

Part 5

Finding New Housing

19 Can you get help keeping or moving to housing?

Homeless Families Not In Shelter. Families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness but not yet in EA shelter may be able to get help keeping their housing or finding and moving to new housing from:

- The Regional Entities created by the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness, listed in **Appendix D**. Contact the entity in your local area for help.
- A DHCD EA worker in your local DTA office. DHCD has started a Shelter Diversion Pilot through which families who are not in shelter can receive up to 3 months of rental assistance or families who wish to return to another state can get transportation payments of up to \$200 per family member. DHCD/DHS Flexible Funds and Stabilization Programs - Master Agreement With Providers (DHCD/DHS rev 7/31/09), www.masslegalservices.org/node/27236.
- The regional nonprofit agencies listed in **Appendix E**. Contact the one serving your local area. Among other resources, these agencies administer a program called **RAFT (Residential Assistance for Families in Transition)**. The RAFT program helps eligible families keep housing, get new housing, or otherwise avoid homelessness. When funds are available, RAFT provides money for security deposits, first and last month's rent, moving expenses, rent and utility and mortgage arrears, and other housing-related expenses for homeless families and families at risk of homelessness.

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Homeless Families in Shelter. Families in shelter are eligible for help from:

- **Their EA shelter providers** who are required by contracts with DHCD to help families find and keep housing for up to one year after leaving shelter. Shelter providers have EA funds they can use to help, including:
 - **The Flexible Funds Program** under which up to \$2,000 per family is available to pay for first and last month's rent, a security deposit, up to \$150 of moving expenses, 3 beds worth no more than \$150 per bed, and the amount of a utility arrearage needed to restore service.
 - **The Housing Stabilization Program** under which families who entered shelter prior to August 1, 2009 can receive a 12-month rental subsidy for a private market apartment that costs no more than 80% of the fair market rents for the area and for which the family must pay 25% of their income as rent.

Shelter providers may also be able to access RAFT funds (discussed above) for homeless families. Ask your shelter provider.

- **The DTA Relocation Benefit Program.** DTA (separate from DHCD) will pay up to \$1,000 to help get permanent housing for some families who are leaving a shelter or a teen living program. This benefit may be used for advance rent, security deposit, rent or utility arrears, moving expenses or other relocation costs. The relocation benefit is available through a DTA worker to
 - a family receiving TAFDC or EAEDC who has been in emergency shelter (whether or not funded by DTA) for 60 days or more,
 - a family receiving TAFDC who has been in a domestic violence shelter for 60 days or more,
 - a teen parent age 18 or 19 who has been in a teen living program for 60 days or more and can live independently. 106 C.M.R. § 705.350.

You can get the \$1,000 relocation benefit only once in a 12-month period. But it is not an EA benefit and will not disqualify you from receiving an EA benefit within the 12-month period. See **Question 9**.

Other Relocation Resources for Families and Individuals Whether or Not in Shelter. Individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) may be eligible for state-funded Special Benefits of up to \$150 in moving costs to move within the state if the current living situation has been certified as substandard, a move is required due to health, safety or other conditions, or the individual is moving into subsidized housing. Special Benefits for SSI recipients may also be available to cover the cost of replacing furniture, household equipment, food, clothing or supplies lost as a result of a fire or other natural disaster. Ask about Special Benefits at your local DTA office.

Advocacy Tips:

- √ Ask your shelter provider and DHCD worker to explain to you all of the rehousing services that may be available to you and your family and the effect they may have on your future eligibility for shelter and other benefits.
- √ Accepting housing with a short-term subsidy may cause you to lose your priority for long-term subsidized housing. Before accepting such housing, ask your shelter provider and/or DHCD worker to explain how it will affect any priority for permanent housing and what steps they can take to make sure your priority is not lost, or to help you find permanent housing. Or consult an advocate.
- √ If you reject an offer of housing that is affordable only for a limited time because of a short-term subsidy, DHCD may try to terminate your shelter benefits. See **Question 15** and consult an advocate about your options.
- √ You should ask your DTA worker for the DTA relocation benefit while you are still living in a shelter or a teen living program.
- √ DTA may give you less than \$1,000 in relocation benefits unless you can show you need the full \$1,000 for expenses related to getting

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permanent housing. Be sure to tell DTA why you need the full \$1,000 before you leave shelter.

- √ DTA relocation costs in some circumstances may include furniture and appliances that you need in order to move into permanent housing. DTA Transitions, Feb. 2007, p. 3.