



## **Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter Program in Massachusetts**

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### **1. FAQ: Changes to EA Family Shelter Prioritization, Safety-Net Sites**

#### **1.1 OVERALL**

##### **Why is this policy shift being made now?**

The Healey-Driscoll Administration’s goal to ensure that shelter for families is temporary, supportive, and non-recurring. However, the emergency assistance (EA) program continues to see demand for shelter beyond the fiscal and operational capacity of the system. The administration is making these changes so that the program can continue to exist within current and future fiscal constraints while redirecting families into more stable housing options outside of the EA system.

The changes to our EA program’s prioritization criteria and implementation of a new Temporary Respite Center (TRC) model in place of our current state-run overflow sites are in line with our peer cities and are designed to provide quick temporary shelter for those who need it while providing a path to EA shelter for eligible families. Providing short stays at Temporary Respite Centers for families will enable more families to access on-site case management and diversion services.

##### **Does this policy change how the state plans to operate former overflow sites?**

The state continues to house hundreds of families at Temporary Respite Centers in Cambridge, Chelsea, Lexington and Norfolk. We expect that this policy will enable us to establish the capacity needed to continue serving new families without opening any new TRCs.

##### **What about TRCs not currently at capacity?**

Currently all of our TRCs are at capacity. We will continue to monitor the demand for the sites and will adjust as needed.

##### **Are Clinical & Safety Risk Assessment (CSR) and United Way sites subject to this policy?**

No. CSR sites in Quincy and Revere are reserved for prioritized families who need extra support and are waiting for placement into the EA system. The existing United Way Safety-Net sites use a different model than EA shelters and are not operated by the state.



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### **1.2 TEMPORARY RESPITE CENTERS**

#### **Will families have 5 calendar or business days in TRCs?**

All families will have 5 business days in TRCs. Their date of arrival will be Day 0. Families will leave on the morning of the 6<sup>th</sup> business day. For example:

1. Families that enter a TRC on a Monday, will need to leave by Tuesday morning the next week
2. Families that enter a TRC on a Thursday, will need to leave by Friday morning the next week

TRC providers will be able to issue administrative extensions for families who meet designated criteria.

#### **Where will families who are not placed in TRCs be directed to go?**

Families who do not meet priority criteria and do not choose to utilize TRCs will be assisted with identifying a safe alternative for housing. Families will be provided transportation within Massachusetts or to identified safe locations outside of Massachusetts.

#### **Where will families exiting Temporary Respite Centers after 5 business days go?**

During their stay at the Temporary Respite Centers, families will be provided with case management services focused on connecting the family to their existing support network who may be able to help them, even if that network is not in Massachusetts. If a connection is made to a friend or family member outside of Massachusetts, the family will be provided with tickets to that friend or family member.

If, after their stay at the TRCs, a family has not identified resources within their social network, families will be directed to identify a safe alternative for housing and will be provided transportation to that location. Families can access the HomeBASE program if they have a unit identified, including their own apartment or a shared space. Families will also be provided basic needs and information about local resources, including services at Family Welcome Centers.

Temporary Respite Center providers can grant administrative extensions at any point in a family's stay.

#### **When will families be notified of exit dates?**

Families currently staying in overflow shelters – soon to be Temporary Respite Centers – have been notified of the pending changes. Families are working with their case managers on exit planning and will be notified of their exit dates on or after August 1, depending on their scheduled date of discharge. TRC Providers will give families no less than 6 days notice of their exit date.

#### **Will all of the families currently in overflow shelters be discharged on the same day?**

No. Families in overflow shelters have all been notified of the pending change and will be discharged on a schedule based on their entry date into the overflow site throughout the month of August. Those who have been in the shelter the longest will be exited first.

#### **What about school enrollment?**

Under the federal McKinney-Vento law, homeless children have a right to continue attending the school they were previously enrolled in or to immediate school enrollment in the district where they are living. Temporary Respite Centers will work directly with families to ensure they understand their educational rights and school enrollment options.



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### **What if a family has housing lined up or another reason they cannot leave the Temporary Respite Center within 5 business days?**

Temporary Respite Center providers can grant administrative extensions at any point in a families' stay. Administrative extensions may be granted for needs, including but not limited to, rehousing plans, delays in transportation, and health-related events. Families who are granted extensions will receive an extension of 5-30 business days depending on the approved reason. More details on Temporary Respite Center administrative extensions can be found [here](#).

### **What services will be offered in the Temporary Respite Centers over 5 business days?**

Families will be given an opportunity to shower, eat and access any basic necessities (e.g., diapers, wipes, hygiene kits). In addition, case managers will work with families on plans for their next location, including identifying social networks that they may have and opportunities for outreach. Additionally, medical personnel will be on-site on a limited basis to attend to any acute medical needs.

### **Will families receive health care services in the Temporary Respite Centers?**

Yes. The Department of Public Health and/or one of their partner health agencies will be on site on a limited basis to attend to any acute medical issues that a family member may have.

### **Will the state still work with families to obtain their work authorizations?**

Yes. The Family Welcome Centers will continue to have the "Lawyer of the Day" program and work with families to obtain their work authorization. One change will be that given the short stay at the TRCs, families will need to select a location different from the TRC location for the work authorization to be sent to.

### **Will families be able to enroll in public benefits?**

Case managers at TRCs will work with families on a case-by-case basis to ensure they are aware of benefits they may be eligible for in the state they plan to reside long term and assist them in applying for benefits if they are staying in MA. All families staying at TRCs will be able to access health care services as needed.



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### 1.3 EA PRIORITIZATION

#### How does the EA prioritization criteria work?

Beginning August 1, 2024, families will be prioritized for placement in EA shelters if they are homeless because of a no-fault eviction, if they have at least one family member who is a veteran, or if they are exiting a DCF Young Parent Living Program due to age limits.

Families will also continue to be prioritized if they have specific medical needs, are at risk of domestic violence, or are homeless because of fire, flood, or other disasters. If there are no shelter units immediately available, prioritized families will be eligible to temporarily stay at one of the Clinical Safety Risk Assessment sites.

Priority criteria includes:

1. Families with certain medical needs that meet EA priority criteria:
  - a. Family member aged 0-9 months
  - b. Family member with high-risk pregnancy
  - c. Family member in 3<sup>rd</sup> trimester of pregnancy
  - d. Family member with immunocompromised condition
  - e. Family member with medical device
  - f. Family member with three or more chronic conditions
  
  - g. Family member with medications requiring refrigeration
  - h. Family with primary caregiver aged 70 years or more
2. Families at risk of domestic violence,
3. Families that received a DCF Health and Safety Assessment that identified a risk of harm,
4. Families that are homeless because of fire, flood, or other disasters,
5. Families that are homeless from a “no-fault eviction”,
6. Families that have at least one family member who is a veteran, or
7. Families that are leaving a DCF Young Parent Living Program due to age limits

#### Will families in TRCs still be eligible to stay in EA shelters?

Yes. Families in Temporary Respite Centers will need to be eligible for Emergency Assistance before they are placed into a TRC. As part of the case management activities at the TRCs, families will work with their case manager on a number of activities, including being referred to a diversion provider if that makes sense for their situation. A diversion provider is an organization that supports HomeBASE participants as they find housing and can help families access re-ticketing.

#### Why will families have to wait six months for EA after staying at a TRC?

The goal of Temporary Respite Centers is to rapidly divert families from long-term EA shelter by working with families to connect with safe housing options. Families choosing this option will be required to wait at least six months to be on the contact list for the state’s emergency shelter system. This is to help address capacity constraints on the EA system and to redirect families into more stable housing options outside of the EA system.



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### **Will all families currently waiting for EA placement be reassessed for prioritization?**

Yes, EOHLC will administratively reassess families on the EA list to identify if their priority status should be changed. Families will be moved up the list if their priority changes.

At any time, families may also call (866) 584-0653 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday through Friday (closed weekends and state holidays) if there has been a change that may impact their priority or eligibility. Families may need to be re-screened.

### **How will families' status for EA be affected if they enter a TRC?**

Families who are in TRCs **before** August 1 will retain their spot on the EA contact list. Families who enter a TRC **after** August 1 will be excluded from the EA contact list for six months. After six months, they will return to the list and be able to be placed into EA shelter.



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## 2. 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](#).

### **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.