

October 31, 2023



Senator Cynthia Creem
Representative Kay Khan
Representative John Lawn
Representative Ruth Balser
Massachusetts State House
24 Beacon St.
Boston, MA 02133

cc: Governor Maura Healey, Lt. Governor Kim Driscoll, Mayor Ruthanne Fuller

RE: Critical: Protecting Homeless Families in Massachusetts

We are concerned about the status of homeless families in Massachusetts and their ability to be accommodated in emergency shelters this coming winter after [Governor Healey's announcement](#) on October 16th to cap the number of families in emergency shelters. *"Beginning November 1, 2023, the state will no longer be able to add new shelter units. At this time, families seeking shelter will be assessed and those with high needs, such as health and safety risks, will be prioritized for placement. Families who are not immediately connected with shelter will be placed on a waiting list."*

The right to shelter for families has long been a bedrock principle in Massachusetts, exemplifying our values and care for one another.

We recognize there has been a significant increase in the need for emergency shelter in the past year. Currently there are nearly 7,000 families with children and pregnant women in emergency shelter. Longtime Massachusetts residents make up about 50% of these families and 50% of these families are newly arrived to Massachusetts. The state has said it only has capacity to house 7500 families and expects to reach this limit in the coming weeks. The [costs of running the emergency shelter program](#) have increased almost two fold from the budgeted \$353 million to an estimated \$600 million given the need to expand to additional locations with significantly higher per family costs. With the ongoing housing crisis making it more difficult to transition to stable housing, stays are also getting longer, with the average family staying over 429 days.

We also acknowledge that the Governor has been working to address the crisis, including requesting an additional \$250 million in supplemental funding and calling on the Federal Government for more assistance. She has appointed an Emergency Assistance Director, Lt. General Rice, who will be responsible for stabilizing the emergency shelter program. In addition, the state will be bolstering efforts to assist families with transitioning to stable housing and increase efforts to help residents get connected with jobs.

While we support the actions of the administration to improve the status of both the emergency shelter system and the housing opportunities for people currently experiencing homelessness, **at the moment we are very concerned about the risk to children, starting this week, if there are families are denied emergency shelter.** Nearly 50% of the current residents being housed in emergency shelters are children. Will we really allow children (more children) to sleep on the streets during the winter? Will even more parents not leave unsafe housing situations because there is nowhere for them to go? Will students fall even further behind in school because of the lack of stability? Will this create a greater crisis in the foster care system or health care costs?

Suspending the right to shelter for families is an unacceptable solution to this crisis.

We call on the State Legislature to work with Governor Healey with all possible speed to address the critical need for emergency shelter for families.

Sincerely,

Newton City Councilors

Susan Albright, President

Rick Lipof, Vice President

Alicia Bowman, Councilor-at-Large, Ward 6

Bill Humphrey, Ward Councilor, Ward 5

Holly Ryan, Ward Councilor, Ward 8

Alison M. Leary, Councilor-at-Large, Ward 1

Maria Scibelli Greenberg, Ward Councilor, Ward 1

Andreae Downs, Councilor-at-Large, Ward 5

Deborah Crossley, Councilor-at-Large, Ward 5

Vicki Danberg, Councilor-at-Large, Ward 6

Brenda Noel, Ward Councilor, Ward 6

David Kalis, Councilor-at-Large, Ward 8

Rebecca Walker Grossman, Councilor-at-Large, Ward 7