



March 14, 2024

RE: Time limits on Family Shelter System

Senate President Karen Spilka
Massachusetts State Senate
State House, Room 332
Boston, MA 02133

Chairman Michael Rodrigues
Committee on Ways & Means
State House, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Senate President Spilka and Chairman Rodrigues:

On behalf of the Providers' Council and our undersigned members who provide Emergency Assistance Family Shelter programs in Massachusetts, thank you for your historic support of this critical safety net.

In March 2022, there were about 3,000 families in the shelter system. Today, Massachusetts remains at the 7,500-family cap it reached in November 2023, while another 780 families are on a waiting list which continues to grow. The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities has noted that in the first two months of 2024, they continue to receive about 100 daily walk-ins to field offices and about 400 calls each day with families looking for shelter.

The average length of stay in a shelter for a family is roughly 15 months. On Wednesday, March 6, the House approved a supplemental spending bill (H.4466) that imposes time limits for many families in shelter of just nine months. While some families may be eligible for shelter for up to 12 months, we remain concerned that these time limits will result in families being forced to leave shelter and having no other place to go.

While House leaders did mention there would be a "reapplication process" for families that need to leave shelter, we're unclear at this time what that means or what such a process would look like. Our members feel strongly that the process needs more clarity; these items should not be left to interpretation.

We're hopeful that the Senate may reconsider some of the provisions in the House bill when it takes up the supplemental budget in the next few weeks. Some items that we would ask the Senate to consider including in the supplemental budget include:

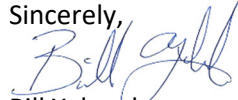
- The creation of three-month interval extensions based on certain circumstances. These would not only be work based, but also include other criteria defined by EOHLC. For example, some criteria might include extensions for those with disabilities, those who are survivors of domestic violence, those with severe medical issues, those compliant on a current rehousing plan and working toward obtaining an apartment, or other to-be-determined criteria.
- A formal process that would allow families to recertify at 12 months based on criteria created by EOHLC. Additionally, there should be a process to allow families to reenter the system at 12 months through a reapplication process if they do not meet the criteria for recertification or if there is not ample affordable housing nor housing subsidies to move all families from shelter.
- Allow EOHLC to phase in implementation. This would include, but not be limited to, establishing a rolling start and a rolling exit process to ensure a smooth transition that considers the resources necessary to implement such a major policy change.
 - EOHLC should be given authorization to determine which criteria to use as the first pilot population.

- This would allow EOHLC to work with providers to understand the impact of this policy change and minimize impacts to children and families.
- Align any first exits with a school year to minimize impacts to children and local educational agencies.
- Consider creation of – and funding for – a *Protective Supervision Caregiver Policy* (similar to one established in California) that addresses the more than 40 percent of families in shelter with a child or elderly parent who has a disability.
- Establish a process to address presumptive eligibility for shelter.

We would also highlight that families forced to exit the system without a housing placement will maintain their homelessness, and municipalities will need to take on a role that will increase their costs, including from emergency services and the Board of Health. This policy would only shift the responsibility for these families to municipalities across the Commonwealth.

Our undersigned members would be glad to meet with you and/or your staff to discuss this issue in greater detail and have an open conversation about workable solutions. We thank you again for your historic commitment to the human services sector and our state's family shelter system, and we look forward to connecting with you in the near future.

Sincerely,



Bill Yelenak

President/CEO

Providers' Council

And the undersigned Providers' Council members:

Leah Bradley, CEO, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance

Charlie Clifford, CEO, Old Colony YMCA

Mark DeJoie, CEO, Centerboard

Danielle Ferrier, CEO, Heading Home

Karen Frederick, CEO, Community Teamwork

Jim Goodwin, President/CEO, Center for Human Development

Melinda Matthews, President/CEO, Eliot Community Human Services

Sandra McCroom, President/CEO, Children's Services of Roxbury

Laura Meisenhelter, Executive Director, North Shore Community Action Programs

Bob Mills, CEO, Middlesex Human Service Agency, Inc.

Shiela Y. Moore, CEO, Hildebrand Family Self-Help Center

Daniel Mumbauer, President & CEO, High Point & SEMCOA

France A. Neff, President and CEO, Family Independence, Inc.

Sarah Porter, Executive Director, Victory Programs, Inc.

Kevin Reed, Executive Director, Making Opportunity Count

Laura Rosi, CEO, Housing Families

Larry Seamans, President & CEO, FamilyAid

David Shapiro, CEO, YMCA of Greater Boston

Felicia Smith, Executive Director, Sojourner House Inc.

Sue Stubbs, President and CEO, ServiceNet, Inc.

Carolina Trujillo, Executive Director, Citizens Inn

John Yazwinski, President & CEO, Father Bill's & MainSpring