



# MASSACHUSETTS HOUSING AND SHELTER ALLIANCE

INITIATING SOLUTIONS TO END HOMELESSNESS

## HOMELESS ADVOCATES PRAISE SENATE BUDGET PROPOSAL

New Line Item Funds “Housing First” Approach to Ending Homelessness

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**May 17, 2006** – The Massachusetts Senate Ways and Means budget proposal released today included an initiative that would provide funding to house the chronically homeless, the costliest and most vulnerable population of homeless individuals who live on the streets. Both advocates and homeless service providers are praising the inclusion of the new line item, which would fund the Home and Healthy for Good Initiative, an innovative, housing-based approach to ending homelessness.

“The introduction of this groundbreaking legislation signals a shift in the way the state responds to homelessness,” said Joe Finn, executive director of the Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance. “The Senate Ways and Means Committee and its chairperson, Senator Therese Murray, deserve a great amount of credit for advancing an approach to homelessness that is more effective, more cost-efficient, and, ultimately, more humane.”

Recent data from the street team of Boston Health Care for the Homeless has catalogued the medical needs and costs associated with living unsheltered on the streets. A cohort of 119 “rough sleepers” in Boston accounted for 18,384 emergency room visits and 871 medical hospitalizations over a five-year period. The average annual health care cost alone for individuals living on the street was \$28,436, compared to \$6,056 for individuals in the cohort who obtained housing.

“For the chronically homeless, a prescription for supportive housing is the most important medical intervention I can make,” said Dr. Jessie Gaeta of Boston Health Care for the Homeless.

Line Item 4406-3010 leverages existing funding and provides \$600,000 to pay for support services and stabilization for chronically homeless people in housing. Currently, homeless providers are unable to take advantage of some existing housing resources as there is minimal funding for support staff to help clients maintain their tenancies. Home and Healthy for Good would also collect data on the chronically homeless individuals who are housed.

“This new line item will allow housing agencies to target the most expensive population of homeless individuals, get them off the streets, move them directly into housing, and help them maintain their tenancies,” said Tom Lorello, executive director of Shelter Inc. in Cambridge. “By using this Housing First approach, the state can literally end the homelessness of individuals who currently shuffle between expensive systems of care without hope. This initiative brings hope to homeless people and to those who are ready to end this social disgrace.”