

THE MASSACHUSETTS RAFT PROGRAM

PREVENTING HOMELESSNESS, PROVIDING FAMILY STABILITY

A Report on the Residential Assistance
for Families in Transition Program,
Metro Housing|Boston, Fiscal Year 2018



Metro Housing
B O S T O N

People First. Housing Always.

SUMMARY

Metro Housing|Boston provided assistance to 1,392 households in every single community in the region through the RAFT program in FY 2018. The average RAFT payment was \$2,689. Eighty-seven households that received RAFT in FY 2018 also received assistance from the program in FY 2017, accounting for less than six percent of the families that received RAFT from Metro Housing in FY 2017.¹

NEED FOR RAFT: HOUSING COSTS AND INCOME IN THE BOSTON METRO REGION

The 2018 HUD Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the Boston Metro region is the highest in the Commonwealth at \$1,740 a month.² To afford a two-bedroom apartment at the Fair Market Rent, a household would need an annual income of \$69,600.³ The median income of the households that received RAFT from Metro Housing in FY 2018 was \$15,650, representing a decrease of nearly 10 percent from FY 2017.⁴ *The Fair Market Rent for a two-bedroom apartment in the Boston metro area represents 133 percent of household income for the typical household that received RAFT from Metro Housing in FY 2018.*

The households that received RAFT in FY 2018 are a small percentage of the region’s residents who struggle to pay for housing. In Suffolk County, an estimated 95,774 households that rent pay more than 30 percent of their income toward housing costs. The families that received RAFT from Metro Housing in FY 2018 represent just 1.2 percent of rent-burdened households in the county. There are 17,478 families with children living in poverty in Suffolk County; 75 percent are female-headed households.⁵

BOSTON BY THE NUMBERS

Families with Children Living in Poverty	15,169
Poverty Level for Family of Three	\$ 20,780
Affordable Rent at Poverty Level	\$ 519
Fair Market Rent for Two Bedroom Apartment	\$ 1,740
Rental Housing Vacancy Rate	2.9 %

METRO HOUSING | BOSTON RAFT PROGRAM

Metro Housing | Boston administers the RAFT program in Boston and 28 other communities in Middlesex, Norfolk and Suffolk counties.⁶ In FY 2018, the agency provided a total of \$3,742,694 in RAFT assistance to 1,392 households. Three quarters of households assisted were in the City of Boston.

Ninety-one percent of households that received RAFT from Metro Housing were headed by women. The typical household that received RAFT was composed of a woman and two children. At least one family was assisted in each of the 29 communities where Metro Housing provides RAFT. Twenty-seven percent of heads of households that received RAFT from Metro Housing identified as white, and 70 percent were Black/African-American. Twenty-two percent identified as Hispanic/Latino. Approximately 25 percent of residents of Boston are Black; African-Americans are heavily over-represented in the households that received RAFT in the city in FY 2018. The average age for heads of household that received RAFT from Metro Housing in FY 2018 was 40.

More than 71 percent of households that received RAFT from Metro Housing in FY 2018 had subsidized housing. This is the highest percentage of RAFT recipients with subsidized housing in the Commonwealth. The City of Boston has made homelessness prevention a key policy priority, and has developed partnerships with housing agencies to achieve this goal. For households with extremely low incomes, securing subsidized housing is the best long-term strategy to ensure housing stability. Generally, households that have housing vouchers or subsidized apartments pay 30 percent of their income toward housing costs. This does not, however, ensure that the remaining 70 percent of household income is sufficient to pay for other household expenses, such as childcare and medical bills. Nearly a third of households that received RAFT from Metro Housing in FY 2018 – 473 individuals and families – had incomes of less than \$10,000 a year.

TABLE 1: METRO HOUSING RAFT ASSISTANCE BY COMMUNITY, FY 2018

Town	Assistance	% of Assistance	Households	% of Households
ARLINGTON	\$ 12,236	0.3 %	5	0.4 %
BEDFORD	\$ 13,505	0.4 %	5	0.4 %
BELMONT	\$ 2,646	0.1 %	1	0.1 %
BOSTON	\$ 2,723,856	72.8 %	1041	74.8 %
BRAINTREE	\$ 76,982	2.1 %	24	1.7 %
BROOKLINE	\$ 14,608	0.4 %	6	0.4 %
BURLINGTON	\$ 9,487	0.3 %	3	0.2 %
CAMBRIDGE	\$ 29,279	0.8 %	16	1.1 %
CHELSEA	\$ 146,531	3.9 %	57	4.1 %
EVERETT	\$ 64,481	1.7 %	25	1.8 %
LEXINGTON	\$ 2,135	0.1 %	1	0.1 %
MALDEN	\$ 105,731	2.8 %	32	2.3 %
MEDFORD	\$ 62,242	1.7 %	19	1.4 %
MELROSE	\$ 14,600	0.4 %	4	0.3 %
MILTON	\$ 23,437	0.6 %	7	0.5 %
NEWTON	\$ 28,825	0.8 %	11	0.8 %
NORTH READING	\$ 3,631	0.1 %	1	0.1 %
QUINCY	\$ 136,194	3.6 %	41	2.9 %
READING	\$ 23,590	0.6 %	6	0.4 %
REVERE	\$ 99,257	2.7 %	32	2.3 %
SOMERVILLE	\$ 38,238	1.0 %	13	0.9 %
STONEHAM	\$ 3,030	0.1 %	2	0.1 %
WAKEFIELD	\$ 4,000	0.1 %	1	0.1 %
WALTHAM	\$ 33,985	0.9 %	12	0.9 %
WATERTOWN	\$ 3,017	0.1 %	2	0.1 %
WILMINGTON	\$ 11,717	0.3 %	3	0.2 %
WINCHESTER	\$ 4,000	0.1 %	1	0.1 %
WINTHROP	\$ 11,999	0.3 %	5	0.4 %
WOBURN	\$ 21,104	0.6 %	8	0.6 %

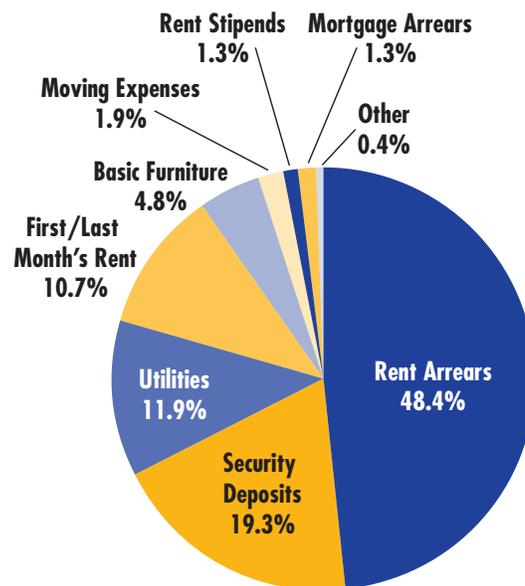
Soon after he enrolled at Roxbury Community College, Garland was notified that he had to leave his apartment building, along with all of the other residents, because the new owner was planning to do major renovations. He searched for a new home but was unsuccessful, and his housing voucher was set to expire. Garland participated in a financial coaching program offered by Metro Housing | Boston, which helped him raise his credit score. When he found a new apartment that was affordable with his voucher, the agency used RAFT to help Garland with his first and last month's rent, furniture, and moving costs, which allowed him to move to a new home. "To see where I am today because of Metro Housing is hard for me to fathom," said Garland. "I kept my faith in God and I will forever show my gratitude to everyone who helped me by being the best I can be."

Once a family or individual with extremely low income falls behind on subsidized rent payments, it becomes almost impossible to catch up. If this household is evicted or loses their rent subsidy, their options for re-housing are very limited. This is why Metro Housing, working in partnership with the City of Boston, Boston Housing Authority and owners of other subsidized housing, has made preserving the tenancies of households with subsidies a key priority.

Metro Housing provided RAFT to 135 households that did not have children under the age of 21 in FY 2018, accounting for approximately 10 percent of the agency's RAFT recipients. All but 29 of these households were single-person households. Their average age was 50. Thirty-six percent of these RAFT recipients were men, compared to fewer than six percent of households with children that received RAFT. Their median income was \$10,092, less than 65 percent of the median income of households that received RAFT from Metro Housing overall. More than three-quarters of these RAFT recipients had subsidized housing.

Nearly 50 percent of the households that received RAFT from Metro Housing in FY 2018 faced eviction. Two thirds of these households had subsidized housing. Nearly 21 percent of assisted households experienced utility shut-offs. Approximately 14 percent were living with other families and were asked to leave. Uses of RAFT funds are shown in Figure 1.

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



ESTIMATED SAVINGS FROM THE METRO HOUSING 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 63 percent of the families that received RAFT from Metro Housing in FY 2018, 795 households, had incomes below this threshold.⁸ Table 2 shows estimated savings from the 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 METRO HOUSING’S 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 %	79	\$ 2,893,444	\$ 272,482	\$ 2,620,961
25 %	199	\$ 7,233,609	\$ 681,205	\$ 6,552,404
50 %	397	\$ 14,467,218	\$ 1,362,410	\$ 13,104,807
75 %	596	\$ 21,700,826	\$ 2,043,616	\$ 19,657,211
100 %	795	\$ 28,934,435	\$ 2,724,821	\$ 26,209,614

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 Regina and her children. Regina fell behind on her rent after she suffered a brain aneurysm and was unable to continue working. Her family was facing eviction when she applied for RAFT.

“Thank you for assisting me in receiving funding from RAFT so that my kids and I wouldn’t become homeless. Since the assistance from the RAFT program, I have moved into a newly developed building in the Fenway, which would have been impossible if I had been evicted or behind on my rent. I’m a 50-year-old woman with a couple of college degrees, and had been moderately successful in my career but fell on hard times, which can happen to anyone.”

ABOUT METRO HOUSING | BOSTON

With a focus on sustainability and understanding of the interconnectedness between housing and related needs, Metro Housing's services are designed to address housing needs along the continuum from homelessness prevention to housing stability and economic security. To advance homelessness prevention, Metro Housing supports participants experiencing homelessness to obtain housing, and works to prevent evictions and other causes of loss of housing among individuals or families at-risk for homelessness. Housing stability and economic security services support participants to maintain housing and work toward financial security. For more information on the RAFT program, please contact Lourdes Tunis, (617) 425-6719, lourdes.tunis@metrohousingboston.org.

REPORT FOOTNOTES

- ¹ All data on RAFT provided by Metro Housing|Boston 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 The decrease in income for recipients of RAFT in FY 2018 may be related to an increase in the number of RAFT recipients with subsidized housing served by Metro Housing|Boston.
- ⁵ U.S. Census, American Community Survey 2013-2017, 5-year estimates.
- ⁶ Metro Housing offers RAFT in the following communities: Arlington, Bedford, Belmont, Boston, Braintree, Brookline, Burlington, Cambridge, Chelsea, Everett, Lexington, Malden, Medford, Melrose, Milton, Newton, North Reading, Quincy, Reading, Revere, Somerville, Stoneham, Wakefield, Waltham, Watertown, Wilmington, Winchester, Winthrop, and Woburn.
- 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.
- ⁹ 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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