



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF HOUSING &
LIVABLE COMMUNITIES**

Maura T. Healey, Governor ♦ Kimberley Driscoll, Lieutenant Governor ♦ Edward M. Augustus Jr., Secretary

**Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities
Division of Housing Stabilization**

**EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE FAMILY SHELTER PROGRAM
GUIDANCE ON CONTACT LIST AND PRIORITIZATION PROCEDURES
pursuant to
Capacity Declaration, dated November 7, 2025**

Last Updated: December 30, 2025

The following guidance is issued by Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (HLC) pursuant to the Capacity Declaration (the “Declaration”) originally issued by Secretary Augustus on October 31, 2023, and as extended on November 7, 2025, regarding the Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter program. This guidance will remain effective only so long as the Declaration remains in effect. This guidance sets forth a prioritization system, including Bridge Shelter Track placement determinations based on those priorities, Rapid Shelter Track placements when activated, and a contact list for eligible households awaiting placement—processes which will be in effect, notwithstanding other EA regulations, only during the period that the Declaration remains in effect. This guidance supplements but does not replace existing HLC regulations.

1. Shelter Capacity

The February 2025 supplemental budget directed that by December 31, 2025, the total capacity of the Emergency Assistance program shall not exceed 4,000 families. To operate consistently with that requirement, in addition to available funding and current capacity projections, on November 7, 2025, Secretary Augustus declared the total capacity of the EA Family Shelter program shall not exceed 3,200 families. Under the Declaration and this guidance, HLC shall manage the EA Family Shelter system to its

capacity, taking into account all shelter unit types under contract.¹ The actual number of shelter units in the system may fluctuate from day-to-day but the capacity of the EA Family Shelter program is approximately 3,200 families.

2. Application Processing and EA Eligibility & Placement Determination

- a. HLC shall continue to accept and process EA shelter applications to determine whether a family is eligible for EA shelter, and this guidance does not alter the meaning of that term. So long as shelter units are available, HLC shall continue placing eligible families, including families who qualify for additional time to submit required verifications, into shelter.
- b. Eligible families will be placed into Bridge Shelter Track sites.
- c. Placement in Bridge Shelter Track sites shall be for the period described in G.L. c. 23B, § 30(G) and accompanying HLC guidance (<https://www.mass.gov/doc/ea-guidance-onsix-month-length-of-stay-0/download>).
- d. If the number of available shelter units is not sufficient to immediately place each family deemed eligible, families shall be placed on a contact list to be maintained by HLC. A family that has been placed on the contact list will be removed from the contact list if the family is subsequently determined to no longer be eligible for shelter.

3. Temporary Verification Waivers for Clinical and Safety Risk Sites

- a. Families identified as priority category 1, as outlined in section 5, may be granted a temporary verification waiver and deemed eligible to enter the HLC Clinical and Safety Risk Assessment (CSR) site while continuing to complete their application and reach full eligibility status, so long as they have met the following standards:
 - i. Verification of identity;
 - ii. Verification of familial relationship;
 - iii. Consent to a criminal background check, often referred to as a CORI, and return of the criminal background check results with no convictions or pending charges for serious crimes leading to ineligibility pursuant to 760 CMR 67.02(12)-(16) and the “Criminal Offender Record Information Policy for the Emergency Assistance Family Shelter Program;”

¹ The 3,200 shelter units shall not include (a) sites set aside for the purpose of performing clinical assessments for health risks, (b) domestic violence shelters operated by or on behalf of the Department of Transitional Assistance, or (c) substance use disorder shelters operated by or on behalf of the Bureau of Substance Addiction Services.

- iv. Return and analysis of Sex Offender Registry Information (SORI) check from Sex Offender Registry Board; and
 - v. Signed attestation that the family meets all other eligibility requirements as part of the application.
- b. HLC may determine, based on capacity, system demand, and other factors, that families identified in other priority categories, as outlined in section 5, can access temporary verification waivers if they have met the standards outlined above. HLC will post a notice to its website as these determinations are made.

4. Rapid Shelter Track Activation, Placement, and Deactivation

- a. In the event that caseload and eligible applications have or will imminently exceed the family shelter capacity as determined and announced by HLC, HLC shall issue a notice activating Rapid Shelter Track sites.
- b. Families identified as priority categories 1, 2, or 3, as outlined in section 5, will be placed in Bridge Shelter Track sites, and families identified as priority category 4 will be placed in Rapid Shelter Track sites through the duration of the activation.
- c. Placement in Rapid Shelter Track sites shall be for a period of 30 business days, subject to extensions as may be granted pursuant to Rapid Shelter Track Site Administrative Extensions, attached as Exhibit B.
- d. HLC shall issue a notice when Rapid Shelter Track will deactivate. At such time, families in Rapid Shelter Track will be transferred to a Bridge Shelter Track unit in the event they are unable to find housing before Rapid Shelter Track deactivates.
 - i. For families transferred from Rapid Shelter Track to Bridge Shelter Track, the duration of their stay in Rapid Shelter Track will count towards their Bridge Shelter Track length of stay, which is outlined in the [Emergency Assistance \(“EA”\) Program Guidance on Six-Month Length of Stay](#).

5. Prioritization

- a. *Priority Categories:*

HLC shall prioritize for placement on the basis of the following criteria (as further defined in Exhibit A), developed in consultation with the Department of Public Health (DPH), the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) and the Department of Children and Families (DCF):

- i. Priority 1: Families with any of the following characteristics shall be deemed Priority 1 (with no distinction in priority between them):
1. Families that have been determined by DTA to be at imminent risk of harm due to domestic violence.
 2. Families with a child aged 0-9 months.
 3. Families with a family member who has high-risk pregnancy as verified by DPH.
 4. Families with a family member who has an intellectual or developmental disability as verified by DPH.
 5. Families with a family member who receives SSDI or SSI.
 6. Families with a family member with a documented disability as verified by DTA.
 7. Families rendered homeless by fire, flood or other natural or man-made disasters, as verified by the American Red Cross of Massachusetts, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency, or Massachusetts municipal fire department, police department, or arson squad.
 8. Families with at least one member who is a veteran (as defined in M.G.L. c. 4, s. 7, cl. 43) and who is not enrolled in services specifically tailored to veterans.
 9. Families that meet one or more of the following criteria as verified by DPH:
 - a. Family member with immunocompromised condition
 - b. Family member with medical device
- ii. Priority 2: Families that do not qualify for Priority 1 shall be deemed Priority 2 (with no distinction in priority between them) if they meet one or more of the following criteria:
1. Families that DCF has determined to be at the highest risk of harm if they are unhoused or remain in their current housing situation as a part of the existing Health and Safety Assessment (HAS) process.
 2. Families referred by DCF for shelter placement under the reunification and placement protocol described in a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Housing and Community Development and DCF dated January 2, 2015.
 3. Families with a primary caregiver aged 70 years or more.

4. Families that meet one or more of the following criteria as verified by DPH:
 - a. Family member in 3rd trimester pregnancy
 - b. Family member with three or more chronic conditions
 - c. Family member with medications requiring refrigeration
- iii. Priority 3: Families that do not qualify for Priority 1 or 2 shall be deemed Priority 3 (with no distinction in priority between them) if they meet one or more of the following criteria:
1. Families evicted from their most recent housing due to: (a) foreclosure; (b) condemnation; (c) documented conduct by a guest or former household member who is not part of the household seeking emergency shelter; or (d) other circumstances through no fault of the family.
 2. Families evicted from their most recent housing due to nonpayment of rent caused by: (a) a documented medical condition or diagnosed disability; or (b) a documented loss of income within the last 12 months directly as a result of a change in household composition or a loss of income source through no fault of the family.
 3. Families with at least one member who is a veteran as defined in state or federal law and who is not otherwise captured by the priority 1 veteran definition.
 4. Families exiting the DCF Young Parent Living Program (also known as the Teen Living Program) based on age limits applicable to that program.
- iv. Priority 4: Families that do not qualify for Priority 1, 2 or 3 shall be deemed Priority 4 (with no distinction in priority between them).
- b. *Assessment*:
- As part of the EA application, all applicants for EA shelter shall be asked to complete questions for self-reporting immediate clinical and safety risk concerns. Translated applications will be available. If the family self-reports that they meet any of the clinical criteria for full assessment, the family shall be offered two options for assessment:
- (1) In-Person or Virtual CSR Assessment by Rapid Response Team Nurse. Rapid Response Team nurses will contact families who choose virtual assessments to arrange an assessment via telephone. HLC will assist in providing a private room

and/or telephone for families who require that. As available, in person assessments may be an option to families presenting at a Family Welcome Center.

- (2) Existing Medical Provider. Families who choose this option shall complete a release of information form and ask their medical provider to share clinical summary information via fax or phone call with the Rapid Response Team who will then perform an assessment to determine priority.

c. *Contact List:*

- i. Within each priority group, position on the contact list will be determined based on the date of the determination that the family is eligible and, for families who qualify for additional time to submit required verifications, the date of the determination that the family appears eligible subject to the submission of pending verifications.
- ii. The contact list will be refreshed at least once per day.
- iii. Families will be offered available shelter units within their assigned Track in order of position on the contact list.
- iv. Families on the contact list will be contacted by email, phone call and text, using contact information provided by the families.
- v. Families will be required to contact HLC by 12:00 p.m. the next business day to accept an offer of placement. If the family does not accept the offer of placement by 12:00 p.m. on the next business day, HLC will offer the placement to another family on the contact list according to placement on that contact list. A family may be removed from the contact list, and required to reapply if they still seek shelter, if they fail to respond to an offer of placement three times or more absent good cause.
- vi. Families who have been on the contact list for six months or longer shall be required to undergo an additional priority assessment prior to placement in shelter.
- vii. Families shall be required to report any changes in potential eligibility or priority to HLC without delay. Prioritization will be reassessed in light of any significant changes to family status.

EXHIBIT A

Prioritization Score Reference Table for DPH Verification Criteria – Clinical Risk Assessment

Note: There are additional prioritization criteria noted in the guidance above that do not require DPH verification.

1 (Highest Priority)	2 (Moderate Priority)	3 (Lower Priority)	4 (No Priority)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family member aged 0-9 months - Family member with high-risk pregnancy - Family member with an intellectual or developmental disability - Family member with immunocompromised condition - Family member with medical device 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family member in 3rd trimester pregnancy - Family member with three or more chronic conditions - Family member with medications requiring refrigeration - Family with primary caregiver aged 70 years or more 	(No qualifying condition)	(No qualifying condition)

Glossary of Terms

This list is illustrative, not exhaustive, of the health conditions or needs that may fall under each criterion as defined by the Department of Public Health (DPH). Specific conditions or devices not listed here may qualify based on information collected during the clinical and safety risk screening by DPH.

1. High risk pregnancy criteria
 - a. Genetic conditions
 - b. Pre-eclampsia
 - c. Gestational diabetes
 - d. Pregnant with multiples (e.g. twins)
 - e. Preexisting medical conditions
 - f. Advanced maternal age 35 years and older
2. Chronic medical conditions
 - a. Diabetes
 - b. High blood pressure
 - c. Seizure disorder
 - d. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease
 - e. Asthma
 - f. HIV/AIDS
 - g. Chronic kidney disease
 - h. Severe mental illness (e.g. bipolar disorder or schizophrenia)
 - i. Substance use disorder
3. Conditions suppressing immune system secondary to treatment
 - a. Cancer
 - b. Rheumatologic diseases
 - c. Organ transplant recipients
 - d. Inflammatory bowel disease
 - e. Sickle cell disease
4. Medical devices

- a. Tracheostomy
 - b. Ventricular peritoneal shunt
 - c. Indwelling venous catheter
 - d. Gastrostomy tube
 - e. Nebulizer (daily use)
5. Intellectual or Developmental Disability
- a. If under 5 years old:
 - i Significant developmental delay or specific congenital or acquired condition that has a high probability it will result in a developmental disability if services are not provided.
 - b. If 5 years old or older:
 - i Autism spectrum disorder
 - ii Smith-Magenis syndrome
 - iii Prader-Willi syndrome
 - c. If between 5 years old and 18 years old:
 - i Williams syndrome
 - ii Down syndrome
 - iii Cerebral palsy
 - iv Spina bifida
 - v Fetal alcohol syndrome
 - vi Rett syndrome
 - vii Fragile X syndrome
 - d. Other intellectual or developmental disabilities that cause severe impairment that makes it difficult for that person to perform major life activities without assistance.

Exhibit B

Rapid Shelter Track Site Administrative Extensions

In circumstances where caseload and eligible applications have or will imminently exceed the Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter program capacity, HLC will issue a notice to activate Rapid Shelter Track. Families deemed Priority 4 will then be placed into available Rapid Shelter Track sites for up to 30 business days, unless they are granted a longer stay under an administrative extension. A shelter provider may grant an administrative extension at any point during a family's stay at a Rapid Shelter Track site. Extensions are determined by case managers and shelter administrative staff. Case managers will issue a notice to families if an extension is granted. Administrative extension reasons include:

- **Families with Imminent Access to Housing**

- Families can receive up to a 30-business day administrative extension if they meet one or more of the following conditions:
 - The family has a signed lease with a start date that is within 30 business days. An extension may be granted up to the lease start date.
 - The family has confirmed a safe alternative housing option, including moving in with a friend, host family or family member, moving to a home share, relocating with the assistance of another organization, or moving outside of Massachusetts, but needs more time to complete necessary steps for a transition. The family can stay at the Rapid Shelter Track site for up to 30 business days to ensure a safe exit. If a safe exit is feasible prior to the end of the extension, the family must exit on the earlier date.
 - The family has completed necessary paperwork for HomeBASE eligibility, has a signed lease, and has an application in process either with an EA Diversion provider or a Regional Administering Authority (RAA).
 - *Further extensions:* A family can receive additional extensions in up to 30-business day increments if the RAA/provider is still working through the application or if the lease move-in date needs additional time.
 - *Early Exits:* Once the HomeBASE application is approved and the family has a move-in date, the family must exit the site no later than the date their unit is ready for move-in even if it is prior to the extension date. If a HomeBASE application is denied, the family must exit within 14 business days of the denial unless they qualify for another extension, including by identifying another imminent housing option.

- **Families Seeking Reprioritization**

- During the family's stay at the Rapid Shelter Track site, a family member may be identified as potentially meeting higher priority but that reprioritization screening is not able to be scheduled during the family's stay due to delays on behalf of the Commonwealth. The family can stay at the Rapid Shelter Track site until the reprioritization screening is complete.

- **Families with health-related events temporarily preventing engagement in rehousing**
 - If a family member is placed in an isolation placement by shelter staff or medical personnel due to illness, the family may be granted a one-time extension of 5-business days after returning from isolation.
 - In the event of hospitalization or serious illness lasting more than 24 hours of any family member, the family may be granted a one-time extension of 5-business days after discharge.
 - If a family experiences the death of an immediate family member, they may be granted a one-time extension of 5-business days.
 - If a family member has been diagnosed with a serious mental illness, serious emotional disturbance neurodevelopmental disorder, cognitive impairment resulting from a brain injury, chronic physical illness, or otherwise has a condition resulting in functional impairment that substantially interferes with or limits one or more major life activities and currently prevents meaningful engagement in rehousing services, the family may qualify for a 30 business day extension to provide more time for rehousing activities. This extension may be combined with other extensions if a family qualifies for other extension criteria.

At the conclusion of the Rapid Shelter Track activation, HLC will issue a notice on Rapid Shelter Track deactivation. Families placed at Rapid Shelter Track sites will be transferred to Bridge Shelter Track units if they are unable to find housing before the deactivation deadline. The family's length of stay in Rapid Shelter Track will count towards the family's total Bridge Shelter Track length of stay.