Means, but restored in the House budget through a technical amendment. The Senate Ways and Means budget includes the same amount of funding for this line item as House 2 and the House version of the language making it seem likely that this was another inadvertent omission, hopefully correctable by a technical amendment.

### **4. The Governor's proposal for a new Health Insurance Expenditure Fund to receive enhanced federal matching funds is not authorized.**

- The Governor's House 2 budget proposed to create a new fund to receive the enhanced federal matching funds for certain ACA-related Medicaid expenditures.

The proceeds of the fund are “to support the financing of health insurance coverage for low-income residents of the commonwealth.” With this provision the enhanced federal match generated by MassHealth expenditures will be used for health-related purposes rather than simply go into the general fund. Several bills to set aside enhanced matching funds are pending in the current session, Senate 554 and House 1023. Senate Ways and Means follows the House lead and does not create this special fund and would continue to send the enhanced federal matching dollars to the state’s general fund without a designated purpose.

## Homeless Services

1. **Emergency Assistance (item 7004-0101) for homeless families with children would be funded at just over \$136.9 million, slightly more than the House figure but approximately \$24 million less than projected FY 14 spending.**
  - The Emergency Assistance (EA) program provides emergency shelter to certain families who are homeless and whom the Department of Children and Families verifies have no other safe place to stay. In FY 13, the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) implemented restrictions on access so that many families with children must be so desperate that they have slept *in a place not meant for human habitation* before they are eligible for shelter.
  - **The Senate Ways and Means proposal fails to mandate changes to these restrictions, in spite of strong demand by medical providers, educators, and others working with homeless families to provide shelter to those “within 24 hours of staying in a place not meant for human habitation” so that children do not have to sleep in cars, emergency rooms, bus stations or other unsafe places before receiving shelter.** (The Senate Ways and Means Budget also omits language in the RAFT line item that was adopted in FY 14 to keep these children safe. See RAFT discussion in the Housing section).
  - **Senate Ways and Means removed important language that has long ensured that families who are in shelter for less than 30 days while their eligibility is being determined are not barred from returning to shelter for a full year.** A 12-month bar to accessing shelter is grossly disproportionate when fewer than 30 days of benefits were received and would leave more homeless children without the safety of shelter.
  - Senate Ways and Means would fund EA at \$136.9 million. The funds for shelters and overflow motels would be re-consolidated back into one line item, 7004-0101. This is slightly more than in the House budget (which retains two line items, including 7004-0103 to fund motel rooms), but it is approximately \$24 million less than current FY 14 funding and \$42.7 million less than the Governor’s House 2 proposal. The amount is likely to be inadequate and require supplemental funding during the fiscal year.
  - Senate Ways and Means includes language saying that the Administration cannot impose new restrictions on shelter without giving the Legislature 60 days’ advance

notice during FY 15. In prior years, this language has given the Legislature time to ensure that access to shelter and housing assistance for children and their families is not unduly restricted.

**2. HomeBASE (item 7004-0108) would be funded at just under \$24.2 million, a reduction of approximately \$34.7 million, reflecting that almost all families will have reached the end of their 24 months of rental assistance in FY 14.**

- This program was created in FY 12 – at the Administration’s urging – and touted as a key to ending family homelessness. As authorized for FY 12, the program primarily provided up to 3 years of Rental Assistance to families otherwise eligible for emergency assistance. In FY 13, again at the Administration’s request, the Rental Assistance benefit was reduced for current recipients to 24 months and no more Rental Assistance benefits were issued. Now families entering the HomeBASE program are only eligible to receive Household Assistance, a significantly lower assistance amount.
- The Senate Ways and Means Budget, like the House, would increase the amount of HomeBASE Household Assistance families are eligible to receive from \$4000 to \$6000 per year. While an additional \$2000 may enable some families to afford housing, it is still insufficient to enable the vast majority of homeless families to become and remain housed for a full year.
- The Senate Ways and Means Budget, like the House and House 2 budgets, would make eligible for HomeBASE only families who are eligible for EA shelter, even though some families will be losing their Rental Assistance in late FY 14 and need Household Assistance in FY 15 to *avoid* becoming homeless again.
- As with the EA line item, Senate Ways and Means retains important language stating that the Administration cannot impose new restrictions on the HomeBASE program without giving the Legislature 60 days’ advance notice during FY 15.

**3. Individual and Administrative Accounts.**

- **Shelters and services for homeless individuals (item 7004-0102) would be funded at just over \$40.5 million**, a slight increase from FY 14. The **Home and Healthy for Good program (item 7004-0104)**, which provides housing for chronically homeless individuals, **would be funded at \$1.4 million**, a slight decrease from FY 14 taking into account an FY 14 supplemental appropriation.
- **The DHCD homelessness administrative account (item 7004-0100) would be funded at just over \$6 million**, an increase of approximately \$200,000 over FY 14.

## Housing

1. **Public Housing Operating Subsidies (item 7004-9005)**, which provides housing authorities with operating funds to maintain the state’s public housing units, would be

**decreased by Senate Ways and Means from \$64.4 million in FY 14 to \$64 million.**

At a time when the state is facing disturbing increases in homelessness among families, an increase in funding for a housing program that offers extremely low-income households permanently affordable housing is needed now more than ever.

In addition:

- Last year's budget required certain reporting requirements for housing authorities receiving operating funding, including reporting the number of uninhabitable units in need of repair, the number of uninhabitable units that could be restored for less than \$10,000, and the number of units that have been uninhabitable for longer than 60 days that do not have a waiver from DHCD. **Senate Ways and Means does not include these reporting requirements.** Over the past three years, the state will have brought almost 500 permanently affordable state public housing apartments back into use. These reporting requirements are critical in evaluating the continued progress of this effort.
  - Unlike last year's final budget and the House FY 15 budget, the **Senate Ways and Means FY 15 budget does not instruct DHCD to make every attempt to rehabilitate family public housing requiring \$20,000 or less in repairs.**
  - As with last year's final budget, the Senate Ways and Means FY 15 budget requires housing authorities operating elderly public housing to offer first preference for elderly public housing to elders age 60 years or older as of June 30, 2014 who are receiving MRVP vouchers. Similar language was included in the FY 15 House budget, but not included in House 2.
2. **The Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) (item 7004-9024),** which provides long-term rental subsidies to low-income tenants in the private housing market, **would receive \$70 million. This is a substantial improvement over the House budget which gave MRVP \$60.5 million and from the FY 14 amount of \$57.5 million.** The Senate's Executive Summary says that \$70 million is more than double the amount appropriated in FY 2011. Although housing and homelessness advocates had pushed for MRVP to be funded at \$87.5 million, the Senate amount represents good progress. Depending on how budgeting is handled, \$70 million would create somewhere between 1,250 – 2,000 new vouchers.

However, Senate Ways and Means requires that new voucher participants be drawn from existing local waitlists or a new statewide list and specifically **prohibits** a distribution or redistribution method that takes into account participation in the EA program. This will lead to longer shelter stays and increase the cost of the EA program.

3. **The Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP) (item 7004-9030) would be level funded at \$3.45 million, the same amount as in the House FY 15 budget.**
- This program is for non-elderly, disabled households and has been traditionally labeled as a "transitional" voucher program. While the Governor's proposal for

AHVP omitted the word “transitional” and instead referred to it as a program of rental assistance for this population, House and Senate Ways and Means FY 15 budget refers to this program as “transitional” and omits the reference that it is for non-elderly persons with disability.

- Unlike last year’s budget and the House FY 15 budget, Senate Ways and Means does not require DHCD to submit an annual report to the Legislature on AHVP expenditures, the number of outstanding rental vouchers, and the number and types of units leased. Nor does it add a provision, as the Governor’s FY 15 budget did, barring any private right of action to enforce provisions of the item.

**4. The Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP) (item 7004-3045)** a homeless prevention program which helps preserve tenancies of persons with disabilities, would be **level funded at \$500,000.**

- TPP is run by 6 regional provider agencies and is based in housing courts across the state. When very vulnerable individuals and families face possible homelessness as a result of behavior related to a disability (for example, mental illness, developmental disabilities, aging-related impairments), TPP clinicians address the reason for the eviction, identify needed services, develop a treatment plan to maintain the tenancy, and monitor the case as long as necessary.
- In FY13, TPP directly assisted 552 households. Out of the 383 cases that TPP clinicians closed, homelessness was prevented in 335 cases. **The outcome in 87% of cases closed was that the tenancy was saved and stabilized.**
- TPP keeps vulnerable tenants in permanent housing and prevents them from having to live in a shelter, motel or the streets. **With a very modest increase of \$250,000,** TPP services could be provided to an additional 100 disabled households and could increase consultation services to at least 300 additional disabled households.

**5. The Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program (item 7004-9316),** a homelessness prevention program for families with children or with a disabled family member, **would be funded at \$10.5 million, the same amount as in the FY 14 budget and \$500,000 less than the House FY 15 budget.**

- As in FY 14 and the House budget, RAFT provides up to \$4,000 for families who are homeless and moving into subsidized housing or at risk of homelessness, with priority to those who would otherwise require shelter services.
- Like the House budget, Senate Ways and Means targets not less than 50% of RAFT funds to families with incomes not less than 30% of area median. This is a change from the FY 14 budget which required not less than 90% of funds be targeted to these extremely low-income families. But as in FY 14, these “requirements” are subject to DHCD’s discretion.

- Like the House budget and the Governor's budget, Senate Ways and Means eliminates language added in FY 14 through which \$500,000 of RAFT funds were used to provide temporary accommodations to homeless families not yet eligible for EA shelter, but who were within 24 hours of having to stay in an unsafe place. See Homelessness section for more details.
  - As in FY 14, RAFT assistance is capped at \$4,000 in a 12 month period. Although the House budget allows a combined maximum of \$6,000 from RAFT and HomeBASE in a 12-month period, Senate Ways and Means maintains the policies in the FY 14 budget which allow not more than a combined total of \$4,000.
  - Like the House budget Senate Ways and Means requires DHCD to submit quarterly report to the Legislature on various aspects of RAFT but does not include a requirement in the House budget for a report to the Legislature on the involvement of regional Community Action Programs (CAPs) in the RAFT program and the potential for broader inclusion of CAP agencies in administering RAFT.
- 6. DHCD Administrative Account (item 7004-0099) stays at the FY 14 level of \$6.47 which is lower than the House amount of \$7.045 million.**
- The Senate Ways and Means budget does not include, as did the House, \$230,000 to hire 3 housing appeals officers to reduce backlog of EA appeals and \$250,000 to implement and evaluate a homeless family preference in private multi-family housing.
  - Senate Ways and Means corrects a clerical error in the House budget and retains the requirement in FY 13 and 14 budgets that DHCD promulgate regulations ensuring that those in receipt of temporary housing subsidies retain any housing admissions priority for homeless and at risk households.
- 7. Department of Mental Health Rental Subsidy Program (item 7004-9033),** which provides rental subsidies to eligible clients of the Department of Mental Health, would be approximately level funded at \$4 million which is more than \$1 million less than the House amount.
- 8. Housing Services and Counseling (item 7004-3036),** which provides grants to nine regional housing consumer education centers for housing services and counseling would be approximately **level funded at 2.39 million** which is an increase over the House amount of \$1.74 million.
- 9. Access to Health Care in Public Housing** The Senate Ways and Means FY 15 budget did not include, as the House Ways and Means FY 15 did, an outside section requiring the Center for Health Information and Analysis to submit a report evaluating the geographic concentration of morbidity, health costs, and access to care in public housing developments in Massachusetts.

10. **Forward Funding for the Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program:** Outside Section 89 would provide what is called "forward funding" for LIHEAP. This means that Massachusetts could start the program on time on November 1st, even if the federal government has not yet released LIHEAP funds. Without forward funding, if the federal government does not release funds or resolve a budget by November 1st, heating funds would not be available.

## Legal Services

- **Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) (item 0321-1600),** Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (item 0321-1600), which supports grants for civil legal aid programs that serve low-income individuals and families in Massachusetts, was level funded at \$13 million. This is \$2 million less than the House final budget and \$4 million below MLAC's \$17 million request. Additional funding for MLAC is critical to help to meet the increasing statewide demand for civil legal services.

For more information, contact Margaret Monsell ([mmonsell@mlri.org](mailto:mmonsell@mlri.org)), who will direct your inquiry to the right advocate.