

# Emergency Assistance (EA) Reform in Massachusetts

A Report from Ten Regional Forums  
December 2010



Principle Investigator

Susan P. Curnan, Professor and Director, Center for Youth and Communities

Brandeis Facilitation and Documentation Team

Christopher Kingsley, Lisa A. LaCava, Alexandra Piñeros Shields

*Center for Youth and Communities, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management*



Sponsored by:  
One Family, Inc.



Facilitated by:

The Center for Youth and Communities  
Heller School for Social Policy and  
Management Brandeis University

## **Acknowledgements**

The Brandeis University study team would like to thank the many individuals who contributed to the design, implementation and analysis of this project.

Emily Cohen, Associate Director for Policy and Advocacy, One Family, Inc., provided invaluable organizational assistance and presented important contextual information at each forum. Susanne Beaton, Director of Special Initiatives, The Paul and Phyllis Fireman Charitable Foundation, and Madeleine Taylor and John Cleveland, independent consultants, each provided valuable input and guidance throughout the project. We especially appreciate their taking time for a series of briefings prior to the start of the project and their critical review of forum and survey design. Thank you also to Elenore Garton, Senior Researcher, The Sillerman Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy, for introducing us to this project and for serving as an advisor at the start, and to Lanni Isenberg, production assistant and data manager.

Most importantly, this study would not have been possible without the commitment and generosity of the regional leadership who participated in the 10 forums. The 175 participant stakeholders took the time to share their experience and knowledge during a time of intense activity and economic crisis. Thank you all. The full participant list is attached to this report.

**Emergency Assistance (EA) Reform in Massachusetts:**  
A Report from Ten Regional Forums

**Table of Contents**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

<b>I. Introduction.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>II. Context for EA Reform Agenda in Massachusetts.....</b>	<b>5-6</b>
<b>III. Agenda and Structure for Regional Forums and Stakeholder Survey.....</b>	<b>7-8</b>
A. Driving Questions for Facilitated Dialogue	
B. Participant Surveys of Potential Changes in EA	
<b>IV. Findings: An Appetite for Change.....</b>	<b>9-16</b>
A. EA Policy Reform	
B. Changes in Practice and Culture	
C. Consensus on a Reform Agenda with Broad Buy-in and Commitment from the Field	
<b>V. Elements for Success of EA Reform.....</b>	<b>16-19</b>
A. Create Paradigm Shifts about What EA Is and What It Is Not	
B. Move toward Systems Approach for Addressing Homelessness of Which EA Is One Part	
C. Invest in Training and Capacity Building for Shelter Workers and Other EA-Related Staff	
D. Develop Individualized Approaches for Different Levels of Need	
<b>VI. Obstacles.....</b>	<b>19-22</b>
A. Societal Values and Views	
B. Barriers to Long-term Self-Sufficiency	
C. Resource Constraints and Fragmented Systems	
D. Top-Down Policy Decision Making and Political Will	
E. Rushing System Change and Not Reinvesting Savings in the New Infrastructure	

**ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Annotated Agenda & Structure for EA Regional Forums
- B. Introductory Slides/Context for EA Reform Dialogue
- C. Cross Regional Themes from EA Forums: Questions 1 and 2 Synthesis
- D. Cross Regional Survey Results of Potential Changes in EA

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sponsored by One Family, Inc and carried out by a politically-neutral study team from Brandeis University's Heller School for Social Policy and Management, the ten regional forums engaged more than 175 stakeholders in constructive dialogue about transforming the EA system. The forums represented another strategic step toward the goal of ending family homelessness in Massachusetts and follows the 2007 "Report of the Special Commission Relative to Ending Homelessness in the Commonwealth," and a White Paper, "Ending Family Homelessness in Massachusetts: A New Approach for the Emergency Assistance (EA) Program", released in 2010 and commissioned by the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Charitable Foundation.

The purpose of the forums was explicit and twofold: to explore ways of improving the Emergency Assistance (EA) program so that it is able to serve more families in need and more effectively prevent and end homelessness for families in Massachusetts; and to capture the Network's thinking and perspectives on creating a stronger, more flexible EA system that better meets the needs of the families they serve.

The launch of the forums also followed on the heels of a big year of innovation and learning among the networks and change at the regional, state and federal level, including passage of the HEARTH Act (Homelessness Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing) which targets prevention, diversion and rapid re-housing strategies. This period of innovation was coupled with unprecedented need at the shelter front door and a painful lack of affordable housing statewide. For example, in FY 2010, 32,790 families came to DHCD seeking assistance, 11,147 families filled out applications and only 4,432 families were approved for shelter services. That left 28,366 families who are in housing crises with no assistance from the Emergency Assistance system.

All participants recognized the severity and consequences of the economic crisis and the reality of budget constraints. For the purposes of the forums, all agreed to keep suggestions for EA reform within the budgetary reality of the EA program. In FY2010, EA was allocated just over \$91 million, and through supplemental budgets, this grew to nearly \$150 million. This meant the dialogue would necessarily be about priorities and trade-offs and the current system is not an option going forward (see insert on current EA system).

## Overview of the Current EA System: What EA Funds and Does Not Fund

- EA is the state program that funds shelter services for homeless families
- FY 2010 Spending = \$151 million
- FY 2011 Appropriation = \$115 million

### EA Currently Funds:

- Family shelter and motels
- Transitional housing
- Short-term housing assistance
- Rapid re-housing
- Limited shelter diversion (up to 3 months of rent)

All for families with incomes at or below 115% of the federal poverty level

### EA Currently Does Not:

- Provide prevention services
- Serve any families above 115% of poverty even if they are in a housing crisis
- Provide flexible assistance
- Triage families based on need
- Provide families an alternative to shelter

The perspectives of the forum participants were captured in two ways: through highly structured and documented dialogue, and through a quantitative exit survey. The dialogue was organized around two driving questions:

*Driving Question #1: Based on upon your experience and learning over the last year, what might providers do to ensure that more families are appropriately served under EA, and fewer families get turned away without increasing the EA budget?*

*Driving Question #2: Staying within the EA budget, what specific EA changes do you think need to happen to achieve more positive outcomes for families?*

The exit survey was built around the four EA reform goals established at the Spring Convening of the Network and asked participants to rank ten specific ideas for change using a scale from “very interested” to “moderately interested” to “not interested”.

The bottom line across the forums and network is that there is a robust appetite for EA reform and it is coupled with a sense of urgency for the thousands of families who suffer from homelessness in Massachusetts each year. (See Exhibit 1.)

In broad terms, and in their own words, the majority of stakeholders in the forums supported the two key policy recommendations set forth in the White Paper, “Ending Family Homelessness in Massachusetts”:

- The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) should consider more flexible eligibility criteria, allowing providers to serve families with the appropriate level of assistance.
- The Department should provide families with a shelter “exit plan” within a certain time period so shelter and motel stays can be shortened.

In other words, there is virtually no support for the status quo or the “one size fits all”, “shelter or nothing” approach.

The degree of consensus on specific game-changing ideas is illustrated in the following table depicting the percentage of stakeholders ranking specific reform ideas as “very interested.”

Exhibit 1 Survey of Potential Changes in EA	
REFORM IDEAS	“Very Interested”
<b>Focus</b>	
1. Create new categories of EA eligibility that allow prevention and diversion resources to be used to prevent homelessness.	83%
2. Conduct a marketing and messaging campaign to make it clear that you don’t need to enter a shelter to get access to benefits.	11%
<b>Reduce</b>	
3. Allow shelter funding to be redirected to flexible funding for prevention, diversion and rapid re-housing.	79%
4. Authorize payments to family members for housing relatives as an alternative to shelter.	40%
5. Require shelter exit plans and implement them as part of triage process.	58%
6. Incentivize provider best practices on reducing shelter time	45%
<b>Customize</b>	
7. Create a tiered eligibility system that gives the providers the flexibility to make choices about the service levels and types provided to families.	70%
<b>Integrate and Localize</b>	
8. Allow local networks to make decision about placement of EA eligible families in shelters,	69%
9. Continue funding for regional coordinators and regional infrastructure.	61%
10. Fast track state housing production funds for permanent supportive housing.	83%

This is not to say that the EA change agenda was endorsed without some concerns or outliers. There were both. The obstacles most often identified included: societal values and views, barriers to long-term self-sufficiency, resource constraints and fragmented systems, top-down policy decision making and political will, and rushing system change and not reinvesting savings in the new infrastructure.

*“Ending the pervasive social and economic problem of homelessness is possible and a moral imperative... The social costs of homelessness are huge, both for society and for homeless individuals and families.”*

Summary Report of the Massachusetts  
Commission to End Homelessness, p. viii, (December 28, 2007).

## **I. Introduction**

Sponsored by One Family, Inc and carried out by a politically-neutral study team from Brandeis University’s Heller School for Social Policy and Management, the ten regional forums engaged more than 175 stakeholders in constructive dialogue about transforming the EA system. The forums represented another strategic step toward the goal of ending family homelessness in Massachusetts and follows the 2007 “Report of the Special Commission Relative to Ending Homelessness in the Commonwealth,” and a White Paper, “Ending Family Homelessness in Massachusetts: A New Approach for the Emergency Assistance (EA) Program”, released in 2010 and commissioned by the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Charitable Foundation.

The purpose of the forums was explicit and twofold: to explore ways of improving the Emergency Assistance (EA) program so that it is able to serve more families in need and more effectively prevent and end homelessness for families in Massachusetts; and to capture the Network’s thinking and perspectives on creating a stronger, more flexible EA system that better meets the needs of the families they serve.

The launch of the forums also followed on the heels of a big year of innovation and learning among the networks and change at the regional, state and federal level, including passage of the HEARTH Act (Homelessness Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing) which targets prevention, diversion and rapid re-housing strategies. This period of innovation was coupled with unprecedented need at the shelter front door and a painful lack of affordable housing statewide.

All participants recognized the severity and consequences of the economic crisis and the reality of budget constraints. For the purposes of the forums, all agreed to keep suggestions for EA reform within the budgetary reality of the EA program. In FY2010, EA was allocated just over \$91 million, and through supplemental budgets, this grew to nearly \$150 million. This meant the dialogue would necessarily be about priorities and trade-offs.

The perspectives of the forum participants were captured in two ways: through highly structured and documented dialogue, and through a quantitative exit survey.



## II. Context for EA Reform Agenda in Massachusetts

The Commonwealth is on a path to end homelessness by 2013. A key part of succeeding on this path is system transformation of the existing Emergency Assistance (EA) program. The EA program, the primary system serving families at-risk of homelessness, is increasingly costly to support and has not been effective in eliminating homelessness.

Ending homelessness has required changes in how the Commonwealth responds to homeless individuals and families. At the heart of the change is a shift in the role of shelters to be used for emergency transitions and a move toward permanent housing for families. Moving from a shelter-based system to a system that focuses on permanent housing through prevention, diversion and rapidly re-housing families before they enter shelter requires patience and investment. It requires connecting families to community supports around finding and maintaining stable housing and improving economic situations so housing situations are sustainable over time. And it requires political will supported by a constituency for change.

Over the last several years, momentum has been gathering to transform the EA system. Steps in this system transformation process have included:

- The creation of the Special Commission Relative to Ending Homelessness in the Commonwealth. Convened by Governor Deval Patrick in 2007, the Special Commission was charged with developing recommendations for a plan to end homelessness in the Commonwealth and came up with a three-pronged focus: 1) prevention, 2) housing stabilization through housing placement, subsidy and production responses, and 3) sustainability through asset development supports.
- Establishment of ten flexible, coordinated Regional Networks to implement the Commission's recommendations.
- Contract procurement to assist with the transition from a shelter-based system to one based on housing solutions, offering an array of prevention, diversion and rapid rehousing options.
- Resources from newly created federal Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP), part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA) became available to leverage EA policy reform through prevention activities. Massachusetts received \$44.5 million in HPRP funding, including \$18.8 million for the state and \$26.1 million provided directly to local communities.
- Recognition that the current unprecedentedly high levels of spending on EA is not sustainable, and juxtaposed with the unprecedentedly low spending on affordable housing programs, the facts call out to provide a more flexible array of services.



- Pilot and Innovations Phase: The Commission set out a vision for transforming the way we respond to homelessness and recommended the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness (ICHH) oversee the execution of the this plan. The first phase, occurring over the last eighteen months, focused on testing and experimenting with flexible tools to learn the most cost-effective sustainable strategies to move families from shelters and to assist them in securing stable housing situations. The Commonwealth piloted several initiatives to learn about best practices for avoiding long-term homelessness.

As a result, Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and ICHH have made significant changes that have allowed increased spending on re-housing, prevention and diversion with positive outcomes for families. While FY 2010 was a year of extreme need, it was also a year of new resources and with flexible funding to be spent on prevention, diversion and rapid, re-housing, families had more choices in how to handle their housing crisis.

However, as these supplemental prevention and diversion resources “dry up,” more families have been entering the shelter system. Shelter entries for July and August 2010 are significantly higher than ever before and the diversion being conducted at the front door has been decreasing. Based on the way EA line item language and regulations are currently written, when funding tightens, prevention and diversion resources are cut first, and the system begins to shift back to shelter-focused model and families have fewer choices for assistance, creating an unsustainable and unproductive model of “shelter or nothing.”

The Commonwealth has taken action to move in the direction of better balancing emergency shelter, prevention, and diversion; however it will take legislative action to change the regulations to take this system change to the next level. The next big step is to create an EA Reform Advocacy Agenda that has broad support in the field.

It is not easy to transform a system during these times. We are living in a time of great economic challenges for families, providers and the Commonwealth. We are seeing unprecedented need at the shelter front door and a painful lack of affordable housing options. In FY 2010 32,790 families came to DHCD seeking assistance (screened at a TAO). 11,147 families filled out applications, and only 4,432 families were approved for shelter services. That leaves 28,366 families who are in housing crisis with no assistance from the EA system.

At the same time, it is unlikely that EA or other housing subsidy programs will receive increased funding in the near future. Funding of the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) has decreased drastically from over \$120 million in FY1990 to \$35.4 million in FY2010. Funding for Rental Assistance for Families in transitions has been decimated, cut from \$5.5 million to \$160,000 in FY2010.

Given these budgetary realities, critical questions include: How do we best proceed with EA reform advocacy? And specifically, what are the tradeoffs stakeholders are willing to make? (See Attachment B for full contextual information presented at the forums.)

### III. Agenda and Structure for Regional Forums and Stakeholder Survey

To that end, One Family, Inc. sponsored a series of 10 regional sessions across the Commonwealth reaching out to more than 175 stakeholders to determine the lessons learned from the last year of innovation and to explore consensus points for change in EA Policy and practice moving forward.

The ten forums took place from September 16 – October 28, 2010 and included:

Location	Forum Date	# of Participants
Merrimack Valley	September 16, 2010	20
Western Massachusetts	September 21, 2010	18
Boston	September 28, 2010	25
South Coast	September 30, 2010	18
Metro Boston	October 5, 2010	19
South Shore	October 7, 2010	15
North Shore	October 12, 2010	15
Worcester	October 19, 2010	12
Cape Cod & The Islands	October 26, 2010	22
Metrowest	October 28, 2010	11

Broad questions guiding the development of the EA Dialogue Forums included: What policy and practice changes do we still need to make so that more families are served more effectively and efficiently? Is there consensus on policy reforms? What are the preferred policy options that should become part of an EA reform agenda? What priorities and trade-offs are providers willing to make? (See Attachment A for full agenda and structure of forums.)

#### A. Driving Questions for Facilitated Dialogue

Driving questions for facilitated dialogue were two-fold:

*Driving Question #1: Based on upon your experience and learning over the last year, what might providers do to ensure that more families are appropriately served under EA, and fewer families get turned away without increasing the EA budget?*

*Driving Question #2: Staying within the EA budget, what specific EA changes do you think need to happen to achieve more positive outcomes for families?*

## B. Participant Surveys of Potential Changes in EA

Participant survey questions related to potential changes in EA were organized around the four categories for EA reform that emerged at the Spring Regional Convening, where there was broad general agreement on the following reform goals:

- **Focus** on housing stabilization not emergency shelter.
- **Reduce** numbers of families needing emergency shelter and time spent in shelter so can serve more families.
- **Customize** based on individualized need.
- **Integrate and Localize** to improve effectiveness by integrating EA service with the resources and relationships of regional networks.

Participants were asked to consider specific ideas in each goal area and rank their level of interest from “very interested”, to “moderately interested”, to “not interested”. 120 exit surveys were returned and analyzed. Ten specific reform ideas were tested for level of interest among the networks (Exhibit 1).

### Exhibit 1 Survey of Potential Changes in EA

#### Focus

1. Create new categories of EA eligibility that allow prevention and diversion resources to be used to prevent homelessness.
2. Conduct a marketing and messaging campaign to make it clear that you don't need to enter a shelter to get access to benefits.

#### Reduce

3. Allow shelter funding to be redirected to flexible funding for prevention, diversion and rapid re-housing.
4. Authorize payments to family members for housing relatives as an alternative to shelter.
5. Require shelter exit plans and implement them as part of triage process.
6. Incentivize provider best practices on reducing shelter time

#### Customize

7. Create a tiered eligibility system that gives the providers the flexibility to make choices about the service levels and types provided to families.

#### Integrate and Localize

8. Allow local networks to make decision about placement of EA eligible families in shelters,
9. Continue funding for regional coordinators and regional infrastructure.
10. Fast track state housing production funds for permanent supportive housing.

## IV. Findings: An Appetite for Change

Both the regional dialogues and the exit survey provide evidence that there is indeed an appetite for change coupled with a sense of urgency among key stakeholders.

### A. EA Policy Reform

*Driving Question #1: Based on upon your experience and learning over the last year, what might providers do to ensure that more families are appropriately served under EA, and fewer families get turned away without increasing the EA budget?*

When asked this question in the structured dialogue, all 10 regional networks demonstrated an interest in and commitment to change and to moving from a predominantly shelter-based system to a housing-based system. Though networks differed in how they prioritized changes and what they thought would facilitate and hinder change, there was broad general agreement in increasing prevention, diversion, and housing stabilization services. Participants largely appeared to have made the paradigm shift in thinking about EA. As one participant stated, *"We need to change the thrust of EA from a guarantee of shelter to a guarantee of some kind of housing assistance."* Another participant stated, *"Already, the system is not as shelter-focused as it used be. The shift is happening. We could do this within the EA budget. We just need to shift resources and do more collaboration and coordination."*

In terms of how to go about continuing the change process, regional networks suggested EA policy reforms, as well as changes in practice and in agency and system culture, to continue the momentum toward a new housing-focused vision for the EA system. There was consensus across the ten regional networks on the following:

- **Redirect allocation of EA funds toward flexible funding for prevention, diversion and stabilization services.** There was broad consensus across the regional networks in the need to redirect EA funding toward prevention, diversion and stabilization services.
- **Create calibrated or tiered system: Increase flexibility in determining both eligibility and service options based on family needs, barriers and strengths.** There was broad agreement that responses should be individualized, community-based and provide a variety of options for assistance rather than the either-or / shelter or no shelter model. Instead, participants discussed ideas such as multiple levels of eligibility with different allotments of services like fuel assistance.
- **Change shelter role to triage model with shortened length of stays linked to family participation and accountability.** For complex families with multiple barriers to self-sufficiency who require longer stays, shelter

stays should be connected to supportive services such as mental health, DV, and workforce development.

- **Increase autonomy and decision making at regional and local levels** so that responses can be individualized based on family needs, barriers and strengths and within context of local circumstances. There was significant interest in giving regional networks more authority to create continuum of care where funding comes into continuum of care and decisions are made at the community-level about how much funding is directed toward prevention versus toward shelter. To that end, participants discussed the importance of creating incentives that encourage providers to coordinate services and invest in prevention and stabilization and for clients to be accountable.

## **B. Changes in Practice and Culture**

In addition to the consensus on specific EA reforms, regional networks shared common ground on their ideas for changes in practice and the changes in agency and system culture necessary to ensure the success of policy reforms and overall system change efforts. Practice and culture changes fell into the following four categories:

- **Comprehensive Assessment and Triage:** Every regional network brought up the importance of reforming and rethinking assessment and intake processes and moving toward a triage model for most effectively and efficiently serving families in need. Specific practice change ideas included, more in-depth and comprehensive assessment of family needs, barriers, and strengths to determine most effective and efficient mix of service options; specific protocols for assessing high risk families; and clearer messages to clients regarding client responsibilities, eligibility, and services offered.
- **Empowerment of Families and Self-Sufficiency Planning:** Several networks focused on the importance of taking a holistic, family-centered approach, which included the following elements: take time to listen and get to “know” family and family story; focus on family strengths and tap into family’s natural support networks; create self-sufficiency opportunities, in particularly money management and life skills development; be respectful and attend to issues of diversity; increase family awareness and education regarding rights, regulations, options and how to access services; train volunteers to serve as advocates for homeless families one-on-one; and increase provider presence at DHCD to inform families. These discussions centered around the importance of understanding and accepting that vulnerable families require long-term supports that include affordable housing, education, job training, childcare, mental health and other supportive services. Effective and sustainable system reform requires true collaboration with families, clear self-sufficiency plans, and changes in a system culture that has unintentionally provided incentives for stagnation or failure.

- **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Across the board, regional networks discussed the importance of partnerships and collaboration at multiple levels to improve EA services, increase housing options, more effectively coordinate services, improve referral system for the main issues related to permanent housing solutions, create multiple entry points, and share best practices. Specific ideas about the role of partnerships included: working with landlords and housing authority to improve prevention and stabilization efforts; creating partnerships with community-based organizations, faith-based organizations and other social service agencies to improve referral for families and better matching of services to family needs, barriers and strengths; explicitly working with other state agencies and providers working with families to more effectively and efficiently serve families; developing better connections with education, training and workforce development system to increase opportunities for families; and creating innovative partnerships with local businesses, areas colleges, and others.
- **Improvements in communication and data management** to more effectively track families and their needs, strengths and barriers, leverage funding between organizations, and reduce agency redundancy and turf issues. Specific ideas included: provide data bank for better communication regarding community resources and agencies; collect baseline information on all families, even if they do not apply so there is more data on who they are and what they need; develop better communication between DHCD and DTA; increase communication with DHCD homeless coordinators; and increase communication with school systems.

### C. Consensus on a Reform Agenda with Broad Buy-in and Commitment from the Field

*Driving Question #2: Staying within the EA budget, what specific EA changes do you think need to happen to achieve more positive outcomes for families?*

In the second half of the structured dialogue, participants were asked to determine what specific EA changes needed to happen across an array of service strategies to achieve more positive outcomes for families and move toward a transformed EA system based on permanent housing solutions. Based on a synthesis of the results of this process, there was again broad consensus on EA policy reforms focused on:

- Reallocating existing EA funds toward prevention and diversion
- Increasing flexibility in funding, eligibility, and packaging of service options
- Reducing utilization of shelters and motels

The following is a summary of the specific reforms by service strategy. For each strategy listed (prevention, diversion, etc.), the list of bulleted change ideas were explicitly highlighted and discussed by four or more networks.



- **Reallocating Existing EA Funds Toward Prevention and Diversion**

As part of the discussions of specific EA changes that needed to happen to shift toward prevention and diversion, regional networks suggested the following specific changes in practice: developing risk criteria for early intervention and early warning system for vulnerable families; investing in intensive case management for high risk and young adult families; utilizing triage system to determine most effective use of prevention and diversion as strategy; funding direct service prevention staff and outreach teams to prevent homelessness; providing clearer pathways to housing, education and jobs; following up with families that have been diverted; and better and earlier education of clients regarding the advantages of electing diversion over shelter.

Specific EA reforms aimed at shifting resources toward prevention and diversion included the following:

#### Prevention

- Reallocate funding to prevention
  - From EA shelter and motels
  - From all state agencies
- Shift EA dollars to invest in case management, follow up and using data for decision making to determine when prevention works and for whom
- Allow more flexible use of EA dollars to fund legal and mediation services
- Invest in rental arrearage and forward funding for arrearage as EA benefit

#### Diversion

- Utilize existing EA dollars to re-fund diversion
- Increase flexibility of funding, eligibility and packaging
  - Use diversion earlier in the process before damaged relationship with landlord
  - Use funding in different ways based on family needs and local circumstances
  - Family empowerment and decision making in designing diversion package
  - Expand eligibility for non-EA eligible families
- Allow families to be eligible for diversion before eviction when it is too late.
- To avoid families cycling back in: provide longer time period of financial assistance and gradually taper families off assistance as income increases and other supports are in place



- **Increasing Flexibility in Funding, Eligibility and Packaging of Services**

#### Short-term Rental Assistance

A key element to the success of EA reforms related to short-term rental assistance is better analysis and targeting of resources based on likeliness of sustainability. Several networks discussed targeting short-term rental assistance to families experiencing episodic homelessness and to those with stronger work histories and higher education levels. Coupled with this were conversations about the importance of creating rental assistance policies that reflect and accept the fact that some families will need long-term supportive housing and some will cycle back into the system before achieving sustainable permanent housing. Specific EA reforms cited included:

- Reallocate EA funds to flexible short term rental assistance
- Set standards for receiving, maintaining and extending rental assistance/ Contingent on family participation and accountability
- Flexibility is crucial to effectiveness:
  - Tailor package to fit family needs.
  - Consider sliding scale for families
  - Consider longer length but with increased family contributions over time
  - Flexibility re: extensions based on individual family needs and plan
- Create plan for sustainability: Tie to income enhancement activities and services
  - Workforce development
  - Education
  - Employment
- Move toward longer term rental assistance with limitations rather than short-term assistance so that rental assistance balances family needs with accountability.

#### Housing Stabilization

Several networks discussed the need to combine EA reforms in this area with making shifts in staffing from shelter to stabilization with a focus on advocacy and empowerment, investing in training staff and lowering case loads, linking stabilization to prevention and diversion activities, and engaging in eviction prevention through developing relationships with landlords, developing tenant skills and assisting with rental and rental arrearage negotiation. Specific EA reforms cited included:

- Increase flexible funding to providers for stabilization and allow plans to be individualized and adjustable based on comprehensive assessment.
- Focus on package of services necessary for long-term self-sufficiency of family, including workforce development, education, access to jobs, community resources, childcare, and other services re: mental health, physical health, addiction, DV, etc.
- Provide ongoing financial assistance including credit counseling, monthly review of family budget and stringent spending guidelines

*Center for Youth and Communities, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management*

## Re-housing Assistance

When discussing re-housing assistance, several networks focused on the need to improve coordination with other systems to increase long-term self-sufficiency of families and to take into account geographic considerations by striving to keep families local. Many networks were clear that re-housing assistance must be packaged with sets of services families needed for long-term success, including workforce development, education, lifeskills development, mental health, DV, and childcare. Specific EA reforms cited included:

- Create calibrated, tiered system of assistance: Increase flexibility of assistance based on comprehensive assessment and continuum of options.
  - Shift to more long-term assistance (e.g. MRVP).
  - Invest in intensive case management and stabilization services once housed.
  - Increase tenant accountability (consider up to 30% income toward housing, with budgeting and savings expectations).
- **Reducing Use of Shelters and Motels**  
Many networks noted that there was a lack of focus on shelters and motels as the way to most effectively and efficiently assist families experiencing homelessness. In many cases, the focus of discussions was on reducing reliance on shelters and ensuring comprehensive assessment at intake to increase diversion and reduce length of stay. In addition, participants discussed increasing accountability and participation for families and increasing accountability of providers, in particular, oversight and accountability of motels, specifically around health and safety.

Specific EA reforms cited included:

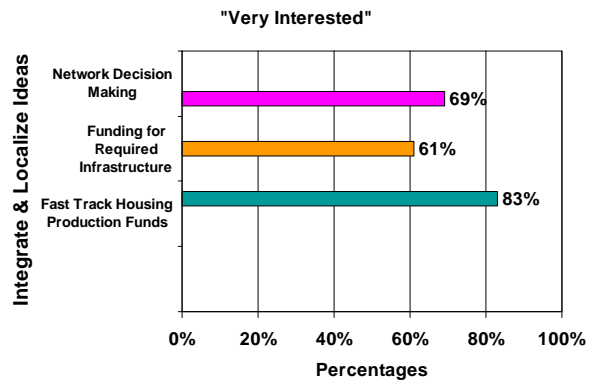
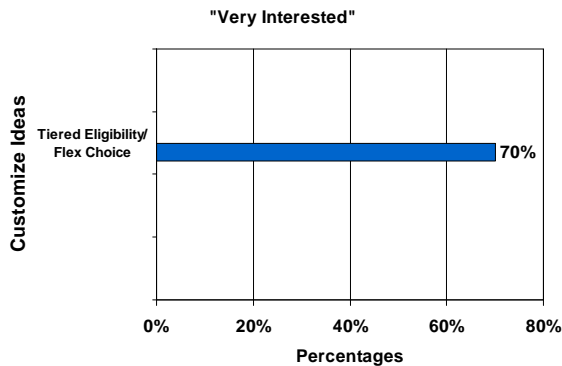
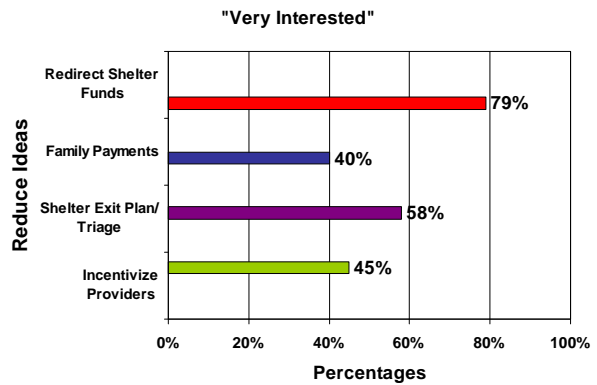
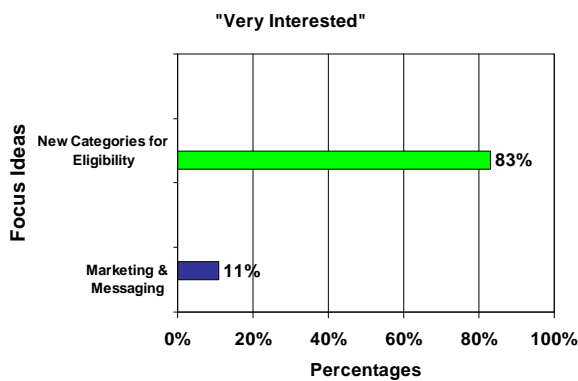
### Shelter

- Reduce use of shelters with transition plan for changing the system
- While family in shelter, invest more resources in case management, that includes focus on the following:
  - Post-placement lifeskills
  - Income maximization
  - Tenant readiness curriculum
  - Financial education, particularly budgeting and savings
- Limit length of stay or numbers of times a family can enter
- Additional ideas where there was less clear consensus:
  - Rethink eligibility in terms of assets (i.e. expect family to sell a moderately valuable car before being eligible for shelter)
  - Increase family accountability and independence
  - Residency requirements
  - Keep families local

Motels

- Limit length of stay (e.g. 2 week diversion) and only as last resort
  - Eliminate motels and reallocate funding to prevention, diversion, housing search, stabilization, or to scattered sites when necessary.
- (See Attachment B for a cross regional analysis of themes.)

The appetite for change was further supported by anonymous, individual participant exit surveys from the forums. Based on the results of the exit survey, there again was broad consensus for change across an array of EA reforms. The bar graphs below indicate the percentages of cross network stakeholders who ranked their support for the specific reform ideas as “very interested”.



Highlights:

Eighty-three percent of participants surveyed were very interested and only two percent were not interested in the following EA policy reforms:

- **Integrate and Localize:** Fast track state housing production funds for permanent supporting housing and
- **Focus:** Create new categories of EA eligibility that allow prevention and diversion resources to be used to prevent homelessness.

There was also broad consensus for several additional EA reforms, including:

- **Reduce:** Allowing shelter funding to be redirected to flexible funding for prevention, diversion and rapid re-housing (79% very interested, 5% not interested),
- **Customize:** Create a tiered eligibility system that gives the providers the flexibility to make choices about the service levels and types provided to families (69% very interested, 9% not interested),
- **Integrate and Localize:** Allow local networks to make decisions about placement of EA eligible families in shelters (69% very interested, 5% not interested), and
- **Reduce:** Require shelter exit plans and implement them as part of triage process (61% very interested, 5% not interested).

With the exception of the reform: *Focus: Conduct a marketing and messaging campaign*, each regional network had a significant majority of respondents note that they were either very interested or moderately interested in each specific EA reform, confirming a clear mandate from the field for further EA policy reform. (See Attachment D for cross regional survey results.)

## V. Elements for Success of EA Reform

All of the Regional Networks spent time discussing what would facilitate and hinder the success of system change efforts. There was agreement about critical success factors including the following:

### A. Create Paradigm Shifts about What EA Is and What It Is Not

Overall, participants agreed that there has been a “mission creep” with EA. One participant asked, “What is EA? Is it everything for all? Or emergency temporary shelter for a family who does not have a place for the night?” Participants discussed the fact that EA has come to mean a guarantee of shelter and that this has become costly. Another participant asked, “*Can we move from this EA paradigm of a guarantee of shelter to a new paradigm where EA is seen as emergency temporary shelter for families who do not have a place for night and that EA is a guarantee not of long-term shelter but of some kind of emergency help which varies based on family need.*” Another participant wondered, “*Can we get back to the original mission of EA to help families move into self sufficiency and change the focus from shelter to housing assistance.*” Participants at the ten forums, by and large, had made this paradigm shift, and they were encouraging efforts to continue creating this mind-set change at several levels:

- **Legislators/ Administration:** Several participants believed that shelter is an easy out for the legislature and administration because it is emergency and temporary rather than having to admit the larger issue: that people are poor and need long-term solution that are going to cost money. These participants were calling for advocacy efforts aimed at shifting the mindset of legislators to help them understand that homelessness is not temporary for

*Center for Youth and Communities, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management*

many of the families the EA systems serves; it is a long-term issue with multiple barriers to permanent, sustainable housing solutions. Several networks also discussed the need for data that demonstrated the outcomes, in terms of cost savings and evidence of stabilized families, to convince policymakers to make the EA reforms.

- **Providers:** Though all networks expressed an interest in investing in prevention and understood the benefits for families and in terms of cost savings, several networks expressed concerns about the shift and the mind-set changes that needed to happen. One provider put it this way: *“We need to shift our own mentality as well. Will we stand up and say we do not want \$20 million more for shelters? Will we say instead that we want it for permanent housing and rental assistance? We, as advocates, have not gotten to the point that we will say this.”*

Related to this, several networks spoke candidly about providers’ fear as an obstacle to reforming EA. Fears cited included the fear of repercussions for taking risks be too innovative, fears of not having the skills and knowledge to carry out the change, and fears that families will fall through the cracks and suffer if the changes are made too rapidly and without thinking through the consequences.

- **Other Systems:** A number of participants also expressed the importance of other systems understanding the role and place of EA, as well as the role and place of other systems in assisting homeless families to facilitate more effective coordination and collaboration across systems that may already be serving EA families in other areas.
- **Families:** Several networks discussed client views of EA as an obstacle to EA reform. According to some participants, clients mistakenly believe that shelter *“is the way to permanent housing (Section 8 housing) and other long-term supports”* and may be driven to use shelters as a door opener for a broad array of services. These participants advocate for life skills and budget training for clients to broaden their understanding of how to access appropriate services.

## **B. Move toward Systems Approach for Addressing Homelessness of Which EA Is One Part**

Most networks discussed the fact that EA reforms would not result in long-term, sustainable and significant change under the current silo approach to social services, where agencies provide services in fragmented and disjointed ways. The result is that some families get lost in the system and others cycle through EA again and again because longer-term barriers to self-sufficiency have not been addressed effectively or in a coordinated way. Many of the families that cycle through the EA system have long-term self-sufficiency issues that if not addressed will slow the pace of change and the effectiveness of reforms made.

Several networks talked about using EA System as a leveraging point for clients to apply for job training or education options or to secure other supportive services that would assist families in maximizing income in order to sustain market rents. Building on this, participants discussed the need for other systems to have requirements to make homes families a priority in their system – something that several participants did not believe was currently the case.

Specific ideas that came up as part of these discussions included:

- Recognize that EA is part of DHCD, which has additional state and local housing initiatives that need to be linked with EA.
- Conduct comprehensive resource mapping process to identify all sources of services provided and funding drawn on for these families beyond EA to more effectively coordinate funding and services.
- Create incentives and policies to encourage collaboration and team approaches where EA is one piece of the puzzle surrounding families so that different agencies come together around the table with specific expertise and with a more holistic picture of the families being served.
- Develop policies that encourage information sharing among providers and agencies working with families to improve assessment of family strengths, needs and barriers.
- Create early warning system. Identify risk factors for families at higher risk for homelessness and address issues earlier before point of crisis.
- Co-locate resources and services from different systems, including EA.
- Invest more in MRVP: funding dropped from 130 to 30 million over 10 years. This was a precipitous drop and likely impacted numbers of homeless families at EA front door.
- Restore RAFT and utility bill assistance. Rent arrearage does work and we need to ramp up political pressure to fund prevention so it does not always come out of EA budget and yet will help families who are EA eligible.

### **C. Invest in Training and Capacity Building for Shelter Workers and Other EA-Related Staff**

There was general consensus that another critical success factor is long-term investment in building the skills and capacity of shelter workers and other EA-related staff. Specific ideas included the following:

- Reinvent role of shelter providers to focus more on housing stabilization out in community at subsidized housing places where families will be.
- Provide frontline practitioners with the tools to work on underlying issues that have contributed to homelessness.
- Consider licensing or certification process for shelter workers, case managers, etc.
- Provide training and education related to trauma, working with trauma survivors and providing trauma-informed care and services.
- Increase technical skills regarding knowledge of client rights, EA rules and regulations and options.
- Provide training on alternative resources that supplement the budget.
- Provide training in how to give clear, consistent information to families early in process so they understand how they can be served and what is possible.

*Center for Youth and Communities, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management*



Underlying these discussions was the beginnings of a vision for investing in the growth and development of the people working with families experiencing homelessness. This investment would then result in a cadre of change-maker practitioners with the vision, political and technical skills to effect and manage change and maximize impact of EA reforms.

#### **D. Develop Individualized Approaches for Different Levels of Need**

Many networks also discussed the need to develop individualized approaches for different levels of need and for families sharing certain common characteristics, such as intimate partner violence or families living with addiction. One specific program idea that sparked particular interest in several networks was the creation of a Young Families Program targeted to 18-21 year old population. Participants thought this program could work with young heads on households in more structured ways to assist them in figuring out next steps to self-sufficiency whether that be college, job training, mentoring. Participants saw the need for a Young Families program that was age and stage appropriate, dealt with the reality of being young with children and the critical need for childcare, and that addressed intergenerational experience of homelessness.

### **VI. Obstacles**

Many networks had passionate discussions about some of the systemic issues and obstacles to change and to the successful prevention of homelessness in our society. The following highlights participant voices around some of these important challenges to consider.

#### **A. Societal Values and Views**

Several networks engaged in passionate and brave discussions about societal views and values about the role of social welfare, the impact of our current system on vulnerable families, and the larger issues underlying homelessness. Participants had the following to say:

*"We need to deal with bigger issues underlying the problem of homelessness such as the lack of affordable housing, lack of jobs, and lack of jobs with living wages."*

*"All we are doing is band aids. We are addressing immediate needs in reactionary way and not the big picture."*

*"EA is mirroring what is going on in society right now. There are no safety nets for families with barriers to self-sufficiency."*

*"EA is a barometer of larger issues. It points to the fact that we are a reactionary society. Instead of looking at the underlying factors and the root causes, people want easy solutions. We have to change the whole system. It's bigger than just EA."*

**Center for Youth and Communities, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management**



## **B. Barriers to Long-term Self-Sufficiency for Many Families**

Participants also continued to come back to the long-term barriers to self-sufficiency that many families in the EA system face. Many networks talked about the reality of economics. One had this to say, *"We need to face reality. Many family incomes are too low and so families can not be stabilized in housing without rental vouchers and housing assistance."* Another stated in frustration, *"Do the math: the notion that a family can make enough money to pay the market rate in Massachusetts (about \$54,000 on the North Shore) is unreasonable. A single mother who does not have a high school diploma, has never really had a job, and has limited English cannot possibly earn this amount even if I secured 6 months of training and education for her."*

Another participant brought to the surface the often hidden issue of trauma and its impact on a family's ability to become self-sufficient, *"The common denominator for many of these families is trauma and lack of preparedness. This gets in the way and overwhelms families and their ability to make it over the long-term."*

Several networks also talked about the need to make long-term commitments to complex families facing multiple barriers. One participant explained, *"We need to make a multi-year commitment to many of these families in order to give them tools to be able to sustain market rate rents. Young families need education and skills to have wages to do this over long-term, and this takes time."*

## **C. Resource Constraints and Fragmented Systems**

Several participants expressed frustration with the focus on the EA system versus taking a cross-system approach to homelessness. These participants were skeptical that real and sustainable change would happen within context of current resource-constrained environment. One participant stated, *"A question is how to lower shelter numbers without leaving families still in trouble. Diversion should not be crumbs. It is disingenuous because it makes our numbers look better since alternatives to shelter are found for people, but is it sustainable? We need adequate stabilization with these approaches."* Another participant had this to say, *"There is an elephant in the room: We need to create more affordable housing and need to involve housing authorities. Most of this stuff needs funding. There comes a time that you can no longer do more with less. We will reach a point where we will need to increase funding."*

Participants also discussed the challenge of creating change within the context of fragmented and inadequate systems. One participant explained, *"One of the challenges is balancing re-tooling EA versus bigger changes that will make a real difference in how many families we are serving. We need to move beyond current EA budget if we are going to really change things. It is also about coordination and collaboration."* Another participant stated the problem this way, *"Without adequate housing resources in other programs, EA is going to continue to grow. This is a tough conversation to have. EA is at the center of a lot of broken systems that need to be changed and work differently."*

## D. Top-Down Policy Decision Making and Political Will

In talking about trade-offs necessary for EA system reform, several networks brought up political will as an obstacle to change. One participant put it this way, *“The trade-offs are political ones. Political will is part of this and it’s missing.”*

Another participant highlighted why it is hard to sustain political will, as well as garner momentum and support for system change: *“No one thinks shelters are a good or humane place for people, and yet shelters still exist. This points to how difficult it is to change not just the EA system but other support systems surrounding these families and how difficult it is to provide coordinated services based on inter-agency collaboration.”*

Several participants spoke with frustration and sadness about the impact policies have on families when policies are not thought through, and frontline workers are not part of the decision making process. One participant felt that DHCD does not have a full enough understanding of the population EA serves. She stated, *“Decisions and policies seem to be made in a vacuum without understanding what families need or what the impact or unintended consequences of the policies might be on families. We are watching what these policies do to people. We provide little money for the most vulnerable populations and then make insane rules for using it.”*

Another participant highlighted the specific impact of childcare policies on families, *“Thought is not put into how these policies affect families. The daycare voucher policy makes it difficult for clients to get jobs because they need the position first before vouchers are released. We should give them vouchers if they can prove they are actively job searching or create drop off center for kids. Because employers don’t want to wait until the clients gets the vouchers, so families go to shelters to get services because they can’t make it work otherwise.”*

## E. Rushing System Change and Not Reinvesting Savings in the New Infrastructure

Though there was broad-based interest in investing more resources toward prevention and housing-based solutions, several networks did express some targeted concerns about how this shift in resources from shelters to prevention happens. Three networks expressed concern that the shift may need to happen over a period of years and that attention needs to be paid to what the transition period will look like. One participant explained, *“A concern is that the cuts will happen too soon in shelters before we have resources to support families through long-term affordable housing. We are already turning 75% away. We shouldn’t be rushing to use EA money for other things until we have data and a plan and are prepared.”*

Another participant stated, *“We need a conversion strategy to move from shelters to permanent housing. For instance we can do 72 hour assessment and have smaller congregates and more flexible housing assistance packet with two to three years of subsidies with stabilization supports.”*

Additionally, these networks discussed the fact that transformation can't happen without investment in new infrastructure, and they had concerns this reinvestment would not happen in the way it needed to and would lead to families cycling back into the system and an increase in homelessness rather than its prevention.

# **Attachment A**

## **Annotated Agenda & Structure for EA Regional Forums**

*Center for Youth and Communities, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management*



# ATTACHMENT A: Annotated Agenda & Structure for EA Regional Forums

## Family Homelessness Emergency Assistance (EA) Regional Dialogue Sessions/ Facilitated Forums

### Welcomes/Opening Remarks/Introductions

- Emily's welcomes and opening remarks.
- Brandeis introductions (Chris and Lisa describing the role of Brandeis as objective facilitators, moderators, and recorder/documenters. This is one of ten similar sessions that will be held around the state over the next 2 months. Brandeis will be synthesizing your input, along with that of other people such as yourselves, to ultimately produce a report that summarizes, "Here's what people close to the homelessness issue have to say.").
- Participants briefly introduce themselves with names, organizations, and roles/positions (occurs when all participants have arrived).

### Presentation of Context for the Work Ahead: (Emily)

- We're all here to explore new and better ways to address family homelessness because of our shared values and commitment to ending family homelessness in the Commonwealth.
- We hope that this will be a special opportunity for you to contribute your wisdom in a way that, however brief, will ultimately be heard by key decision makers.
- Through this forum we are seeking your input regarding how Massachusetts might move forward in the future with policies, legislation, and approaches addressing homelessness.
- We want to focus on EA and to make recommendations that live within its budget.
- Powerpoint presentation showing background and context -- the status of homelessness and Massachusetts' response to it over the last year.
  - offering statistics and context necessary to frame this session;
  - summarizing some results for the past year and its pilots, lengths of stay data, what happens when diversion and prevention resources are not available, uptake in motel numbers, what the federal principle and blueprint will be going forward, etc.

### Assumptions and Givens (Chris)

- Families seeking EA services are all different, and have varying strengths and needs.
- For too many families, our current systems do not regularly achieve optimal outcomes.
- We know that resources addressing homelessness, always limited, are not likely to increase.
- We know that change is inevitable, and may at times be uncomfortable for you and your organizations.

### Ground-Rules For The Session (Chris)

- Please speak up if there is terminology or an acronym that you do not understand.
- Please listen and be open to what you hear from others.
- Please seek the high ground.
- Please use your passion intelligently.
- Please consider that what we talk about here might prove perhaps to be a "heads-up" for where your organization might wish to go in the future as it adapts to new realities.
- One parameter for today's discussion is that we will strive to stay within the EA budget.
- If difficulties or bottlenecks arise during the session, the facilitator will make executive decisions about how to proceed.
- Please keep in mind that it's all about people and families. How we can do our best to meet their needs in times of reduced resources and significant change?

## **Session Structure** (Chris)

We have three segments of work that we'll be tackling today in our limited time:

- Based upon your experiences and learning over the past year or so, what might providers do to ensure that more families are appropriately served under EA, and fewer families get turned away, without increasing the EA budget?
- Staying within the EA budget, what specific EA changes do you think need to happen to achieve more positive outcomes for families?
- What immediate steps might be taken by those present here, and by others, to move toward what EA should be?

### **Issue #1: Based upon your experiences and learning over the past year or so, what might providers do to ensure that more families are appropriately served under EA, and fewer families get turned away, without increasing the EA budget?** (Chris)

Prompts:

- What do you already do that works very effectively and efficiently?
- What have you planned to do to increase effectiveness and efficiency?
- What other steps to improve effectiveness and efficiency do you think might be worth investigating?

### **Issue #2: Staying within the EA budget, what specific EA changes do you think need to happen to achieve more positive outcomes for families?** (Chris)

Within the realms of:

- Prevention
- Diversion
- Shelter
- Motels
- Re-Housing Assistance
- Short-Term Subsidies
- Other Interventions (What?)

### **Issue #3: How might Complex Change be stimulated and managed?** (Chris)

- Overview of *Managing Complex Change Framework*: a model for thinking about future MA approaches to homelessness.
- General facilitated discussion: *What* key immediate next steps by those in the room, advocates, or others need to happen to make possible the ideas and recommendations stated here?

## **Session close-out**

- Thanks to all who gave their time. (Chris)
- Request for participants to complete a **post-session survey**. (Chris + Emily)

# Attachment B

## Introductory Slides/Context for EA Reform Dialogue



# ATTACHMENT B: Introductory Slides / Context for EA Reform Dialogue

**EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE REFORM DIALOGUE SESSION**

Facilitated by Brandeis University  
Sponsored by One Family, Inc.

## Context for the Dialogue: Your Achievements and Learnings

Family shelter diversion and prevention	Total to Date (Sept 2009 - Aug 2010)			
	Region	Total Diversion (ICHH + other resources)	Total Prevention (ICHH + other resources)	Prevention referrals from DHCD
	Boston	163	2659	209
	Cape and Islands	37	1959	98
	Merrimack Valley	58	150	49
	Metro Boston	128	1397	204
	Metro West	47	154	55
	North Shore	21	949	59
	South Coast	33	426	32
	South Shore	85	351	133
	Western Mass	160	2144	157
	Worcester	107	694	78
	State Total*	839	10883	1074

## Context for the Dialogue

- One Family is interested in exploring ways of improving the Emergency Assistance (EA) program so that it is able to serve more families in need and more effectively prevent and end homelessness for families in Massachusetts.
- We are interested in your thoughts and perspectives on creating a stronger more flexible EA systems that better meets the needs of the families we advocate for and serve.

## Budget Context for the Dialogue

- We are living in hard economic times for families and for the Commonwealth.
  - It is unlikely that EA or other housing subsidy programs will receive increased funding in the near future.
  - Funding for the Massachusetts Rental Vouch Program (MRVP) has decreased drastically from over \$120 million in FY1990 to \$35.4 million in FY 2010.
  - Funding for Rental Assistance for Families in Transition has been decimated. RAFT funding was cut from \$5.5 million in FY 2010 to \$160,000 in FY 2010.
- Given these budgetary realities One Family is interested in exploring, with you, how the EA program can be reformed within its FY 2010 budget of \$91,605,510 (nearly \$150 million after supplemental budgets) to serve more families in need and serve them more effectively.

## Overview of the Current EA System

In FY 2010 32,790 families came to DHCD seeking assistance (screened at a TAO), 11,147 families filled out applications, and only 4,432 families were approved for shelter services. **That leaves 28,366 families who are in a housing crisis with no assistance from the EA system.**

- We would like to explore how EA could serve more of these families within the current budget.

## Overview of the Current EA System: What EA Funds and Does Not Fund

- EA is the state program that funds shelter services for homeless families
- FY 2010 Spending = \$151 million
- FY 2011 Appropriation = \$115 million

**EA Currently Funds:**

- Family shelter and motels
- Transitional housing
- Short-term housing assistance
- Rapid re-housing
- Limited shelter diversion (up to 3 months of rent)

All for families with incomes at or below 115% of the federal poverty level

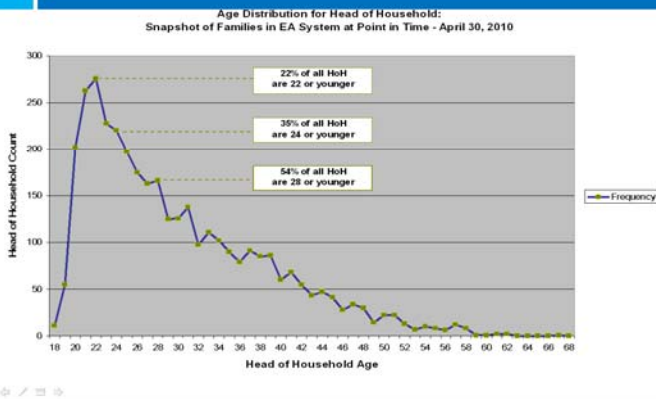
**EA Currently Does Not:**

- Provide prevention services
- Serve any families above 115% of poverty even if they are in a housing crisis
- Provide flexible assistance
- Triage families based on need
- Provide families an alternative to shelter

## Families Currently in the EA System

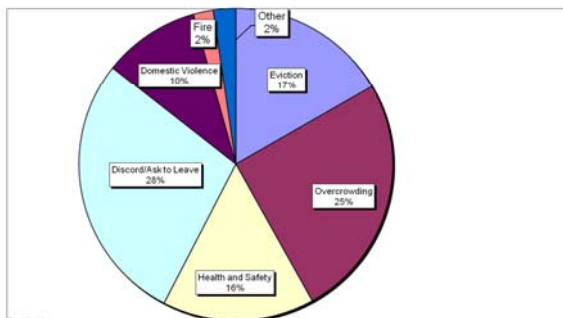
- 39% of families in shelters and motels are currently placed outside of the catchment area of their home DTA office
- 10% of the current EA families are from out of state
- Average Family Size is 2.99
- Average Age of Head of Household is 30.0, although 35% of families are headed by a parent 24 years old or younger
- 92.46% of families are headed by a female head of household
- The average monthly income for families in EA is **\$696.37**

## Families Currently in the EA System



## Families Currently in the EA System

- Reasons for shelter utilization:



## Families Exiting the Shelter System

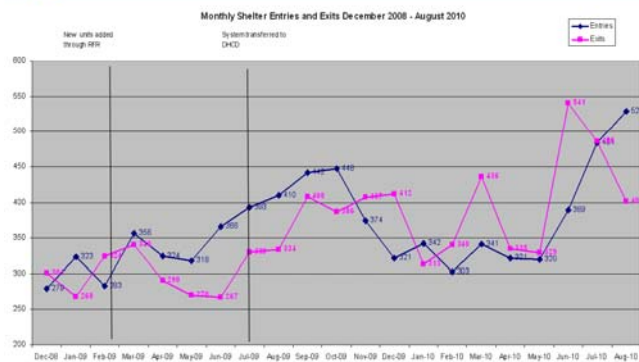
Shelter Exit Reason	% of All Families
Permanent placement in subsidized housing	26%
Abandoned placement after stay	6%
Permanent placement in unsubsidized housing (flex funds)	21%
Terminated from EA	8%
Did not go to shelter once placed	27%
Moved to Non EA Shelter/Shelter Interruption	3%
Shared Housing	2%
Other/Missing	8%
<b>Total Exits</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Overview of the Current EA System

Over the past year DHCD and the ICHH have made many changes in the form of pilots and initiatives.

- Creation of the flexible funding program
- Increased prevention and diversion activities (ICHH, DHCD, HPRP)
- DCF Health and Safety Assessments

## Overview of the Current EA System

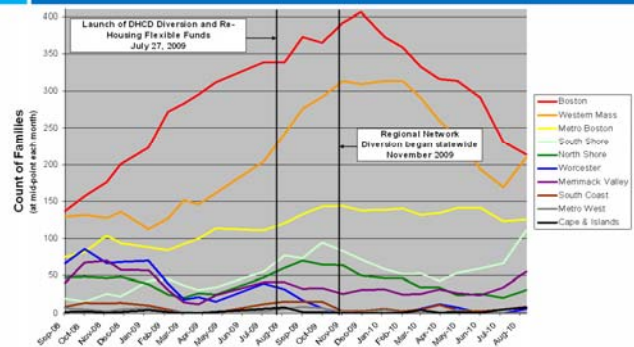


## Shelter and Motels

Usage by Shelter Type	% of Total Usage	Contracted Units	Average LOS*	Average Daily Rate	Average Cost Per Family
Shelter (Congregate and Scattered)	70.45%	2017	253	\$117	\$29,601
Hotel/Motel	23.58%		121	\$80	\$9,680
Substance Abuse	1.92%	55	241	\$157	\$37,837

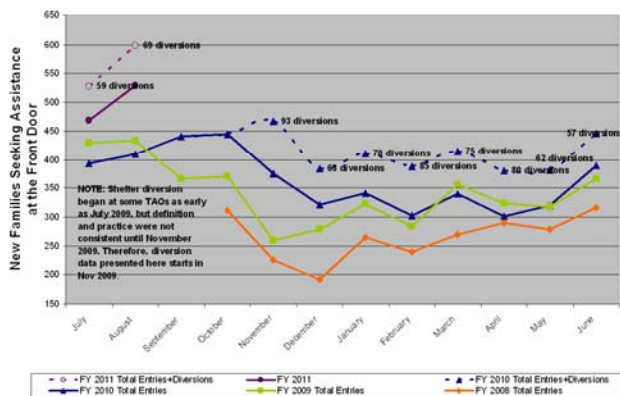
## Motels

Families Sheltered in Motels: Census by Region



## FY 2011: Increases in Entries as Diversion Activities Shrink

Family Shelter Entries by Fiscal Year



## The New Federal Direction: HEARTH

The Homelessness Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act was enacted on May 20, 2009.

The legislation:

- ▢ Sets ambitious goals for reducing the length of time people are homeless.
- ▢ Significantly increases resources for prevention and rapid re-housing.
- ▢ Continues to provide incentives for developing permanent supportive housing.

The changes made by the HEARTH Act will begin to take effect with the programs that are funded by the FY 2011 round of Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG, formerly the Emergency Shelter Grants) and the FY 2011 NOFA, which will probably be released sometime in mid-2011.

## Where Do We Want EA To Go?

- ▢ We hope that today we can explore ways to reform the EA policy so that families have more choices, receive better services, and have better housing outcomes.
- ▢ We have heard providers and advocates call for greater housing supports for families and we hope that today's session will help us all figure out how EA can better function so that families can receive these types of housing supports.

# **Attachment C**

## **Cross Regional Themes from EA Forums: Questions 1 and 2 Synthesis**

*Center for Youth and Communities, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management*



**ATTACHMENT C: Cross Regional Themes from EA Forums: Questions 1 and 2 Synthesis**

**Driving Question #1:**

**Based upon your experience and learning over the last year or so, what might providers do to ensure that more families are appropriately served under EA, and fewer families get turned away, without increasing the EA budget?**

<b>Merrimack Valley</b>	<b>Western Mass</b>	<b>Boston</b>	<b>South Coast</b>	<b>Metro Boston</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved Assessment and Triage</li> <li>• Housing Stabilization Services</li> <li>• Prevention and Outreach</li> <li>• Regulation Changes</li> <li>• Specific Shelter Programming</li> <li>• Affordable Housing with supportive services</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Management System Changes</li> <li>• Regulation/ Legislative Change</li> <li>• Support Services</li> <li>• Prevention (innovative)</li> <li>• Work towards moving families out of poverty</li> <li>• Coordination/ Collaboration</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Access to other supportive services</li> <li>• Keeping Families Housed</li> <li>• Housing-based Solutions</li> <li>• Non-EA eligibility</li> <li>• True partnerships with families</li> <li>• Assessment</li> <li>• Informed, educated families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving Communication</li> <li>• Clarify Eligibility</li> <li>• Effective triage/assessment</li> <li>• Self sufficiency supports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prevention</li> <li>• Better Assessment and Triage</li> <li>• Comprehensive Consumer Education</li> <li>• Eligibility Reform</li> <li>• Related Benefits</li> <li>• Collaborations</li> <li>• Shared Housing Flexibility</li> <li>• Neighborhood-based EA practices</li> <li>• Stabilize Housing</li> </ul>

<b>South Shore</b>	<b>North Shore</b>	<b>Worcester</b>	<b>Cape</b>	<b>Metrowest</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family-centered approach</li> <li>• Increase &amp; Customize Options</li> <li>• Regulation Change / Restrict Access</li> <li>• Flexibility of funding</li> <li>• Private / Public Partnerships</li> <li>• Collaboration</li> <li>• Educate providers/ families</li> <li>• Creative prevention</li> <li>• Housing Focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduce burdensome requirements</li> <li>• Rethinking/ questioning allocation of funds</li> <li>• Coordination, Collaboration and partnership</li> <li>• Reform Intake</li> <li>• Training and Information</li> <li>• Outside Resources</li> <li>• Broaden Access Points</li> <li>• Earlier Interventions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• System coordination</li> <li>• Increasing housing resources</li> <li>• Empowerment through information / education</li> <li>• Support systems</li> <li>• Triage and assessment</li> <li>• Prevention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community-based income guidelines</li> <li>• Prevention/ Diversion funds</li> <li>• Education &amp; Self-sufficiency</li> <li>• The New EA Guidelines</li> <li>• Eligibility requirements</li> <li>• Increased and accessible communication and data</li> <li>• Assessment and referral</li> <li>• Logical consequences</li> <li>• Not likely to happen</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactive Intervention</li> <li>• Prevention</li> <li>• Resources</li> <li>• Systemic Change</li> <li>• Eligibility</li> <li>• Triage</li> <li>• Communication and Collaboration</li> <li>• Policy Recommendations</li> </ul>



**Driving Question #2:**

**Staying within the EA budget, what specific EA changes need to happen to achieve more positive outcomes for families?**

**SHORT-TERM SUBSIDIES**

<b>Merrimack Valley</b>	<b>Western Mass.</b>	<b>Boston</b>	<b>South Coast</b>	<b>Metro Boston</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tie in to prevention and diversion rather than shelter</li> <li>• Sliding scale for families' % of rental fees</li> <li>• Tie STS into Workforce development programs/ lifeskills programs or employment</li> <li>• Consider STS EA benefit for purpose of EA eligibility (1 year rule)</li> <li>• STS= short term subsidy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contingent on family participation</li> <li>• Fund intensive case management for people at risk ++</li> <li>• Use as prevention as well as for moving families out of motels and shelters</li> <li>• Family accountability</li> <li>• Assessment-based</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a system whose short term subsidies can be extended</li> <li>• Acknowledge that some families may need to cycle back into the system – with ultimate goal/need of long-term subsidized supportive housing without penalty</li> <li>• Using data to appropriately target resources (ok to cream at first)</li> <li>• Subsidy contingent on participation/completion in employment/training/education</li> <li>• Provide employment/training resources without contingencies</li> <li>• Set up families for success by providing necessary supports/resources/ advocacy with other systems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Set standards for receiving subsidies, maintaining and extending them</li> <li>• Prioritize by likeliness of sustainability...</li> <li>• Think about who giving them to... should be a priority system .. if give it to a family that has not shown any ability to support housing – it's a waste...</li> <li>• But what about discrimination....</li> <li>• Why giving subsidies (for families who have extreme barriers to finding housing so can build up their housing resumes)...</li> <li>• We are at the end of the year of the subsidy... there are a lot of families in non-compliance – didn't find a job, or lost the job, or don't have childcare (old bad habits)...</li> <li>• And what about the question of extensions?</li> <li>• Tailor subsidy to family needs</li> <li>• Banking and budgeting for clients...</li> <li>• “They need to pay something”...</li> <li>• There needs to be a good plan in place for when subsidy ends.</li> <li>• Monthly re-evaluation</li> <li>• Job Prep/Career Counseling/ vocational assessment – what can they do well</li> <li>• Mentoring</li> <li>• Have these short term subsidies even worked .... Evaluate “real” outcomes...</li> <li>• Match savings program (incentives)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A subsidy to voucher program</li> <li>• We should make sort-term subsidies more like transitional assistance</li> <li>• For those likely to link to permanent housing</li> <li>• (We want long-term subsidy too)</li> <li>• Subsidy linked to services</li> <li>• Lose the 12 month rule (can't lose access to shelter)</li> <li>• Stay close to home</li> <li>• Minimum of 2 to 3 year subsidy with services dependent on compliance</li> <li>• Use TANF for sort-term subsidy</li> <li>• Clearly defined regulations (esp. around extensions)</li> <li>• <u>Comprehensive</u> assessment for sustainable families</li> <li>• Joint family assess to subsidy (shared housing)</li> <li>• Retain childcare voucher</li> <li>• Divert reduction of cash benefit into escrow</li> <li>• Short-term subsidy until voucher available</li> <li>• Step down contribution model</li> </ul>

**Driving Question #2:**

**SHORT-TERM SUBSIDIES, CONTINUED**

<b>South Shore</b>	<b>North Shore</b>	<b>Worcester</b>	<b>Cape</b>	<b>Metrowest</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility in subsidies/ length of time and type of subsidy and in level of family participation – longer term subsidies (maybe even 5 years) but expect families to participate at higher level each of say 5 years... so more individualized based on what family needs... opportunity to finish school/get full time job.. Graduated level of participation of the family</li> <li>• Flexibility in amount family contributes</li> <li>• Longer length of subsidy but increased percent of family contribution over time.</li> <li>• Shift big chunk of EA funding to short-term subsidies. 150 million EA budget.. why 100 million in shelter money.. why not give more families short term subsidy but without self sufficiency plans not going to work in long term. Need to think about self sufficiency and what is needed.</li> <li>• Shift large percentage of EA money to short term (2-3 year) FLEXIBLE subsidies. (see housing stabilization points)</li> <li>• Do short term subsidies work for some.. and for whom? There could be more families this would work for if there were more opportunities for education, job training, etc.. Needs to be linked to job training/education...If someone has the background and can get a working</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility is crucial</li> <li>• When subsidy is short and family is placed in market rate – income must increase – need to help with job, training, etc.</li> <li>• Match length of subsidy to family self-sufficiency plans</li> <li>• Individualized service plans</li> <li>• Opportunities for longer term subsidies for families with significant housing and/or employment barriers</li> <li>• Better coordination at the state level with DHCD, workforce development, and adult education programs through DESE</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Using re-housing plan as a map for assessing family stabilization outcome               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Including lengths and amount of subsidy</li> <li>2. Providing longer subsidies for those focusing on education / training</li> <li>3. Limiting / creating shorter terms of a subsidy for those who have stronger work history or education that is completed</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Better analysis and targeting of subsidies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Giving subsidies to people who can't make use of them in long-term...Be selective re: participants... put money where it will actually work... some people can't save 30% for a year.. How going to expect them to handle it once subsidy gone... be back in shelters</li> <li>• Or reducing subsidies over time.. Weaning people off subsidies.. Decreasing subsidy</li> <li>• Many people will need the safety net of a long-term subsidy</li> <li>• Income enhancement tied to subsidy (i.e. employment training) : Income enhancing (education, training, etc)... So can get better jobs.. Training opportunities paired with short term subsidies.. to ensure better chance of long term success..</li> <li>• Short term subsidies won't be sufficient for many families, subsidy ends and cycle repeats.</li> <li>• Longer subsidy = longer engagement with case management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make this long-term instead of lifetime in section 8</li> <li>• 2<sup>nd</sup> group also talked about reallocating from shelters to short-term subsidies... housed from shelters given 12 month subsidy... have more of these by reallocating..</li> <li>• Yes, reallocate funds from shelter /motels to short term subsidies.</li> <li>• More flex funds for short term subsidies</li> <li>• Access to mental health supports and assistance (including substance abuse) (these families different then family who as reasonably stable and lost house to fire.</li> <li>• Childcare included</li> </ul>



<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Directed toward short-term episodic homeless / not directed toward intensive, long-term needs (waste of resources as we are just going to see them)</li><li>• “Families are so busy fighting to maintain homeless status rather than on doing what it takes to be self sufficient.”</li></ul>				
---	--	--	--	--

# **Attachment D**

## **Cross Regional Survey Results of Potential Changes in EA**

*Center for Youth and Communities, The Heller School for Social Policy and Management*



***Focus: Create new categories of EA eligibility that allow prevention and diversion resources to be used to prevent homelessness.***

Forum Location	# Very Interested	% Very Interested	# Moderately Interested	% Moderately Interested	# Not Interested	% Not Interested	# Like Idea but need more info	% Like Idea but need more info	Grand Total	Total %
Boston	11	69%	4	25%	1	6%		0%	16	100%
Cambridge	11	85%		0%	1	8%	1	8%	13	100%
Cape Cod	18	95%		0%		0%	1	5%	19	100%
Metrowest	11	100%		0%		0%		0%	11	100%
North Shore	5	63%	3	38%		0%		0%	8	100%
South Shore	12	92%	1	8%		0%		0%	13	100%
Southcoast	8	53%	5	33%		0%	2	13%	15	100%
Western Mass	14	93%	1	7%		0%		0%	15	100%
Worcester	10	100%		0%		0%		0%	10	100%
Grand Total	100	83%	14	12%	2	2%	4	3%	120	100%

**Focus: Conduct a marketing and messaging campaign to make it clear that you don't need to enter a shelter to get access to benefits.**

Forum Location	# Very Interested	% Very Interested	# Moderately Interested	% Moderately Interested	# Not Interested	% Not Interested	#Like Idea but need more info	% Like Idea but need more info	Grand Total	Total %
Boston	3	20%	1	7%	9	60%	2	13%	15	100%
Cambridge	1	8%	3	23%	9	69%		0%	13	100%
Cape Cod	1	5%	5	26%	13	68%		0%	19	100%
Metrowest		0%	4	36%	7	64%		0%	11	100%
North Shore	1	13%	3	38%	2	25%	2	25%	8	100%
South Shore	1	8%	2	15%	9	69%	1	8%	13	100%
Southcoast	1	7%	3	20%	10	67%	1	7%	15	100%
Western Mass	3	20%	3	20%	8	53%	1	7%	15	100%
Worcester	2	20%	3	30%	4	40%	1	10%	10	100%
Grand Total	13	11%	27	23%	71	60%	8	7%	119	100%

***Reduce: Allow shelter funding to be redirected to flexible funding for prevention, diversion and RRH.***

Forum Location	# Very Interested	% Very Interested	# Moderately Interested	% Moderately Interested	# Not Interested	% Not Interested	# Like Idea but need more info	% Like Idea but need more info	Grand Total	Total %
Boston	10	63%	2	13%	3	19%	1	6%	16	100%
Cambridge	9	75%	1	8%	1	8%	1	8%	12	100%
Cape Cod	17	94%	1	6%		0%		0%	18	100%
Metrowest	8	80%	2	20%		0%		0%	10	100%
North Shore	5	63%	2	25%		0%	1	13%	8	100%
South Shore	11	85%	2	15%		0%		0%	13	100%
Southcoast	12	80%	3	20%		0%		0%	15	100%
Western Mass	11	79%	2	14%	1	7%		0%	14	100%
Worcester	8	89%		0%	1	11%		0%	9	100%
Grand Total	91	79%	15	13%	6	5%	3	3%	115	100%

***Reduce: Authorize payments to family members for housing relatives as an alternative to shelter.***

Focus Group Location	# Very Interested	% Very Interested	# Moderately Interested	% Moderately Interested	# Not Interested	% Not Interested	# Like Idea but need more info	% Like Idea but need more info	Grand Total	Total %
Boston	7	47%	3	20%	3	20%	2	13%	15	100%
Cambridge	10	77%	3	23%		0%		0%	13	100%
Cape Cod	7	44%	2	13%	5	31%	2	13%	16	100%
Metrowest	3	33%	2	22%	2	22%	2	22%	9	100%
North Shore	1	13%	1	13%	3	38%	3	38%	8	100%
South Shore	2	15%	7	54%	2	15%	2	15%	13	100%
Southcoast	3	23%	2	15%	5	38%	3	23%	13	100%
Western Mass	7	50%	4	29%	1	7%	2	14%	14	100%
Worcester	4	44%	3	33%	1	11%	1	11%	9	100%
Grand Total	44	40%	27	25%	22	20%	17	15%	110	100%

***Reduce: Require shelter exit plans and implement them as part of triage process.***

Forum Location	# Very Interested	% Very Interested	# Moderately Interested	% Moderately Interested	# Not Interested	% Not Interested	# Like Idea but need more info	% Like Idea but need more info	Grand Total	Total %
Boston	8	62%	5	38%		0%			13	100%
Cambridge	7	54%	3	23%	2	15%	1		13	100%
Cape Cod	12	71%	4	24%	1	6%			17	100%
Metrowest	7	70%	3	30%		0%			10	100%
North Shore	3	38%	4	50%	1	13%			8	100%
South Shore	6	46%	3	23%		0%	4		13	100%
Southcoast	6	43%	5	36%	1	7%	2		14	100%
Western Mass	9	69%	3	23%	1	8%			13	100%
Worcester	6	60%	4	40%		0%			10	100%
Grand Total	64	58%	34	31%	6	5%	7		111	100%



***Reduce: Incentivize provider best practices on reducing shelter time.***

Forum Location	# Very Interested	% Very Interested	# Moderately Interested	% Moderately Interested	# Not Interested	% Not Interested	# Like Idea but need more info	% Like Idea but need more info	Grand Total	Total %
Boston	7	47%	3	20%	5	33%		0%	15	100%
Cambridge	4	31%	3	23%	3	23%	3	23%	13	100%
Cape Cod	14	82%	1	6%		0%	2	12%	17	100%
Metrowest	4	40%	3	30%		0%	3	30%	10	100%
North Shore	3	38%	1	13%	3	38%	1	13%	8	100%
South Shore	4	31%	5	38%	1	8%	3	23%	13	100%
Southcoast	7	50%	3	21%	2	14%	2	14%	14	100%
Western Mass	5	42%	6	50%	1	8%		0%	12	100%
Worcester	2	22%	6	67%	1	11%		0%	9	100%
Grand Total	50	45%	31	28%	16	14%	14	13%	111	100%

***Customize: Create a tiered eligibility system that gives the providers the flexibility to make choices about the service levels and types provided to families.***

Forum Location	# Very Interested	% Very Interested	# Moderately Interested	% Moderately Interested	# Not Interested	% Not Interested	# Like Idea but need more info	% Like Idea but need more info	Grand Total	Total %
Boston	7	50%	4	29%	2	14%	1	7%	14	100%
Cambridge	7	54%	3	23%	1	8%	2	15%	13	100%
Cape Cod	14	78%	2	11%	1	6%	1	6%	18	100%
Metrowest	9	90%	1	10%		0%		0%	10	100%
North Shore	4	50%	2	25%	2	25%		0%	8	100%
South Shore	11	85%	1	8%	1	8%		0%	13	100%
Southcoast	8	53%	3	20%	2	13%	2	13%	15	100%
Western Mass	12	80%	2	13%	1	7%		0%	15	100%
Worcester	8	80%	1	10%		0%	1	10%	10	100%
Grand Total	80	69%	19	16%	10	9%	7	6%	116	100%

***Integrate and Localize: Allow local networks to make decisions about placement of EA eligible families in shelters.***

Forum Location	# Very Interested	% Very Interested	# Moderately Interested	% Moderately Interested	# Not Interested	% Not Interested	# Like Idea but need more info	% Like Idea but need more info	Grand Total	Total %
Boston	8	53%	5	33%		0%	2	13%	15	100%
Cambridge	8	62%	2	15%		0%	3	23%	13	100%
Cape Cod	13	76%	4	24%		0%		0%	17	100%
Metrowest	5	45%	4	36%	2	18%		0%	11	100%
North Shore	5	63%	1	13%	1	13%	1	13%	8	100%
South Shore	10	77%		0%	1	8%	2	15%	13	100%
Southcoast	12	80%	2	13%	1	7%		0%	15	100%
Western Mass	12	80%	1	7%	1	7%	1	7%	15	100%
Worcester	8	80%	1	10%		0%	1	10%	10	100%
Grand Total	81	69%	20	17%	6	5%	10	9%	117	100%

<b><i>Integrate and Localize: Continue funding for regional coordinators and regional infrastructure.</i></b>										
Forum Location	# Very Interested	% Very Interested	# Moderately Interested	% Moderately Interested	# Not Interested	% Not Interested	# Like Idea but need more info	% Like Idea but need more info	Grand Total	Total %
Boston	8	57%	4	29%	1	7%	1	7%	14	100%
Cambridge	6	55%	2	18%	1	9%	2	18%	11	100%
Cape Cod	12	63%	4	21%	1	5%	2	11%	19	100%
Metrowest	7	70%	3	30%		0%		0%	10	100%
North Shore	5	63%	2	25%	1	13%		0%	8	100%
South Shore	7	54%	5	38%		0%	1	8%	13	100%
Southcoast	11	73%	3	20%	1	7%		0%	15	100%
Western Mass	9	60%	5	33%		0%	1	7%	15	100%
Worcester	4	44%	3	33%	1	11%	1	11%	9	100%
Grand Total	69	61%	31	27%	6	5%	8	7%	114	100%

***Integrate and Localize: Fast track state housing production funds for permanent supporting housing.***

Forum Location	# Very Interested	% Very Interested	# Moderately Interested	% Moderately Interested	# Not Interested	% Not Interested	# Like Idea but need more info	% Like Idea but need more info	Grand Total	Total %
Boston	12	69%	1	7%		0%	2	13%	15	100%
Cambridge	10	85%	2	15%		0%	1	8%	13	100%
Cape Cod	16	95%		0%		0%		0%	16	100%
Metrowest	8	100%	2	18%		0%	1	9%	11	100%
North Shore	6	63%	1	13%		0%	1	13%	8	100%
South Shore	10	92%	1	8%	1	8%	1	8%	13	100%
Southcoast	9	53%	4	29%		0%	1	7%	14	100%
Western Mass	12	93%		0%	1	7%	1	7%	14	100%
Worcester	8	100%	1	11%		0%		0%	9	100%
Grand Total	91	83%	12	11%	2	2%	8	7%	113	100%