



October 29, 2024

Lt. Governor Kimberley Driscoll  
Chair, Special Commission on Emergency Housing Assistance Programs  
State House, Room 360  
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Lt. Governor Driscoll,

Thank you for the critical work that you and your fellow Commission members have been doing to identify strategies for reducing family homelessness, and stabilizing the Emergency Assistance shelter system. On behalf of One Family, Inc., I respectfully offer the following recommendations:

1. Strengthen HomeBASE through:
  - Education- and-career-focused coaching that connects HomeBASE participants to public higher education and other education, training and career opportunities
  - Expedited access to EEC Child Care Financial Assistance
  - Adding a rent escrow component
2. Restore upstream access to RAFT rental assistance
3. Eliminate restrictive and punitive Temporary Respite Center policies
4. Ensure that no family times out of EA shelter without a safe and appropriate home

**Background - One Family, Inc.**

One Family, Inc. ([onefamilyinc.org](http://onefamilyinc.org)) was established in 2000, with a mission to prevent homelessness and break the cycle of family poverty in Massachusetts, by promoting pathways to economic independence through advocacy, education, and innovation. We currently serve over 500 families across Massachusetts through three direct service programs - [One Family Scholars](#), [Credential to Career Coaching \(C2C\)](#), and [Family Self-Sufficiency \(FSS\)](#). We are proud and fortunate to partner with the Department of Higher Education on the One Family Scholars program, and with the Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities on the C2C and FSS programs

The underlying philosophy of all three programs is that education and career success leads to increased income and assets, which helps make it possible for parents to afford a home where their family can thrive. Each program helps parents with low incomes throughout Massachusetts identify and pursue education and career goals, and [increase their income](#), to achieve economic independence and long-term housing stability.

In addition to our direct service work, we also help state agencies and nonprofit organizations incorporate individualized coaching focused on education and career pathways into their housing and asset-building programs. Finally, we advocate for policies that support housing stability and economic opportunity; importantly, we engage the families we serve in that advocacy.

### **Recommendation #1: Strengthen HomeBASE**

HomeBASE has the potential to relieve pressure on the EA system, by helping families transition from homelessness to long-term housing stability – both families who have yet to enter shelter, as well as families already in shelter. However, as currently implemented, HomeBASE lacks key elements that would help ensure that families don't fall back into homelessness after benefits run out.

We recommend that HomeBASE be strengthened by adding these components:

- **HomeBASE recipients should be supported in accessing education, training and career opportunities**, including the Commonwealth's recent increased investments in higher education access and completion, which have been made possible by Fair Share surtax revenues.
- **That support should come in the form of individualized career and education coaching**, to help guide HomeBASE recipients to higher education and other credentials and training that lead to family-sustaining careers.
- **Expedited access to EEC Child Care Financial Assistance** for HomeBASE recipients would also help them access job opportunities leading to increased income and assets.
- We also recommend incorporating a **rent escrow** component into HomeBASE, similar to the rent escrow component in the Section 8 Family Self-Sufficiency program. A rent escrow would provide additional incentive to HomeBASE participants to increase their income, so that they can afford to pay for market-rate housing after they exit HomeBASE. As a HomeBASE participant's income increases, the resulting rent increase would be escrowed, available to pay for rent, education, a business opportunity, or some other investment in family well-being or career advancement.

### **Recommendation #2: Restore upstream access to RAFT rental assistance**

During the COVID emergency, RAFT rental assistance was available on an "upstream" basis - i.e., as soon as a family or individual began to fall behind on rent. However, since August of 2022, a household is not eligible for RAFT until their landlord initiates the eviction process, by serving a Notice to Quit. By the time things get to this point, the rent arrears often exceed the \$7,000 RAFT cap, and it may be too late to keep the household from being evicted and becoming homeless. **We urge the Commission to support restoration of upstream access to RAFT, by eliminating the Notice to Quit requirement.**

**Recommendation #3: Eliminate restrictive and punitive Temporary Respite Center policies**

Requiring families with children to leave overflow shelters after just five days, and barring them from entering an Emergency Assistance shelter for six months, are unnecessarily harsh policies that have resulted in families with children sleeping outdoors and in other unsafe situations. **We urge the Commission to support lifting these restrictive and punitive policies, to protect families with children who are experiencing homelessness from harm.**

**Recommendation #4: Ensure that no family times out of EA shelter without a safe and appropriate home**

Families living in Emergency Assistance shelters who reach the nine-month time limit must not be forced to live in unsafe conditions. **We urge the commission to add “no appropriate housing situation is available” as a criterion for a hardship waiver to the nine-month length of stay limit,** with language making it clear that no family is required to accept a housing situation that would make an existing school, job or medical provider inaccessible.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer these recommendations, and for the critical work that you and your fellow Commission members have been doing to identify strategies for reducing family homelessness, and stabilizing the Emergency Assistance shelter system.

Sincerely,



Valerie Paric  
Executive Director