



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 PROGRAM GUIDANCE ON CONTACT LIST AND PRIORITIZATION
PROCEDURES**

pursuant to

Capacity Declaration dated October 31, 2023

Updated April 11, 2025

The following guidance is issued by EOHLC pursuant to the Capacity Declaration issued by Secretary Augustus on October 31, 2023, as extended (the “Declaration”). This guidance will remain effective only so long as the Declaration remains in effect. This guidance sets forth a prioritization system, including Rapid Shelter and Bridge Shelter track placement determinations based on those priorities, 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 EOHLC regulations.

1. **Shelter Capacity.** The February 2025 supplemental budget directed that that by December 31, 2025, the total capacity of the Emergency Assistance program shall not exceed 4,000 families, and on March 14, 2025, Secretary Augustus declared the maximum capacity of the Emergency Assistance Shelter Program to be approximately 5,800 shelter units. Under the Declaration and this guidance, EOHLC shall manage the EA Shelter System to its capacity, taking into account congregate shelter units,

scattered-site and co-shelter units, hotel rooms, Rapid Shelter sites, and other forms of temporary emergency shelter for homeless families (i) procured directly by EOHLC or shelter providers under contract to EOHLC or (ii) procured by other Commonwealth agencies or their contracted provider agencies.¹

- a. The actual number of shelter units in the system may fluctuate from day-to-day but in no event shall exceed 5,800 shelter units.

2. **Application Processing and EA Eligibility & Placement Determination**

- a. EOHLC 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, EOHLC shall continue placing eligible families, including families who qualify for additional time to submit required verifications, into shelter.
- b. Families will be placed in either Bridge Shelter or Rapid Shelter sites based on the assessment of family risks described in § 3(b). Families identified as priority categories 1, 2, or 3 will be placed in Bridge Shelter sites, and families identified as priority category 4 will be placed in Rapid Shelter sites.
 - i. Placement in Rapid Shelter sites shall be for a period of 30 business days, subject to extensions as may be granted pursuant to Rapid Shelter Site Administrative Extensions, attached as Exhibit B.
 - ii. Placement in Bridge Shelter 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-on-six-month-length-of-stay-0/download>).

¹ The 5,800 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.

- c. 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 EOHLC.
- d. 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. **Prioritization**

- a. **Priority Categories:** EOHLC shall prioritize families for placement on the basis of the following criteria, 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 0-3 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.

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 child aged more than 3 months up to 9 months.
4. Families with a primary caregiver aged 70 years or more.
5. 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 immunocompromised condition
 - c. Family member with three or more chronic conditions
 - d. Family member with medications requiring refrigeration
 - e. Family member with medical device

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 three options for assessment:

- (1) In-person assessment at a clinical and safety risk assessment site (subject to availability). Families sent to a clinical and safety risk assessment site will be assessed within 24-48 hours of arrival by on-site clinical staff at each site. Results from the assessment will be used to determine prioritization for placement in EA shelter or on the EA contact list.
- (2) Virtual CSR Assessment by Rapid Response Team Nurse. A Rapid Response Team of nurses will contact families who choose this option to arrange a virtual assessment via telephone.
- (3) 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:**

- (1) 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.
- (2) The contact list will be refreshed at least once per day.
- (3) Families will be offered available shelter units within their assigned Track in order of position on the contact list.
- (4) Families on the contact list will be contacted by email, phone call and text, using contact information provided by the families.
- (5) Families will be required to contact EOHLC by 12 pm the next business day to accept an offer of placement. If the family does not accept the offer of placement

by 12 pm on the next business day, EOHLC 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.

- (6) 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.
- (7) Families shall be required to report any changes in potential eligibility or priority to EOHLC without delay. Prioritization will be reassessed in light of any significant changes to family status.

EXHIBIT A

Prioritization Score Reference Table – Clinical Risk Assessment

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

Glossary of Terms:

1. High risk pregnancy criteria
 - a. Genetic conditions
 - b. Pre-eclampsia
 - c. Gestational diabetes
 - d. Multiples
 - 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. COPD
 - e. Asthma
 - f. Sickle cell
 - g. HIV
 - h. Chronic kidney disease
 - i. Severe mental illness (i.e. bipolar disorder or schizophrenia)
 - j. 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 (VP) shunt
 - c. Indwelling venous catheter
 - d. Gastrostomy tube
5. Intellectual or Developmental Disability
 - i. If under 5 years old:

1. 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.
- ii. If 5 years old or older:
 1. Autism spectrum disorder
 2. Smith-Magenis syndrome
 3. Prader-Willi syndrome
- iii. If between 5 years old and 18 years old:
 1. Williams syndrome
 2. Down syndrome
 3. Cerebral palsy
 4. Spina bifida
 5. Fetal alcohol syndrome
 6. Rett syndrome
 7. Fragile X syndrome
- iv. Other intellectual or developmental disabilities that cause a severe impairment that makes it difficult for that person to perform major life activities without assistance

Exhibit B

Rapid Shelter Site Administrative Extensions

Families deemed Priority 4 will be placed into available Rapid Shelter sites for up to 30 business days unless they are granted a longer period under an administrative extension. A shelter provider may grant an administrative extension at any point during a family's stay at a Rapid Shelter 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 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).
 - Note on 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.
 - Note on 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.
 - The family has identified safe housing outside of Massachusetts, but needs additional time to access that housing option. The family can stay at the Rapid Shelter site for up to 30 business days to complete necessary steps for moving.

- **Families Seeking Reprioritization**

- During the family's stay at the Rapid Shelter 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 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.