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January 30, 2023

To the Honorable Senate and House of Representatives,

I submit for your consideration a bill entitled “An Act Making Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2023 to Provide for Supplementing Certain Existing Appropriations and for Certain Other Activities and Projects.”

The demand for emergency shelter by families experiencing homelessness in the Commonwealth has significantly increased, and the emergency temporary shelter system is at capacity. While the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) has been working to place vulnerable people and expanding capacity to meet its revised caseload projections, Emergency Assistance (EA) funds have been depleted. As a right to shelter state, the Commonwealth is committed to providing safe temporary shelter to these families. With additional funding, DHCD will be able to continue the urgent task of expanding the capacity of the EA system by investing in the infrastructure, workforce, and supportive network of providers that help stabilize and rehouse these families to improve their circumstances.

As we invest in our EA shelter system, we must also partner with the local communities that have stepped up to welcome their neighbors and newcomers who need a hand. We will continue to increase shelter capacity equitably and sustainably, recognizing that these families and the communities in which they live are struggling to meet their needs. In particular, we must assist the schools and school districts that play a key role in helping kids whose families are experiencing homelessness.

We know that people affected by homelessness may require medical care and other services in addition to shelter to get back on their feet. School-aged children need to continue their education. People with complex language and legal barriers due to federal immigration and refugee policies may need support that addresses these distinct challenges. The Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency (MEMA) has established a temporary central intake center



located in the Bob Eisengrein Community Center in Devens where families receive timely case management services and various intake assessments before being transferred to an EA shelter site or another more permanent housing solution.

To address the caseload demand for family shelter, we urgently need to invest in and build the capacity of the EA system through all of these dimensions: increasing shelter units, growing our provider network, investing in our supportive service workforce, assisting local communities and schools who are welcoming families in need, providing interventions and supportive services that will connect people experiencing homelessness with the tools they need to stabilize and find permanent housing. Therefore, I am proposing that the Legislature appropriate \$85 million for immediate needs of the various agencies that each have a unique role in responding to this crisis.

As you know, recently enacted federal legislation will end the supplemental emergency allotment of aid to households who benefit from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). This enhanced federal benefit had been available during the pandemic and will be ending March 1. In order to assist Massachusetts residents who rely upon SNAP to feed their families, I am proposing a temporary ramp-down of the enhanced federal benefit by repurposing enhanced federal Medicaid funding to cover three months of supplemental allotments to SNAP recipients at an amount equal to 40% of the previous federal emergency program. These three months will assist households benefitting from SNAP to pay for healthy food. I am proposing \$130 million to establish this temporary ramp-down of enhanced SNAP benefits for this purpose, and an additional \$2 million to reimburse victims of SNAP benefit theft.

In the fiscal year 2023 General Appropriation Act, the Legislature enacted a pilot program to allow all K-12 students in Massachusetts to qualify for free school meals. The funding for that program has now been depleted, which would result in the program's early end in March. In order to continue the universal school meals pilot program statewide for the remainder of the 2022-2023 school year, I am proposing an additional \$65 million to meet projected need.

The total supplemental appropriations requested, including EA shelter and related proposals, enhanced SNAP ramp-down, and completion of the universal school meals pilot program is \$282 million.

Funding from this proposal will:

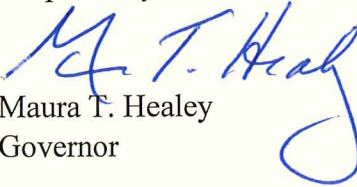
- Cover the cost of the projected increase in EA program caseload through the end of Fiscal Year 2023 (FY23);
- Facilitate the recruitment and retention of necessary service providers to scale the EA shelter provider network and its workforce;
- Expand the EA system by bringing new shelter units online;
- Assist local school districts with emergency aid for students whose families are experiencing homelessness;
- Establish and operate a temporary centralized intake center so families during their first few days in shelter can receive timely and focused case management services;

- Provide health care, supportive services, and specialized immigration and refugee-focused case management to families who need them;
- Provide a three-month ramp down of enhanced SNAP benefits at an amount equal to 40% of the previous federal enhanced SNAP allotment; and
- Continue funding for the universal free student meals pilot program for the remainder of the 2022-23 school year.

The bill also includes an outside section to allow for the efficient use of available resources by authorizing the transfer of funds between the EA and the HomeBASE line items in the FY23 budget, which will allow appropriated shelter funding to be utilized where it is most needed across the system.

Sufficient revenues are available to finance the appropriations and other proposed measures. I urge you to enact this legislation promptly to ensure that we continue to have capacity to shelter all eligible families.

Respectfully submitted,



Maura T. Healey
Governor