



**Changes to Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter Policies**

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## Overview

A press release with additional information from November 2024 policy changes can be found [here](#) and February 2025 policy changes [here](#).

### What changes are being made to the EA program?

- Our administration believes that the use of the state’s Emergency Assistance (EA) Family shelter system should be brief, rare, and non-recurring.
- Beginning December 10<sup>th</sup>, we will be implementing changes to the EA program to lower costs, phase out the use of hotels, focus resources where they are most impactful to serve more families while dramatically reduce the number of shelter units and families in the system at any point in time, all while better meeting the needs of more individual families annually, in line with the [recommendations](#) made by the bipartisan Special Commission on Emergency Housing Assistant Programs (the EA commission).
- Beginning December 10<sup>th</sup>, families will be placed on one of two EA shelter tracks based on need: the **Rapid Shelter Track** or the **Bridge Shelter Track**.
  - The **Rapid Shelter Track** involves thousands of families who have strengths and needs that position them to rapidly find self-sufficient permanent housing. We offer them 30-days of high intensity support at our Temporary Respite Centers (TRCs) to transition them quickly to stable, permanent housing – many with stabilization services available through HomeBASE – as well as connect them with work authorizations, job placements and English classes.
  - The **Bridge Shelter Track** is meant for our more high-risk families and those with more complex needs that take longer to resolve to find permanent housing – they may be women who have a late-term pregnancies, people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. These families would be eligible for up to six months in the shelter system, and the goals would be the same - to help them quickly transition to stable, permanent housing, as well as connect them with needed services, work authorizations, job placements and English classes.



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- On February 28, 2025, Governor Healey signed a supplemental budget that included proposals to reduce the taxpayer cost of the state's Emergency Assistance family shelter system and additional changes to make it safer for shelter residents and communities. Along with the supplemental budget, the results of a security assessment performed by The Edward Davis Company was also published; the report included recommendations to enhance safety at shelter sites.

Some policy changes will be implemented beginning March 7, 2025, and others will be implemented over the next few months. Many of the policy changes based on the FY25 Supplemental budget are around Intake & Eligibility requirements, length of stay changes, and shelter safety.

#### Why are these policy changes being made now?

- The FY25 supplemental budget, signed on Friday, February 28, 2025, appropriates **\$425M**, which enables EOHLC to sustain the Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter program through June 2025. It includes a number of policy changes aimed at improving safety and fiscal sustainability of the EA Family Shelter System. Many of the policy changes are largely in line with the Administration's proposal from January 2025.

#### How did you come up with these changes?

- Over the past two years we have learned a lot by serving tens of thousands of families, all of whom are resilient, but have different risks, needs, and strengths, and in that time, we have deployed robust data tracking and analysis to inform decisions.
- We have made progress toward operational and fiscal sustainability:
  - Daily demand for the Emergency Assistance program today is less than what it was in 2023. Last year up to 40 eligible families per day applied for shelter. Now on average 15-18 families apply daily. Demand is stabilizing but remains extraordinary compared to rates of demand experienced before 2023.
  - Families are working hard with case managers to find stable housing, and exits from the program have drastically increased. Last October, 190 families exited shelter. This October 490 families exited. Furthermore, 125 families were entirely diverted from shelter in October, compared to only 33 diversions in October 2023.
- We have also held multiple public listening sessions with local leaders, advocates, shelter residents and service providers to better understand how the system can better service families.
- In July 2024, the EA Commission convened and met over the subsequent five months to discuss how to improve the shelter program; the EA Commission has now offered recommendations to further stabilize this program and to improve outcomes.
- On January 10, Governor Healey contracted former Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis's firm, EDC, to conduct an in-depth assessment of the security and safety conditions across the EA shelter system. Over 30 days, EDC visited a selection of shelter sites, reviewed EA policy and procedures related to shelter safety and security, and interviewed stakeholders and staff. The report proposed recommendations for the EA system to develop and implement new and more uniform guidance for onsite shelter security measures and use of on-site security contractors.
- All of these experiences have informed our decision making.

#### Are you reducing overall shelter capacity?

- We will soon begin to reduce reliance on hotels and stop backfilling hotel units when families exit. Hotels and motels currently make up 46% of the shelter portfolio and are more expensive than operating traditional EA family shelter sites. Reducing reliance on hotels is in line with



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recommendations made by the EA Commission and will reduce the overall footprint of the system, leading to overall cost savings.

- As required by the FY25 Supplemental Budget passed by the legislature, beginning in 2026 the EA system will have a 4000-family capacity limit.
- We believe these changes will dramatically decrease the number of families in this system at any given point in time, below the existing cap.
- We are doing this in a way that will enable us to serve more families annually, better serve the individual needs of families, and make the use of the shelter system brief, rare, and non-recurring.
- A significant number of people can be served effectively by our Rapid Shelter Track – which means they can rapidly find permanent housing without using the more intensive, longer-term shelter model.

### How will there be enough units for people who need them?

- Our plan will further increase shelter exits and shelter diversions to help families move through shelter more quickly. Brief shelter stays are better for families and help us turn over units more quickly and in turn to serve more families.
- We are reducing our reliance on hotels but will continue to invest in traditional congregate shelters.

### Are you changing any length of stay requirements?

- **The Bridge Shelter Track:** The Administration expects to file legislation to reduce the maximum length of stay in the program from 9 to 6 months. Families and case managers are working harder than ever to identify stable housing for families to exit and we are helping families move through shelter more quickly. We have made progress: today the average length of stay is less than one year. That's thanks in part to the success of investment in job programs: Over 4,000 people in shelter have been connected to a job. And thanks to investments in rehousing supports: 85% of exits from the system this year have utilized HomeBASE rehousing supports.
- **The Rapid Shelter Track:** Beginning December 10<sup>th</sup>, the stay limit in TRCs will be extended from 5 business days to 30 business days, with some allowance for extensions. Families who are placed into TRCs will continue to have access to a rapid rehousing model of service provision which seeks to provide rapid access to permanent housing placement tools including HomeBASE. These changes are in line with the recommendation of the EA Commission that we maintain policies that set clear expectations and outcomes, and the principle that shelter stays should be brief.

### How much money will be saved by these changes?

- This plan seeks to bring EA and related programs toward fiscal and operational sustainability.
- The FY25 supplemental budget appropriates \$425M, which enables EOHLC to sustain the Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter program through June 2025.

## 1.1 Needs-based Model and TRC Changes

### What is a needs-based shelter model?

- The updated EA prioritization criteria recognizes that there are different levels of need within the EA system and provides families with the appropriate shelter and services relative to their risks,



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needs, and strengths. Based on their needs, families will be placed in two tracks: The Rapid Shelter Track and the Bridge Shelter Track.

- **The Bridge Shelter Track:** Some families who apply for EA benefit from longer-term stabilization services to help them get back into permanent housing. These families have more complex needs such as late-term pregnancies, newborn children, intellectual or developmental disabilities, or are survivors of domestic violence, or veterans.
- **The Rapid Shelter Track:** Other families need a temporary place to stay and financial support to secure a lease and get back on their feet. These families are better served by the rapid rehousing model offered in TRCs.

### **Why did you choose to increase the maximum TRC length of stay from 5 to 30 days?**

- Beginning December 10<sup>th</sup>, the stay limit in TRCs will be extended from 5 business days to 30 business days, with some allowance for extensions.
- Families who are placed into TRCs will continue to have access to a rapid rehousing model of service provision which seeks to provide rapid access to permanent housing placement tools including HomeBASE.
- We made this decision after discussing with families in shelter and service providers and determined that a 30-day length of stay is more in line with the time it takes to successfully rapidly rehouse.

### **Will families have 30 calendar or business days in TRCs? Will families in TRC sites ahead of the policy change have 30 business days?**

- Beginning December 10<sup>th</sup>, the maximum length of stay in TRCs will increase from 5 to 30 business days.
- Families entering TRCs on or after 12/10 will have 30 business days and families who were in TRCs prior to 12/10 will have their length of stay extended to 30 business days if their current exit date is prior to 30 business days from their entry.

### **Where will families on the contact list ahead of the December 10, 2024, policy change be placed within the EA shelter system?**

- Families on the contact list before December 10<sup>th</sup> will be placed in the Bridge Shelter Track.

### **How will families in EA shelter by December 10, 2024, be impacted by the shelter track changes?**

- Families currently in shelter prior to December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2025, will not be impacted by the shelter track changes.
- Specifically, if a family is currently in EA shelter with priority 4 status, they are able to continue to stay in their current type of shelter.
- However, families are still subject to the EA Length of Stay policy and shelter rules and should work with their EA Provider Case manager on their specific exit date details.

### **Does this mean families on the Rapid Shelter Track at TRCs won't be placed in the Bridge Shelter Track?**

- Families will be served by either the Rapid Shelter Track or the Bridge Shelter Track based on their needs.
- Families who are placed on the Rapid Shelter Track at TRCs will continue to have access to a rapid rehousing model of service provision which seeks to provide rapid access to permanent housing placement tools including HomeBASE.



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### What changes were made to the EA prioritization criteria based on December 10, 2024, policy changes?

- Families with higher relative risk and need (priority 1-3) will be directed to the appropriate traditional EA shelter model, focused on a placement with the right type of provider and site to best serve their needs. We are also adding a new priority 2 status for families with a family member with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD).
- If there are no EA shelter units immediately available, prioritized families (priority score of 1-3) will continue to be eligible to temporarily stay at a Clinical and Safety Risk Assessment sites.
- Families who are determined as able to be rapidly rehoused (priority 4) will be placed in a TRC shelter, with a 30-business day Length of Stay.

### Can a family change their track assignment? What is the process?

- Once a family has been assigned to a shelter track, they cannot change their track unless they are reassessed because of a significant change to family status (such as a change in a health condition).
- Families should provide information about a change of circumstance that would warrant an update to their Track placement (reassessment needed). It is recommended that families report any changes as soon as possible that may impact priority or eligibility to their caseworker and/or call (866) 584-0653 8 a.m.- 5 p.m. Monday through Friday (closed weekends and state holidays).

## 1.2 Investments in Exits and Diversions

### What are the proposed changes to the HomeBASE package?

- The Administration is working on process changes to improve application processing times.
- We also expect to file legislation to increase the amount of the HomeBASE rental stipend from \$15,000 per family per year to \$25,000 per family per year. This proposal would also limit the benefit to 2 years. These changes better reflect current rental market prices and help more families find permanent housing, reducing their reliance on EA shelter.

### How will you support families in exiting?

- We will continue to support families with the HomeBASE program. HomeBASE is an integral support for families securing stable housing: 82% of families exiting EA to market rate housing in the past year received HomeBASE support.
- Additionally, work training and job programs have been a success: as of the week of 11/17/24, the administration has helped 6,035 shelter residents get work authorizations, 4,131 shelter residents have gotten jobs and 1,551 shelter residents have enrolled in ESOL classes.
- We will work to support providers in improving case management supports to help families exit.

## 1.3 EA Portfolio Changes

### Where are the Family Welcome Centers (FWCs)? When are they open?

- Quincy Family Welcome Center, 1120 Hancock Street, Quincy, MA 02169.
  - Monday-Friday: 8AM – 7PM
  - Saturday: CLOSED.
  - Sunday: 9AM – 3PM.
  - Holidays: 9AM – 3PM.



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- Mattapan Family Welcome Center. 1626 Blue Hill Ave, Mattapan, MA 02126.
  - Monday-Friday: 7:30AM – 7PM.
  - Saturday: 8AM – 1PM.
  - Sunday: CLOSED.
  - Holidays: 8AM – 1PM.
- Allston Family Welcome Center. 14 Harvard Ave. #2 Allston, MA 02134.
  - Monday-Friday: 8AM – 6PM.
  - Saturday-Sunday: 9AM – 2PM.
  - Holidays: CLOSED.

### Will you be opening new shelters?

- We'll continue to assess capacity needs statewide, but this rapid rehousing model means that we will be helping families quickly leave TRCs for stable housing.

### How will you work with EA providers on reducing reliance on hotels?

- Hotel and motel shelter closures will occur in phases over the coming year.
- Notification will be provided well in advance to families and communities in order to support as many families as possible to exit to safe and stable housing prior to site closure.
- Some families may transfer to other shelter program locations.

### Why were hotels utilized to expand shelter?

- Hotels are the most efficient option to rapidly deploy additional shelter units when traditional capacity is exhausted.
- We have worked to secure fair billing rates; however, hotels are still more expensive than operating traditional EA family shelter sites.
- Reducing reliance on hotels is in line with recommendations made by the EA Commission and will reduce the overall footprint of the system, leading to overall cost savings.

### How will school enrollment be impacted?

- Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, homeless children have a right to continue attending the school they were previously enrolled in or to immediately enroll in the district where they are living. Families on both the Rapid and Bridge shelter tracks will work with their shelter providers to ensure they understand their educational rights and school enrollment options.

## 1.4 Intake & Eligibility Changes

### What changes to intake and eligibility will begin on March 7, 2025?

- Starting March 7, 2025, there are two changes to required documents for EA Family Shelter:
  1. **New Lawful Status Requirement:** Each member of the family must have an eligible immigration status. However, if a child in the family has an eligible immigration status, that satisfies the immigration status requirement for the family.
  2. **New Residency Requirement:** Each member of the family must be a resident of Massachusetts who intends to remain in Massachusetts permanently or indefinitely. The family must provide documents for all adults over 18 to prove this.
- Beginning March 7, 2025, in order to be placed into EA shelter the following must be true:



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- Identity, familial relationship, and criminal background check verified by HLC Staff prior to placement.
- Head of household must **attest that** the entire household has (1) Lawful status documents and (2) Residency documents for family members 18 and over.

### Will there be future changes to intake and eligibility?

- Yes, the following policies in line with the FY25 Supplemental Budget will be effective in the coming months which will impact intake and eligibility for the Family EA program:
  - Require full eligibility before placement with case-specific waivers.
  - Update excess income threshold for families in shelter.

## 1.5 In-Shelter Changes

### What in-shelter changes are a result of the FY25 Supplemental Budget?

- Starting March 7, 2025, EOHLIC will make best efforts to meet the 20-mile home community transfer rule, but this is no longer guaranteed.
- In the coming months, families over income (200+% FPL) for 4 mos. (vs. 6) will be ineligible and adding relatives without going through the PAHBM process will result in a termination of shelter benefits. More detailed information will be shared soon about adding new family members and rules when family incomes changes while in shelter.

## 1.6 Length of Stay Changes

### What changes to the Length of Stay policy will begin March 7, 2025?

- Starting March 7, 2025, the Length of Stay at Bridge Shelter will go from 9 months to 6 months.
- For families arriving in shelter on or after March 7, 2025:
  - New families will be subject to the 6-month length of stay law and the new waiver procedures. Families should plan to exit on a 6-month timeline.
  - Families will receive a notice with their exit date at least 90 days before they need to exit.
- For families in shelter before March 7, 2025:
  - Families who have already received a notice with an exit date should plan to leave shelter on or before that date. Eligible families should follow existing procedures for the hardship waiver and the lease bridge, until new guidance is published.
  - Families who have not received a notice with an exit date should wait to receive a notice. They may not receive this notice immediately. All families will get at least 90 days' notice before they need to leave.
- Current rules governing Bridge Length of Stay hardship waivers continue to apply until new regulations and guidance are released.

### Will there be additional changes that impact Length of Stay?

- In the next several months, the department will develop bridge shelter hardship waiver policy, and provide LOS notices and exit dates at intake.



## 1.7 Shelter Safety

### **What were the Safety Recommendations from the EDC?**

On January 10, Governor Healey contracted former Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis's firm, EDC, to conduct an in-depth assessment of the security and safety conditions across the EA shelter system. Over 30 days, EDC visited a selection of shelter sites, reviewed EA policy and procedures related to shelter safety and security and interviewed stakeholders and staff. The EDC made the following recommendations:

- Improve Shelter Staff Training and Support
- Enhance Intake and Placement Procedures
- Strengthen Onsite Shelter Security Measures
- Review and Enhance EOHLC Policies
- Improve Data Collection and Tracking
- Establish Consistent Shelter Security Standards

EOHLC will work with the EDC team to develop and implement new and more uniform guidance for onsite shelter security measures and use of on-site security contractors.

### **What safety changes were part of the FY25 Supplemental Budget?**

- EOHLC will continue criminal background checks requirements as follows:
  - EA CORI policy requires criminal background checks for all individuals 18+ applying to shelter, on the EA contact list, or who are currently in shelter.
  - Families need to have a criminal background check prior to placement into shelter.
  - As part of the EA application, families are required to disclose criminal convictions outside of Massachusetts.
- In the coming months, there will be updates to the criminal background check requirements:
  - EOHLC will issue emergency regulations on the protocols for information received from DCJIS and on limitations or exclusions on those found to have convictions or pending charges for serious crimes.
  - Families who do not consent to a criminal background check will be denied.
  - Families who do not disclose a criminal conviction upon intake will be denied.





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### EA Fact Sheet

#### **Massachusetts is a “Right to Shelter” state by law**

Massachusetts is among the few states in the country with a “right to shelter” law guaranteeing emergency shelter for homeless families who meet certain eligibility requirements, subject to appropriation from the Legislature, per [Section 30 of Part I, Title II, Chapter 23B](#) of the Massachusetts General Laws.

#### ***Emergency housing is only provided to families with children and/or those who are pregnant***

Only families with children and pregnant individuals with no other children may be eligible for placement in state emergency shelter.

#### **Emergency Assistance services are fully funded by the state**

The Massachusetts family homelessness system is called the Emergency Assistance (EA) program and is operated and overseen by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC). Massachusetts covers the cost of emergency shelter services for eligible families, including eligible costs for education, food assistance, medical care, and other basic needs. In April 2024, Governor Healey signed a supplemental budget that provides \$251M for shelter-related costs.

#### **Massachusetts has seen a steady rise in shelter demand**

The emergency shelter system has had to expand each month since September 2022 in order to meet increases in need, as the result of factors such as rising housing costs in every region, and new arrivals to the state. Additionally, with an increasingly tight housing market and significant delay in federal work authorizations, more families are experiencing homelessness and fewer are exiting shelter into their own stable, permanent housing.

#### **Expanding shelter capacity and permanent housing requires local, state, federal partnership**

Non-profit service providers help oversee state-run family shelters, which include 3,600 permanent shelter units statewide. Since late 2022, EOHLC has added nearly 4,000 temporary hotel and new permanent sites. EOHLC is working with local, federal and state partners to help shelter eligible families, including by increasing the [HomeBASE benefit](#).

#### **EA Contact List**

If there are no longer shelter units available in the EA Family Shelter system, families may be placed on the **EA Family Shelter Contact List**. The Contact List is the order in which the state will contact EA-eligible families for placement in EA Family Shelter if there is no capacity. A family’s spot on the Contact List will depend on when they were found eligible and the shelter track they are in, the Rapid Shelter Track or the Bridge Shelter Track.

#### **Statewide coordinated approach will help meet increased needs**

The administration has implemented an Incident Command Structure, including the Governor’s Office, Administration and Finance, Health and Human Services, Housing and Livable Communities, Public Safety and Security, Labor and Workforce Development, and Education that will develop a cross-agency approach to help meet the needs of families who are struggling. Additionally, with leadership at the Office of Refugees and Immigrants, the state is better accommodating the unique needs of new arrivals.