



**Metro Housing|Boston's Testimony
FY 2019 Budget Hearing for Joint Committee on Ways and Means
by
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March 16, 2018

Thank you Chairman Sanchez, Chairwoman Spilka, and members of the committee for allowing us the opportunity to provide testimony on issues related to affordable housing and homelessness prevention that Metro Housing|Boston has prioritized for fiscal year 2019.

Metro Housing is a leading nonprofit dedicated to connecting the residents of Greater Boston with safe, decent homes they can afford. We work with residents in Boston and 32 surrounding communities. The foundation of our work is our rental assistance program where we provide rental assistance to more than 9,600 households, and work with 4,300 property owners. Building on this effort, we also provide services to stabilize housing with information, referral, and supports, responding to in excess of 10,000 housing inquires annually.

Metro Housing serves as a vital link in the Commonwealth's housing delivery system, both publicly and privately-funded. We work closely with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) and the state legislature on housing solutions for those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. We also work with an array of private and nonprofit partners throughout the region to help families navigate the affordable housing system, and help provide our families the tools they need to be stably housed.

Based on our understanding of the homelessness prevention and affordable housing program options within the state, we believe that the programs prioritized for the FY 2019 budget in this testimony go a long way toward supporting comprehensive and accessible options for thousands of Massachusetts residents.

For example, the families and participants of Metro Housing rely upon the funding for the **Housing Consumer Education Center (HCEC)** as their connection to housing search assistance, workshops and trainings, resources for navigating the housing field, and other affordable housing support services. Underlining that reality is our experience in our new office in Roxbury Crossing. The number of our participants and others looking for housing help in our new space is approximately double compared to our

previous downtown Boston location, demonstrating the significant need for affordable housing supports for families with low incomes.

The cost-effective impact of the HCECs in addressing and preventing housing crises are illustrated with a few statewide numbers:

- Almost 70,000 families were assisted by HCEC staff in FY 2017,
- An average of 1,700 families per month contacted HCECs over the past five years because they were at immediate risk of homelessness, and
- Families were assisted at an average cost of \$32 per household.

One of the tools the staff of HCEC has at their disposal to help families is **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT)**. In FY 2017, Metro Housing assisted 1,474 families with an average of \$2,614 to help keep them stably housed. Without this funding, these families may have become homeless and entered the emergency shelter system at significantly higher financial and social costs, for both the state and the family members.

Building upon the success of pilot programs in the last two fiscal years, Metro Housing requests an increase in RAFT to \$18.5 million, with most of the increase over FY 2018 dedicated to the expanded eligible population to include individuals. As the results from the most recent RAFT report shows for the Metro Housing region, participants in the pilot program in FY 2017 were older, poorer, and more likely to be male. Resources for individuals at risk of homelessness are limited. Increasing this line item will help hundreds more individuals with disabilities and elders stay in their homes, close to their support networks, and connected to their medical homes.

Massachusetts ranks among the top states when it comes to the cost to rent a home. As a result, we have a high rate of homelessness and many people in need of housing they can afford. One of the most crucial tools for addressing this need is a housing voucher.

In 2014 when Metro Housing had 78 vouchers available through a one-time lottery through the **Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP)**, we received more than 10,000 applications. The unmet demand for affordable housing could not have been more stark. In combination with the crucial development elements of the Housing Bond Bill, an increase of vouchers available through MRVP will help continue the state's trend of increasing supply of housing options for families with low incomes.

Thank you for your support of affordable housing and for your work with Metro Housing. Without stable housing, people cannot work, children do not thrive, and education and training is next to impossible. On behalf of Metro Housing and those we serve, thank you for considering these attached priorities as you deliberate the budget.

Thank you.