



The General Court of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Boston, MA 02133-1053

August 8, 2023

Governor Maura Healey
Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll
Massachusetts State House
Office of the Governor, Room 280
24 Beacon Street
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Governor Healey and Lieutenant Governor Driscoll,

We are writing to thank you for you and your administration's commitment to providing shelter to homeless families in Massachusetts, including new arrivals coming from other countries. We are proud to join you in representing a state that not only has a right to shelter for families experiencing homeless, but is committed to investing adequate resources to support the emergency shelter system, align multiple state agencies across several secretariats for coordinated responses, and establish regulations to provide thoughtful flexibility to provide care through our shelter system in times of crisis. We greatly appreciate the dedicated work of literally hundreds of your administration's staff, working around the clock to prevent homeless people from living on the streets.

We recognize that the emergency shelter system is taking care of thousands of families and individuals. As we see the rise in housing costs and instability, along with global crises that have exacerbated global migration, we also recognize that there is growing financial, staffing, physical shelter, and logistical challenges in the system. We were proud to vote for a historic investment in both the Supplemental Budget and the FY24 Budget, to maintain the shelter system. We want to affirm that we support the right to shelter law and remain committed to working with you and our communities in welcoming new arrivals to the communities that we represent, and the entire Commonwealth.

As Senators collectively representing Marlborough, Northborough, Southborough, and Westborough, where due to a large number of motels existing in our communities we have seen the placement of hundreds of new arrivals in the past few months, we wish to work with you in coordinating placements in our communities who have seen an increase of new families, including those without an assigned service provider.

We are grateful for our municipal officials, community advocates, faith leaders, local non-profits and fire, police, EMS and other professional emergency support professionals, who are stepping up to help. However, we urge the administration to provide better notification and coordination of state resources. While there may not be a lead service

provider located directly in the community, we have seen local leaders and volunteers step up to provide care, and providers in larger communities share resources and support. Following the pandemic, many communities are prepared for crisis response and clear coordination is key to ensuring appropriate responses are in place, communities are getting reimbursed, and no one is getting overwhelmed.

Over the past week, we have heard not only from municipal officials, social safety net non-profits, community leaders, but a growing number of housing and homeless advocates, which we have relied upon to guide state policy in the Legislature. We would like to lift up some of the actions they suggest and we would respectfully ask the Healey-Driscoll Administration to consider:

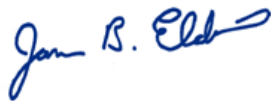
- Establish a statewide crisis response team for implementing the Emergency Shelter System, including one agency head that is the direct point person for the implementation of the shelter system, and policy decisions that impact the system.
- Coordinate action among state agencies, along with an external coordination between the Administration and other stakeholders (including shelter providers, advocacy groups, and community-based organizations) to get the specific resources each family needs, including in individual municipalities.
- Establish clear protocols for decision-making and definitive communication to our municipal leaders.
- Invest in additional Welcome Centers across the state and wraparound services.
- Issue a call to action to developers and property owners to identify vacant apartments that can be leased with MRVP for families to move out of shelter and into homes.
- Direct vouchers to families in shelter. The FY24 Budget passed by the Legislature includes an increase to the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program along with new flexibility to adjust voucher amounts to different rental markets across the state.
- Make deeper investments in homelessness prevention programs and streamline access to these resources including the RAFT program.
- Create more homes that are affordable for extremely low-income families.
- Immediately use state-owned land where buildings can provide shelter, and file legislation to expedite the production of all types of housing on state-owned land.
- Commit to spending a significant amount of the remaining \$300 million in ARPA funds to quickly create more low-income housing and shelter for Massachusetts residents, including new arrivals.

- File a Housing Bond bill by the early fall that includes the construction of more permanent shelters and low-income housing that will relieve the emergency shelter system.

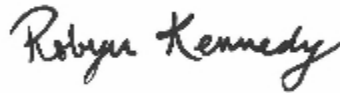
We support your ongoing efforts to engage community leaders and community resources in responding to the crisis we face, including identifying new, safe temporary shelter spaces.

We are here to work with you.

Sincerely,



James B. Eldridge
State Senator
Middlesex & Worcester District



Robyn Kennedy
State Senator
First Worcester District



Michael O. Moore
State Senator
Second Worcester District

CC:

Secretary Kate Walsh, Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Secretary Ed Augustus, Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities
Executive Director Cristina Aguilera, Office for Refugees and Immigrants
Director Dawn Brantley, Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency