

# Children and Homelessness in Massachusetts

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When children are without a safe and nurturing place to live, they face hardships that have long-lasting consequences—for themselves, their families, and the community. That 1.6 million children [1] each year could be without the security of a home—in our wealthy nation—is a national disgrace. The persistent growth in child homelessness is one of the clearest consequences of our collective failure to effectively halt increases in poverty and income inequality in our nation.

For more than three decades, solving family homelessness has been a central objective for policymakers, philanthropies, community coalitions, municipalities, and families themselves. Complexly related, structural root causes of family homelessness, such as unaffordable housing, low wages and low-wage work conditions, exacerbate the problem and are central precipitants for an unending flood of families seeking emergency shelter and other public and private emergency assistance.

Until 2008, state laws and regulations focused primarily on an emergency response: developing emergency shelter programs which not only provided a temporary roof over families' heads, but also provided priority access to housing assistance. Since 2008, however, Massachusetts has intentionally integrated a prevention-based approach into its blueprint for ending family homelessness [2]. Indeed, Massachusetts is highly ranked for its national leadership on having a plan for reducing child homelessness [1].

Nonetheless, the numbers of families seeking shelter has not decreased significantly in the past five years. Now is the time for directing public policy attention to addressing not only the proximate causes of family homelessness (e.g., evictions, rent arrearages), but also its root causes. This policy brief focuses on the extent of child and family homelessness in Massachusetts, its root causes, and those families most at risk. We highlight Massachusetts' current blueprint for addressing family homelessness, and make recommendations based on lessons learned and evaluation of prevention measures.

## EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM

On any given night in 2011 in Massachusetts, 17,501 persons were homeless, and 38% of them were children [3, 4]. The number of homeless children in the state during 2010 was estimated to be 22,569, a dramatic increase since 2006 [1]. This increase was largely attributed to the Great Recession and the associated increase in risk factors for homelessness, such as foreclosures and persistent poverty.

In 2010, 13% of Massachusetts children lived in poverty for an average of five years, and the state was ranked 29th in foreclosure rates. Despite more than 15,000 housing units being added through the federal Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program (HPRP), the risks of low-income families becoming homeless have worsened [1]. Although the Recession has caused higher rates of homelessness, the extent of the problem can be slowed only if prevention programs are not cut further and root causes are addressed.

### Definition

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act defines homeless children with the following criteria:

- Sharing the housing of other persons due to loss of housing or economic hardship, where they would not be guaranteed or allowed to stay for more than 14 days;
- Living in motels, hotels, trailer parks, camping grounds, or emergency or transitional shelters;
- Abandoned in hospitals or awaiting foster care placement; or
- Living in cars, parks, public spaces, or migratory situations.

### Facts on Family Homelessness in the U.S.

In the public view, lone individuals living on the street are assumed to be the “face of homelessness,” but 38% of the homeless in the U.S. — at one point in time in 2011 — were family members and 59% of family members were children [3]. Family homelessness is invisible to the public eye.

When families lose their housing, they commonly move in temporarily with friends and/or relatives. These arrangements are rarely stable or permanent. At times, they lead to families splitting up and children losing friends and educational ground [5]. Understanding these facts is a first step towards solution development and policy action.

In 2010, the National Center on Family Homelessness updated its state-by-state report card titled “America’s Youngest Outcasts” [1]. They found that in the U.S.:

- 1.6 million American children — 1 in 45 — are homeless in a year, equaling **30,000 children each week** and more than **4,400 each day**. These numbers are likely underestimates.
- Children experiencing homelessness suffer from hunger, poor physical and emotional health, and missed educational opportunities.
- Sixteen U.S. states have done no planning related to child homelessness, and only seven states have extensive plans.
- States in the North and Northeast tend to have the lowest percentages of homeless children due to lower poverty levels and stronger publicly funded safety nets. This geographic distinction is consistent on a composite ranking, using four data points:
  - o Number of homeless children
  - o Child well-being
  - o Risk for child homelessness
  - o State-level planning and policy activities

### How does Massachusetts Compare?

In the 2010 National Center on Family Homelessness report, Massachusetts ranked 8th in the nation based on the composite criteria listed above [1]. This performance highlights the state's commitment to addressing homelessness. Below, we highlight Massachusetts' changes and improvements over time on these domains:

- Massachusetts' ranking on **Extent of Child Homelessness** has improved from #30 in 2007 to #21 in 2010.
- Massachusetts' rank in **Child Well-being** has improved from #16 in 2007 to #12 in 2010, and all other New England states scored worse than Massachusetts in 2010.
- Massachusetts' rank in **Risk of Child Homelessness** improved from #19 in 2007 to #16 in 2010. However, in comparison to Massachusetts, all other New England states (except Connecticut) showed a lower risk of homelessness in 2010.
- Massachusetts has continued to show commitment to **State Policy and Planning Efforts**, ranking #2 after Maine in 2010. However, Massachusetts was ranked #1 in policy and planning efforts in 2007.

### Homelessness and Student Mobility

Student mobility, caused by housing instability, leads to serious negative consequences for children in their educational progress. Student mobility is most prevalent in the state's 35 lowest performing schools, concentrated in only nine school districts, which saw 45,914 students change schools at least once in 2008-2009 [6]. High mobility is most common in urban school districts, because low-income, Hispanic, black, and special education students are disproportionately more mobile. Specifically:

- Low-income students comprise 31% of the total student body in Massachusetts and 53% of all mobile students;
- Hispanic students comprise 14% of the student body and 29% of all mobile students;
- Black students comprise 8% of the student body and 16% of all mobile students;
- Special education students comprise 17% of the student body and 24% of all mobile students.

Eleven school districts in Massachusetts' "Gateway Cities" (Brockton, Fitchburg, Haverhill, Holyoke, Springfield, and Worcester) represent 35% of all mobile students statewide. Once thriving industrial towns, these cities are now facing troubling economic and social problems, yet are perceived as "gateways" for diverse, foreign-born residents to pursue the American Dream [6].

In addition, emerging data on youth homelessness in the city of Worcester speaks to the alarming state of homelessness for young people and indicates the need for more prevention-focused resources [7]. Findings show that homeless youth:

- Experience greater rates of family violence;
- Become parents four times more often than youth who have homes, thereby creating a "new generation of housing instability" (p. 2); and
- Have an exceptionally difficult time accessing needed support services—40% of youth who tried to get help were unable to because of several barriers: placement on waiting lists, lack of transportation, never hearing back from providers, failure to qualify, and not knowing where to go for help.

## ROOT CAUSES OF CHILD HOMELESSNESS

### Barriers to Ensuring Basic Needs for Children

Unless family incomes are adequate enough to meet families' basic needs, housing instability and its consequences will be a reality for low-wage earners with children and for Massachusetts communities. In addition to higher wages and a greater supply of low-income housing, effective packaging of wages and public work supports<sup>1</sup> has the potential to bridge the gaps between income and expenses for greater numbers of these families. In reality, however, Massachusetts public work supports—while commendable—are inaccessible for an overwhelming number of low-wage earners in the state.

First, a Hardship Gap exists. That is, families who combine earnings and obtain public work supports are still without enough income to cover the basic costs of living. Nearly 25% of Massachusetts families with a wage earner fall into this gap, regardless of their income source [8]. Reasons for this hardship gap are multi-layered:

- Too many jobs pay too little, affecting housing stability.
  - Consistent with U.S. statistics overall, more than 50% of Massachusetts renter households spend more than one-third of their income on rent [9].
- The housing affordability standards set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) are unrealistic.
  - In no part of the U.S. can a full-time minimum wage worker pay for private market housing with just 30% of his or her income. Even more affected are persons of color, elders, sole women with children, and renters [5].

Second, an Eligibility Gap exists. That is, when families make too much to qualify for public work supports, but have too little income to pay all their bills, they are in trouble. Something as simple as lack of information about how to access services or rules of eligibility can put families through struggles that exacerbate emotional and financial stress, contributing to housing instability.

- Nearly 37% of all people in families with earners who cannot meet their family's basic needs are also ineligible for any work support programs in Massachusetts.
- Program rules are complex and uncoordinated, with varying definitions of eligibility across programs.
- The programs with highest eligibility gaps are the Temporary Assistance to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC), Section 8 housing assistance, and childcare assistance [8].

A final barrier is the Coverage Gap, in which low wage earners are eligible for public work supports, but do not receive them.

- Reasons for the coverage gap vary as much as the programs themselves, and the programs' rules vary. However, the need for public work supports far exceeds the amount of funding provided to cover those who are eligible.
- Administrative burden deters families from confirming their eligibility status.
- As workers' earnings increase, co-payments for child and health care increase and SNAP benefits decrease—or families suddenly become ineligible for assistance. Abrupt or precipitous changes in assistance levels serve as a disincentive for workers' career advancement (e.g., workers offered a promotion and higher wages may be better off financially if they turn down promotions and keep their hold on housing assistance or lower child care bills) [8].

The following data contrast the percent eligible versus the percent receiving public work supports in Massachusetts, as of 2007:

- TAFDC (4% Eligible; 1% Receive)
- Section 8 Housing Assistance (11% Eligible; 3% Receive)<sup>ii</sup>
- Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) tax filers (12% Eligible; 10% Receive)
- Child Care for <13 years old (16% Eligible; 6% Receive)
- SNAP (Food Stamps) (17% Eligible; 6% Receive)
- MassHealth for individuals (19% Eligible; 12% Receive) [8].

### **Low Family Wages Put Children at Risk of Developmental, Educational, and Health Disparities**

Monetary resources and low-wage work conditions are important indicators for child and youth well-being, even beyond the provision of basic needs [10]. Low-wage jobs are the least likely to provide employer benefits such as paid time off for illness, although they are increasingly the most readily available form of employment due to the Great Recession [10].

Single parents, parents of color, and immigrant working parents face acute work/family problems that affect their children even more than white, married citizens' problems do [10]. Highlighted below are aspects of low-wage employment that intersect with child/adolescent well-being.

- Access to adult presence, as well as books, recreational equipment, lessons, and safety, all contribute to positive youth development. Low-income parents experience a time crunch, which impacts their opportunities to offer these resources to their children. In addition, they do not have the resources to pay for time substitutes, such as 'nannies,' or healthy prepared food [10].
- Parental and child stress is greatly increased with financial instability, which is connected to housing instability. All of these stresses impact the potential for children's educational achievement and increase the likelihood of youth dropping out of school [10].
- Low-income employment affects young people's health as well, particularly the children of single mothers. Negative outcomes include:
  - o Obesity
  - o Malnutrition
  - o Lack of physical activity
  - o Forced self-care on the child
  - o "Adultification" roles for older children who need to take care of younger siblings
  - o Early childbearing, associated with perpetuating a young person's educational, workforce, and developmental difficulties [10].

### **Consequences of Housing Instability and Homelessness on Families and Children**

Housing insecurity and instability are known risk factors for homelessness. Housing instability is more prevalent than homelessness, although less apparent. In a nationwide sample of more than 22,000 low-income families, only 52% were stably housed [11]. Housing insecurity is characterized by:

- Multiple moves (5% of the sample);
- Overcrowding and doubling up with another family for economic reasons (41% of the sample).

In a survey of 6,000 Boston families with children under the age of four, only 43% were securely housed in 2012, while 21% lived in crowded places, 8% were homeless, 4% were frequently mobile, and 24% were behind on rent [9].

The implications of housing insecurity on family well-being are severe, yet varied. For older children, impacts include poor school performance, mental health issues, and behavioral concerns. Meanwhile, young mobile children are more likely to be food insecure, in fair or poor health, at risk for developmental delays, and seriously underweight [9].

Stable housing reduces negative outcomes on a wide range of issues, including energy insecurity, household food insecurity, child food insecurity, and child access to healthcare. Increased state investments in stable housing, through programs like the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP), improve health for unstably housed children. [9].

According to Children’s HealthWatch [9], families who cannot make rental payments are:

- Three and a half times more likely to be energy insecure in their home;
- Five and a half times more prone to household food insecurity;
- Six times more prone to child food insecurity; and
- Two times more likely to forego health care for their children.

When a family’s housing insecurity crosses the line into homelessness, the consequences are magnified. Dislocation of a family into shelters or transitional housing can result in stress, discontinuity of educational experience, and a sense of social exclusion for children. Childhood homelessness is also a risk factor for continued homelessness as an adult [5].

Family homelessness can also put strains on an under-resourced system of care. Challenges arise among shelter staff in the form of help-giving fatigue, and families may in turn feel that seeking shelter is less desirable than living on the streets, in cars, in train stations, or in tent cities [5].

Shelter life can create challenges and stresses on families that perpetuate the sense of being “unseen.” However, shelters that follow alternative models by providing safe, respectable, supportive, and predictable environments, have the potential to reverse the damage sustained by both parents and their children on their traumatizing homelessness journeys [5].

### **Housing Mobility and Educational Achievement**

Homeless children are:

- Eight times more likely to be asked to repeat a grade;
- Three times more likely to be put in special education classes; and
- Twice as likely to score low on standardized tests [1].

Educational achievement is related to housing mobility. For example, mobile students in Massachusetts score 24 percentage points lower on MCAS English language arts and math tests [6].

These statistics should come as no surprise, as mobile students already struggle to adjust to emotional and behavioral health challenges, new classroom communities, and inadequate housing, food and health care. Educators also face the challenge of adjusting to the mobility of their students [6]. For families sheltered outside of their home communities, transportation costs for children to attend school in their home districts are high [6].

Massachusetts’ commitment to ensuring that all students are college- and career-ready creates a strain on educators who are also expected to serve the needs of mobile students. Mobile students may arrive behind academically or without any academic records.

In urban schools where classrooms may already be crowded, intake requirements and the tailoring of educational needs could create even larger challenges. Rural and suburban schools may have the resources to meet these needs, but student mobility is densely concentrated in urban areas. Thus, we see unequal test scores and college- and career-readiness across geographic boundaries [6].

## EVIDENCE ON SOLUTIONS

### The Importance of Housing Assistance and Increasing Affordable Housing Options

Housing vouchers encourage positive housing mobility, education and training, child well-being, and family income [12]. An evaluation of programs by HUD showed a reduction in the overall number of moves. A follow-up evaluation indicated that the families relocated to better locations, characterized by lower poverty rates, higher employment rates, and lower welfare concentrations [5].

Subsidized housing reduces housing instability and protects children's health, growth, and development. In addition, because people who devote the majority of their income to housing cannot afford other basic needs, combining housing subsidies with WIC or SNAP support would help close the coverage gap [9].

Funding levels for the state's voucher programs have been on the rise since FY2004. For FY2014, the Governor proposed an 11% increase from FY2013 for the MRVP [13].

Increasing the supply of housing that is affordable to families with low incomes is another important tool for addressing family homelessness. Massachusetts has a Housing Trust Fund, which promotes rehabilitation, construction, preservation, acquisition, and supportive housing to special populations [1].

Housing Trust Funds are supported by public revenue such as real estate transfer taxes. Money from this fund can also be put toward transitional housing and emergency rental assistance, but a focus on improving state-held resources can support the Housing Trust Fund in its ability to fulfill the needs of these programs.

### The Efficacy and Limitations of Homelessness Prevention Interventions

Over the past ten years, researchers have evaluated several comprehensive prevention models that are based on an understanding of risk factors. One was the **Homelessness Prevention Initiative (HPI)**, funded by the Boston Foundation/Starr Foundation, the Ludcke Foundation, Tufts Health Plan, Massachusetts Medical Society, and Alliance Charitable Foundation. These agencies pooled resources in 2004 for a 3-year investment to learn from a range of promising homelessness prevention interventions across the state.

The UMass Boston Center for Social Policy outlines these models and how they have been implemented [14]:

- In the three years of the initiative, 4,830 families and 2,417 individuals were served, at an average cost of \$1,436 per household [14].
- Successes, defined as housing stability for families 12 months after initial intervention, were associated with:
  - o families' access to cash assistance, flexibly provided, in concert with case management supports;
  - o income maximization strategies (obtaining all the public work supports for which families were eligible);
  - o effective regional and local collaborations among organizations for leveraging resources families needed [14].

### *A sample of other promising approaches*

A study in Western Massachusetts suggests that implementing a preventive counseling program and redirecting the community's resources from crisis management to education and economic development leads to better results in maintaining housing stability [14].

In 2007, an **Early Warning System** collaboration was created between utility companies and the state Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA). Its purpose was to inform DTA-assisted families of the resources available, particularly the state's utility discount program. In one year, an estimated 60,000 low-income Massachusetts households were automatically enrolled in the program because of this broadening of access.

Through the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless (MCH) **First Stop Initiative**, caseworkers are placed in health centers and public schools to help identify and assist people who are at risk of becoming homeless. These preventative interventions are focused on helping people maximize their incomes by accessing public work supports for which they are eligible, as well as helping them navigate available support services for the purposes of stabilizing their housing circumstances [14].

FamilyAid Boston's **Housing Access Collaborative** started as a pilot program in 2009, but became a permanent program due to its success. Through a mix of services that includes case management, workforce development, literacy training, and other support services, the program has helped 65 families move to permanent housing from being homeless.

In addition, **Victory Programs Inc.**, works with targeted clients including people with substance abuse, chronic diseases such as HIV/AIDS, and issues of domestic violence, and helps them overcome personal obstacles and reach stable housing. Together, these two programs contributed to a 21.5% decrease in the number of families in transitional housing between 2010 to 2011 [15].

The **Dudley Diversion Pilot Project** of 2008 was an attempt to alleviate the rapid increase in the number of homeless families in the prior year in the Dudley area of Boston. Project collaborators—the City of Boston, Massachusetts DTA, and nine other major service providers in Boston—worked with 69 families on the brink of homelessness to find viable alternatives to secure housing [16].

Results of this project showed that 42% of all families were diverted from DTA shelters. Of these, 86% had not entered a shelter after seven weeks. The program invested \$50,000 in a flexible way. For example, six families received 1-year housing subsidies averaging \$7,564—considerably less expensive than a 1-year of shelter stay for a family that averages \$33,600 [16].

The **Tenancy Preservation Program** (TPP) is a homelessness prevention program that mediates between landlords and tenants facing eviction procedures due to disability-related issues ranging from mental illnesses, substances abuse problems, and old-age impairments. TPP works with landlords to accommodate various disabilities and avoid eviction. TPP works with 500 households every year, preventing evictions—and subsequent homelessness—in 80% of all cases [17].

### ***Recent sobering findings***

Very few Massachusetts families who received federally funded, recession-related Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing (HPRP) resources saw their incomes rise 12-18 months after receiving financial assistance and other housing relocation and stabilization services. For these persistently low-income families, housing assistance and other resources need to be available for long periods of time. Additionally, unless family incomes increase substantially through earnings, the risk of homelessness will remain high for low-income families without a housing subsidy [18].

In an evaluation of homelessness prevention models being implemented by three Boston organizations, cash assistance to families on the brink of homelessness provided a financial cushion that enabled them to remain housed 12 months after the last cash assistance payment. However, persistent unemployment, very low incomes and an expensive rental market continue to pose serious hardships that threaten their long-term housing stability and well-being [19].

### **RECENT STATE CHANGES: ADDRESSING FAMILY AND CHILD HOMELESSNESS**

Massachusetts is a leader in addressing child homelessness. We are ranked second in the country for policy and planning efforts. The state has a 5-year plan that focuses on prevention and intervention policies for child homelessness.

As recommended in the Commission to End Homelessness blueprint, radical changes to the state's approach to addressing family homelessness have been implemented in the past several years, characterized by a shift to a "Housing First" model. As a result, homeless families—who would have in previous years been accepted into one of the state's emergency shelters—are no longer eligible for shelter.



Eligibility criteria have been tightened to allow shelter entry to only those families who are homeless due to domestic violence, eviction caused by loss of income or disability, or living in a place not meant for human habitation. Homeless families denied shelter are offered other supports, ranging from a one-time cash assistance award of \$4,000 to multi-year cash assistance with lesser amounts awarded each year [13]. These changes have coincided with the Great Recession, a time in which many low-income families lost their jobs and/or were impacted by the foreclosure crisis.

Gov. Patrick has proposed significant increased funding in FY2014 for state housing voucher programs, which would assist some, but not all, families at risk of homelessness. Before the Great Recession, nearly 200,000 Massachusetts households eligible for Section 8 housing assistance were not receiving this assistance. On average, families eligible to receive a Section 8 Housing Voucher experienced a 2.5-year wait for the voucher. These waits are now even longer [5, 18].

In addition, the supply of affordable subsidized housing is far below what is needed to meet the demand of those eligible for vouchers [14]. The demand for affordable housing for families with low incomes is way beyond what is currently being planned for the state's blueprint to end homelessness [9].

### Policy and Planning Overview

Massachusetts and other surrounding states have a variety of bills, laws, and initiatives already on the table to address child homelessness. These initiatives are often related to educational opportunity.

For example, in 2004, an *Act Establishing an Alternative Education Grant Program* was passed that called for the creation of programs and services within the schools that deal specifically with the educational and psychosocial needs of children, particularly those who are currently "suffering from the traumatic effects of exposure to violence," one example of which is child homelessness [20].

In 2008, an *Act Relative to Children's Mental Health* was passed, calling on a task force to ensure that all children in the state of Massachusetts have "access to clinically, linguistically, and culturally appropriate behavioral health services...especially for children transitioning to school from other placements, hospitalization, or homelessness" [21].

A report by this task force states: "By 2017 all schools in the Commonwealth will implement the Behavioral Health and Public Schools Framework to create safe, healthy, and supportive school environments with collaborative services so that all students—including those with behavioral health challenges—are successful in school. The Commonwealth will provide the infrastructure and supports at the state and district levels to enable schools to create these environments" [22]. One of the action steps recommended to schools is to better recognize the early warning signs of students who might be distressed or traumatized due to violence, including child homelessness.

Bills in the current legislative session, relevant for addressing the root and proximate causes of risks of child/youth homelessness in Massachusetts, include:

- HD364: *An Act providing housing and support services to unaccompanied homeless youth*
- SD1487: *An Act relative to the protection of youth*
- HD639: *An Act to prevent homelessness among recipients of transitional assistance*
- HD1862: *An Act to prevent homelessness by providing a refundable rent credit for low-income taxpayers*
- SD861: *An Act establishing earned paid sick time*
- SD501: *An Act regarding pathways to family economic self-sufficiency*
- HD361: *An Act regarding pathways to family economic self-sufficiency*
- SD752: *An Act to improve the Commonwealth's economy with a strong minimum wage*

Other states are currently considering bills that Massachusetts may also think about in its homelessness prevention efforts. For example, in Rhode Island, Bill 5132 would allow families initially eligible for child

care assistance to remain eligible as long as their income does not exceed 225% of the federal poverty level and child care is necessary to maintain employment. RI Bill 2284 would prevent the interruption in benefits for parents receiving child care subsidies whose income fluctuates between 180% and 225% of the federal poverty level.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS: CONNECTING THE DOTS**

With local communities mobilizing to address family homelessness, state support is required to address the root causes of persistent poverty and sustain effective preventative measures.

#### **Next Steps for Policymakers toward Prevention of Child Homelessness**

- Modify unpredictability of prevention services by securing adequate and steady funding [1];
- Ensure prevention initiatives across locations within the State and expand access [6];
- Invest state resources in ensuring that low-wage workers in Massachusetts can access public work supports for which they are eligible as a way of supplementing their family incomes [8];
- Increase the state’s minimum wage and promote all workers’ access to paid sick leave [10];
- Replicate, expand, and sustain promising models of prevention that show signs of stabilization [1];
- Invest in long-term evaluations of program innovations by investigating what is happening with families who are diverted from shelter and receiving time-limited cash assistance [5, 8, 11];
- Facilitate a cross-sector planning process and peer learning among agencies and initiatives already taking action [6].

#### **No Single Solution: A Need for Multipronged Strategies**

A single solution for child and family homelessness has yet to be found—and will be impossible to find. Multilayered and sustained cross-policy approaches need to focus on the interrelated factors of high housing costs, low wages, limited prevention resources, and hurdles to accessing public work supports that currently interact in problematic ways to put low-income families and their children at risk for homelessness.

Acknowledging and overcoming challenges outlined in this report are essential steps, if the Commonwealth is committed to closing our children’s persistent educational achievement gaps and reducing the number of families seeking shelter. Only a multipronged approach will address structural issues and provide sustained solutions.

In schools, enforcing a mechanism for sharing practices around student intake and assessment, family outreach, and specialized curriculum would advance progress [6]. Allowing for more flexibility in addressing homelessness across state agencies could promote interagency collaboration at the regional and local levels. The Massachusetts Child and Youth Readiness Cabinet is well-poised to prioritize and expand such streamlining efforts [6].

Imbalances between long-term solutions and emergency interventions jeopardize children’s well-being as well. When funding favors emergency interventions, money for long-term, sustainable preventative solutions is spread too thin. When the emergency safety net is too thin, children and families without a stable housing are harmed. It is imperative that we achieve a balance between long-term and emergency fixes for child homelessness, and that progress on ameliorating the root causes be effectively sustained.

i Specifically, housing assistance, child care assistance, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, previously known as Food Stamps), the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Temporary Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) and Mass Health.

ii In 2007, 195,000 MA households were income eligible for Section 8 housing assistance and were not receiving this resource.

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