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January 6, 2009

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **PATRICK-MURRAY ADMINISTRATION TO FILE LONG-TERM HOMELESS SHELTER REFORM INITIATIVE**

***Measure will focus on more permanent housing and reducing the need for shelters to serve the homeless***

BOSTON – Tuesday, January 6, 2009 – The Patrick-Murray Administration today took another step toward improving the long-term effectiveness of support systems for the homeless by announcing it will file legislation under Article 87 of the Commonwealth's Constitution to reorganize state agencies that provide services for the homeless in an effort to combine emergency shelter programs with the state's housing resources.

The Administration will propose merging Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) emergency shelter services with existing Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) housing programs to make state services more efficient by shifting focus away from shelter use to a permanent housing strategy that will help to end homelessness in Massachusetts .

The reorganization under Article 87 must be voted up or down without amendment by the Legislature within 60 days of being filed. The Patrick-Murray Administration plans to file the proposal at the end of January.

"We have started to implement the recommendations of the Massachusetts Commission to End Homelessness to respond to a housing and homelessness crisis precipitated by a worsening economy," said Lt. Governor Timothy Murray, a former commission member who currently serves as the state's Chairman of the Interagency Council of Housing and Homelessness (ICHH). "Our proposal will reduce long term shelter use, and help give homeless people what they really need – a permanent place of their own to call home."

Under the consolidation plan, DTA's family and emergency shelter programs will move to DHCD to help carry out a "Housing First" approach, as recommended by the homelessness commission, which focuses on helping individuals and families quickly access and sustain permanent housing.

The proposal follows last month's announcement to award \$8 million to eight regional pilot networks around the state. Those networks will help better coordinate, integrate and implement innovative services focused on securing permanent housing options for homeless individuals and families, and ultimately lessen the need for emergency assistance shelters.

"This reorganization of emergency services is an important step in a comprehensive restructuring of the state's shelter and housing systems to ensure that we immediately deploy the right resources to the right people at the right time," said ICHH Executive Director Robert Pulster. "By integrating these existing functions into one department, the state can directly coordinate its housing production agenda with specific housing supply needs and extend the reach of subsidized housing to extremely low-income households."

In addition to the regional networks and the restructuring plan, the Administration will consider changes to our Emergency Assistance regulations to ensure the Commonwealth is meeting the needs of our most vulnerable, while encouraging self-sufficiency through education and training.

This reform effort is supported by a number of initiatives within the Administration that are already underway:

- DTA's re-procurement of the emergency assistance temporary shelter system for families, which is set to be effective February 1, 2009. This re-procurement will ensure equity and accountability in the provision of shelter services with a renewed focus on rapid re-housing and housing stabilization.
- DTA's purchasing of 2,000 units of both congregate and scattered site shelter units, in sizes and configurations that meet the needs of the families applying for emergency shelter
- The development of eight regional networks to demonstrate how greater coordination and effective integration of services and housing can eradicate homelessness, which is set to be effective on February 1, 2009. Lessons learned through the regional networks will continue to inform systems change needs.
- Key innovations that will be tested include comprehensive assessment, permanent supportive housing, flexible rental supports, Housing First models, coordinated case management, and early warning prevention and diversion systems.
- Quasi-public agency MassHousing will invest \$7 million in the ICHH over four years to support a collaborative housing venture directed by an interagency team led by the DTA and DHCD. The *Moving to Economic Opportunity Pilot* will provide rental support combined with employment assistance and an asset-building component. With the major planning and operational details finalized, up to 150 families can be placed in early 2009 with the first \$1.75 million installment expected within the month.

"This consolidation underscores the Administration's understanding that homelessness is a housing issue. DTA will continue to work closely with DHCD and other state agencies to coordinate resources and employment supports in order to comprehensively assist extremely low-income families and individuals move out of poverty," said DTA Commissioner Julia Kehoe.

"The Administration's proposal will offer homelessness prevention and diversion resources to provide a broader array of housing solutions and resources than is currently available to families under the existing delivery system," said housing and community development undersecretary Tina Brooks. "Those actions along with DHCD's ongoing commitment to significantly fund developments that create housing for extremely low-income families, we can further our mission to strengthen neighborhoods in our cities and towns and make them places of opportunity for all."

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