



Massachusetts Catholic Conference
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May 24, 2012

The Honorable Stephen Brewer
Massachusetts State House
Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairman Brewer,

My purpose for writing to you today is to communicate the support of the Massachusetts Catholic Conference and the four Roman Catholic Bishops of the Commonwealth for six amendments to the Senate Budget proposal, specifically Amendments 284, 288, 299, 539, 540, and 584.

Specifically, Amendment 284 increases funding for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program to \$46 Million, slightly more than the budgets of the Governor and the House. Amendments 288 and 299 would eliminate four narrow categories for Emergency Shelter Access eligibility currently in the budget and maintain current eligibility rules. Narrowing these categories would exclude many thousands of children from accessing the safety net of a shelter, such as those that have fled a domestic violence situation. Both Amendments would also restore the requirement for 60 days advance notice to the Legislature before new eligibility restrictions are imposed and maintain reasonable exceptions to the existing requirement that families in shelter save 30% of their income for housing. Amendments 539 and 540 allow for a 60-day legislative notice period for new eligibility restrictions for Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children Program and the Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children Program, respectively. Amendment 584 follows the House's lead to include language to create the Special Commission on Unaccompanied Youth Experiencing Homelessness.

In a recent statement called *Standing in Solidarity with All*, released in 2011, the four Bishops of the Commonwealth stated that "hundreds of families are doubling-up in inadequate housing or are being squeezed into already overwhelmed shelters and motel rooms. We all face a punishing intersection of rising human needs and declining resources that threatens the dignity of the human person and the stability of family life." The Catholic Church has a long history of supporting the most underprivileged in recognition of the inherent dignity of every human person. Thus, we urge the members of the Senate Ways and Means Committee to support Amendments 284, 288, 299, 539, 540, and 584 in an effort to combat homelessness during these turbulent economic times as the Senate takes up debate on its budget this week.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

James F. Driscoll
Executive Director
Massachusetts Catholic Conference