

THE MASSACHUSETTS  
**RAFT**  
**PROGRAM**

PREVENTING  
HOMELESSNESS,  
PROVIDING  
FAMILY STABILITY

A Report on the  
Residential Assistance  
for Families in  
Transition Program in  
Fiscal Year 2018



FEBRUARY 2019



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## **ABOUT THE REGIONAL HOUSING NETWORK OF MASSACHUSETTS**

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The Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts (RHN) is a statewide network of regional agencies that have worked together to address the housing needs of Massachusetts residents for more than 40 years. RHN's member agencies serve residents in all 351 cities and towns in the Commonwealth. These services include development and management of affordable housing, housing education and assistance, and the management of more than 26,000 housing vouchers.

RHN member agencies include Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority, Berkshire Housing Development Corporation, Community Teamwork, Inc., Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority, Housing Assistance Corporation, Housing Solutions for Southeastern Massachusetts, Metro Housing | Boston, RCAP Solutions Inc., South Middlesex Opportunity Council, and Way Finders.

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

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This report was developed and produced by the Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts.

Robin Sherman analyzed the data and wrote the report.

The report was designed by Six-Point Creative of Springfield, Massachusetts.

This report includes supplements that summarize operation of the RAFT program on a regional basis. Regional supplements are available upon request from RHN and from the regional agencies directly.

## ABOUT THE DATA

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Data on operation of the RAFT program in FY 2018 used in this report was provided by the member agencies of the Regional Housing Network, Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance, Lynn Housing Authority and Neighborhood Development, and Tracker Systems, the Commonwealth's software vendor for the RAFT program. In a very small number of cases, data on the demographics of FY 2018 RAFT clients may reflect changes to household demographics in early FY 2019.

Unless otherwise noted, all general information on Massachusetts households is from the U.S. Census American Community Survey 5-year estimates from 2013 - 2017.

# SUMMARY

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Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) is a homelessness prevention program for households with very low incomes experiencing a housing crisis. Eligible households may receive up to \$4,000 each fiscal year to help retain their housing, obtain new housing, or otherwise avoid becoming homeless. RAFT receives an annual funding allocation through the state budget. It is a program of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development and is administered by 11 regional agencies.

The RAFT program assists households with incomes at or below 50 percent of Area Median Income, which is defined regionally based on household size. Until FY 2017, eligible households were defined as families with at least two persons including a dependent child under age 21, and single pregnant heads of household. In FY 2017, eligibility for the program was expanded to include households of all sizes, including those comprised of elders, persons with disabilities, and unaccompanied youth, with limited funding available for households eligible under the new definition.

To avoid the need for emergency shelter, RAFT is primarily targeted to families with children that are most at risk of becoming homeless. RAFT agencies must determine that the assistance will allow families to retain current housing, obtain new housing, or otherwise avoid homelessness. Assistance is flexible and may be used for a variety of purposes, including but not limited to payment of rent, utility, and mortgage arrears; rent stipends; security deposits; first and last months' rent; childcare; transportation; basic furniture; and moving expenses.

RAFT continues to be extremely cost-effective in helping Massachusetts families avoid homelessness. In FY 2018, the Commonwealth spent an average of \$3,130 per family on the RAFT program to ensure continued housing for households. By contrast, the state spent an average of \$46,450 for each household that entered the state's family shelter program.<sup>1</sup>

**This represents an average savings of \$43,321 for each family that avoided homelessness through the RAFT program in terms of shelter costs alone.**

Actual savings per family are much higher, because adults that enter the family shelter system often lose employment and require public assistance, school systems incur additional costs for busing children from shelters to their regular school, and families in shelter experience high stress that may result in increased medical costs.

Eligible households may apply for and receive RAFT every fiscal year, but historical data shows that very few families receive RAFT in consecutive years. Only 6.5 percent of families that avoided homelessness through RAFT in FY 2017 also received RAFT in FY 2018.

## THE NEED FOR RAFT: HOUSING COSTS IN MASSACHUSETTS

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Massachusetts has some of the least affordable housing in the nation. Housing affordability is generally measured in terms of the percentage of household income required to pay for housing and utilities. Housing is considered to be affordable as long as it costs no more than 30 percent of household income. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, Massachusetts was the sixth most expensive state in terms of the income required to afford a two-bedroom apartment in 2018.<sup>2</sup>

The HUD Fair Market Rent<sup>3</sup> for a two-bedroom apartment in Massachusetts, including utilities, was \$1,489 in 2018. Statewide, a single person working full time would need to earn \$28.64 an hour to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the Fair Market Rent for their housing to be considered affordable. Using the same housing costs and standard of affordability, it would take 2.6 household members working full time at minimum wage to afford the two-bedroom Fair Market Rent.<sup>4</sup> The statewide median income for households that received RAFT in FY 2018 was \$18,504, which is the full-time equivalent of approximately \$8.90 an hour. The statewide Fair Market Rent represents more than 96 percent of household income for the typical recipient of RAFT in FY 2018.

There is a severe shortage of rental housing that is available and affordable to low-income families in all areas of the Commonwealth. Rental housing accounts for 37.9 percent of all housing in Massachusetts, and 33.8 percent of Massachusetts residents live in rental units. In 2017, half of Massachusetts households that rent – more than 461,000 households – paid more than thirty percent of their income toward housing costs. Households that received RAFT in FY 2018 represent just over one percent of these cost-burdened individuals and families.

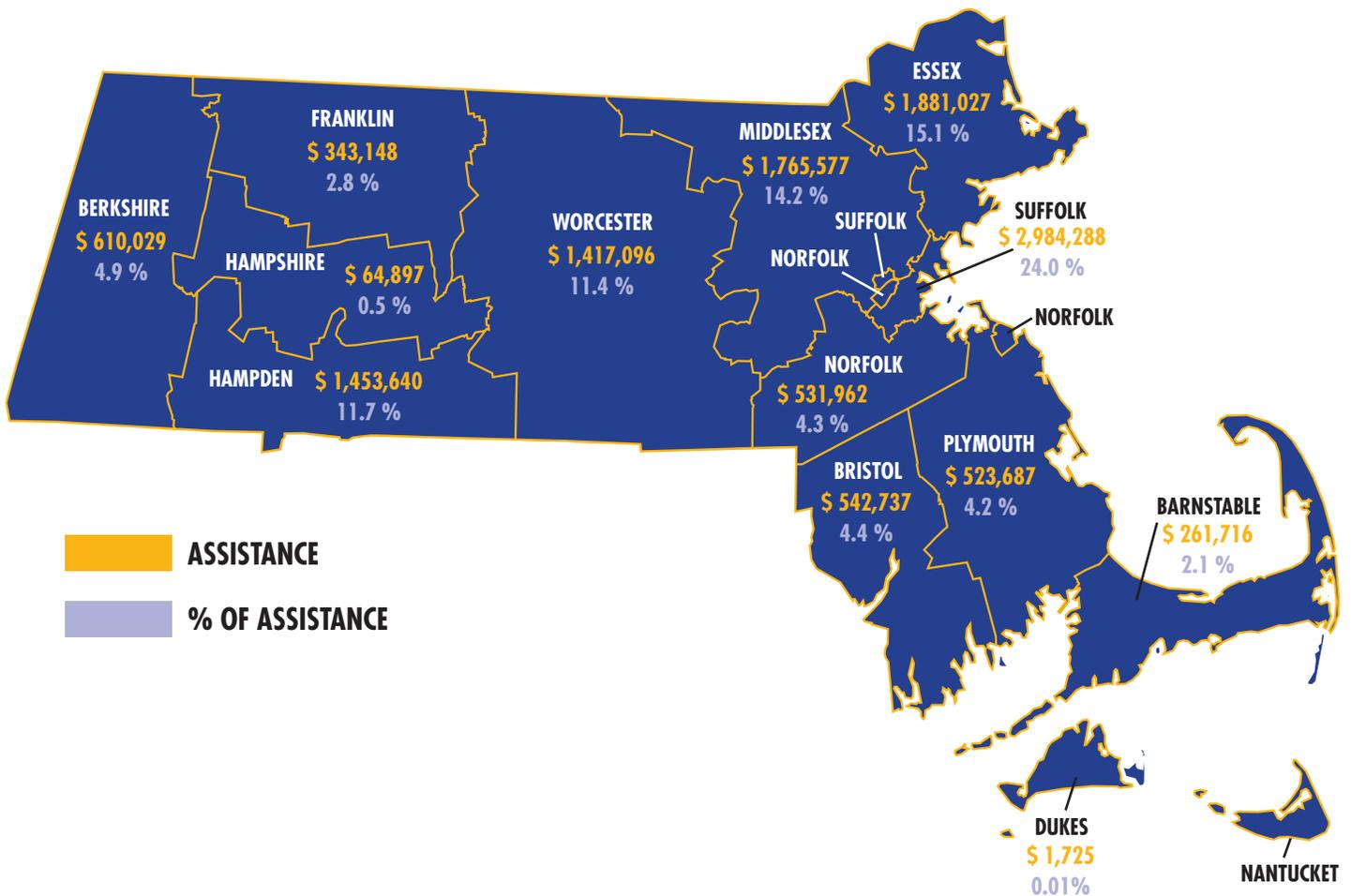
# RAFT IN FY 2018

The FY 2018 state appropriation for RAFT was \$15,000,000, an increase of \$2 million from FY 2017. The RAFT program provided a total of \$12,437,486 in assistance to 4,793 households in FY 2018.<sup>5</sup> Average assistance per household was \$2,595, an increase of less than one half of one percent from FY 2017. Total average cost of the program per participant was \$3,130.

## RAFT Assistance by Region

Households received RAFT in all regions of the Commonwealth in FY 2018. Figure 1 shows RAFT assistance by county.<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 1: RAFT ASSISTANCE BY COUNTY, FY 2018**



Households received RAFT in 213 Massachusetts communities. Twelve cities accounted for approximately two-thirds of RAFT assistance in FY 2018.



**TABLE 2: CITIES WITH THE MOST RAFT HOUSEHOLDS, FY 2018**

| City        | Households | % of Households | Assistance   | % of Assistance |
|-------------|------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|
| BOSTON      | 1,042      | 21.7 %          | \$ 2,726,501 | 21.9 %          |
| SPRINGFIELD | 490        | 10.2 %          | \$ 1,009,791 | 8.1 %           |
| LOWELL      | 401        | 8.4 %           | \$ 907,084   | 7.3 %           |
| WORCESTER   | 322        | 6.7 %           | \$ 848,164   | 6.8 %           |
| LAWRENCE    | 176        | 3.7 %           | \$ 458,668   | 3.7 %           |
| HAVERTHILL  | 174        | 3.6 %           | \$ 465,016   | 3.7 %           |
| LYNN        | 159        | 3.3 %           | \$ 458,200   | 3.7 %           |
| PITTSFIELD  | 153        | 3.2 %           | \$ 452,206   | 3.6 %           |
| HOLYOKE     | 99         | 2.1 %           | \$ 198,893   | 1.6 %           |
| BROCKTON    | 85         | 1.8 %           | \$ 277,913   | 2.2 %           |
| NEW BEDFORD | 75         | 1.6 %           | \$ 232,360   | 1.9 %           |
| GREENFIELD  | 70         | 1.5 %           | \$ 149,752   | 1.2 %           |

There is no precise means of measuring how well the RAFT program is assisting eligible households, but census data provides some insight. The number of households that received RAFT statewide represents approximately one percent of all Massachusetts households that pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing costs. On a regional level, it appears that RAFT is serving a higher percentage of rent-burdened households in Berkshire, Franklin and Hampden counties, and a lower percentage of these households on the South Shore, the Cape and Islands, and in Hampshire County. In Franklin County, the number of households that received RAFT represents 3.3 percent of all rent-burdened households, while in neighboring Hampshire County, the 33 households that received RAFT represent just 0.4 percent of all households that pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing costs.

RAFT may also be used to assist families in relocating outside of Massachusetts to avoid homelessness and reliance on the state's family shelter system. In FY 2018, 23 families used RAFT for this purpose, which accounted for 0.4 percent of RAFT assistance overall.

Average RAFT assistance per household increased by \$64 statewide in FY 2018 compared to the previous year. The amount of assistance per household varied significantly by region and administering agency, from a low of \$2,047 in RAFT assistance from Way Finders in Hampden and Hampshire counties, to a high of \$3,206 for clients of Housing Solutions in Bristol, Norfolk and Plymouth counties, as shown in Table 3. It is not clear what explains the variability in RAFT benefits between agencies.

**TABLE 3: AVERAGE RAFT BENEFIT BY RAFT ADMINISTERING AGENCY, FY 2018**

|  |                 |
|--|-----------------|
| BERKSHIRE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION                  | \$ 2,905        |
| CENTRAL MASS HOUSING ALLIANCE                              | \$ 2,655        |
| COMMUNITY TEAMWORK, INC.                                   | \$ 2,477        |
| FRANKLIN COUNTY REGIONAL HOUSING & REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY | \$ 2,289        |
| HOUSING ASSISTANCE CORPORATION                             | \$ 3,075        |
| HOUSING SOLUTIONS FOR SOUTHEASTERN MASS                    | \$ 3,206        |
| LYNN HOUSING AUTHORITY & NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT          | \$ 2,914        |
| METRO HOUSING   BOSTON                                     | \$ 2,689        |
| RCAP SOLUTIONS INC.  | \$ 2,658        |
| SOUTH MIDDLESEX OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL                        | \$ 2,350        |
| WAY FINDERS  | \$ 2,047        |
| <b>STATEWIDE</b>   | <b>\$ 2,595</b> |

## RAFT Households by Income, Age, and Sex

RAFT eligibility is limited to families earning up to 50 percent of Area Median Income. At least 50 percent of the annual funding available for assistance is allocated to families earning incomes at or below 30 percent of Area Median Income. The average RAFT household has three family members, typically, a woman with two children.

Median household income for all Massachusetts households was \$74,167 in 2017. Median income for three-person households was \$96,788. In FY 2018, median household income for households that received RAFT was \$18,504, representing a *decrease* of \$1,250 compared to 2017. Five hundred twenty-seven RAFT households reported having no cash income, representing 11 percent of all households that received RAFT. Median income of households that received RAFT varied significantly by region and administering agency, from a low of \$9,923 in Berkshire County to a high of \$24,585 for clients of Lynn Housing Authority and Neighborhood Development, as shown in Table 4.

**TABLE 4: MEDIAN HOUSEHOLD INCOME OF RAFT RECIPIENTS, FY 2018**

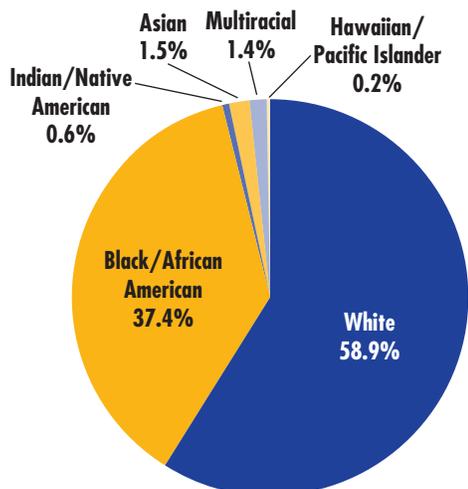
|  |                  |
|--|------------------|
| BERKSHIRE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION                  | \$ 9,923         |
| CENTRAL MASS HOUSING ALLIANCE                              | \$ 16,996        |
| COMMUNITY TEAMWORK, INC.                                   | \$ 20,190        |
| FRANKLIN COUNTY REGIONAL HOUSING & REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY | \$ 16,248        |
| HOUSING ASSISTANCE CORPORATION                             | \$ 19,500        |
| HOUSING SOLUTIONS FOR SOUTHEASTERN MASS                    | \$ 21,380        |
| LYNN HOUSING AUTHORITY & NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT          | \$ 24,585        |
| METRO HOUSING   BOSTON                                     | \$ 15,650        |
| RCAP SOLUTIONS INC.  | \$ 17,220        |
| SOUTH MIDDLESEX OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL                        | \$ 20,616        |
| WAY FINDERS  | \$ 21,639        |
| <b>STATEWIDE</b>   | <b>\$ 18,504</b> |

The average age for heads of households that received RAFT in FY 2018 was mid to late thirties. More than 87 percent of families that received RAFT in FY 2018 had a female head of household.

## RAFT Households by Race and Ethnicity

A majority of heads of household that received RAFT in FY 2018 were non-Hispanic and white, but African-Americans and Latinos were over-represented in the group of households that received RAFT in proportion to the general population of the state. More than 37 percent of the households that received RAFT had an African-American head of household, compared to approximately six percent of households statewide. Approximately 36 percent of RAFT households identified as Latino. Statewide, 11 percent of Massachusetts residents are Hispanic/Latino.

**FIGURE 2: RAFT HOUSEHOLDS BY RACE, FY 2018**



## RAFT Households by Housing Type and Crisis

Eviction is the leading issue causing households to seek assistance from RAFT. Approximately 48 percent of RAFT recipients reported facing eviction in 2018. This is not surprising given that the **median** income of RAFT households is slightly less than a third of what is required to afford rent and utilities in Massachusetts according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition.

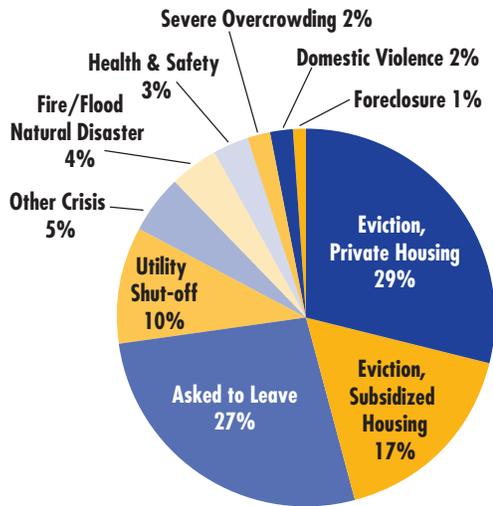
Of the FY 2018 RAFT recipients who reported being evicted, a majority lived in private housing, but 844 households that faced eviction had subsidized housing. Statewide, 37.4 percent of households that received RAFT had subsidized housing. The percentage of RAFT recipients with housing subsidies in FY 2018 varied significantly by administering agency and region, from a low of 12 percent of RAFT beneficiaries at RCAP Solutions in Worcester County to a high of more than 71 percent for households that received RAFT from Metro Housing | Boston. The recipients of RAFT from Metro Housing | Boston accounted for approximately 55 percent of the households with subsidized housing that received RAFT statewide.

Twenty-eight percent of RAFT recipients reported that they were asked to leave a home that they were sharing with others, again underscoring the instability of housing for women with low incomes raising children on their own. Another 10 percent of RAFT households faced utility shut-off notices; many families with low incomes cannot afford to keep up with payment for both rent and utilities. One hundred sixty-eight households reported a crisis due to fire, flood, or natural disaster; a majority of these households were located in Worcester County. Figure 2 shows RAFT clients by the type of housing crisis they experienced.

### **Use of RAFT by households with housing subsidies:**

*The City of Boston has made homelessness prevention a key policy priority, and has developed partnerships with housing agencies to achieve this goal. For households with extremely low incomes, securing subsidized housing is the best long-term strategy to ensure housing stability. Generally, households that have housing vouchers or subsidized apartments pay 30 percent of their income toward housing costs. This does not, however, ensure that the remaining 70 percent of household income is sufficient to pay for other household expenses, such as childcare and medical bills. Nearly a third of households that received RAFT from Metro Housing | Boston in FY 2018 – 473 individuals and families – had incomes of less than \$10,000 a year. Once a family or individual with extremely low income falls behind on subsidized rent payments, it becomes almost impossible to catch up. If this household is evicted or loses their rent subsidy, their options for re-housing are very limited. This is why Metro Housing, working in partnership with the City of Boston, Boston Housing Authority, and owners of other subsidized housing, has made preserving the tenancies of households with subsidies a key priority.*

**FIGURE 2: TYPE OF HOUSING CRISIS FOR HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING RAFT IN FY 2018**



Note: Figures add to more than 100 percent; households may report more than one type of crisis resulting in the need for RAFT

## Uses of RAFT Funds

Eligible households may receive up to \$4,000 in RAFT funds, which can be used in a variety and combination of different ways to help avoid homelessness. The most common use of funds is for rent arrears, accounting for approximately 40 percent of FY 2018 RAFT payments. Costs associated with establishing new tenancies, including payment of first and last months' rent, security deposits, moving costs, and basic furniture accounted for approximately 48 percent of RAFT funds. Households in Berkshire and Franklin counties used a lower percentage of RAFT funds on moving expenses than in other regions; more funds were spent on preserving tenancies in these areas.

**TABLE 5: USES OF RAFT FUNDS, FY 2018**

| Use of Funds            | Amount Paid  | % of Total |
|-------------------------|--------------|------------|
| RENT ARREARS            | \$ 5,010,946 | 40 %       |
| FIRST/LAST MONTHS' RENT | \$ 3,029,944 | 24 %       |
| SECURITY DEPOSITS       | \$ 2,207,104 | 18 %       |
| UTILITIES               | \$ 783,826   | 6 %        |
| BASIC FURNITURE         | \$ 581,802   | 5 %        |
| RENT STIPENDS           | \$ 501,977   | 4 %        |
| MORTGAGE ARREARS        | \$ 125,641   | 1 %        |
| MOVING EXPENSES         | \$ 103,452   | 1 %        |
| OTHER                   | \$ 92,794    | 1 %        |

In FY 2018, RCAP Solutions used RAFT to assist 50 households that were victims of Hurricane Maria, which devastated Puerto Rico in September 2017, and Central Mass Housing Alliance assisted 39 Puerto Rican evacuees. These individuals and families were living in hotels or were doubled up with family members. Thousands of families without shelter and/or electricity left the island. Massachusetts, which is home to nearly 314,000 Americans who identify as Puerto Rican, saw some of the largest numbers of Maria evacuees. The state ranked second in the number of storm refugees receiving transitional shelter assistance from FEMA, according to FEMA spokesperson Dasha Castillo.<sup>7</sup> A study conducted in March 2018 concluded that a total of 2,556 students displaced by Hurricane Maria enrolled in Massachusetts school districts, including 68 students in Worcester County schools.<sup>8</sup> Use of RAFT funds to provide stable housing for these families is an example of program flexibility and responsiveness to changing needs, as well as a cost-effective strategy to prevent the need for expensive and disruptive placements in family shelters.

**Preserving  
Tenancies  
with RAFT in  
Berkshire County**

Rent stipends are a permitted use of RAFT funds, but in practice, most of the administering agencies do not use RAFT this way. The \$4,000 annual cap on RAFT benefits limits the size of the subsidy, and the fact that a new application for RAFT benefits must be filed each year creates uncertainty for landlords. In Berkshire County, however, nearly 24 percent of RAFT funds were used for rent stipends in FY 2018. Berkshire Housing Development Corporation (BHDC) works in partnership with Berkshire County Regional Housing Authority (BCRHA) in administering the RAFT program in the region. BCRHA has a strong record of using RAFT to preserve tenancies through mediation in eviction cases in court. BCRHA executive director Brad Gordon reports that many court-ordered plans to preserve tenancies involve the use of RAFT. Elton Ogden, president of BHDC, adds that households with extremely low incomes in Berkshire County have fewer options for employment, transportation, and permanently affordable housing than in other areas of the state. "Stipends are often the only way to buy time for households trying to attain sustainability moving forward," explains Ogden.

Other uses of RAFT included but were not limited to mortgage payments, transportation, and childcare costs.

## Households Receiving RAFT under Expanded Eligibility Criteria

In FY 2017, RAFT eligibility expanded to provide homelessness prevention resources to an expanded population by broadening the definition of families. This population includes households of all sizes, including elders, persons with disabilities, and unaccompanied youth. A limited amount of funding was allocated to provide assistance to households under the new definition.

The Commonwealth spent \$1,370,691 in RAFT funds to serve 599 households under this expanded definition of eligibility in FY 2018, representing 11 percent of RAFT assistance funds and 12.5 percent of FY 2018 RAFT recipients. The overwhelming majority of these RAFT recipients were single-person households, which differed from the overall group of RAFT recipients in a variety of ways. Nearly 38 percent of households that received RAFT under the expanded definition were headed by men; not including these recipients, only nine percent of households that received RAFT under the original eligibility criteria were headed by men. In general, these recipients were in their late forties, significantly older than RAFT heads of household as a whole. The exception was in Middlesex and Essex counties, where Community Teamwork, Inc. used RAFT funds as part of an initiative to serve homeless youth.

## Use of RAFT in Consecutive Years

While eligible households may receive up to \$4,000 in assistance from RAFT every year, assistance in consecutive years is the exception rather than the rule.

**TABLE 6: AGE, HOUSEHOLD SIZE, AND INCOME FOR HOUSEHOLDS RECEIVING RAFT UNDER EXPANDED ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA, FY 2018**

| Agency   | Average Age of Head of Household | Average Household Size | Median Household Income |
|--|----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| BERKSHIRE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION                  | 47                               | 1                      | \$ 9,473                |
| CENTRAL MASS HOUSING ALLIANCE                              | 50                               | 1.3                    | \$ 10,373               |
| COMMUNITY TEAMWORK, INC.                                   | 36                               | 1.4                    | \$ 15,042               |
| FRANKLIN COUNTY REGIONAL HOUSING & REDEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY | 41                               | 1                      | \$ 10,786               |
| HOUSING ASSISTANCE CORPORATION                             | 47                               | 1                      | \$ 18,030               |
| HOUSING SOLUTIONS FOR SOUTHEASTERN MASS                    | 48                               | 1.2                    | \$ 13,000               |
| LYNN HOUSING AUTHORITY & NEIGHBORHOOD DEVELOPMENT          | 50                               | 1.3                    | \$ 15,622               |
| METRO HOUSING   BOSTON                                     | 50                               | 1                      | \$ 10,092               |
| RCAP SOLUTIONS INC.  | 50                               | 1.02                   | \$ 14,400               |
| SOUTH MIDDLESEX OPPORTUNITY COUNCIL                        | 58                               | 1                      | \$ 20,874               |
| WAY FINDERS  | 44                               | 1.31                   | \$ 15,564               |

In FY 2018, just 274 out of 4,793 households that received RAFT also used the program in FY 2017. The percentage of households that received RAFT in FY 2017 and returned to the program in FY 2018 ranged from a low of one percent for clients of South Middlesex Opportunity Council to almost 12 percent of FY 2017 RAFT recipients in Franklin County.

## ESTIMATING SAVINGS FROM THE RAFT PROGRAM

In FY 2018, 3,787 households entered the state’s Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter system for homeless families. The average length of stay for families that exited the shelter program between April and June of 2018 was 410 days. The total cost of the program was \$175,907,565, an average of \$46,450 per family. The average cost of the EA program increased by 11 percent in FY 2018 compared to FY 2017. In contrast, RAFT assisted 4,793 families at a total cost of \$15,000,000. The average cost per family served was \$3,130 including administrative costs, which increased by 1.5 percent from FY 2017. The average savings from the RAFT program was \$43,321 for each eligible family that avoided entering the Emergency Assistance program.

Families with children and pregnant women who earn less than 115 percent of the federal poverty level may be eligible for Emergency Assistance. As of January 2018, the annual income limit for a family of three to be eligible for Emergency Assistance was \$23,892. In FY 2018, 63 percent of households that received RAFT had incomes at or below that level.

However, 599 households that received RAFT would be categorically ineligible for the family shelter program. If we estimate that 63 percent of the remaining households could conceivably have been eligible for shelter, that leaves an estimated 2,651 households that could have qualified for Emergency Assistance. It is reasonable to assume that a percentage of these households would have become homeless and eligible for family shelter without assistance from RAFT. Using the average RAFT recipient family size of three household members, Table 7 shows estimated savings from the RAFT program based on a range of assumptions about the percentage of EA-eligible families who would have needed Emergency Assistance without the RAFT program.

**TABLE 7: ESTIMATED EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE SAVINGS FROM RAFT PROGRAM, FY 2018**

| Assumed % of EA Eligible RAFT Clients That Could Have Needed Shelter | Number of EA Eligible Clients That Could Have Needed Shelter Based on Assumed % | Cost of EA @ \$46,450/ Household | Cost of RAFT @ \$3,130/ Household | Estimated Savings |
|--|---|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 10%  | 265   | \$ 9,654,019                     | \$ 909,141                        | \$ 8,744,879      |
| 25%  | 663   | \$ 24,135,048                    | \$ 2,272,852                      | \$ 21,862,196     |
| 50%  | 1,326   | \$ 48,270,096                    | \$ 4,545,704                      | \$ 43,724,393     |
| 75%  | 1,988   | \$ 72,405,144                    | \$ 6,818,555                      | \$ 65,586,589     |
| 100%   | 2,651   | \$ 96,540,192                    | \$ 9,091,407                      | \$ 87,448,785     |

The benefits of the RAFT program far exceed the monetary value of avoided costs in the family shelter system. Other savings to the Commonwealth and its municipalities include avoided costs for public assistance and school transportation that are incurred when families are displaced from their homes into shelter. When RAFT assistance allows a family to avoid eviction, housing authorities and private landlords also benefit.



## CONCLUSION

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The RAFT program is a cost-effective strategy to prevent homelessness. On average, RAFT can provide housing stability at a cost of \$2,595 per family, not including administrative expenses. This represents the equivalent of just 20 days in the family shelter system. During the last quarter of FY 2018, households that left the Emergency Assistance program had stayed in shelter for an average of 410 days.<sup>9</sup> Given the very low incomes of households that received RAFT, it is remarkable that 93.5 percent of families that used the program in FY 2017 did not return for assistance the following year.

More importantly, however, every \$2,595 spent on the RAFT program represents a positive investment in a family – most often a mother and two children – who did not have to select a few treasured belongings to fit into two plastic trash bags per person and move into a single room in a shelter, often in a new neighborhood or community, for close to a year. While it is impossible to put a monetary value on the avoided cost of homelessness for individual families, it is clear that RAFT provides stability, dignity, and independence for thousands of Massachusetts parents and children living on incomes that are insufficient to pay for housing in the Commonwealth.

“ My children and I have moved 14 times in the past 10 years. I have absolutely no words to express the financial strain this has put on all four of us. In March 2018, the Falmouth Department of Health came to inspect our rental that we had just moved into and wanted to condemn it. There was a rat infestation, and sewage in the basement that was filling the tubs daily. Now, thanks to RAFT, we have a safe home. Before, it had been months since any of us had been able to sleep through the night without fear, or worry if we would be on the street homeless. I am hard working, educated, and doing the best I can to survive and live on the Cape where I was born and raised. RAFT saved us. ”

– RAFT recipient,  
Housing Assistance  
Corporation

## REPORT FOOTNOTES

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- <sup>1</sup> These figures include all administrative expenses for both programs.
- <sup>2</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition, *Out of Reach 2018: The High Cost of Housing*.
- <sup>3</sup> HUD Fair Market Rent (FMR) is used to determine payment standards for the federal Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program. FMRs reflect the cost of rent and utilities paid by tenants, and are determined regionally. FMRs must be both high enough to permit a selection of units and neighborhoods and low enough to serve as many low-income families as possible. The standard represents the 40th percentile rent, i.e., the dollar amount below which 40 percent of the standard-quality private market housing units are rented. Statewide, the 2017 median monthly housing cost calculated by the U.S. Census is slightly lower than Fair Market Rent at \$1,431. FMRs are calculated to exclude subsidized public housing, which does not represent market rent.
- <sup>4</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition, *Out of Reach 2018: The High Cost of Housing*.
- <sup>5</sup> The remainder of the state appropriation paid for RAFT administrative expenses.
- <sup>6</sup> There were no households that received RAFT in Nantucket in FY 2018.
- <sup>7</sup> "One Year On, Refugees from Hurricane Maria Still Need Homes," *Hampshire Gazette*, September 21, 2018.
- <sup>8</sup> Puerto Rican Post-Maria Relocation by States, Center for Puerto Rican Studies, Hunter College, March 2018.
- <sup>9</sup> Commonwealth of Massachusetts, *Emergency Assistance, HomeBASE and RAFT Programs, Fiscal Year 2018, Fourth Quarterly Report, August 21, 2018*.





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