

SPECIAL COMMISSION ON EMERGENCY HOUSING ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

July 18, 2024
1:30 pm – 3:00 pm

John W. McCormack Building
21st Floor Conference Room
1 Ashburton Place, Boston MA

MEETING MINUTES

A meeting of the Special Commission on Emergency Housing Assistance Programs was held on Thursday, July 18, 2024, in person and with additional public access via Zoom.

The following Commission members were present:

- **Lt. Governor Kimberley Driscoll**, Commission Chair
- **Sec. Edward Augustus**, Secretary of Housing and Livable Communities
- **Sec. Kate Walsh***, Secretary of Health and Human Services
- **Sec. Matthew Gorzkowicz**, Secretary of Administration and Finance
- **Cristina Aguilera Sandoval**, Executive Director, Office for Immigrants and Refugees
- **Sen. Lydia Edwards***, Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Housing
- **Rep. James Arciero***, House Chair, Joint Committee on Housing
- **Sen. Robyn Kennedy***, Senate Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
- **Rep. Jay Livingstone***, House Chair, Joint Committee on Children, Families and Persons with Disabilities
- **Rep. Paul Frost***, Second Assistant Minority Leader
- **Sen. Ryan Fattman***, Assistant Minority Leader
- **Leah Bradley**, Executive Director, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance
- **Lyndia Downie**, President & Executive Director, Pine Street Inn
- **Pastor Dieufort Fleurissant***, President & Executive Director, True Alliance Center

All members attended in person. *Those denoted with an asterisk attended in part.

Members reviewed or discussed the following materials:

- A slide deck, which has been posted at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/emergency-assistance-ea-commission-kickoff-july-18-2024-presentation/download>

1. INTRODUCTION, SWEARING IN & COMMISSION OVERVIEW

Lieutenant Governor Driscoll opened the meeting shortly after 1:30 pm. The Lieutenant Governor outlined the statutory goals of the Commission. Members were sworn in (all but Sen. Edwards and Pastor Fleurissaint were present). Members introduced themselves. The Lieutenant Governor asked members to speak loudly enough for the public to hear. The Lieutenant Governor explained that the Commission is subject to the Open Meeting Law and the day's meeting would be open to the press and the public.

2. VOTE ON REMOTE PARTICIPATION

Rep. Frost, with Sen. Fattman seconding, moved for a vote on the following motion:

The Commission encourages in-person attendance of members at all meetings, but will allow remote participation of members in accordance with the requirements of the Open Meeting Law.

The motion passed by voice vote; all but Sen. Edwards and Pastor Fleurissaint were present.

3. EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE FAMILY SHELTER PROGRAM HISTORY

The Lieutenant Governor, joined by Emergency Assistance Program Director Lt. Gen. Scott Rice and Deputy Director Adit Basheer, provided an overview of the history of the Emergency Assistance (EA) program, from its inception in 1983 to recent responses to rising demand, and how cities in other states have addressed similar rising demand. The Lieutenant Governor asked presenters to speak loudly enough for the public to hear.

Reps. Livingstone, Arciero, and Frost departed at 1:53 pm. Sen. Edwards and Pastor Fleurissaint arrived at 1:54 pm.

4. EA POLICIES AND PROCESSES OVERVIEW

Sec. Walsh and Sec. Augustus provided an overview of recent efforts by the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and other state agencies to expand shelter capacity and provide services amidst rising demand.

5. FISCAL HISTORY

Sec. Gorzkowicz provided an overview of funding for the EA program since 2022. He explained that funding for the program's increasing needs has been provided through the annual budget, supplemental appropriations, and the Transitional Escrow Fund, a temporary source of funding that stores one-time savings from FY21 and FY22 surpluses. He explained that the EA program is projected to cost over \$1 billion in FY25, and that on its current course is projected to require additional funding in January.

6. DISCUSSION

The Lieutenant Governor said that addressing the challenges of rising demand for EA shelter requires a concerted effort across government and in partnership with organizations like those

represented on the Commission. She invited comments from Commission members on their goals for the Commission.

Sen. Kennedy discussed her work in 2009 on the transfer of the EA program to the then-Department of Housing and Community Development; she said this was a transition to treating the program as part of a continuum of housing supports. She said the program should avoid burdensome requirements and unintended consequences.

Leah Bradley noted the importance of preventing homelessness and ensuring that the EA system places families on a path to sustainable housing, including through improvements to housing vouchers and the HomeBASE program.

Lyndia Downie discussed the importance of supporting exits from the EA system, and noted that the HomeBASE program and work authorizations are critical in this regard.

Sens. Fattman, Kennedy and Edwards exited at 2:24 pm and returned at 2:26 pm.

Sen. Fattman said that communities he represents came together to support families in shelter, and that it's important to develop a sustainable approach in light of fiscal constraints, including by addressing job training and placement, work authorization, considering the approach taken by other cities and states, and considering the requirements of the federal immigration parole system.

Sec. Walsh departed at 2:42 pm; Undersecretary for Human Services Mary McGeown took Sec. Walsh's seat as Sec. Walsh's designee.

Sen. Edwards said the Commission should address lessons learned from recent developments and how the system can be prepared for future instances of suddenly rising need that require scaling up the system, including through partnerships with entities outside government. Sen. Edwards said she would like to see the right to shelter maintained.

Sen. Kennedy said the program should take a regional approach responsive to community and individual needs.

Leah Bradley noted the need to increase the supply of affordable housing and supporting homeless families in accessing housing.

Lyndia Downie discussed her work housing homeless individuals and the challenges faced by that population, noting that the EA system serves families. She said the Commission should consider rethinking the fundamentals of the state's approach to homeless shelter.

The Lieutenant Governor summarized major themes from member comments and stated that the EA system will need to evolve in light of funding constraints. The Lieutenant Governor stated her hope that the Commission will contribute to the development of a new plan and new approach. She reminded the Commission of Open Meeting Law limits on deliberation outside of formal meetings. She said the Commission would meet on a monthly basis.

Sec. Augustus, with Leah Bradley seconding, moved to adjourn. The motion passed by voice vote. The Lieutenant Governor adjourned the meeting at 3:00 pm.