

## Eviction Diversion Initiative (EDI): Services Available on Monday, October 19, 2020, and Preview of Upcoming Expansions

- **Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) website:** [www.mass.gov/CovidHousingHelp](http://www.mass.gov/CovidHousingHelp) is updated with information for renters, landlords, homeowners, and others needing assistance. In addition, the Frequently Asked Questions page provides up-to-date information: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-eviction-diversion-frequently-asked-questions>
- **Mass211:** Any person facing a housing crisis may dial 211, which is available 24 hours a day for guidance and referral to EDI resources. If call volume is high, callers may choose to wait on hold for an attendant or leave a message to receive a call back within 24 hours or less. Mass211 is continuing to hire and train staff to meet demand.
- **Housing Consumer Education Centers (HCECs):** Anyone seeking definitive advice and counseling about housing-related issues may skip calling 211 and directly contact one of the 9 regional HCECs. HCECs will be taking calls during normal business hours and will return calls within 48 hours when callers leave a message. Expansion/Enhancement: Throughout November, HCECs will continue to staff up to meet demand for assistance. In December, HCECs will have new “special service coordinators” to assist consumers who need extra levels of assistance navigating their housing crisis. To find the HCEC that serves each municipality, go to [www.mahousinghelp.com](http://www.mahousinghelp.com) or call 211.
- **Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) – for households earning up to 50% Area Median Income (AMI) or 60% AMI for those experiencing Domestic Violence:** The regular & upstream RAFT programs continue to be available, offering eligible applicants up to \$4,000 for rent, mortgage, moving, or utility costs. In addition, the new COVID RAFT benefit up to \$10,000 for rent is available for new and pending RAFT applicants whose housing crisis is due to COVID-19. This larger benefit is only available if the landlord and tenant execute an agreement to maintain the tenancy for 6 months or through June 2021, if there are school aged children in the household, whichever is longer. A new, shorter application will be live on Regional Agency websites. In the coming weeks, average application processing times will remain at the 4-6 week timeframe. In order to reduce processing time, applicants and their landlords are encouraged to submit applications online, if possible, with all required income and identity documentation included in the submission. Applicants may also request a pdf that they can complete in paper form, but that will slow down processing. Expansion/Enhancement: Starting on November 2nd, landlords owning up to 20 units of housing will be able to apply to RAFT or ERMA (see below), with tenant consent. In addition, Regional Agencies will be verifying incomes through other state agency databases (DUA, DOR, DTA, and MassHealth) and will only ask for copies of income documentation when the applicant’s information in the database is unclear. By end of November, new processes are expected to reduce processing time down to an average of three weeks. To find a designated Regional Agency and see income eligibility levels, go to: <https://hedfuel.azurewebsites.net/raa.aspx> or call 211.
- **Emergency Rental and Mortgage Assistance (ERMA) – for households 50% to 80% AMI:** ERMA continues to be available to COVID-impacted, income-eligible households, providing up to \$4,000 for rent or mortgage assistance. ERMA and RAFT have a shared application. To find a designated Regional Agency and see income eligibility levels, go to: <https://hedfuel.azurewebsites.net/raa.aspx> or call 211.
- **Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP) – for households where one family member has a disability that is contributing to housing instability:** The regular (Housing Court Referral) TPP program remains in operation as does the upstream program. TPP provides case management support and acts a neutral 3<sup>rd</sup> party between landlords & tenants, with the goal of preserving tenancies. Expansion/Enhancement: Starting in December, a temporary COVID Response TPP will be available to serve a broader range of high-risk households, targeting extremely low-income

seniors and families with children. This temporary program will be accessible via HCEC or Court referral. To find one of 6 regional TPP providers, go to: <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/tenancy-preservation-program> or call 211.

- **Rapid Rehousing Programs – for families with children or pregnant women with incomes up to 115% Federal Poverty Level who are homeless, in shelter, or at risk of homelessness:** The HomeBASE program continues to offer up to \$10,000 in benefits to families with children and pregnant women who are eligible for Emergency Assistance (EA, the state’s family shelter system). Benefits can be used to help with housing, moving, and utility costs. HomeBASE helps families to exit or avoid shelter. In addition, the Strategic Prevention Initiative (SPI), currently available in Boston and Brockton, offers up to \$3,000 in benefits for families who are likely EA-eligible. Expansion/Enhancement: Starting in November, SPI will also be available to likely EA-eligible families in Worcester, Lawrence, and Springfield. Then, in December, a temporary COVID response program called the Massachusetts Emergency Transitional Assistance Reserve (METAR) will be available offering up to \$10,000 in benefits to likely EA-eligible families statewide. If one is homeless or on the verge of homelessness, please contact the [Family Resource Center \(FRC\)](#) in the community or call (866) 584-0653 to speak to a Homeless Coordinator.
- **Legal Aid – for households up to 200% Federal Poverty Level:** When courts reopen, legal aid organizations will be assisting court-involved, income-eligible clients, at normal capacity. In addition, volunteer lawyers will be available to help through Lawyer for the Day programs in some Housing Courts. Expansion/Enhancement: Starting in mid-November, COVID Eviction Legal Help will start being available to assist a larger number of income-eligible landlords and tenants, both before and during the court process. By the end of December, the program will be operating at full capacity statewide. To locate legal aid, go to: <https://www.masslegalservices.org/findlegalaid> or call 211.
- **Community Mediation Centers (CMCs):** Through the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration, 12 CMCs currently offer mediation services on a variety of issues, including housing on a limited basis. Mediation services are available for no fee or on a sliding scale. Expansion/Enhancement: Starting in mid-November, the 12 CMCs will begin expanding their capacity to mediate housing cases. By December, all 12 CMCs will be operating full scale mediation for eviction cases that are referred by HCECs, RAFT agencies, Legal Aid, or the Courts. To locate CMCs, go to: [https://www.umb.edu/mopc/what\\_we\\_do/projects/community\\_mediation\\_center\\_grant\\_program/centers](https://www.umb.edu/mopc/what_we_do/projects/community_mediation_center_grant_program/centers)

**Eviction Diversion Initiative Ramp Up Timeline:**

Date	Status
October 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 211 live &amp; returning calls within 24 hours</li> <li>• RAFT increased benefit &amp; streamlined application live</li> <li>• HCEC, TPP, HomeBASE, SPI, Legal Aid &amp; Community Mediation operating at normal scale &amp; recruiting staff/volunteers</li> </ul>
November 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RAFT application portal live for landlords ≤20 units &amp; RAFT cross-agency income verifications live</li> <li>• HomeBASE &amp; SPI expansion live</li> <li>• Augmented volunteer lawyer corps (30+attorneys) live</li> </ul>
November 16	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community mediation staffed to capacity</li> <li>• Legal aid, RAAs, HCECs, TPP expansion partially staffed</li> </ul>
December 1-21	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• METAR live</li> <li>• Legal aid, RAAs, HCECs, TPP expansion staffed to capacity</li> </ul>
January 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All EDI related programs operating at full capacity</li> </ul>

For more information about EDI, call 2-1-1 or DHCD’s main phone line at 617-573-1100

Email: [ryan.ambrose@mass.gov](mailto:ryan.ambrose@mass.gov)