

June 13, 2016

The Honorable Karen E. Spilka, Senate Ways and Means Chair
The Honorable Brian S. Dempsey, House Ways and Means Chair
The Honorable Sal N. DiDomenico
The Honorable Viriato M. deMacedo
The Honorable Stephen Kulik
The Honorable Todd M. Smola

RE: FY17 Conference Budget – “SNAP Gap” and Common Application Option

Dear Members of the FY2017 Budget Conference Committee:

The organizations listed below wish to thank the Massachusetts House and Senate for their deliberations on the FY17 Annual Appropriations Bill and are grateful that both branches seek to ensure key services are accessible to our most vulnerable low income residents. We especially appreciate the consensus of both the House and Senate to explore creation of a “common application” portal, which would enable low-income residents to apply for key safety-net services for which they may qualify.

A streamlined application process that uses common eligibility information is efficient for state government agencies, human services providers and the low income communities we collectively serve. By ensuring all eligible low-income families access key health and nutrition programs –the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – we can both reduce medical costs and increase federal dollars to the Commonwealth. Further, receipt of SNAP automatically qualifies children for federally-funded free school meals, and allows low-income households to automatically qualify for regulated utility discounts.

We urge the Conference Committee to include the following in the FY17 Conference Budget:

1. Support the Senate appropriation in line item 4400-1000 (DTA Central Administration), which includes additional \$1.9M to hire new caseworkers to support an increased SNAP caseload.
2. Support a consensus compromise between the House (Section 42A) and Senate language (within line EOHHS item 4000-0100) by including the Senate appropriation of \$1M and language which -
 - a. directs the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to use the funds to facilitate SNAP applications for MassHealth applicants and recipients, and electronically share relevant MassHealth eligibility data and documents with DTA for SNAP eligibility purposes.
 - b. directs EOHHS, the Executive Office of Communities and Development (EOCD) and sister agencies, during FY2017, to identify the costs and systems changes needed to create a common application for low income households eligible to apply for income-eligible child care, housing subsidies and other key services. We are mindful of the IT systems challenges involved in major changes to the Health Connector, and urge EOHHS and EOCD to identify options that can successfully create a common application path for multiple benefits.

We believe that these are important and achievable goals within the proposed time frame and with the proposed funding. We thank you for you for your work in helping government work effectively and efficiently for all residents of the Commonwealth, including our most vulnerable.

Sincerely,

55 statewide and local Massachusetts organizations* including:

- *Action for Boston Community Development, Inc.
- *Action, Inc. (Gloucester)
- *Arise for Social Justice (Springfield)
- *Beverly Bootstraps
- *Boston Area Rape Crisis Center (BARCC)
- *Boston Public Health Commission
- *Central West Justice Center
- *CEOC -Cambridge Economic Opportunity Committee, Inc.
- *Children's HealthWatch
- *Community Action of the Franklin, Hampshire, and North Quabbin Regions
- *Community Servings
- *Elizabeth Freeman Center, Inc. (Pittsfield)
- *EMPath - Economic Mobility Pathways (formerly Crittenton Women's Union)
- *Family-to-Family Project (Boston)
- *Food Bank of Western Massachusetts
- *Gray House (Springfield)
- *Greater Boston Food Bank
- *Greater Boston Legal Services
- *Health Care for All
- *Horizons for Homeless Children
- *Immigrant Service Providers Group/Health
- *JALSA - Jewish Alliance for Law & Social Action
- *Jane Doe Inc.
- *Jewish Family & Children's Service
- *Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry (Worcester)
- *Lorraine's Soup Kitchen & Pantry (Chicopee)
- *MAS - Food Pantry and Soup Kitchen (Holyoke)
- *Mass Home Care
- *Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
- *Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy Coalition
- *Massachusetts Law Reform Institute
- *Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers
- *Massachusetts Public Health Association
- *Massachusetts Senior Action
- *Mayor's Office of Food Initiatives for the City of Boston
- *Medical-Legal Partnership Boston
- *On Solid Ground
- *Our Father's House (Fitchburg)
- *Poor Peoples United Fund (Boston)
- *Prescott Mill Apartments (Clinton)
- *Project Bread
- *Project Hope
- *Quincy Community Action Programs - Southwest Community Food Center
- *Rosie's Place
- *Safe Passage (Northampton)
- *Salvation Army (Pittsfield)
- *Single Stop (Boston, Springfield)
- *St. Francis House (Boston)
- *St. John's Food Pantry (Springfield)
- *The Alliance for Business Leadership
- *The Open Door (Gloucester)
- *The People's Pantry (Great Barrington)
- *Worcester County Food Bank
- *Worcester Food Policy Council
- *Worcester State University - Hunger Outreach Team