

Food Stamp/SNAP Improvement Coalition

c/o Mass Law Reform Institute
99 Chauncy Street
Boston, MA 02111
617-357-0700 www.mlri.org



February 8, 2012

The Honorable Brian Dempsey
The Honorable Stephen Kulik
House Ways and Means
State House
Boston, MA 02113

**RE: FY2013 Budget – DTA Administrative Funding for
Front Line SNAP Case Workers, Line Item 4400-1100**

Dear Chairman Dempsey and Vice Chairman Kulik:

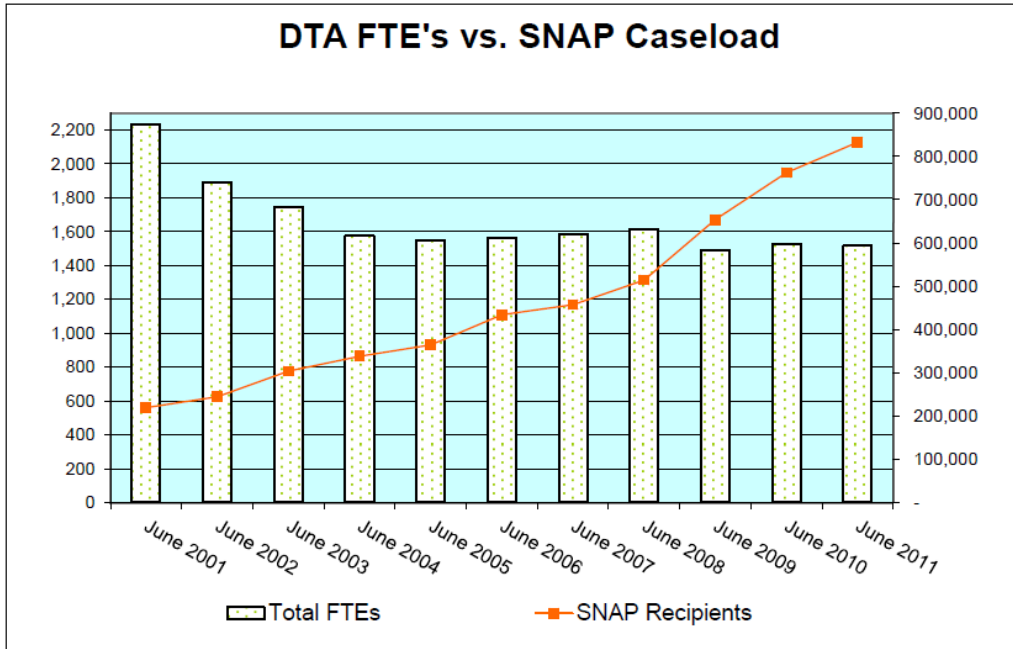
On behalf of the Food Stamp/SNAP Improvement Coalition, I am writing to urge increased funding in the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) case worker line-item, 4400-1100 in the House Ways and Means FY2013 Budget. The growth in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) caseload coupled with attrition of front line DTA staff – during the most severe economic downturn in recent history – has made it extremely difficult for DTA to keep up with the workload. Administrative funding is critical for DTA to timely process federally-required SNAP case reviews as well as manage the growth of new SNAP applications that flow in each month. Further, there are thousands of additional low-income Massachusetts residents who are likely eligible for SNAP, such as MassHealth recipients or households exhausting UI benefits, but DTA is not in a position where front line staff can engage in aggressive outreach to enroll them.

SNAP benefits remains first line of defense against hunger for low income families, recently unemployed households, seniors and persons with disabilities. As you also know, SNAP benefits are 100% federally funded. Approximately 50% of the state's SNAP administrative costs are federally reimbursed. By our estimate, *for every \$1 net in administrative costs, the Commonwealth leverages at least \$50 in 100% federally-funded nutrition benefits.* SNAP benefits go directly into the hands of low income residents of the state, who spend these benefits in local grocery stores, supermarkets and farmer's markets. According to both the USDA Economic Research Service and Moody's Economy, SNAP benefits are one of the most effective economic stimulus benefits for states and local economies, *generating \$9 in economic activity for every \$5 in federal benefits.*

Over the past five years, DTA has worked tirelessly to pursue a host of federal waivers and policy options. These initiatives have increased SNAP participation and the value of monthly SNAP benefits – both which have risen at a rate faster than the national average. As of October 2011, DTA reported over 463,000 SNAP households representing 838,000 individual residents. *Massachusetts now ranks among the top 10 states in SNAP participation* thanks to these efforts, with over *\$1.3 billion in federal nutrition dollars coming into the Commonwealth annually.* DTA deserves much credit and praise for these efforts.

Even with all the new policies in place, DTA continues to struggle with managing the growth of the SNAP caseload due to a substantial decrease in staffing due to attrition. *Since 2005, the SNAP caseload has increased from 500 per worker to 900 per worker*, and more in some area offices. The lack of adequate DTA administrative resources makes Massachusetts especially vulnerable to quality control errors for failure to timely process SNAP applications and renewals. And lack of staff makes it impossible to fully respond to the unexpected but now frequent natural disasters and power outages that plagued the state in 2011 and may continue in years ahead.

The caseload/workforce chart below highlights the current administrative burden facing dedicated DTA staff who struggle daily to keep up with applications, renewals and federal processing requirements.



The Massachusetts Food SNAP Coalition urges House Ways and Means to include in its FY2013 budget sufficient administrative funding for DTA to fully staff local and DTA Central offices to meet the SNAP and cash caseload needs. **The Coalition supports the request of SEIU Local 509 in urging a \$10 million increase over FY2012 appropriations to hire additional front line staff.** Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Patricia Baker
Chair, Massachusetts Food Stamp/SNAP Coalition

- cc. Daniel Curley, DTA Commissioner
- dd. Members, House Ways and Means
- ee. Members, Food SNAP Improvement Coalition