

THE MASSACHUSETTS RAFT PROGRAM

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS, PROVIDING FAMILY STABILITY

A Report on the Residential Assistance
for Families in Transition Program,
Franklin County Regional Housing
& Redevelopment Authority,
Fiscal Year 2018



SUMMARY

Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority (HRA) provided assistance to 151 households through the RAFT program in FY 2018. The average RAFT payment was \$2,290. Eleven Franklin County households that received RAFT in FY 2018 also received assistance from the program in FY 2017, representing 11.7 percent of households that received RAFT in Franklin County in FY 2017.¹

NEED FOR RAFT: HOUSING COSTS AND INCOME IN FRANKLIN COUNTY

Rental units account for 31 percent of all housing in Franklin County, and 27 percent of county residents live in rental units.² The HUD Fair Market rent for a two-bedroom apartment was \$1,084 in 2018, which represents an increase of \$171, or more than 18 percent compared to 2017.³ To afford a two-bedroom apartment at the Fair Market Rent, a household would need an annual income of \$43,360.⁴ The median income of the Franklin County households that received RAFT in FY 2018 was \$16,248. Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Greenfield represents 80 percent of household income for the typical recipient of RAFT in Franklin County.

Nearly 53 percent of renters—an estimated 4,575 households—in Franklin County pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing costs. The families that received RAFT from HRA in FY 2018 represent 3.3 percent of the county's rent-burdened households.⁵ There are 932 families with children living in poverty in Franklin County; two-thirds are single mothers.

FRANKLIN COUNTY BY THE NUMBERS

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Families with Children Living in Poverty | 932 |
| Poverty Level for Family of Three | \$ 20,780 |
| Affordable Rent at Poverty Level | \$ 519 |
| Fair Market Rent for Two Bedroom Apartment | \$ 1,084 |
| Rental Housing Vacancy Rate | 3.6 % |

RAFT IN FRANKLIN COUNTY

HRA administers the RAFT Program in Franklin County.⁶ In FY 2018, HRA provided a total of \$345,652 in RAFT assistance to 151 households. Households received RAFT in 16 of the 26 towns in Franklin County in FY 2018.⁷ Households that received RAFT in Greenfield, Montague and Orange accounted for 83 percent of total RAFT assistance in the county in FY 2018. The households that received RAFT in FY 2018 represent 0.49 percent of all households in Franklin County. Statewide, 0.18 percent of households received RAFT. In Greenfield, 0.89 percent of all households received RAFT in FY 2018.

TABLE 1: HRA RAFT ASSISTANCE BY COMMUNITY, FY 2018

| Town | Assistance | % of Assistance | Households | % of Households |
|------------|------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|
| ASHFIELD | \$ 4,000 | 1.2 % | 1 | 0.7 % |
| CHARLEMONT | \$ 10,590 | 3.1 % | 4 | 2.6 % |
| CONWAY | \$ 1,513 | 0.4 % | 1 | 0.7 % |
| ERVING | \$ 9,832 | 2.8 % | 3 | 2.0 % |
| GILL | \$ 2,010 | 0.6 % | 1 | 0.7 % |
| GREENFIELD | \$ 149,752 | 43.3 % | 70 | 46.4 % |
| HEATH | \$ 2,421 | 0.7 % | 1 | 0.7 % |
| LEVERETT | \$ 1,713 | 0.5 % | 1 | 0.7 % |
| LEYDEN | \$ 2,104 | 0.6 % | 2 | 1.3 % |
| MONROE | \$ 1,800 | 0.5 % | 1 | 0.7 % |
| MONTAGUE | \$ 84,539 | 24.5 % | 35 | 23.2 % |
| ORANGE | \$ 53,210 | 15.4 % | 21 | 13.9 % |
| ROWE | \$ 3,391 | 1.0 % | 1 | 0.7 % |
| SHELBURNE | \$ 4,755 | 1.4 % | 3 | 2.0 % |
| SUNDERLAND | \$ 9,667 | 2.8 % | 3 | 2.0 % |
| WARWICK | \$ 1,852 | 0.5 % | 2 | 1.3 % |

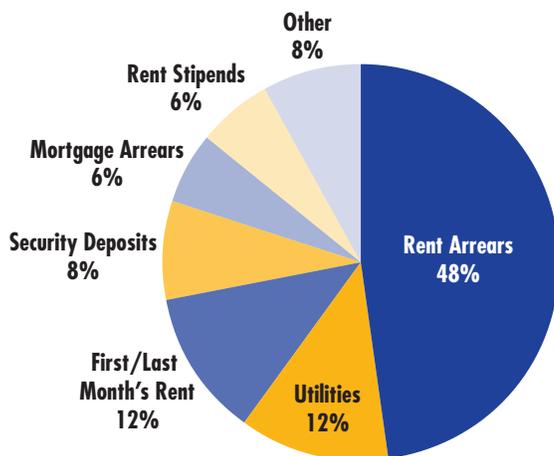
Of the 151 households that received RAFT in Franklin County in FY 2018, 126 were families with children. Eighty percent of all households that received RAFT in the region were headed by women. The typical household that received RAFT included a woman and two children. Ninety-five percent of heads of household identified as white and five percent as Black/African-American. Eighteen percent identified as Hispanic/Latino. The average age for heads of household that received RAFT in FY 2018 was 39.

Twenty-five Franklin County households that did not include children under age 21 received RAFT in FY 2018, representing 16.5 percent of the region’s RAFT recipients. These were all single-person households. Thirty-six percent were men. The average age of these recipients was 41.

Fifty-two percent of the households that received RAFT in Franklin County in FY 2018 had subsidized housing, compared to 37 percent of RAFT recipients statewide. Fifty-one percent of the Franklin County households that received RAFT in FY 2018 were facing eviction, including 43 families that had subsidized housing. Sixteen percent of RAFT recipients were living with other families and were asked to leave, and 16 percent experienced utility shutoffs.

Uses of RAFT funds by HRA are shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: USES OF HRA RAFT FUNDS, FY 2018



ESTIMATED SAVINGS FROM THE HRA RAFT PROGRAM

Families with children and single pregnant women earning up to 115 percent of the Federal Poverty Level may be eligible for Emergency Assistance, the state’s family shelter program. On average, the Commonwealth spent \$46,450 on each family that used the Emergency Assistance program in FY 2018.⁸ Thirty families entered the Emergency Assistance program in Franklin County in FY 2018, representing an estimated cost to the Commonwealth of nearly \$1.4 million for shelter alone; the state and municipalities often incur additional costs to support parents and children in the shelter system.

The income eligibility threshold for a family of three to receive Emergency Assistance was \$23,892 in FY 2018. Seventy-five percent of the households that received RAFT in Franklin County in FY 2018 had incomes below this threshold.⁹ Table 2 shows estimated savings from the HRA RAFT program based on different assumptions about the percentage of RAFT recipients that might have become homeless and eligible for shelter without assistance from RAFT.¹⁰

TABLE 2: ESTIMATED EA SAVINGS FROM THE HRA RAFT PROGRAM IN FY 2018

| Assumed % of EA Eligible RAFT Clients That Could Have Needed Shelter | Number of EA Eligible RAFT Clients That Could Have Needed Shelter Based on Assumed % | Cost of EA @ \$46,450/ Household | Cost of RAFT @ \$3,130/ Household | Estimated Savings |
|--|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|
| 10 % | 9 | \$ 343,334 | \$ 32,333 | \$ 311,001 |
| 25 % | 24 | \$ 858,335 | \$ 80,831 | \$ 777,503 |
| 50 % | 47 | \$ 1,716,669 | \$ 161,663 | \$ 1,555,006 |
| 75 % | 71 | \$ 2,575,004 | \$ 242,494 | \$ 2,332,510 |
| 100 % | 94 | \$ 3,433,338 | \$ 323,325 | \$ 3,110,013 |

In addition to representing savings from the avoided cost of the Emergency Assistance Program, RAFT also provides critical stability for families facing challenging circumstances, like Rosie (not her real name), a single mother in Turners Falls who received assistance from the RAFT program in FY 2018.

“When I was applying for RAFT, it was for help moving into an apartment, since me and my daughter needed to leave a shelter and program for women in recovery. I live on a set income and didn’t have the money needed to move into an apartment. RAFT was not only able to pay for us to move in; they got beds and a kitchen table for us. Having a place to live that is my own has been the best feeling for me and my daughter. I am grateful that I got the help.”

ABOUT HRA

Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority provides a comprehensive range of housing-related services in Franklin County, including rental assistance, public and private affordable rental housing, housing and homebuyer counseling, housing rehabilitation loans, and information and referrals to other services. For more information on HRA services or to apply for housing assistance, contact the agency’s RAFT administrator at (413) 863-9781 x 150.

REPORT FOOTNOTES

- ¹ All data on RAFT provided by HRA and Tracker Systems, the Commonwealth’s software vendor for the program.
- ² U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2013-2017 5-year estimates.
- ³ HUD Fair Market Rent (FMR) is used to determine payment standards for the federal Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) program. FMRs reflect the cost of rent and utilities paid by tenants, and are determined regionally. FMRs must be both high enough to permit a selection of units and neighborhoods and low enough to serve as many low-income families as possible. The standard represents the 40th percentile rent, i.e., the dollar amount below which 40 percent of the standard-quality private market housing units are rented.
- ⁴ National Low Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach 2018. Housing costs, including rent and utilities, are considered to be affordable if they are no more than 30 percent of household income.
- ⁵ U.S. Census, American Community Survey, 2013-2017 5-year estimates.
- ⁶ HRA offers RAFT assistance in all 26 communities of Franklin County.
- ⁷ HRA also provided \$2,504 in assistance to one household that relocated to Worcester County.
- ⁸ Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Housing and Community Development, DHCD EA Monthly Report, Statewide Summary, June 2018.
- ⁹ This is a rough estimate of the number of EA-eligible households, assuming average family size of 3 and subtracting the number of households that would be categorically ineligible for Emergency Assistance.
- ¹⁰ For the purpose of this table, the average cost of the RAFT program is a statewide figure that includes all administrative expenses for the program.

Report written by
Robin Sherman
for the Regional
Housing Network
of Massachusetts

