

Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP), Line Item 7004-9024
FY24 Funding Request: \$250 million

Governor's FY24 Proposal: \$168.3 million
FY23 Budget: \$175 million

The majority of households that are homeless or at risk of homelessness simply do not have sufficient income to pay for housing. Rent increases in greater Boston continue to outpace income, low vacancy rates further drive rents higher, and continued development pressures families to move further from employment opportunities and transportation options. **Rental assistance is the quickest, most efficient method of bridging that income gap. Funding at \$250 million will increase the number of vouchers, help preserve affordable developments, and allow DHCD to make programmatic fixes that will make vouchers more usable.** It will help tenants achieve greater stability in their housing, help increase participant mobility, and reduce lease-up times.

Additionally, Metro Housing requests that the rules regarding Fair Market Rents more closely align with Section 8 so that residents in high-cost areas can compete in the private market. Capping the rent artificially increases the challenges of eligible families to secure safe and decent homes. Additionally, we request that Small Area FMRs be implemented statewide in order to provide families and individuals true choice when using their state voucher in communities across the Commonwealth.

Residential Assistance for Families in Transition, Line Item 7004-9316
FY24 Funding Request: \$250 million

Governor's FY24 Proposal: \$162.6 million
FY23 Budget: \$210 million

Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) provides flexible funds to help families with very low and extremely low incomes avoid homelessness or re-establish tenancies. It has been instrumental in providing households with the opportunity to remain stably housed rather than entering emergency shelter ever since its creation, and very notably during the last three years.

With the drop-off in federal funding with the expiration of ERAP funds, it is more critical than ever for the state to continue to support this resource that is used by a more diverse array of residents than ever. For example, while federal dollars helped increase overall RAFT funding to \$325 million in the first seven months of FY22, **funding for RAFT in the same period this year (through January) has totaled \$157 million, with a shortfall anticipated** before the end of the year. Any amount less than \$250 million in FY24 will result in a significant drop-off of support for families who may lose stable housing and potentially enter shelter.

In order to continue to provide the most appropriate level of support, Metro Housing proposes total funding at \$250 million, removing the Notice to Quit requirement which has slowed the process and burdened tenant and property owner alike, and maintaining the maximum level of support at \$10,000 for these households seriously in threat of housing instability.

Housing Consumer Education Centers, Line Item 7004-3036

FY24 Funding Request: \$10.2 million

Governor's FY24 Proposal: \$8.8 million

FY23 Budget: \$9.7 million

At Metro Housing, the **Housing Consumer Education Center (HCEC)** is the front line for people facing housing crisis. The HCEC line item funds core staff and access to an array of resources for homelessness prevention services such as RAFT. HCEC funds provide critical capacity that leverages additional sources of funding such as federal housing counseling and financial assistance; private foundation support; and other state and local grants and contracts. Additionally, HCEC services work hand in hand with the RAFT program. HCEC and RAFT together represent a fully integrated model that allows RAFT participants to receive a holistic and supportive experience.

Access to these services for households of all incomes depends on the state's HCEC funds. During Fiscal Year 2022, the third year impacted by the COVID demand for services, Metro Housing's **HCEC assisted 20,000 households** with their housing crises through counseling sessions, walk-ins, workshops, and phone calls, **double the number of families helped annually pre-pandemic.**

Additionally, in FY23 for the first time this line item included \$1.5 million to provide enhanced services and flexible funding (ie. child care, auto repairs, etc.) for households that received RAFT in the preceding 12 months. While this program was only very recently launched (Metro Housing was the first HCEC to launch in December 2022) we support giving this initiative the time and potential programmatic changes to address similar issues impacting our families.

Public Housing Operating Subsidy, Line Item 7004-9005

FY24 Funding Request: \$184 million

Governor's FY24 Proposal: \$92 million

FY23 Budget: \$92 million

Investments in the state's public housing stock has been stagnant for years. This housing serves elders and households that have among the lowest incomes in the state. Failing to adequately fund public housing so that it can operate effectively negatively impacts the housing itself and the health and safety of tenants.