



Moving from Rhetoric to Results:

Recommendations to Reduce Family Homelessness in Massachusetts

February 2014

Executive Summary

Today, homelessness in Massachusetts is at its highest point in the thirty-year history since the shelter system was created. Incomes have not kept pace with rent levels, and those earning less than the median income have experienced a reduction, in real terms, of resources while poverty rates remain high.

The homelessness crisis in Massachusetts could be easily solved if the 4,000 families in shelter and motels were the only families in need of permanent housing. Unfortunately, what we see is only the tip of an iceberg that is getting larger with each passing year. To end homelessness in the Commonwealth we must make sure that all families have access to safe, decent, affordable housing and the opportunities they need to maintain long-term housing stability.

Against this backdrop, the federal government has decreased rental assistance; and federal housing production programs where rent is determined based on income all but cease to exist. Over the last few years, however, the Commonwealth has stepped up. We have seen new state rental assistance vouchers, increased funding for homelessness prevention efforts, steps to preserve expiring use rental properties, and programmatic changes that have led to public housing apartments being returned to the rental market and new private rental developments that serve people who are homeless being funded more quickly. However, available resources continue to lag far behind the current need.

Member Agencies:

Berkshire Housing Development Corporation . Community Teamwork, Inc. . Franklin County Housing and Redevelopment Authority . HAPHousing . Housing Assistance Corporation
Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership, Inc. . RCAP Solutions, Inc. . South Middlesex Opportunity Council, Inc. . South Shore Housing Development Corporation

www.regionalhousing.net . 18 Tremont St. Suite 401 . Boston, MA 02108 . Tel: 617-367-0646 . Fax: 617-367-9404

Our efforts must be multi-faceted, and as we secure housing opportunities we must also, as a team, with agencies and departments working together, address the underlying causes of homelessness. Housing provides the platform. When linked with well-paying jobs, education, training, child care, and support services as needed, families can achieve long-term housing and economic stability.

As we embark on this effort, our expectations need to be realistic with goals that reflect the demographics and real-life experiences of those in need.

The Regional Housing Network, therefore, makes the following 18 recommendations:

- Raise the minimum wage in Massachusetts and support efforts to increase it at the federal level.
- Increase the number of state rental vouchers and incentivize work and training.
- Link education, training, and work initiatives to housing supports.
- Provide access to behavioral health services and case management.
- Support the revitalization of our gateway cities, including the creation of new affordable housing.
- Increase affordable access to public transportation.
- Make emergency shelter available only to those who are absolutely without a safe and reasonable living alternative.
- Allow flexibility in the use of state resources to reflect regional differences in need and approach.
- Continue to support flexible funding programs such as Residential Assistance to Families in Transition (RAFT) and the Tenancy Preservation Program.
- Institute a state approved, mandatory curriculum to help families in shelter develop the skills necessary to move on.
- Increase the ratio of case managers to families.
- Increase diversion efforts.
- Dispel the myth that going to shelter leads to earlier access to a housing voucher.
- Strengthen alliances between provider agencies.
- Share the risks and the resources.
- Remember that prevention is the key to success.
- Support DHCD in its efforts to streamline procedures.
- Increase program production and review outcomes.

We have the ability, and hopefully the will, to make changes as described that will make a significant difference in reducing homelessness.

February 2014

Member Agencies: