

MASSACHUSETTS CATHOLIC CONFERENCE
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Bishop of Fall River

MOST REVEREND ROBERT J. MCMANUS
Bishop of Worcester

April 4, 2011

The Honorable Therese Murray
Senate President
State House Room 332
Boston, MA 02133

Re: House One Proposal to Address Homelessness

Dear Senate President Murray:

As a follow up to the recent statement "Standing in Solidarity with All" (see attached), the Massachusetts Catholic Conference, upon consultation with the diocesan Catholic Charities agencies, and on behalf of the Roman Catholic Bishops in the Commonwealth, writes in response to the Governor's proposed initiative in "House 1" to improve Emergency Assistance for homeless families with children in our state. We applaud the effort in working to seriously confront the complexity of this problem, and consider this letter an opportunity to participate in the broader discussion on the proposal, as well as a means of acting on our pledge to take up our share of responsibility for the well-being of the larger community.

The Administration's "House 1" proposal rightly gives emergency shelter protection to young mothers and their children, and for this reason, we affirm the proposal's commitment to this extremely vulnerable population. We do wish, however, to strongly recommend (based on the experience of our Catholic Charities agencies) that this group be supported with a well trained staff and quality developmental programs in order to provide more than simply a roof over the heads of mothers and their young child/ren. Reducing the risk that the family may return for additional shelter is essential not only for the stability of the particular family, but for the overall financial security of the Commonwealth as well.

We also agree that immediate shelter must be provided for those facing domestic violence and other emergencies such as natural disasters and fires. There is no need to second-guess those priorities to emergency assistance. However, we are deeply concerned about those families with children who will no longer meet the proposed eligibility requirements for immediate shelter and assistance. If currently qualified families are denied immediate assistance and cannot be sheltered in some form of emergency housing, where does the leadership believe they will end up, since these families have already exhausted their options? This unanswered gap in meeting the needs of those who currently appear at our Catholic Charities agencies is our most serious problem with this proposal. We fear they will become invisible to the state.

We would also like greater clarification regarding the specific nature of the proposed intended regional agency roles, staffing, and extent and timeliness of the emergency assistance to be provided to eligible

families. We are concerned about the shifting responsibility to regional agencies that are not specifically trained to serve the localized and specialized homeless families populations.

Additionally, we would like to encourage our state leaders to specify their willingness to:

- Maintain the current basic safety net of emergency shelter services for homeless families and their children;
- Provide more than the proposed \$8,000 cap annual housing subsidy for income eligible families; and
- Include basic daily living requirements when calculating income percentages expected for rental payment; no family should be expected to contribute more than thirty-five percent of their total monthly income on rent and utilities.

The Roman Catholic Bishops maintain their pledge to do all they can as Bishops to enable our institutions – parishes, Catholic Charities, health care facilities and schools – to continue to do their best in extending help to our neighbors in need, including but not limited to families experiencing homelessness.

We appreciate the challenge of these times and hope that you find solace in the fact that you do not walk alone in seeking to address the needs of our most vulnerable families with children.

Sincerely,

Gerald D'Avolio, Esq.
Executive Director

CC: The Honorable Brian S. Dempsey, Chairman, House Committee on Ways & Means

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April 4, 2011

The Honorable Robert A. DeLeo
Speaker of the House
State House Room 356
Boston, MA 02133

Re: House One Proposal to Address Homelessness

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Sincerely,

Gerald D'Avolio, Esq.
Executive Director
Massachusetts Catholic Conference

CC: The Honorable Stephen M. Brewer, Chairman, Senate Committee on Ways & Means