



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

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**New State Spending Cuts Could Increase  
Child Homelessness in Massachusetts**  
*Advocates Urge Continued Support for Homeless Children*

**ROXBURY, Mass.** (October 16, 2009): Leaders from the Massachusetts Campaign to End Child Homelessness gathered at Horizons for Homeless Children in Roxbury today to urge continued state and federal support for critical housing and supportive services.

Massachusetts state government has announced an estimated \$1 billion revenue deficit at a time when federal government housing funds are nearing depletion. State officials have indicated that new spending cuts may be announced within the next two weeks.

With approximately 17,500 children already homeless in Massachusetts annually, continued home foreclosures will increase the number of children and families without homes. Further spending cuts to programs and services for children and families who are homeless would likely increase the number of homeless children in Massachusetts.

Participants included Horizons for Homeless Children ([www.horizonsforhomelesschildren.org](http://www.horizonsforhomelesschildren.org)), Homes for Families ([www.homesforfamilies.org](http://www.homesforfamilies.org)), Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless ([www.mahomeless.org](http://www.mahomeless.org)), and The National Center on Family Homelessness ([www.familyhomelessness.org](http://www.familyhomelessness.org)).

National advocate Diane Nilan of the [HEAR US Learning Curve Express](http://www.hear-us.org), who has embarked on a national tour to raise awareness about homeless children and families, also joined the gathering. She traveled here in her RV to meet with Massachusetts families currently experiencing homelessness and to document their experiences. "This nation can no longer ignore the plight of millions of impoverished children, families and teens who are homeless or in danger of losing their housing," Nilan said. "This is happening all over this country. It is time to draw a line in the sand."

Sue Heilman, Executive Director of Horizons for Homeless Children, spoke to the early education needs of children who are homeless. "These children need to learn and grow in safe and secure environments so they can be successful later in life and so their families can get back on their feet," Heilman said. "In Massachusetts, thousands of young homeless children lack access to early education programs, and we must make that opportunity available to them."

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## **State Spending Cuts Could Increase Child Homelessness 2222222**

Advocates attending the gathering urged specific state and federal policy steps to help people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in Massachusetts:

- Adequately fund the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program at \$35.8 million in order to provide cost-effective housing alternatives to the already overburdened shelter system which now houses over 3,000 Massachusetts families – 1,000 of which are living in motels – at an average cost of \$3,510 per month. The cost of a rental voucher is less than \$600 per month.
- Enact Massachusetts House Bill 1242 to give priority to people who are homeless or at-risk of becoming homeless in most state housing programs.
- Enact Massachusetts Senate Bill 43/House Bill 169 to target Department of Transitional Assistance resources to prevent homelessness for people at-risk of losing their housing.
- Restore immediate access to early education and care for homeless children in Massachusetts (suspended on Sept. 1, 2009) to allow families to move towards housing stability.
- Increase Head Start enrollment for young children who are homeless and ensure educational stability for all children who are homeless, including those in shelters, overflow motels, and living doubled-up in unstable situations because of economic necessity.
- Urge the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to assist Massachusetts housing authorities facing a \$3.5 million funding shortfall in the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

### **Homeless Children in Massachusetts**

According to *America's Youngest Outcasts: State Report Card on Child Homelessness*, there are over 17,500 homeless children in the state of Massachusetts. When homeless, children experience high rates of acute and chronic health problems. The constant barrage of stressful and traumatic experiences also has profound effects on their development and ability to learn. 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—that is 1 in every 50 children. For more information, please visit [www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org](http://www.HomelessChildrenAmerica.org).

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