



March 12, 2024

Dear Chair Michlewitz, Vice Chair Ferrante, and Members of the House Committee on Ways and Means,

The Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) is a statewide, non-profit organization of 58 members, comprised of children and family services providers, advocates, and individuals who bring deep human services expertise and leadership to our recommendations for best supporting children and families within the Commonwealth. As you develop your FY2025 state budget, please prioritize critical funding for children, families, and their human services providers here in the Commonwealth, as outlined below.

OVERVIEW: INVESTING IN CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SUPPORTS THEIR WELL BEING AND THE BEST FOR THE COMMONWEALTH

While each family faces unique challenges, the most common threats we see to family stability and child safety are housing and food insecurity, unstable employment, mental and behavioral health challenges, substance use disorders, trauma, abuse, and neglect. The Commonwealth has committed to serve these families, but the contracted providers delivering services are at breaking points. As we work to ensure families' basic needs are met, we must also address the human services workforce crisis that delays delivery of services that keep children safe and thriving.

BUDGET PRIORITIES REQUIRING ADDITIONAL INVESTMENT

CLM asks the Legislature to support these programs above the levels proposed in the Governor's budget.

- \$495.9M to **Congregate Care** (line item 4800-0041) and add funding to implement a pilot program, as approved in the FY24 Budget, to address the high concentration of "high acuity" adolescents residing in congregate care, which negatively impacts the safety, climate, and effectiveness of these care settings. Having successfully diverted many youth from the juvenile justice system, we need a wider array of non-DYS services to meet their needs. Parameters should include as follows:
 - *The department of children and families (DCF), in coordination with the office of the child advocate, and providers, shall develop and implement a pilot program to use evidence-based program models in DCF congregate care provider programs for youth that are in the department's care and who: (i) are experiencing an intensive behavioral or a behavioral and medical crisis; (ii) are being housed in emergency departments or inpatient units; and (iii) cannot safely receive treatment in the existing congregate programs; program designers shall include expert stakeholders, including those noted above and representation of the department of youth services; the program will create a new, trauma-informed level of care providing safety, support, and stabilization to these identified youth; provided further, that not later than September 30, 2025, the department shall issue a report on pilot program data, including but not limited to numbers of kids served per region, kids with cross-agency involvement, reduction of duration and instances in mismatched placements, e.g., emergency room boarding, and decreases in aggressive/assaultive behaviors to the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities, the house and senate committees on ways and means, the executive office for*

administration and finance, the executive office of health and human services and the office of the child advocate.

- \$27.3M for **Family Resource Centers** (line item 4800-0200) and an additional \$5M of flexible funding to deliver the myriad of critical, locally relevant, and ever-evolving programming for families with appropriate staffing and resources. As you know, FRCs support families with children requiring assistance, provide a variety of critical treatment services, deliver child abuse and prevention education, divert families from more intensive DCF involvement, and provide access to a wide variety of basic resources for housing, food, baby supplies, transportation, and emergency shelters. As the migrant crisis continues, needs for necessities, housing, work, translation, and other support services are greater than ever pushing FRCs to their limits. Furthermore, responses to unexpected crises are repeatedly endured, such as with COVID-19 and natural/man-made disasters that unexpectedly impact local communities. The added flexible funding is critical to addressing the significant strains on staff and resources.
- 20% increase to **Temporary Assistance for Families with Dependent Children** (line item 4403-2000) and **Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled and Children** (line item 4408-1000). The current maximum cash assistance grants in our state are far below even half the federal poverty level known as Deep Poverty which hurts kids through health and emotional damage, housing instability, toxic stress, and impaired school performance; the Governor's budget would freeze TAFDC and EAEDC at the inadequate October 2022 levels.
 - Direct assistance is one of the strongest prevention tools in our child safety toolbox. Ensuring families can meet basic needs like housing, food security, health care, and childcare has proven time and again to be the keystone of child safety and well being. Recent 9C cuts prevented the small but hard fought 10% increase to cash assistance grants that was supposed to take effect in April 2024. The Governor's budget proposal would freeze grants at October 2022 level for all of FY 25, which would be another kick to the most vulnerable in our state. Grants have lost 44% of their value since 1988 and lose more value every month as the cost of living goes up.
- \$15,000,000 for **Housing and Services for Unaccompanied Youth and Young Adults Experiencing Homelessness** (line item 4000-0007) to provide more housing and wraparound services to youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and housing instability (the Governor's initial recommendation is less than the \$11,000,000 allocated in FY24 budget).
- **EA (Emergency Assistance) for Emergency Family Shelter** (line item 7004-0101) should be further supported by a supplemental budget, continued appeals for federal assistance, and reforms to the overburdened system, which was noted by the Governor.

BUDGET PRIORITIES APPROPRIATELY FUNDED IN THE GOVERNOR'S BUDGET

- **Human Services Critical Workforce**
 - Understanding the fiscal realities of this budget cycle, CLM supports maintaining the Governor's proposal for line-item 1599-6903 to fund critical rate adjustments mandated by Chapter 257 of the Acts of 2008. We will be sharing more detailed information about Chapter 257 and the continuing need for adequate wages for these essential workers under separate cover as part of The Collaborative, comprised of ABH, the Association of Developmental Disabilities Providers (ADDP), the Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM) and the Providers' Council.
- **Child and Family Welfare and Well Being**
 - \$139.5M for **Family Support and Stabilization** (line item 4800-0040) to support delivery of high-quality, evidence-based preventative services, including significant new, evidence-based services expected in an RFR to be implemented in FY25. These programs pay dividends for the state by effectively reducing child abuse and neglect cases, allowing children to stay safely in their homes, and reducing trauma for children and families.
 - \$10M to develop new **intensive residential program models** for youth with complex needs not currently being met.
 - \$2.1M to support increased demand in the **Massachusetts Youth Diversion program** (line item 4200-0700) and serve three additional counties.
 - \$11.4M to the **Department of Children and Families Local and Regional Management of Services** (line item 4800-0030) to meet the needs of children and families and uphold the system. Lead Agencies serve as DCF's local partners to assist youth and families to navigate the complexities of the child welfare system, coordinate with families and DCF social workers to facilitate Family Team Meetings, arrange for and monitor services, advocate for enhanced interagency collaboration, and provide resources to remove barriers to successful implementation of treatment plans.
 - \$3.1M in a new **Postpartum Care Services** program within DCF, serving families impacted by substance use disorders.
 - \$492.2M to **Special Education Circuit Breaker** (line item 7061-0012) combined with prior \$75M supplemental funding meets projected claims for extraordinary costs for out of district placements.
 - \$577,600 to **BAY-CASH** to cover the cost of one year of regular, modest cash transfers for 30 out of the 60 participants in this pilot providing targeted supportive services to effectively end homelessness for 18 to 24-year-olds (recommend incorporating this as part of a line item such as FY23's EOHHS and Medication Administration 4000-0300).

- **Behavioral Health**

- \$10M increase to DMH's **children and adolescent mental health services** (line item 5042-5000)
- \$3.6M to support DPH's **school-based behavioral health programming**
- \$5M for **early childhood mental health supports and services** (line item 3000-6075)

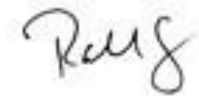
- **Childcare and Early Education**

- Building up the Commonwealth Preschool Partnership Initiative (CPPI) **Pre-K Initiative** (line item 1596-2412) with a \$21M investment up from \$5.5M to expand universal access to high-quality preschool
- Creating a **Childcare Affordability Initiative** (line item 1596-2435) receiving a \$75M investment to serve an additional 4,000 children
- \$150M for **Child Care Grants to Providers**
- \$65M for **Early Education and Care** (line item 1596-2434) financial assistance rate increases

CONCLUSION

With these critical needs in mind, the Children's League respectfully asks the Legislature to ensure we are making the best possible investments in human services to improve outcomes for children and families across the continuum of care. Vulnerable children and families and the providers that serve them across the Commonwealth rely on these critical investments that pay dividends in preventing child abuse and neglect, keeping families together, and ensuring all Massachusetts children have the opportunity to be safe, healthy, and thriving. We are responsible for the future outcomes of all children, and we cannot let them down.

Sincerely,



Rachel Gwaltney, Executive Director
Children's League of Massachusetts

Endorsing Members of the Children's League:

Brandon Residential Treatment Center, Inc.
Bridges Homeward
Center for Human Development (CHD)
Child & Family Services
Communities for People (CFP)
Cotting School
Devereux Advanced Behavioral Health MA
Family Continuity
Family Nurturing Center of Massachusetts, Inc.



CHILDREN'S
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PROMOTING THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH PUBLIC POLICY

Friends of Children
Gándara Center
Hillcrest Educational Centers
The Home
HopeWell
JRI (Justice Resource Institute)
KDC (Kennedy-Donovan Center)
The Key Program, Inc.
LUK, Inc.
Old Colony YMCA
Open Sky Community Services
Plummer Youth Promise
RFK Community Alliance
Roxbury Youthworks, Inc.
Saint Vincent's Services
MARE Inc.
Massachusetts MENTOR
New England Community Services (NECS)
NFI Massachusetts, Inc.
Old Colony YMCA
Stetson School
Wayside Youth & Family Support Network