

SPECIAL COMMISSION ON EMERGENCY HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

October 15, 2024
1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

Massachusetts State House, Room 157
24 Beacon St., Boston MA

MEETING MINUTES

A meeting of the Special Commission on Emergency Housing Assistance Programs was held on Tuesday, October 15, 2024, in person and via Zoom.

The following Commission members were present in person:

- **Lt. Governor Kimberley Driscoll**, Commission Chair
- **Sec. Edward Augustus**, Secretary of Housing and Livable Communities
- **Sec. Kate Walsh**, Secretary of Health and Human Services
- **Sec. Matthew Gorzkowicz**, Secretary of Administration and Finance
- **Cristina Aguilera Sandoval**, Executive Director, Office for Immigrants and Refugees
- **Rep. James Arciero**, House Chair, Joint Committee on Housing
- **Sen. Robyn Kennedy**, Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
- **Leah Bradley**, Executive Director, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance
- **Lyndia Downie**, President & Executive Director, Pine Street Inn
- **Pastor Dieufort Fleurissant**, President & Executive Director, True Alliance Center

The following Commission members attended via Zoom:

- **Rep. Jay Livingstone**, House Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
- **Rep. Paul Frost**, Second Assistant Minority Leader
- **Sen. Ryan Fattman**, Assistant Minority Leader

The following Commission member was not in attendance:

- **Sen. Lydia Edwards**, Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Housing

Members reviewed or discussed the following materials:

- A slide deck, which has been posted at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/ea-presentation-emergency-assistance-ea-commission-meeting-october-15-2024/download>
- Minutes from the September 16, 2024 meeting, which have been posted at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/emergency-assistance-ea-commission-september-16-meeting-minutes/download>

* * *

1. INTRODUCTION

The Lieutenant Governor opened the meeting at 1:06 pm. The Lieutenant Governor noted that Rep. Livingstone, Rep. Frost, and Sen. Fattman were attending by Zoom.

The Lieutenant Governor entertained a motion to approve the September 16, 2024 meeting minutes. Leah Bradley, with Sen. Kennedy seconding, so moved. The minutes were unanimously approved by roll call vote, with all but Sec. Augustus, Rep. Arciero, and Sen. Edwards voting. The Lieutenant Governor called a roll call to identify members attending. All but Sec. Augustus, Rep. Arciero, and Sen. Edwards were present.

The Lieutenant Governor provided an overview of the agenda and goals for the meeting, including discussing how the Emergency Assistance (“EA”) system should operate in light of the data and practices the Commission has discussed, and planning for the Commission’s report.

2. RECAP OF PREVIOUS SESSIONS AND UPDATE ON CURRENT STATE OF SYSTEM

The Lieutenant Governor said that the Commission has been working to understand how the EA system can meet the needs of all families, and had discussed key principles as including making family homelessness brief, rare, and nonrecurring, ensuring fiscal and operational sustainability, and flexibly serving the needs of families. The Lieutenant Governor noted that Sec. Augustus recently held a listening session for providers and that other listening sessions were planned with key stakeholders including landlords, advocates, and families.

The Lieutenant Governor shared that average daily demand for shelter had been between 17 and 20 families, down slightly from July, and that diversions and exits had increased. Sec. Gorzkowicz said that projected FY25 expenditures were \$1.094 billion, of which \$455 million had yet to be appropriated, leaving the system with an estimated run-out date in late January.

Sen. Kennedy asked how the introduction of the Temporary Respite Center (“TRC”) model on August 1 had affected EA and other expenditures. Sec. Gorzkowicz explained there had been a shift in the system’s projected run-out date. He noted that municipalities continue to need and receive additional funding for busing and schools. The Lieutenant Governor noted that families taking advantage of TRCs had seen success in finding housing, and that it was important to incorporate lessons learned from that model. Sen. Kennedy emphasized the importance of providing services and supports to families given the challenging housing market.

3. REPORT OUTLINE & LISTENING SESSION PLAN

The Lieutenant Governor shared and invited feedback on an outline of the Commission’s report, and outlined plans for listening sessions timed to inform the final report, including sessions with providers, EA families, advocates and community-based organizations, TRC families, municipalities, and landlords and property developers. Chris Thompson (Undersecretary of Housing Stabilization, Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities) shared that the session for providers had been well attended, with providers sharing success stories in supporting families as well as constructive feedback. Sec. Augustus and Rep. Arciero arrived.

Leah Bradley noted the importance of meeting the needs of children. The Lieutenant Governor noted that the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has been a key partner.

Bradley asked about the approach to listening sessions for families and whether families in HomeBASE would be included. Chris Thompson and Cristina Aguilera Sandoval explained that there would be two sessions, one for families in EA and one for families in TRCs, and that both current families and that the sessions would be open to both current and exited families. Sen. Kennedy asked about how invitations were being sent for the advocates and community-based organizations session. The Lieutenant Governor said a large list would be invited and encouraged Commission members to share the invitation or to provide recommendations.

4. DEEP DIVE ON SYSTEM LEVERS, NEEDS-BASED MODEL

The Lieutenant Governor explained that families have unique needs and that the system should better align sites and services to family needs, including by assessing which families can be rapidly rehoused and which need longer-term stabilization. Sec. Augustus provided an overview of the EA population by shelter type, noting that half of EA families are in hotels, which are expensive and don't allow for intensive case management. The Lieutenant Governor said long-term stays in hotels weren't best for families, and emphasized the need to make the system fiscally and operationally sustainable.

Lyndia Downie asked about the balance of families with lower v. higher needs. Sec. Walsh explained that families in scattered sites are often high need. Chris Thompson said they had been analyzing the needs of families in the system. Downie said that in individual homeless shelters, 15% to 20% of individuals require intensive support. Leah Bradley said her experience was that closer to 40% of families are high-need because of chronic conditions as well as complicating factors such as credit and eviction history.

Sen. Kennedy said the goal should be designing a new model of service. She said the way to make homelessness rare is to support families before they need shelter and help them stay in their current housing, and that the way to make homelessness brief is to focus on supportive services rather than eligibility limitations. The Lieutenant Governor agreed front-end prevention of homelessness was essential. Sen. Kennedy said it was more cost-effective to invest in keeping families in their homes than for them to be evicted, go into shelter, and find housing.

Sec. Walsh shared that length of stay policies have focused the system on rehousing, and on moving families from hotel placements, which are disruptive to families and municipalities, to more sustainable housing supports like HomeBASE.

Pastor Fleurissant suggested establishing more partnerships between TRCs and organizations that work with families, which may be able to facilitate rapid rehousing through relationships with brokers and landlords, and connecting TRC residents with employers with unfilled positions. Cristina Aguilera Sandoval shared an update on recent clinics. Pastor Fleurissant noted that HomeBASE approvals can take time. Chris Thompson said HLC has been working to expedite and strengthen the HomeBASE process while the number of applications has increased. The Lieutenant Governor emphasized the importance of moving quickly once units are

identified. The Lieutenant Governor and Cristina Aguilera Sandoval discussed new initiatives to support families in obtaining work authorization, job training, and job placement.

Leah Bradley emphasized the important of giving families the right types of shelter and supports, given that some can be successful through HomeBASE on day one while others need long-term support. Bradley said that hotels are the most expensive form of shelter and are not designed for long-term living, and should be downsized into other models. Bradley suggested considering how public housing and Section 8 could support families exiting shelter.

The Lieutenant Governor asked how to provide continuing support to families who exit shelter. Bradley shared that they provide structured once a month touch points to families for two years, after which the frequency of contact is up to the family. Sen. Kennedy noted that the special legislative commission on poverty was addressing related issues, including child care, transportation, housing, and other pressures facing families.

The Lieutenant Governor and Sec. Augustus provided an overview of the regional support model HLC implemented over the summer, in which regional teams support providers, families, and municipalities.

Catia Sharp (Chief of Social Innovation, Executive Office for Administration and Finance) provided an overview of work authorization and job placement initiatives and data: of 6,000 new arrival individual adults, 1,700 are not yet work authorized, 2,500 are work authorized but not yet employed, and 1,800 are work authorized and employed. The Lieutenant Governor noted the extensive efforts underway and the importance of partnering with employers. Sen. Kennedy said this was great news, and that Massachusetts industries such as agriculture were in need of employees. The Lieutenant Governor and Sec. Augustus discussed efforts to address challenges including child care, transportation, and translation.

Pastor Fleurissant asked what the state can do to attract employers. Rep. Arciero emphasized the need to increase housing supply. Sen. Kennedy emphasized the importance of addressing licensing, translation, and child care.

Rep. Frost shared a constituent's experience and suggestion regarding the importance of providing English lessons at shelter sites. Cristina Aguilera Sandoval shared an overview of English for Speakers of Other Languages ("ESOL") classes offered at shelter sites and plans to expand such classes.

5. NEXT STEPS

The Lieutenant Governor reminded Commission members to RSVP for the upcoming listening sessions. She said the Commission's report was due December 1 and would be shared with the Committee for feedback in November.

The Lieutenant Governor entertained a motion to adjourn. Sec. Augustus, with Sec. Walsh seconding, so moved. The motion was unanimously approved by roll call vote. The meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm.