

# Constituent Questions on Homelessness

## Q

I'm afraid of my partner and have nowhere to go. What can I do?

If it is safe to use the phone, call **SafeLink**, the state's multi-lingual 24/7 toll-free hotline at 877-785-2020 (TTY: 877-521-2601). All calls to SafeLink are free, confidential and anonymous. You can also contact domestic violence shelters directly. See <http://www.mahomeless.org/index.php/survivors-of-domestic-violence>.

The state's Emergency Assistance (EA) shelter program also provides shelter to pregnant women or families with children who are homeless due to domestic violence and meet other eligibility rules.

## A

I'm a **homeless veteran**. Where do I turn?

Massachusetts has shelters just for veterans and provides benefits and financial assistance to low-income veterans. Your town's veteran agent ([www.mass.gov/veterans/utility/local-veterans-service-officers-3.html](http://www.mass.gov/veterans/utility/local-veterans-service-officers-3.html)) can provide details and an application. The VA's National Call Center for Homeless Veterans has counselors available to veterans anytime at 1-877-424-3838.

I'm a **homeless adult** and need a place to sleep. Where can I go?

There are many different shelters for homeless adults who have no children with them. Beds are generally available on a first-come, first-serve basis. These shelters are usually single sex. <http://www.mahomeless.org/index.php/adults>

I am homeless and have **children**. My friend is homeless and has no children, but is **pregnant**. Where do we go for help?

The **Emergency Assistance (EA)** program provides temporary shelter for low-income pregnant women and families with children under age 21. The eligibility criteria are strict. Staff from the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), located at local welfare (DTA) offices, will determine if you are eligible. To find the nearest office, go to [www.masslegalservices.org/content/appendix-dta-offices-where-there-are-dhcd-staff-providing-ea-benefits](http://www.masslegalservices.org/content/appendix-dta-offices-where-there-are-dhcd-staff-providing-ea-benefits) and click on Appendix A. Or if you can't get to an office call 866-584-0653 to apply.

See [www.masslegalservices.org/content/non-ea-shelter-lists](http://www.masslegalservices.org/content/non-ea-shelter-lists) for non-EA shelters.

My **application for EA shelter was denied**, and my family has nowhere to sleep but in the car. Please help!

Contact your local legal aid office right away to find out if you were properly denied. You can reapply at any time and, with the help of legal services, DHCD may approve a new application. If you are denied EA, the DHCD representative must give you a denial notice that explains the reason for the denial. You have just 21 days to appeal the denial, so send it in as soon as possible. But because getting a hearing and a decision may take so long, it may be best to reapply after getting legal advice.

I just arrived at a homeless shelter. Where will my children **go to school**?

Each school district is required to have a homeless liaison, who can be reached by calling your district's administration office. If you have trouble, contact the Office for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth at 781-338-6330. **Homeless students have a right to remain in their school of origin** or to attend school where they are temporarily residing, whichever their parents choose. If a student is homeless outside their original district and their parents do not want to change schools, **the new district must ensure that transportation is provided** to and from the school of origin if it is not too far away. If the student changes schools, **school districts must immediately enroll homeless students** for classes and for free and reduced lunches, even if the students do not have the required documents, such as school and medical records and proof of residency.

(Over)



Can I get **financial help** if I'm homeless or at risk of being homeless?

Yes, if you meet strict rules. Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) and HomeBASE Household Assistance are **homelessness prevention programs** available to some low-income families at risk of homelessness and those currently in shelter. RAFT helps families who are facing immediate eviction because they are behind on rent or utility bills or who have to move but do not have enough money to pay a security deposit, utility startup costs or first/last month's rent. HomeBASE is only available to EA participants and may be an option for families in shelter or those who are approved for but have not yet entered shelter. RAFT provides up to \$4,000 in benefits per 12-month period. HomeBASE provides up to \$8,000. To apply or find more information on RAFT call 800-224-5124 and for HomeBASE call 877-418-3308.



I left shelter five months ago and now have nowhere to go. DHCD tells me that I **can't go back to EA shelter**. Is that true?

Families generally cannot get back into EA shelter for 12-months from when they left. But there are certain exceptions to this "12 month rule." For instance, the 12-month rule does not apply if you were only placed presumptively the first time or if you left for safe, permanent housing that ended up not being so. Families who left shelter with HomeBASE can return to shelter after 3 months if they complied with the rules but are becoming homeless again. Families terminated from HomeBASE for not complying with the rules can be barred from shelter for 24 months. Contact legal services for additional details.

I am in a shelter and applied at my local housing authority for the Emergency wait list for state-aided housing. They said I was denied because **they don't consider me "homeless" enough**. How can that be?

**Each government program defines homelessness differently.** (In some situations, a person could be living on the street for years but still not be eligible under the regulations.) If one program has said you do not qualify, it does not mean that you are not homeless and it does not affect your "homeless applicant" status with other housing authorities or programs. **You should contact legal services immediately for additional details and to discuss your options.**

I am living in an apartment subsidized by **HomeBASE**. Am I considered "homeless" for permanent subsidized housing?

Yes, for state housing. Contact your HomeBASE provider for details.

I am in an apartment subsidized by HomeBASE but have **problems such as mice, bed bugs, etc.** Can I do anything?

Yes, the **State Sanitary Code and landlord-tenant laws remain in full effect**, so contact your landlord, in writing, to fix those problems. If he or she fails to do so, call the local Board of Health or Inspectional Services Department for an inspection. Also call your HomeBASE worker to document the problems and ask for help.

**Can my children be taken away** because I am homeless?

Homelessness, in and of itself, is **not a valid reason** for the Department of Children and Families (DCF) to remove your children. If they attempt to, you need legal help. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed to represent you at the removal proceedings. DCF has a legal obligation to provide emergency shelter to families in situations where the family's lack of housing is the reason for a potential removal of a child, but it rarely does this.

Can DCF **keep custody** of my children just because I am homeless?

Even if DCF has custody of your children, they are required to immediately shelter you if you have complied with your service plan and the only obstacle to reunification is lack of appropriate housing. If they don't reunite you with your children in a shelter after you inform them of their duty, tell your attorney or contact your local legal aid program.

*This information is general in nature and not intended as legal advice. The income eligibility limit for legal aid is generally 125% of the federal poverty line (or \$591 per week for a family of four in 2017), with some exceptions. **Due to limited funding, legal aid programs cannot serve all eligible callers.***