

THE MASSACHUSETTS RAFT PROGRAM

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS, PROVIDING FAMILY STABILITY

A Report on the Residential Assistance
for Families in Transition Program,
Housing Solutions for Southeastern Massachusetts,
Fiscal Year 2018



SUMMARY

Housing Solutions provided assistance to 391 households through the RAFT program in FY 2018. The average RAFT payment was \$3,206. Eighteen households that received RAFT in FY 2018 also received assistance from the program in FY 2017, accounting for five percent of the families that received RAFT from Housing Solutions in FY 2017.¹

NEED FOR RAFT: HOUSING COSTS & INCOME IN SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS

Housing Solutions provides services to communities in Southeastern Massachusetts in Plymouth and Bristol counties and in four towns in Norfolk County. There are four Gateway Cities in the region – Brockton, Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton – each of which has a distinct real estate market. Fall River and New Bedford also have high rates of poverty for families with children.

The 2018 HUD Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the region ranges from \$906 in New Bedford to \$1,425 in Easton and Raynham.² Fair Market Rents in the region range from the lowest to the third-highest in the Commonwealth. To afford a two-bedroom apartment at the Fair Market Rent of \$1,365 in Brockton, a household would need

an annual income of \$54,600.³ The median income of the households that received RAFT from Housing Solutions in FY 2018 was \$21,380, representing a decrease of five percent from 2017. The Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Brockton represents 80 percent of household income for the typical household that received RAFT from Housing Solutions in FY 2018.

The households that received RAFT in FY 2018 are a very small percentage of the region’s residents who struggle to pay for housing. In Brockton, Fall River, New Bedford and Taunton, an estimated total of 34,334 households that rent pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing costs. The families that received RAFT from Housing Solutions in FY 2018 represent just 0.68 percent of rent-burdened households in the region’s four largest cities alone. There are more than 10,000 families with children in these four cities living in poverty; 72 percent are female-headed households.⁴

SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS BY THE NUMBERS

Families with Children Living in Poverty - Bristol & Plymouth counties	15,710
Poverty Level for Family of Three	\$ 20,780
Affordable Rent at Poverty Level	\$ 519
Fair Market Rent for Two Bedroom Apartment	
Brockton	\$ 1,365
Fall River	\$ 1,014
New Bedford	\$ 906
Taunton	\$ 1,187
Rental Housing Vacancy Rates	
Brockton	8.3 %
Fall River	3.0 %
New Bedford	6.0 %
Taunton	3.5 %

The number of families living in poverty in the region has remained steady since 2017 while rents have risen and rental housing vacancy rates have decreased.

HOUSING SOLUTIONS' RAFT PROGRAM

Housing Solutions administers the RAFT program in Southeastern Massachusetts, including Plymouth and Bristol counties and parts of Norfolk County.⁵ In FY 2018, the agency provided a total of \$1,253,713 in RAFT assistance to 391 households. Households received RAFT from Housing Solutions in 33 communities.⁶ Residents of Brockton, Fall River, New Bedford, and Taunton accounted for 60 percent of the RAFT assistance provided by Housing Solutions in FY 2018.

TABLE 1: HOUSING SOLUTIONS' RAFT ASSISTANCE BY COMMUNITY, FY 2018

Town	Assistance	% of Assistance	Households	% of Households
ABINGTON	\$ 7,800	0.6 %	2	0.5 %
ATTLEBORO	\$ 18,164	1.4 %	5	1.3 %
BRIDGEWATER	\$ 22,791	1.8 %	6	1.5 %
BROCKTON	\$ 277,913	22.2 %	85	21.7 %
DARTMOUTH	\$ 7,068	0.6 %	2	0.5 %
EAST BRIDGEWATER	\$ 3,600	0.3 %	1	0.3 %
EASTON	\$ 21,041	1.7 %	6	1.5 %
FAIRHAVEN	\$ 8,000	0.6 %	2	0.5 %
FALL RIVER	\$ 153,696	12.3 %	50	12.8 %
HALIFAX	\$ 5,341	0.4 %	2	0.5 %
HANOVER	\$ 7,005	0.6 %	3	0.8 %
HANSON	\$ 4,000	0.3 %	1	0.3 %
HINGHAM	\$ 3,360	0.3 %	1	0.3 %
HOLBROOK	\$ 7,758	0.6 %	2	0.5 %
HULL	\$ 3,897	0.3 %	1	0.3 %
KINGSTON	\$ 4,000	0.3 %	1	0.3 %
LAKEVILLE	\$ 10,679	0.9 %	4	1.0 %
MANSFIELD	\$ 13,664	1.1 %	4	1.0 %
MARION	\$ 6,980	0.6 %	2	0.5 %
MARSHFIELD	\$ 29,984	2.4 %	9	2.3 %
MIDDLEBORO	\$ 13,140	1.0 %	4	1.0 %
NEW BEDFORD	\$ 232,360	18.5 %	75	19.2 %
NORTH ATTLEBORO	\$ 8,000	0.6 %	2	0.5 %
PEMBROKE	\$ 4,000	0.3 %	1	0.3 %
PLYMOUTH	\$ 39,801	3.2 %	12	3.1 %
RANDOLPH	\$ 71,844	5.7 %	24	6.1 %
RAYNHAM	\$ 4,000	0.3 %	1	0.3 %
ROCKLAND	\$ 22,450	1.8 %	7	1.8 %
SCITUATE	\$ 3,125	0.2 %	1	0.3 %
TAUNTON	\$ 76,743	6.1 %	25	6.4 %
WAREHAM	\$ 27,436	2.2 %	9	2.3 %
WEYMOUTH	\$ 92,266	7.4 %	28	7.2 %
WHITMAN	\$ 26,385	2.1 %	8	2.0 %

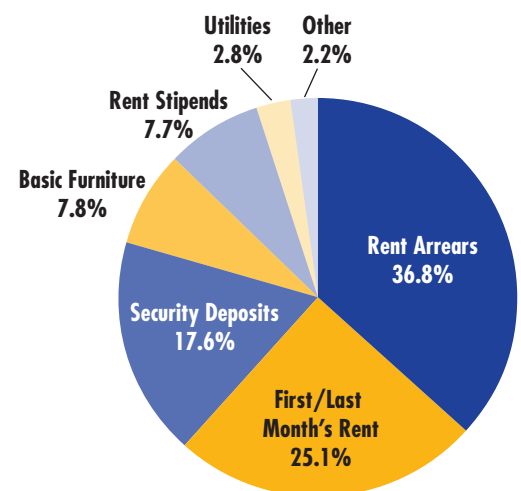
Analysis of statewide RAFT data strongly suggests that eligible households in Southeastern Massachusetts are underserved by the program. The number of households that received RAFT represents approximately one percent of all rent-burdened households statewide, but just 0.5 percent of rent-burdened households in Bristol and Norfolk counties and 0.7 percent in Plymouth County. By way of comparison, in Lowell, an estimated 12,288 households pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing costs, and there are 10,402 rent-burdened households in Lawrence. In these two Gateway Cities, the number of households that received RAFT in FY 2018 represents 3.3 percent and 1.7 percent of rent-burdened households respectively. Fall River and New Bedford have similar numbers of rent-burdened households to Lowell and Lawrence – 11,345 and 11,004 renters in these two cities respectively pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing costs. However, the number of households that received RAFT in Fall River and New Bedford represent just 0.4 percent and 0.7 percent of all rent-burdened households respectively.

The average RAFT benefit per household served by Housing Solutions was the highest in the state, but this does not explain much of the difference in the percentages of rent-burdened households served. Even if RAFT recipients in Fall River and New Bedford received the average RAFT benefit of \$2,477 paid in Lowell and Lawrence instead of the \$3,206 paid by Housing Solutions, it would only be enough to assist 0.76 of rent burdened households in the two cities, and this does not take into account the possibility that regional differences in housing markets may require higher RAFT benefits in the region served by Housing Solutions.

Housing Solutions provided RAFT to 41 households that did not have children under the age of 21 in FY 2018, accounting for 10 percent of the agency’s RAFT recipients but less than six percent of its RAFT funding. These were mostly single-person households. The average age of these heads of household was 48.

Forty-six percent of the households that received RAFT from Housing Solutions in FY 2018 reported that they were “doubled up” with other families and were asked to leave. Forty-two percent of households faced eviction, mostly from private housing. Uses of RAFT funds are shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1: USES OF RAFT FUNDS BY HOUSING SOLUTIONS, FY 2018



ESTIMATED SAVINGS FROM THE HOUSING SOLUTIONS 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 2018.⁷ The income eligibility threshold for a family of three to receive Emergency Assistance was \$23,892. Approximately 59 percent of the families that received RAFT from Housing Solutions in FY 2018, 205 households, had incomes below this threshold.⁸ The chart below shows estimated savings from the Housing Solutions 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.⁹

TABLE 2: ESTIMATED EA SAVINGS FROM HOUSING SOLUTIONS RAFT PROGRAM, 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 %	20	\$ 746,399	\$ 70,290	\$ 676,109
25 %	51	\$ 1,865,999	\$ 175,725	\$ 1,690,273
50 %	102	\$ 3,731,997	\$ 351,451	\$ 3,380,547
75 %	154	\$ 5,597,996	\$ 527,176	\$ 5,070,820
100 %	205	\$ 7,463,994	\$ 702,901	\$ 6,761,093

In addition to representing savings from the avoided cost of the Emergency Assistance Program, RAFT also provides critical stability for individuals and families facing challenging circumstances, like Colette.

Colette is an elderly, disabled woman who lives alone in a mobile home that she owns. She fell behind on rent payments to the owner of the mobile home park when she became the victim of a phone scam that extorted her for thousands of dollars. She ended up in housing court, where she met Quincy Community Action Program staff, who referred her to the RAFT program. Housing Solutions staff worked cooperatively with QCAP and a legal services attorney to negotiate an agreement with the landlord. RAFT paid \$4,000 of the \$5,000 that Colette owed, and Colette agreed to pay the remaining balance over the course of the next 12 months, saving her home.

ABOUT HOUSING SOLUTIONS FOR SOUTHEASTERN MASSACHUSETTS

Housing Solutions, formerly known as South Shore Housing, is a regional nonprofit organization focused on providing housing services and developing affordable housing in Plymouth and Bristol counties. Its programs include homelessness prevention and re-housing, rental assistance, management of affordable housing, information, education and referrals for renters and homebuyers, and partnerships with service providers to address the housing needs of people with disabilities. For more information, please contact Kathleen Facchini, (781) 422-4222, kfacchini@housingsolutionssema.org.

REPORT FOOTNOTES

- ¹ All data on RAFT provided by Housing Solutions and Tracker Systems, the Commonwealth's software vendor for the program.
- ² 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.
- ³ National Low Income Housing Coalition, Out of Reach 2018. Housing costs, including rent and utilities, are considered affordable if they are no more than 30 percent of household income.
- ⁴ U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2013-2017, 5-year estimates.
- ⁵ Housing Solutions offers RAFT assistance in the following communities: Abington, Acushnet, Attleboro, Berkley, Braintree, Bridgewater, Brockton, Carver, Cohasset, Dartmouth, Dighton, Duxbury, East Bridgewater, Easton, Fairhaven, Fall River, Freetown, Halifax, Hanover, Hanson, Hingham, Holbrook, Hull, Kingston, Lakeville, Mansfield, Marion, Marshfield, Mattapoisett, Middleborough, New Bedford, North Attleboro, North Easton, Norton, Norwell, Pembroke, Plymouth, Plympton, Quincy, Randolph, Raynham, Rehoboth, Rochester, Rockland, Scituate, Seekonk, Somerset, Swansea, Taunton, Wareham, West Bridgewater, Westport, Weymouth, and Whitman.
- ⁶ Total does not include \$15,421 in assistance to five households that moved out of Massachusetts.
- ⁷ Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Department of Housing and Community Development, DHCD EA Monthly Report, Statewide Summary, June 2018.
- ⁸ 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.
- ⁸ 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.

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