



August 16, 2024

Lt. Gov. Kim Driscoll, Chair  
Emergency Assistance Commission  
Massachusetts State House  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Lt. Gov. Driscoll:

Thank you for chairing the Emergency Assistance Commission and encouraging EA Family Shelter providers and other groups to share their thoughts with the group around cost savings opportunities in this essential sector.

As you may know, the Providers' Council is the state's largest human services membership association and the Massachusetts Family Shelter Provider Collaborative (MFSPC) is a group of EA Family Shelter provider leaders that has recently come together to represent the interests of EA Family Shelter providers. Together, our joint membership comprises nearly 85 percent of the organizations providing EA Family Shelter services in Massachusetts.

We appreciate the Commission holding its first meeting in July and discussing these important issues. We have held several meetings with members to discuss possible cost savings opportunities, and we've outlined three potential solutions below: reducing the state's use of hotels when it is able to do so; increasing RAFT payments; and removing the Housing Search Specialist positions at the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities.

### **I. Reduce the state's use of hotels when it is able to do so**

The state should make it a priority to reduce the use of hotels when it is able to do so. This should be done strategically to target hotels that have the highest cost per night, have no access to cooking facilities and do not have amenities that help families move toward self-sufficiency.

This was the agreement between the state and providers when we needed to take on hotels over the last 18 months – that this would always be a temporary model and traditional shelter would be preserved. This model is far more expensive when compared to traditional shelters. Further, hotels negatively impact the long-term health of children, as the moisture and pest issues in such properties have been well documented in the media and by EOHLIC, and they are not developmentally healthy environments for children to grow up in for any length of time. We see two potential ways for the state to reduce the use of hotels:

- Allow providers to transition hotel units to less expensive models while maintaining capacity. In a time when we need cost savings measures and the system continues to be over capacity, this is phase one where capacity is maintained at a lower cost.
- Develop plans with providers who are managing hotels on how they will reduce their capacity over two years with specific goals and timelines. Contracts using hotels should be on a year-by-year basis with a requirement to reduce capacity.

We believe reduction of reliance on hotels represents a massive cost savings to the shelter system when the state is able to begin reducing the number of families living in such units.

**Providers' Council/MFSPC Letter to EA Commission**  
**August 16, 2024**

**II. Increase the RAFT maximum annual benefit to \$10,000 and eliminate the notice to quit**

Our members in meetings suggested increasing the Rental Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) maximum benefit from \$7,000 to \$10,000 – a level where it had been previously before July 1, 2023. One of our members noted that their data showed only 7 percent of families accessing RAFT in their catchment area would enter the homelessness system, showing that it would have the potential to keep people in their current housing situation – particularly if the benefit was raised back to the \$10,000 level.

A notice to quit is required to show the family or individual is in jeopardy of losing their housing, which means the landlord needs to file for eviction. Eliminating the notice to quit would open the benefit up to more people and ensure they don't have an eviction history on their record – something that would limit their ability to get future housing.

**III. Eliminate the position of Housing Search Specialists that have been added at EOHLC**

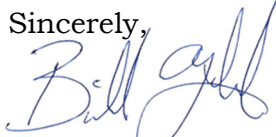
The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities added Housing Search Specialist positions at the secretariat about six months ago. While we know these positions were well intended, we do not believe they are serving their intended purpose.

These eight positions have not assisted agencies in placements, and providers feel this is an unneeded redundancy. Having this position simply creates more work for providers with additional meetings or contact points, and it does not help those in the shelter system find housing. In fact, this takes staff at EA Family Shelter programs away from the work of finding housing for residents to participate in additional meetings.

We understand the intention of these positions and appreciate EOHLC trying something new, but these positions do not serve their intended purpose. To save costs, we believe these positions could be eliminated with no impact to the EA Family Shelter system or helping residents find housing.

In closing, the Providers' Council, MFSPC and our undersigned members thank you for considering cost savings opportunities in the EA Family Shelter system that still ensure that Massachusetts is honoring its history of being our country's only right-to-shelter state. **We hope, too, that the EA Commission would consider holding listening sessions to hear directly from EA Family Shelter providers.** We appreciate the inclusion of a provider on the commission, though that is just one of about 50 organizations in Massachusetts that are doing the work. We hope there will be opportunities to hear from all providers in the system.

Thank you again for this opportunity, and we look forward to working together in the future.

Sincerely,  
  
Bill Yelenak  
President/CEO  
Providers' Council

  
Robert Mills  
CEO, Middlesex Human Service Agency on behalf of  
Massachusetts Family Shelter Provider Collaborative

And our undersigned members on the following page:

**Providers' Council/MFSPC Letter to EA Commission  
August 16, 2024**

Trudy Bartlett, Family Shelter Director, YWCA Cambridge  
Kelley Tuthill, CEO, Catholic Charities Boston  
Jim Goodwin, President/CEO, Center for Human Development  
Mark DeJoie, CEO, Centerboard  
Joan Sinner, Vice President of Housing and Stabilization, Children's Services of Roxbury  
Karen Frederick, CEO, Community Teamwork  
Jeanine Murphy, CEO, Emmaus  
France A. Neff, President and CEO, Family Independence  
Larry Seamans, President, FamilyAid  
Jonathan Lanham, COO, Father Bill's & MainSpring  
Trish Appert, Executive Director, Friendly House  
Danielle Ferrier, CEO, Heading Home  
Daniel Mumbauer, President & CEO, High Point  
Shiela Y. Moore, CEO, Hildebrand  
Deb Chausse, Executive Director, House of Hope  
Laura Rosi, CEO, Housing Families  
Mark Evans, CEO, Lynn Shelter Association  
Laura Meisenhelter, CEO, North Shore Community Action Programs  
Charlie Clifford, CEO, Old Colony YMCA  
Alexis Steel, President, St. Mary's Center for Women and Children  
Sarah Porter, Executive Director, Victory Programs, Inc.  
Melissa Dimond, President and Executive Director, Wellspring  
David Shapiro, CEO, YMCA of Greater Boston