

Dear Secretary Kate Walsh,

My name is Cayden Davis and I work for the Behavioral Health Partners of MetroWest. I am also a resident of Worcester.

In the MetroWest region we are seeing families sleeping in outside, in cars, train stations, and other unsafe places, staying in DV situations - even when they are eligible for Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter. We are receiving overwhelming inquiries for emergency housing funds to cover short term hotel stays – and those funds are just not available as funders are looking for more sustainable solutions – we are trying to fill gaps as small organizations but we simply cannot.

These policy changes have devastating impacts. Families without shelter face severe mental and behavioral health challenges, while children struggle in school due to stress and instability. Policies such as the 5-day limit for overflow shelters are simply not enough time to address families' complex needs, and the 6-month ban for those who stay in Temporary Respite Centers (TRCs) is a punitive measure that forces families into dangerous situations. This has led to more families sleeping in cars or staying in unsafe environments, including domestic violence situations.

The 9-month cap on EA shelter stays is equally as unrealistic. Families in EA shelters face the most complex barriers to housing—including eviction records, gaps in rental history, and low credit scores. More tenant protections in order to keep people housed once they are out of the EA system.

In a market with historically low vacancy rates and high rents, expecting families to secure housing in 9 months is not feasible. During those 9 months, the stress of this unrealistic expectation inhibits families ability to address their other needs, with the end date looming above them, and being faced with a housing market that feels like a setup to fail.

As service providers, we are increasingly forced to tell families, “We don’t have any resources for you.” Immense pressure is being placed on community organizations to fill the gaps, even when we lack the resources or capacity. Families are turning to churches and other religious organizations, desperate for help, but this support relies on donations and is not sustainable.

We urge immediate action to address these issues:

For Temporary Respite Centers (TRC):

- Remove the 6-month ban for families who have stayed in a TRC.
- Reverse the restrictive 5-day limit on stays in overflow shelters.
- Continue funding access to overflow shelters until families have safe, stable housing options.

For Emergency Assistance (EA):

- Remove the 9-month cap on EA shelter stays.
- Provide more resources for housing search support, so families have a real chance at securing permanent, affordable housing.
- Considerations of mental and behavioral needs as well as we are thinking about medical extensions

Other suggestions:

- Increased funding for subsidies & caps on rent increases, or folks will continue to cycle in and out of homelessness
- We need to consider mental and behavioral needs as well as we are thinking about medical extensions

It's critical that changes to the EA system are made thoughtfully, with input from key stakeholders, including current and former EA families. We must ensure Massachusetts remains a state where no child is forced to sleep on the street and families have real opportunities to build stable futures. Thank you for your time.

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