



Changes to Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter Policies

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Overview

A press release with information from November 2024 policy changes can be found [here](#), February 2025 policy changes [here](#), March 2025 policy changes [here](#), and April 2025 policy changes [here](#).

What recent changes have been made to the EA program?

- Our administration believes that the use of the state’s Emergency Assistance (EA) Family shelter system should be brief, rare, and non-recurring.
- On December 10th, we implemented changes to the EA program to lower costs, phase out the use of hotels, focus resources where they are most impactful, and better meet the needs of more individual families annually, in line with the [recommendations](#) made by the bipartisan Special Commission on Emergency Housing Assistance Programs.
- Families applying for the EA program are placed on one of two EA shelter tracks based on need: the **Rapid Shelter Track** or the **Bridge Shelter Track**.
 - The **Rapid Shelter Track** is for families who have strengths and needs that position them to rapidly find self-sufficient permanent housing. We offer them 30-days of high intensity support at our Rapid Shelter sites to transition them quickly to stable, permanent housing – many with stabilization services available through HomeBASE – as well as connect them with work authorizations, job placements and English classes.
 - The **Bridge Shelter Track** is meant for more high-risk families and those with more complex needs that take longer to resolve to find permanent housing – they may be women who have a late-term pregnancies or people with intellectual or developmental disabilities. These families are eligible for up to six months in the shelter system, and the goals are the same: to help them quickly transition to stable, permanent housing.
- On February 28, 2025, Governor Healey signed a supplemental budget that included proposals to reduce the taxpayer cost of the state’s Emergency Assistance Family Shelter system and to make it safer for shelter residents and communities. At the same time, the recommendations from a security assessment performed by The Edward Davis Company were published.
 - Policy changes have been implemented on a rolling basis – some were implemented March 7, 2025, others March 14, 2025, and the latest round on April 11, 2025. Many of the policy changes based on the FY25 Supplemental budget are around Intake & Eligibility requirements, length of stay changes, and shelter safety.



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Why are these policy changes being made now?

- The FY25 supplemental budget, signed on Friday, February 28, 2025, appropriates **\$425M**, which enables EOHLC to sustain the Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter program through June 2025. It includes a number of policy changes aimed at improving safety and fiscal sustainability of the EA Family Shelter System. Many of the policy changes are largely in line with the Administration's proposal from January 2025.

How did you come up with these changes?

- Over the past two years we have learned a lot by serving tens of thousands of families, all of whom are resilient, but have different risks, needs, and strengths, and in that time, we have deployed robust data tracking and analysis to inform decisions.
- We have made progress toward operational and fiscal sustainability:
 - Daily demand for the Emergency Assistance program today is less than what it was in 2023. Last year up to 40 eligible families per day applied for shelter. Now on average ~15 families apply daily. Demand is stabilizing but remains extraordinary compared to rates of demand experienced before 2023.
 - Families are working hard with case managers to find stable housing, and exits from the program have drastically increased. We have tripled exits from shelter from 2022 to 2025, while also dramatically increasing diversions.
- We have also held multiple public listening sessions with local leaders, advocates, shelter residents and service providers to better understand how the system can better service families.
- In July 2024, the EA Commission convened and met over the subsequent five months to discuss how to improve the shelter program; the EA Commission has now offered recommendations to further stabilize this program and to improve outcomes.
- On January 10, 2025 Governor Healey contracted former Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis's firm, EDC, to conduct an in-depth assessment of the security and safety conditions across the EA shelter system. Over 30 days, EDC visited a selection of shelter sites, reviewed EA policy and procedures related to shelter safety and security, and interviewed stakeholders and staff. The report proposed recommendations for the EA system to develop and implement new and more uniform guidance for onsite shelter security measures and use of on-site security contractors.
- All of these experiences have informed our decision making.

Are you reducing overall shelter capacity?

- We believe changes made over the last year will decrease the number of families in the system at any given point in time while enabling us to serve more families annually, better serve the individual needs of families, and make the use of the shelter system brief, rare, and non-recurring.
- We have started work to reduce reliance on hotels. Hotels and motels are more expensive than operating traditional EA family shelter sites. Reducing reliance on hotels is in line with recommendations made by the EA Commission and will reduce the overall footprint of the system, leading to cost savings.
- As required by the FY25 Supplemental Budget passed by the legislature, beginning in 2026 the EA system will have a 4000-family capacity limit. On March 14, 2025, we updated the Emergency Declaration to reduce the capacity of the system to 5,800 families.



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How will there be enough units for people who need them?

- Our plan will further increase shelter exits to help families move through shelter more quickly. Brief shelter stays are better for families and help us turn over units more quickly and in turn to serve more families.
- We are reducing our reliance on hotels but will continue to invest in traditional congregate shelters.

Are you changing any length of stay requirements?

- **The Bridge Shelter Track:** The length of stay limit for families in bridge shelter is now 6 months. Families entering shelter after April 11 will receive an exit notice upon entry into shelter. Families in shelter who have not received an exit notice are also subject to the new 6-month length of stay policy – families will have 6 months to exit from the date they get their notice. Families who have already received their notice should continue to work towards exiting by the date on the notice. We have also made updates to the hardship waiver criteria to align with requirements from the supplemental budget. Families can receive one, 30-day hardship waiver that they must apply for in month 5 of their shelter stay. Families with a signed lease can also qualify for one, 30-day lease bridge on top of their hardship waiver.
- **The Rapid Shelter Track:** The length of stay limit for families in rapid shelter is 30 business days, with some allowance for extensions. Families who are placed into rapid shelters have access to a rapid rehousing model of service provision which seeks to provide rapid access to permanent housing placement tools including HomeBASE. These changes are in line with the recommendation of the EA Commission that we maintain policies that set clear expectations and outcomes, and the principle that shelter stays should be brief.

How much money will be saved by these changes?

- This plan seeks to bring EA and related programs toward fiscal and operational sustainability.
- The FY25 supplemental budget appropriates \$425M, which enables EOHLC to sustain the Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter program through June 2025.

1.1 Needs-based Model

What is a needs-based shelter model?

- The EA prioritization criteria recognizes that there are different levels of need within the EA system and provides families with the appropriate shelter and services relative to their risks, needs, and strengths. Based on their needs, families are placed in two tracks: The Rapid Shelter Track and the Bridge Shelter Track.
- **The Bridge Shelter Track:** Some families who apply for EA benefit from longer-term stabilization services to help them get back into permanent housing. These families have more complex needs such as late-term pregnancies, newborn children, intellectual or developmental disabilities, or are survivors of domestic violence, or veterans.
- **The Rapid Shelter Track:** Other families need a temporary place to stay and financial support to secure a lease and get back on their feet. These families are better served by the rapid rehousing model offered in rapid shelters.
- If there are no EA shelter units immediately available, prioritized families who are directed to the Bridge Shelter Track will continue to be eligible to temporarily stay at a Clinical and Safety Risk Assessment (CSR) sites.



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What changes are being made to the EA prioritization criteria due to the FY25 Supplemental Budget?

- We are making changes to the EA prioritization criteria to align with the “case-specific” waiver criteria in the supplemental budget. This includes adding criteria related to families with documented disability.
- Families will now be prioritized if they have an intellectual or developmental disability as verified by DPH, a disability as verified by DTA, or are receiving SSI or SSDI.

Can a family change their track assignment? What is the process?

- Once a family has been assigned to a shelter track, they cannot change their track unless they are reassessed because of a significant change to family status (e.g., change in health condition).
- Families should provide information about a change of circumstance that would warrant an update to their Track placement (reassessment needed). It is recommended that families report any changes as soon as possible that may impact priority or eligibility to their caseworker and/or call (866) 584-0653 8 a.m.- 5 p.m. Monday through Friday (closed weekends and state holidays).

How will you support families in exiting?

- We will continue to support families with the HomeBASE program. HomeBASE is an integral support for families securing stable housing: 82% of families exiting EA to market rate housing in 2024 received HomeBASE support.
- Additionally, work training and job programs continue to be successful, and we will continue work with providers in improving case management supports to help families exit.

1.2 EA Portfolio Changes

Where are the Family Welcome Centers (FWCs)? When are they open?

- Quincy Family Welcome Center. 1120 Hancock Street, Quincy, MA 02169.
 - Mon-Fri: 8:00am – 7:00pm
 - Sat: CLOSED
 - Sun: CLOSED
 - Public Holidays: 9:00am-3:00pm
- Mattapan Family Welcome Center. 1626 Blue Hill Ave, Mattapan, MA 02126.
 - Mon-Fri: 7:30am – 7:00pm
 - Sat: CLOSED
 - Sun: CLOSED
 - Public Holidays: 8:00am – 1:00pm
- Allston Family Welcome Center. 14 Harvard Ave. #2 Allston, MA 02134.
 - Sat: 9:00am – 3:00pm
 - Sun: 9:00am – 3:00pm
 - Mon-Fri: CLOSED
 - Public Holidays – CLOSED

Will you be opening new shelters?



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- We'll continue to assess capacity needs statewide, but this rapid rehousing model means that we will be helping families quickly leave rapid shelters for stable housing.

How will you work with EA providers on reducing reliance on hotels?

- Hotel and motel shelter closures will occur in phases over the coming year.
- Notification will be provided well in advance to families and communities in order to support as many families as possible to exit to safe and stable housing prior to site closure.
- Some families may transfer to other shelter program locations.

Why were hotels utilized to expand shelter?

- Hotels are the most efficient option to rapidly deploy additional shelter units when traditional capacity is exhausted.
- We have worked to secure fair billing rates; however, hotels are still more expensive than operating traditional EA family shelter sites.
- Reducing reliance on hotels is in line with recommendations made by the EA Commission and will reduce the overall footprint of the system, leading to overall cost savings.

How will school enrollment be impacted?

- Under the federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Education Assistance Act, homeless children have a right to continue attending the school they were previously enrolled in or to immediately enroll in the district where they are living. Families on both the Rapid and Bridge shelter tracks will work with their shelter providers to ensure they understand their educational rights and school enrollment options.

1.3 Intake & Eligibility Changes

What changes to intake and eligibility began on March 7, 2025?

- There were two changes to required documents for EA Family Shelter:
 1. **New Lawful Status Requirement:** Each member of the family must have an eligible immigration status. However, if a child in the family has an eligible immigration status, that satisfies the immigration status requirement for the family.
 2. **New Residency Requirement:** Each member of the family must be a resident of Massachusetts who intends to remain in Massachusetts permanently or indefinitely. The family must provide documents for all adults over 18 to prove this.
- In order to be placed into EA shelter families must verify identity and familial relationship, complete a criminal background check, and provide documentation – or attest to – meeting the new lawful status and residency requirements.

What changes to intake and eligibility began on April 11, 2025?

- Families are required to be fully eligible for EA Family Shelter prior to being added to the contact list and placed into shelter. This means all documentation and verification must be completed and criminal background checks (CORI) results returned with no serious crimes identified.
- Temporary verification waivers may be granted on limited occasions for families with a Priority 1 status. These families can be placed prior to being determined fully eligible as long as they meet the minimum eligibility standards of identity and familial relationship verification, completion of a criminal background check with no serious crimes identified (per [760 CMR 67.02\(14\)](#) and



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accompanying [policy](#)), and attestation to remaining requirements. Families will be denied after 30 days if they do not complete their documentation/verification requirements.

1.4 In-Shelter and Length of Stay Changes

What changes are being made to the Bridge Shelter Length of Stay policy ?

- The Length of Stay at Bridge Shelter changed from 9 months to 6 months (180 days).
- For families in shelter before March 7, 2025:
 - Families who have already received a notice with an exit date should plan to leave shelter on or before that date.
 - Families who have not received a notice with an exit date should wait to receive a notice.
- For families arriving in shelter between March 7, 2025 and April 10, 2025:
 - Families are subject to the 6-month length of stay law and the new hardship waiver procedures. Families should plan to exit on a 6-month timeline.
 - Families will receive a notice with their exit date 6 months (180 days) before they need to exit.
- For families arriving in shelter on or after April 11, 2025:
 - Families will receive a notice with their exit date upon entry into shelter. Families will have 6 months (180 days) to exit from the date of their notice.
- Starting April 11, 2025, we will also make changes to the hardship waiver policy
 - Hardship waivers will be available to families who meet the following criteria: a child under 6, documented disability, imminent risk due to domestic violence, high-risk pregnancy, veteran not receiving veteran services, or an imminent placement in housing.
 - Families can receive one, 30-day hardship waiver that they must apply for in month 5 of their shelter stay.
 - Families with a signed lease can also qualify for one, 30-d lease bridge on top of their hardship waiver.

What in-shelter changes are being made as a result of the FY25 Supplemental Budget?

- EOHLIC will make best efforts to meet the 20-mile home community transfer rule, but this is no longer guaranteed and cannot be appealed.
- Families in shelter over income (200+% Federal Poverty Level) for 4 months (vs. 6 months) will be ineligible for shelter.
- We will make changes to the Uniform Shelter Rules in line with EDC report recommendations.
- Families will have 5 business days to clear a warrant (vs. 30 days).

1.5 Shelter Safety

What were the Safety Recommendations from the EDC?

On January 10, 2025 Governor Healey contracted former Boston Police Commissioner Ed Davis's firm, EDC, to conduct an in-depth assessment of the security and safety conditions across the EA shelter system. Over 30 days, EDC visited a selection of shelter sites, reviewed EA policy and procedures related to shelter safety and security and interviewed stakeholders and staff. The EDC made the following recommendations:

- Improve Shelter Staff Training and Support
- Enhance Intake and Placement Procedures



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- Strengthen Onsite Shelter Security Measures
- Review and Enhance EOHLC Policies
- Improve Data Collection and Tracking
- Establish Consistent Shelter Security Standards

EOHLC will work with the EDC team to develop and implement new and more uniform guidance for onsite shelter security measures and use of on-site security contractors.

What safety changes have been made to the EA Program?

- EOHLC will continue criminal background checks requirements as follows:
 - EA CORI policy requires criminal background checks for all individuals 18+ applying to shelter, on the EA contact list, or who are currently in shelter.
 - Families must have a criminal background check prior to placement into shelter.
 - As part of the EA application, families are required to disclose criminal convictions inside and outside of Massachusetts.
- On March 14, 2025, EOHLC issued emergency [regulations](#) as required in the supplemental budget. These regulations outline that:
 - Households will now be denied EA benefits if adults fail to consent to a CORI check
 - An adult will be excluded from shelter placement if it is determined they have been convicted or have a pending serious charge for crimes including murder, arson, kidnapping, rape, and felonies against children.