

Mayor Martin J. Walsh
1 City Hall Plaza, Suite 500
Boston City Hall

January 23, 2015

BY HAND

Dear Mayor Walsh,

We are writing to request a meeting in the near future to discuss the City's welcome plan to increase resources for housing in Boston, in particular an increased City Budget Line Item for Housing, and to recommend making at least some of these resources available to meet emergency needs.

In 2013, the City faced the reality that 500 low income tenants with Section 8 rental vouchers would be terminated in April 2014 by the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) due to federal "sequester" cuts. In response, we applauded your commitment in November 2013 to seek an increased Line Item for Housing in the City's budget to avert this crisis, in the event that Congress failed to provide sufficient funds in time. Fortunately, Congress passed a Budget Agreement in January 2014 which restored most of the sequester cuts to HUD rental housing. The BHA called off the 500 terminations, restored most payments to landlords and issued 300 new vouchers to its waiting list.

However, the Budget Agreement expires this year, and the 10-year "sequester" cuts imposed by 2011 Budget Control Act resume in 2015. The new Republican leadership in the Senate has already proposed \$5 trillion in even deeper cuts to domestic spending programs, primarily affecting the poor, to match the Ryan Budget cuts already passed by the House. The prospects for even deeper cuts to HUD rental housing programs, beyond the 14% already endured since 2010, will remain for years to come.

Accordingly, we applaud the bold increase in City resources to address Boston's housing crisis, proposed in your State of the City address and "Housing a Changing City" Report. The Report calls for a major increase in the City Budget Line Item, presumably in line with the increase from \$5 million to \$20 million annually recommended by the Housing Transition Task Force in April. The Report also suggests potential increases in Inclusionary Zoning and Linkage payments and a robust effort to pass the Community Preservation Act in Boston. We applaud these initiatives and pledge to do all we can to make them a reality.

Of course, the federal government must do more to restore funds cut in recent years from Section 8, Public Housing, CDBG, HOME and 202 Elderly Housing. To this end, we urge you to join us in advocating for the Congressional Progressive Caucus (CPC) alternative budget with the Massachusetts delegation to Congress each spring. The CPC budget calls for restoring cuts to social programs, preventing future cuts, closing corporate tax loopholes, raising taxes on the top 2% earners, redirecting military spending to domestic needs, and major investment in jobs. It is consistent with the non-binding Budget for All referendum, passed by Boston voters by a 3 to 1 margin in every precinct in 2012. We also ask you to exercise your leadership in the US Conference of Mayors to advocate their support for the CPC budget as well, to maximize pressure on lawmakers to pass a budget that works for all Boston residents.

The Housing a Changing City Report appropriately recognizes that an increased City Budget Line Item is required, in part, to offset recent federal cuts to housing. However, the Report recommends restricting use of new city funds for senior housing programs. While funding senior programs should surely be part of the mix, we respectfully urge you to amend the proposed use of City funds to offset potential future cuts to Section 8 Vouchers and/or other housing emergencies affecting Boston's most vulnerable residents.

Last fall, you rightly supported the use of City funds, if needed, to avert the mass displacement of 500 Voucher families. Now, the City is facing a crisis of even greater proportions: the catastrophic displacement of 700 of needy individuals and families from the various recovery, transitional housing, and shelter programs at Long Island. This on-going emergency surely has underscored the urgent need to provide permanent housing for Boston's poorest residents.

Accordingly, we urge you to dedicate a portion of City funds to address this crisis, as well as to ensure resources are in place in the event of future federal Voucher cuts. A City Line Item of \$15 million annually would provide 1,200 Emergency Vouchers, dedicated to homeless individuals and families of all ages on priority BHA waiting lists, and go a long way toward alleviating the immediate suffering of Long Island displacees. Opening the Budget Line Item for emergency use could also address the urgent need for more recovery beds and transitional housing that the Long Island emergency has revealed.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. In light of the Long Island crisis, we request a meeting in the near future to discuss how City resources can be marshaled on an urgent basis to address this emergency. The undersigned organizations stand ready to help the Administration achieve its vision of ensuring decent affordable housing for all of Boston's residents.

cc: Boston City Councilors
Boston delegation members
at Statehouse

Sincerely,

Ronda Jackson and Concetta Paul, Save Our Section 8/City Policy Committee
Eric Colin-Smith, Margaret Arneaud, Karen Carson, Michael Kane, Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants
Joe Kriesberg, Mass Association of Community Development Corporations
Mel King, "Love is the Question and the Answer"
Melonie Griffith, Mass Jobs with Justice
Tom Callahan, Mass Affordable Housing Alliance
Mike Prokosch, Laurie Taymor-Berry, Cole Harrison
, Mass Budget for All Coalition
Cleve Rea, Tara Cipriano, Liam Grant, Boston Homeless Solidarity Committee
Mat Thall, Southwest Boston Community Development Corporation
Wendy Nicholas, Fenway Community Development Corporation
Richard Thal, Jamaica Plain Neighborhood Development Corporation
Walter Little, Quincy-Geneva Community Development Corporation
Kimberly Simmons, Lena Park Community Development Corporation
Darnell Johnson, Right to the City Alliance/Boston
Kathy Brown, Boston Tenant Coalition
Magalis Troncosco, Dominican Development Center
Lydia Lowe, Chinese Progressive Association
Lisa Owens Pinto, City Life/Vida Urbana
Alan Booth, New England United for Justice