

Letter to the Editor: Homeless can't afford governor's values

A recent press release announcing Gov. Patrick's 9C cuts quoted Gary Blumenthal, executive director of ADDP, an organization that advocates around issues affecting the developmentally delayed and disabled, as saying that the governor's proposed cuts in human services was "courageous," and "based on the values of all the people of the commonwealth."

Those of us in the homeless adult shelter community who have struggled to implement his administration's Five-Year Plan to End Homelessness over the last three years are left to wonder: What values?

Clearly, Gov. Patrick's values do not include any sympathy for the homeless adult persons who are on the streets or languishing in the shelters of Massachusetts. His decision to cut nearly 15 percent — \$2.7 million — from the remaining FY 2010 Homeless Individual Assistance line item 7004-0102, will result in depleted resources in health care, day services, housing, and shelter for men and women across Massachusetts. One would think, if he was not moved by moral values to address this evil, he might at least be moved by solid fiscal values, which are also ill-served by this cut.

Gov. Patrick reduced 265 state budget line items as part of his released 9C cuts. Of these 265 line items, only 19 face a deeper cut than the Homeless Individuals Assistance line item. The reduction to 7004-0102 represents 93 percent of the reduction faced by the Department of Housing and Community Development.

Homeless individuals alone were left to bear the disproportionate burden to meet the governor's need to simply cut.

Programs funded through 7004-0102 have led the way in providing new and effective solutions to reduce the state's reliance on expensive emergency resources for unaccompanied homeless adults, generating documented savings across all systems of care. These resources serve as the platform for the development of innovative "housing first" programs that have resulted in decreased shelter capacity, lower Medicaid costs and reduced street populations in towns and cities all across the state.

Gov. Patrick is plunging our commonwealth deeper into fiscal crisis by cutting programs that have proven to use state resources in an efficient and cost-effective manner, saving taxpayers millions of dollars in the process.

The one successful outcome of his Five-Year Plan to End Homelessness has been a reduction in the numbers of unaccompanied homeless adults around the commonwealth. The governor has now set the stage for an increase in human suffering and an increase in costs to the commonwealth, values none of us can afford.

As we enter into the holiday season, one way all people of conscience in Massachusetts could demonstrate their gratitude is by urging the House and Senate to act promptly to restore these funds.

Joe Finn, Executive Director, Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance

Jim Stewart, First Church Shelter, Boston

(Editor's note: Jim Stewart was one of the founders of Salem's Crombie Street Shelter, now the Salem Mission.)