



Danna E. Mauch, PhD
President and CEO

Ambassador (ret.) Barry B. White
Chairperson of MAMH Board of Directors

March 4, 2022

The Honorable Ronald Mariano, Speaker
Massachusetts House of Representatives
State House, Room 343
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Karen E. Spilka, President
Massachusetts Senate
State House, Room 332
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair
House Committee on Ways and Means
Massachusetts State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Michael Rodrigues, Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 212
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Ann-Margaret Ferrante, Vice Chair
House Committee on Ways and Means
Massachusetts State House, Room 42
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Cindy Friedman, Vice Chair
Senate Committee on Ways and Means
State House, Room 208
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Strong support for \$5M for DMH housing repairs and rental vouchers in H.4479

Dear Speaker Mariano, President Spilka, Chair Michlewitz, Chair Rodrigues, Vice Chair Ferrante, Vice Chair Friedman, and Honorable Members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means:

Thank you for your strong commitment to ensuring the well-being of individuals with behavioral health conditions and their families across the Commonwealth. I am writing in strong support of the \$5M, listed under DMH 5046-0000, for Department of Mental Health (DMH) housing repairs and housing vouchers in H.4479, *An Act Making Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2022 to Provide for Supplementing Certain Existing Appropriations and for Certain Other Activities and Projects*. Our understanding from colleagues at DMH is that \$1M would be used for repairs for DMH-owned housing/residences and \$4M would be used to expand the DMH Rental Subsidy Program.

DMH's Rental Subsidy Program is a rental voucher program. It is designed to help individuals with severe and disabling mental health conditions who are experiencing homelessness and DMH clients, including those awaiting hospital discharge. DMH clients pay 30% of their adjusted income toward rent and the rental vouchers cover the balance. This program is competitive in rental markets where federal vouchers are difficult to use; with DMH RSP, acceptable contract rents for new units and for rent increases can be up to 110% of HUD's Fair Market Rents. We need these state subsidies.

Individuals who participate in the DMH Rental Subsidy Program receive clinical and social services through DMH-contracted community providers that support their recovery, health, and wellness. These providers also support positive tenancy and assist clients in maintaining their units and meeting inspection requirements. Property managers likewise have 24/7 access to DMH-contracted community providers should tenancy issues arise.

The COVID-19 pandemic has taught us that individuals with severe and disabling mental health conditions who are experiencing homelessness or living in congregate settings – such as shelters and state hospitals – are

disproportionately vulnerable to COVID-19. According to our colleagues at DMH and the MA Association of Behavioral Health Systems (MABHS), there are currently a total of 84 DMH clients who are ready to be discharged from public and private psychiatric inpatient units but are stuck because of lack of supportive, community-based housing opportunities.^{i,ii} Additionally, the DMH Homeless Outreach and Engagement program served 2,280 unhoused individuals with severe and disabling behavioral health conditions in FY21.ⁱⁱⁱ For every \$1M expansion of the DMH Rental Subsidy Program, approximately 71 individuals will secure stable, affordable housing. \$4M for the DMH Rental Subsidy Program would help approximately 284 new individuals, addressing a portion of the need.

Expanding the DMH Rental Subsidy Program is also more fiscally prudent for the Commonwealth than the alternatives of paying for unnecessary hospital days or costs associated with homelessness. Based upon a recent Worcester Recovery Center and Hospital (WRCH) cost report submitted to the Center for Health Information and Analysis (CHIA), the WRCH cost per patient per day for psychiatric inpatient hospitalization is \$1,127.70. There are currently 58 patients ready for discharge and confined at WRCH and other state hospitals at a high cost to the Commonwealth and to their recovery.^{iv} Additional funding for DMH RSP subsidies could address this wait list.

Likewise, the National Alliance to End Homelessness estimates that “a chronically homeless person costs the taxpayer an average of \$35,578 per year.”^v Without housing subsidies, 1,142 chronically homeless individuals in Massachusetts remain in shelters or on the streets.^{vi} The cost of rental vouchers to house a DMH client in supported, community-based housing pales in comparison to the cost of paying for unnecessary hospital days or the direct and indirect costs associated with homelessness. Investing in the Rental Subsidy Program is more cost effective for the Commonwealth, better serves the individual, and promotes stability in our communities.

Help protect the health and advance the recovery of individuals with severe and disabling mental health conditions who are experiencing homelessness and DMH clients awaiting hospital discharge. We know that housing and the supportive services DMH provides prevent hospitalization and other destabilizing events in people’s lives. I urge you to support the \$5M for DMH housing repairs and housing vouchers in H.4479.

Should you have any questions or would like additional information, please contact me or Jessica Larochelle, MAMH Co-Director for Public Policy and Government Relations, at jessicalarochelle@mamh.org or Jennifer Honig, MAMH Co-Director for Public Policy and Government Relations, at jenniferhonig@mamh.org.

Sincerely,



Danna Mauch, PhD, President and CEO

Cc: The Honorable Sean Garballey; The Honorable Adrian Madaro; The Honorable Jamie Eldridge; The Honorable Julian Cyr; Katherine O’Reilly, Budget Director, House Committee on Ways and Means; Christopher Marino, Budget Director, Senate Committee on Ways and Means

ⁱ Continuing Care Referral List Summary, DMH Admission Referral Tracking System. 14 February 2022.

ⁱⁱ DMH Section 114 Report, DMH. January 2022.

ⁱⁱⁱ DMH Homeless Outreach and Engagement FY21 Report, MA Department of Mental Health (DMH).

^{iv} DMH Section 114 Report, DMH. January 2022.

^v National Alliance to End Homelessness. Ending Chronic Homelessness Saves Taxpayers Money. 17 February 2017.

Retrieved on March 3, 2022 at: <https://endhomelessness.org/resource/ending-chronic-homelessness-saves-taxpayers-money-2/>

^{vi} 2021 CoC Homeless Populations and Subpopulations Report – Massachusetts. US Department of Housing and Urban Development. Available at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports/>