



Commonwealth of Massachusetts

# Emergency Assistance (EA) Commission

Meeting 5  
November 12, 2024





# Agenda

- **[5 min] Introduction, Review & Approval of Last Meeting Notes**
- **[30 min] Readout of Listening Sessions**
- **[30 min] Review Draft Report, Findings, and Recommendations**
- **[25 min] Discuss Commission Report**
- **[5 min] Meeting Closing**



# Listening Sessions



# Listening Session Overview

*We held six listening sessions with external stakeholders over the course of the last month*

Listening Session	Commission Lead	Date	Time
<b>EA Providers</b>	Sec. Augustus	10/9/2024	2:00pm
<b>Advocates and CBOs</b>	Sec. Walsh	10/25/2024	12:00pm
<b>TRC Families</b>	Cristina Aguilera Sandoval, Executive Director of ORI	10/29/2024	1:00pm
<b>Landlords and Property Developers</b>	Chris Thompson, Undersecretary of Housing Stabilization, EOHLC	10/30/2024	2:00pm
<b>Municipalities</b>	Lt. Governor Driscoll	10/31/2024	11:00pm <u>am</u>
<b>EA Families</b>	Sec. Augustus	11/04/2024	2:30pm

- We had over 700 sign-ups to attend listening sessions
- We heard directly from stakeholders on how to improve the EA system and also received several written testimony submissions
- There will be an overview of testimony in the report



# Listening Session Feedback: Major Themes

- **Invest in other housing resources** such as affordable housing, permanent supportive housing, and vouchers
- **Increase resourcing and accessibility of prevention, diversion, and exit tools**, like RAFT and HomeBASE, including improving application processes, adjusting the benefit to meet the market, and making programs more accessible before a family experiences homelessness
- **Improve data** to understand the housing needs and demographics of families seeking to access the EA system
- **Strengthen wraparound services** for families in EA, including ESOL and immigration services for immigrants, career development services, and health support
- **Improve families' access to child care and after school programs** to facilitate parents' entry into the labor market.
- **Invest in shelter sites that account for family need**, such as size of families, cooking needs, laundry needs
- **Deepen collaboration between HLC and Departments that supply related services**, such as DDS, DPH, DTA
- **Provide clearer information about new policies**, including lengths of stay and extension eligibility, to ease family anxiety
- **Reconsider policies on length of stay** in TRCs and EA shelter
- **Consider comments on landlord-tenant relationships** and strain on landlords that can act as a deterrent to landlords to participate in HomeBASE



# Report Overview



# Report Outline

*Our discussions to date have formed the content for the report due on Dec 1*

<b>Report Section</b>
<b>Commission Overview</b>
<b>History of the EA Program and Current Status</b>
<b>Fiscal Overview</b>
<b>Stakeholder Feedback</b>
<b>EA Program Principles and Recommendations</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>
<b>Appendix: Families in the EA System</b>



# Commission Principles

*The report frames recommendations around the following principles for the EA system:*

- Family homelessness should be rare, brief, and non-recurring
- The EA system should not be one-size-fits-all
- The EA system should be operationally and fiscally sustainable





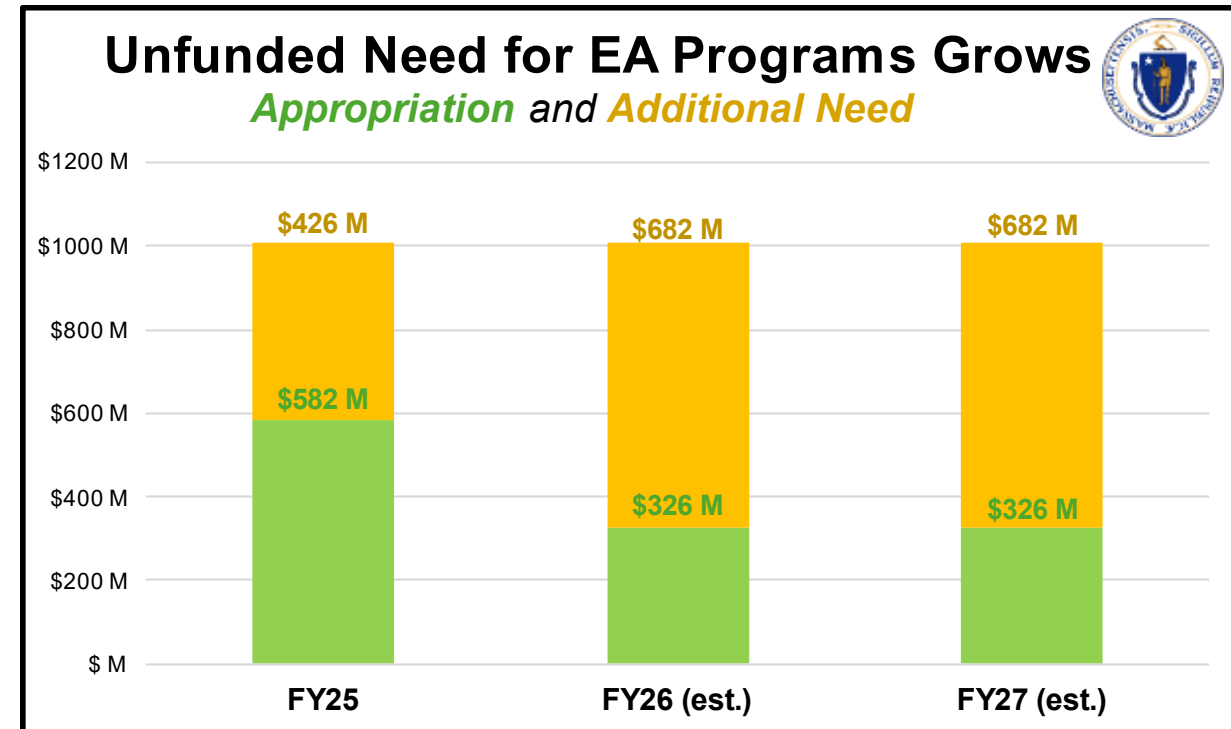
# Report Recommendations



# Commission Recommendations

## 1. Ensure the EA system is fiscally sustainable.

- At the current caseload and service level, the projected costs for FY 2025 is \$1.094 billion.
- The EA program currently faces an additional need of \$426 million for FY 2025 and \$682 million for FY 2026.
- A system where family homelessness is **rare would reduce front door demand and costs** on the system.
- A system designed to make family homelessness **brief creates access to exit and diversion tools** such as HomeBASE, which means families are exiting shelter more quickly to access less expensive programs.





# Commission Recommendations

## *2. Ensure the EA system is operationally sustainable.*

- This system was designed for the previous shelter caseload of 3,500 families, and that number has more than doubled to reach 7,500 families in recent years.
- EA provider caseworker to family ratio is approximately 1:30, with higher ratios for stabilization services after families exit.
- Designing a system where homelessness is **rare, brief, and nonrecurring would increase operational sustainability and serve more families with fewer units** by:
  - Decreasing demand for EA shelter
  - Helping families move through shelter more quickly
  - Averting re-entry into shelter



# Commission Recommendations

## *3. Emphasize prevention, diversion, and exit tools.*

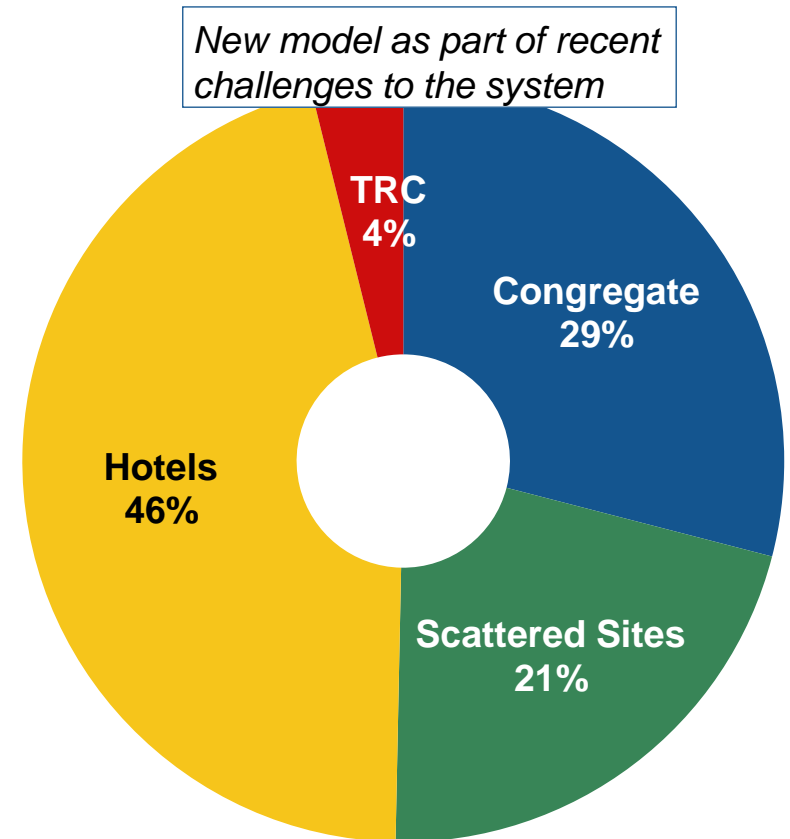
- Continued emphasis on **prevention tools such as RAFT helps ensure family homelessness is rare** and to help families before eviction.
- **Focus on diversion tools such as HomeBASE helps ensure family homelessness is rare** by helping families access rehousing resources before they enter shelter.
- **Improvements to exit tools such as HomeBASE helps ensure family homelessness is brief and non-recurring** by helping families find permanent housing and exit shelter.
- **Focus on pathways to work**, such as language and skills training, access to work authorization assistance, and access to local child care and after school programs, **helps ensure family homelessness is non-recurring** by providing families with the tools to sustain permanent housing after exit.



# Commission Recommendations

## 4. *Limit reliance on hotels and motels as EA shelter.*

- Hotels and motels currently make up 46% of the shelter portfolio.
- Hotels and motels are more expensive than traditional EA family shelter sites.
- **Hotels and motels are neither housing nor appropriate shelter and present significant challenges to families and providers:**
  - No access to kitchen and laundry
  - Far from public transportation
  - Hard to get case workers to families
  - Units are small, which force families into multiple rooms
  - **Reducing reliance on hotels helps ensure family homelessness is brief and non-recurring.**





# Commission Recommendations

## *5. Maintain policies that set clear expectations and outcomes.*

- There is an opportunity to learn from the findings of new length of stay policies introduced into both EA shelter and for TRCs and iterate on these policies to create a system designed for brief shelter stays.
- **A system designed around the expectation of brief shelter stays would increase fiscal and operational sustainability of the EA program.**
- Clear policies and expectations around family timeframes in shelter and towards exits would help design an EA program where homelessness is brief.



# Commission Recommendations

## *6. Move towards a needs-based model and away from a one-size-fits-all approach.*

- The EA system should be designed around **pathways and service provision that consider family risks, needs and strengths**, from their intake process to prioritization and placement in the type of shelter site, to the services that families access while in and exiting from EA shelter.
- Families with different risks, needs and strengths require different service models and timeframes of EA shelter.
- Some families can work quickly towards rehousing and have a path to employment and income.
- Other families have more intensive clinical and human services needs and may need a longer timeframe or different exit tools.



# Commission Recommendations

## *7. Continue and improve regional EA shelter system management*

- Regional management of the EA shelter system can better respond to variations in the housing market, supportive services, and strengths and needs of families.
- Regional management can better ensure that family homelessness is rare by ensuring regional access to prevention and diversion programming, and that it is brief and non-recurring by ensuring regional access to rehousing tools that are responsive to the housing market in particular geographies.
- State staff who are regionally based can best develop EA provider and stakeholder relationships that are localized to support the families in their region.
- Regional staff can also connect with housing initiatives in their area to help families access affordable housing, coordinate opportunities with local service providers, and connect families with regional employment opportunities.





# Commission Recommendations

## *8. Strengthen affordable housing access across Massachusetts.*

- Creating an EA shelter system aligned to the Commission's principles requires available affordable housing for families to access through exit or diversion.
- The dedication of more resources towards building affordable homes for low-income families would help families avoid entering shelter and give them more accessible options to divert or exit.
- A focus on innovative housing models can provide more transition pathways from shelter for EA families.
- **For family homelessness to be rare, brief, and nonrecurring, the availability of sustainable housing must meet the needs of vulnerable families in Massachusetts.**



# Commission Recommendations

## *9. Improve data collection, collaboration, and analysis to support families.*

- The Commission has investigated data on how families use the EA system, and which resources and services they access.
- The Commission recommends continuing to collect and analyze data to inform implementation of the recommendations and that the Administration provide updates on implementation of the recommendations.
- **Better data collection will show whether the EA program is making progress towards the Commission's principles** and help the Administration better understand what is working well, and where gaps remain.
- Key metrics include exit and diversion numbers, per-family costs in the EA program, and work authorization and employment data.