



THE NATIONAL CENTER ON
Family Homelessness
for every child, a chance

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Homeless for the Holidays

Massachusetts Budget Decisions Could Increase Child Homelessness

BOSTON, Mass. (December 3, 2009): The state's budget woes are likely to increase the number of homeless children and families in Massachusetts this holiday season. This increase could result in additional homeless families trying to access an already overburdened service system.

The state has been put in the position of making tough budget choices that affect all residents of Massachusetts. Among the most vulnerable in the Commonwealth are the thousands of children and their families who experience homelessness annually. The state has continued to support some important homeless services; however, other critical programs for homeless children and families have been changed or eliminated.

For low-income families, changes in eligibility for Transitional Aid to Families with Dependent Children (TAFDC) could mean a dramatic loss in income that will likely result in increased housing instability and homelessness, further stressing the state's shelter and service system. Elimination of the state's policy of granting immediate childcare vouchers to children who are homeless has resulted in a 13 percent decrease in the number of children in shelters who are accessing early education and care. Loss of income as well as early education and care means that more children will experience the trauma of homelessness without effective intervention. Without these supports, homeless parents will be unable to search for work or participate in job training, undermining their efforts to secure permanent housing for their families and move towards self-sufficiency.

The experience of homelessness can have a devastating and life-long impact on a child. Compared to their peers, homeless children are more likely to be sick, have learning difficulties and encounter stressful and traumatic experiences. Further erosion of safety net services and supports could cause even more harm to homeless children and their families here in Massachusetts.

The Massachusetts Campaign to End Child Homelessness urges the Governor and legislative leaders to remember those most in need this holiday season: homeless children and families in the Commonwealth. Continued state support for critical housing and services—such as the TAFDC program and access to early childhood education—is imperative for these families.

Homeless Children in Massachusetts

According to *America's Youngest Outcasts: State Report Card on Child Homelessness*, over 17,500 children are identified by school district officials as homeless in Massachusetts annually. When adding in counts of those not identified by school district officials, there are more than 100,000 children in Massachusetts who are homeless. When homeless, children experience high rates of acute and chronic health problems. Children experiencing homelessness are sick four times more often than other children. They go hungry at twice the rate of other children and have three times the rate of emotional and behavioral problems. Children who are homeless struggle in school, with an average 16% lower proficiency in math and reading.

The Campaign to End Child Homelessness

The Massachusetts Campaign is an initiative of the national Campaign to End Child Homelessness which seeks to increase public awareness, inform state and federal policies, and improve services to prevent and end child homelessness. Each year, more than 1.5 million American children are homeless—one in every 50 children. The Massachusetts Campaign is a coalition of organizations that includes The National Center on Family Homelessness (www.familyhomelessness.org), Homes for Families (www.homesforfamilies.org), Horizons for Homeless Children (www.horizonsforhomelesschildren.org), and the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless (www.mahomeless.org). For more information, please visit www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org.

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