

June 3, 2025

The Honorable Michael J. Rodrigues
Chair, Senate Committee on Ways and Means (WM)

The Honorable Joanne M. Comerford
Vice Chair, Senate Committee on WM

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz
Chair, House Committee on WM

The Honorable Ann-Margaret Ferrante
Vice Chair, House Committee on WM

The Honorable Patrick M. O'Connor
Ranking Minority Leader, Senate Committee WM

The Honorable Todd M. Smola
Ranking Minority Leader, House Committee WM

Via email: Michael.Rodrigues@masenate.gov; Jo.Comerford@masenate.gov;
Aaron.M.Michlewitz@mahouse.gov; Ann-Margaret.Ferrante@mahouse.gov; Patrick.OConnor@masenate.gov;
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Dear Distinguished FY26 Conference Committee Members,

As the Children's League of Massachusetts (CLM), a statewide, non-profit association comprised of children and family services providers, we advocate for quality, accessible supports and services to uplift child safety and wellbeing. We are writing with our concerns about funding cuts and investments not keeping pace with needs and inflation in the FY26 budget proposals. We know that you are working diligently to balance spending and programming. No one wants to harm family preservation or youth outcomes. We need you to continue building on recent progress to prioritize critical funding for children, families, and community-based service providers across the Commonwealth.

The Commonwealth is obligated to serve children and families it brings into the child welfare system. To keep children safe and able to thrive, we need adequate investments in a robust continuum of care for children and families, including through the ongoing human services partnership between state agencies and contracted providers. Massachusetts must also supply the necessary food, housing, healthcare, childcare, and other support to keep or get families out of the child welfare system. Poverty issues are best solved upstream – and at lower costs – outside of the child welfare system.

We ask the Legislature to support these priorities as funded by the Senate budget:

- Family Resource Centers (4800-0200) - \$35,000,000
 - Provide a wide variety of support, e.g., housing/emergency shelter, education, food, baby supplies, healthcare referrals, and disaster and humanitarian crisis support.
- Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (5042-5000) - \$132,063,724
 - Without adequate funding DMH and contracted providers will have to reduce or stop providing case management and close secure residential programs that serve children and

adolescents who are struggling with the most serious, long-term mental health crises.

- Head Start Program Grants (3000-5000) - \$20,000,000
 - Supporting infants, toddlers, and pregnant women in learning, health, and family well-being.

We ask the Legislature to support this priority as funded by the House budget:

- Housing Services for Unaccompanied Youth Experiencing Homelessness (4000-0007) - \$10,645,850 with no less than \$100,000 to BAY-CASH
 - Supports youth and young adults under age 25 in every region who are experiencing housing instability and homelessness on their own, without their parent or guardian.

We ask the Legislature to maintain FY2025-level funding in FY2026 as follows:

- Congregate Care (4800-0041) - \$495,864,634
 - Responsive to children whose behaviors, trauma, and needs are particularly high in acuity, threatening the safety and wellbeing of themselves and others.
- Services for Children & Families (4800-0038) - \$374,388,635
 - DCF provides case management, in-home and community-based services and support, and referrals as needed to keep children safe and ensure their well-being.
- Local & Regional Admin. provided by Area Leads (4800-0030) - \$11,701,980
 - Serve as DCF's local partners to help youth and families navigate the child welfare system.

Finally, we share additional needs as follows:

- Family Support and Stabilization (4800-0040) - \$130,486,736
 - To support delivery of high-quality, evidence-based preventative services, including significant new, evidence-based services incorporated in the RFR that launched programming in April 2025. These programs pay dividends for the state by effectively reducing child abuse and neglect cases, allowing children to stay safely in their homes or return with greater stability, reducing trauma for children and families.
- Chapter 257 (1599-6903) - \$307,000,000 with language to ensure: "that in no instance shall a rate implementation be established utilizing a lower percentile of the wage estimate for each position utilized for the previous two-year rate as determined by the most recently available Bureau of Labor Statistics state-specific data for Massachusetts."
 - Provides salary benchmarks for vital human services work at the 63rd percentile of applicable wages reported by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to reduce vacancy rates and ensure a well-staffed, high-quality community-based service system that can be fully utilized to meet children's needs. Current rates lag inflation and do not adequately reflect the labor and economic market which exacerbates the human services workforce crisis.

- Temporary Assistance for Families with Dependent Children (4403-2000) - \$486,929,423 for a 10% increase to grants in January 2026 which is critical to help families meet their basic needs.
 - Provides our state's lowest-income, eligible families or individuals with temporary cash assistance and services to pay for basic needs: housing, food security, health care, or childcare to sustain employment.
- Emergency Aid to the Elderly, Disabled, and Children (4408-1000) - \$219,190,924 for a 10% increase to grants in January 2026, again to help families meet their basic needs.
 - Gives older and or disabled adults, children being cared for by a non or distant relative and adults taking care of a disabled person two cash payments per month to help meet their basic needs and MassHealth coverage.
- Special Education Circuit Breaker (7061-0012) - \$648,214,953
 - Provides critical funds for districts to deliver mandated services and programs for students with significant special education needs.
- Child Care Financial Assistance (1596-2452) - \$128,000,000 with no less than \$30,000,000 to reduce the Waitlist for Income-Eligible Early Education and Care Programs
 - Address the state's childcare financial assistance waitlist, which has been frozen for a year with more than 30,000 children in low-income families, eligible and waiting. Expending no less than \$30,000,000 to reduce the waitlist of the childcare financial assistance programs administered by the department of early education and care.

These investments in child well-being and family preservation are necessary to prevent neglect, trauma, and abuse, and to ensure the Commonwealth's children can thrive. Thank you for your role budgeting for priority programs that keep families together and improve outcomes for individuals and communities, preventing problems from becoming more burdensome, dangerous, and expensive.

Sincerely,



Rachel Gwaltney
Executive Director
Children's League of Massachusetts

CC:

The Honorable Karen E. Spilka

Senate President

<karen.spilka@masenate.gov>



CHILDREN'S
LEAGUE
OF MASSACHUSETTS

PROMOTING THE WELFARE OF CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES THROUGH PUBLIC POLICY

The Honorable Ronald Mariano
Speaker of the House
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