



THE PAUL & PHYLLIS  
FIREMAN  
CHARITABLE  
FOUNDATION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Larry Carpman  
Lauren Malone  
Carpman Communications, LLC  
617-338-6601

**Ending Family Homelessness:**  
*Fireman Foundation Releases “Putting Families First”  
Recommendations To Stretch Public Resources and  
Serve More Families*

BOSTON—About 20,000 families who were in fear of losing their homes went looking for help between the months of July 2009 and February 2010. Only 3,000 of those families found the help they needed. Despite the state spending \$2.3 million per month for motel stays, 17,000 families were left behind, meaning that only 15 percent of families facing homelessness received the help they needed in avoiding long and expensive shelter stays.

Most of these families living in motels and shelters have been shipped around the state – some 50-100 miles away from their home towns. No family can feel settled and secure with this much instability.

That is the challenge the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Charitable Foundation is hoping to overcome with the release today of its “white paper,” *Ending Family Homelessness in Massachusetts: A New Approach for the Emergency Assistance (EA) Program*. The white paper is part of the Foundation’s overall **“Putting Families First”** initiative.

The white paper includes a comprehensive set of recommendations designed to dovetail with existing state and federal programs and funding to bring an end to family homelessness more quickly and at a lower cost. *Ending Family Homelessness in Massachusetts* is the culmination of 10 years of study, analysis, listening and outreach. The Fireman Foundation worked on the white

paper with one of the nation's leading specialists in family homelessness. Dennis Culhane, a social policy professor at University of Pennsylvania, has studied homelessness and housing policy for over two decades. His research has been instrumental on a national level in focusing attention on how society addresses homelessness and housing instability, and on local and regional levels in recommending solutions to cities faced with specific homelessness challenges. The white paper has been the priority of the Fireman Foundation since 2000 when the non-profit first kicked-off its effort to encourage the state's Emergency Assistance (EA) program to operate more efficiently and help more families prevent homelessness or leave shelter sooner.

"The City of Boston is in the process of implementing a series of innovative pilot initiatives that focus on preventing and diverting families from entering the shelter system," said Mayor Thomas Menino. "I applaud the Fireman Foundation for their leadership and thank them for their partnership in this work that is crucial for the present and future of our city's families," he added.

The "**Putting Families First**" initiative seeks to build on successful pilot programs and offer ideas on how to adjust EA programs so the present "one-size-fits-all" approach becomes a customized effort that addresses the needs of individual families. The goal is to broaden the focus on emergency shelter to a more flexible practice that includes prevention and housing stabilization.

"If housing unaffordability is the primary cause for family homelessness, housing affordability is the primary solution," said Culhane. "We need to find a way to stretch family homelessness dollars so more families can be served and placed in permanent housing," he added.

The cost of an average eight-month stay at a shelter for a homeless family has ballooned to \$26,000. The white paper lays out ideas and programs that are designed to highlight prevention and other services for the estimated 5,000 families who suffer from homelessness in Massachusetts each year. A convening with service providers, funders, homeless families and state officials has been scheduled for May 11, 2010 during which time the details of the policy recommendations will be discussed.

*Ending Family Homelessness in Massachusetts* contains two key policy recommendations:

- The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) should consider more flexible eligibility criteria, allowing providers to serve families with the appropriate levels of assistance.
- The Department should provide families with a shelter "exit plan" within a certain time period so shelter and motel stays can be shortened.

"Housing is a basic human right," said Paul Fireman of the Fireman Foundation. "Our current system relies too heavily on shelter. It places families in shelter or motel rooms that cost the state more than renting an apartment. After many months living together in a single room, that family does not emerge stronger or more successful. This is unacceptable – and solvable. Public resources would better be used on prevention, rapid re-housing, and employment services that ensure that family need never returns to a shelter," Fireman added.

The recommendations and goals also include:

- Refocusing public dollars from emergency shelter programs to make sure that every family has a stable housing plan for the long-term
- Changing inflexible regulations that force funds to be used for only emergency shelter to more flexible regulations that allow funds to be used for prevention, and housing stabilization so every family can be guaranteed stable housing
- Changing the present “one size fits all” approach to a more customized policy that better matches family needs.

In 2009, the state spent \$2.3 million a month to pay for putting homeless families in motels. These high costs for motel stays alone highlight the urgency to make sure funds can be used in a more flexible way to provide more long-term shelter and prevention programs to families.

"We see the Fireman Foundation's recommendations as the way to improve the lives of the 5,000 homeless families, use taxpayer dollars more efficiently and create a better fit between our resources and services," said Michael K. Durkin of United Way, an organization that has been a leader in promoting rapid re-housing and financial stability through its funding for shelter services. "This effort has already been tested and it works."

Achieving the goals of the “**Putting Families First**” effort can already be seen in cases like these which demonstrate the positive impact of current pilot projects across the state:

- Sherinda is a single mom with an eight-month-old daughter. Complications with her pregnancy caused her to leave work and shortly thereafter there was a fire in her apartment building resulting in Sherinda becoming homeless. Under these circumstances, Sherinda would routinely be put in emergency shelter or a hotel. But, in September, 2009, she applied for emergency shelter at the Worcester DTA office and was approved for the diversion program allowing her to find stable housing in her own unit. Sherinda got her choice--a real home.
- A father and son along the South Coast area got into trouble when the father lost his job and failed to pay his rent for three months. Working with the non-profit Community Cares agency, the apartment complex owner was willing to work with the family so they could continue to live in their own apartment as opposed to being put in an emergency shelter or a hotel. Catholic Social Services was able to help the father stabilize his situation and the DHCD was able to help the family apply for Section 8 housing so they could stay in the apartment for the long-term. This outcome is what the “**Putting Families First**” policy recommendations are all about—prevention and flexibility.

In addition to unveiling the details of the white paper at the upcoming convening on May 11, members of the Fireman Foundation will be meeting in weeks ahead with family homelessness

providers and state officials from various regions across the state, listening to their ideas and briefing them on the policy recommendations [see attached summary].