



**PUBLIC HEALTH INSTITUTE  
OF WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS**  
PARTNERS FOR HEALTH EQUITY

January 21, 2026

The Honorable Maura Healey  
Governor of Massachusetts  
State House, Room 280  
24 Beacon St,  
Boston MA 02133

Dear Governor Healey,

We write to you on behalf of the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts ([PHIWM](#)), a nonprofit serving Franklin, Hampshire, Hampden, and Berkshire Counties. PHIWM convenes multi-sector coalitions and conducts research, evaluations, and community health needs assessments. The core of our work is to change poor health outcomes in our rural, suburban, and urban communities by advancing health equity and racial justice.

As you finalize your FY27 budget, we respectfully request that you include the following seven items. Each play a key role to improving the health of Baystaters—particularly for those who are working hard but are ‘on the edge’ financially speaking, and essentially, are suffering silently.

**1. \$1m for the MA Healthy Homes Program - Line Item 4400-1004**

As we work to build the many *new* homes the Commonwealth needs, **we cannot afford to lose existing older housing stock due to significant deferred maintenance that is resulting in unhealthy and unlivable conditions.** In addition to **mold, pests, and/or asbestos problems**, tens of thousands of homes in Massachusetts still have **lead paint**. Until these homes are remediated, they are unlivable for families with children under age five due to the health problems caused by lead exposure. We are thrilled that the MA Healthy Homes Program (MHHP) was established in the Affordable Homes Act to address these problems more efficiently, and more equitably. Please include \$5M in the FY26 budget so we can expand and better coordinate **existing home repair programs statewide** and also **leverage other funding sources**. The Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) would administer MHHP by offering grants, forgivable loans, and deferred payment loans to eligible owner-occupants and landlords whose properties have **habitability concerns**. MHHP grants/loans may be used to address the many health and safety problems. [More info](#)

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## 2. \$6m to Prevent Lead Poisoning by Recapitalizing the *Get the Lead Out* Program

Massachusetts has some of the **oldest housing stock** in the country, which means there are still tens of thousands of homes with **lead paint**. The Commonwealth's revolving loan fund (*Get the Lead Out*) helps homeowners de-lead these older homes by lending the funds needed--to be repaid when they sell the home. Given the slow housing market in recent years, the loan fund will run out in the fall of 2026 unless the state recapitalizes it. [More info](#)

## 3. \$2.2m to help end the 'cliff effect' - Line Item 4400-1000

This will **support the Bridge to Prosperity Cliff Effect Pilot Program** that helps low-income working families gain financial stability instead of facing the 'cliff effect' as their careers advance and salaries gradually increase, but not fast enough to make up for a sudden loss of benefits such as childcare and housing assistance. This pilot program is an emerging tool to help people out of poverty and into financial security and better health . [More info](#)

## 4. \$4m for Access to Counsel - Line Item 0321-1800

The MA Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) has been administering a pilot program to provide legal counsel to people facing eviction and it's helping! We urge you to **continue prioritizing this program and to make it permanent**. A Boston Bar Association study revealed that for every \$1 spent for legal assistance in eviction cases, **the state saves \$2.69 from the costs associated with eviction**, including health care and emergency housing. Let's reduce evictions, prevent homelessness, and stabilize housing by supporting a statewide Access to Counsel program. [More Info](#)

## 5. \$280m for Regional Transit Authorities (RTAs) and \$15m for the Micro-transit and the *Last Mile Grant* program.

RTAs are the backbone of public transportation in Western Massachusetts. We're part of the 55% of Massachusetts residents who live outside the MBTA service area, so we rely on RTAs to access jobs, health care, food, and social connections. These services are especially vital for older adults, people with low incomes, and those with disabilities. We are grateful for the Fair Share funding that enabled all four RTAs in Western MA to operate fare-free. To sustain and build on this progress, we ask for increased funding in FY27, because **level funding will not keep pace with inflation and rising wages**. Another thoughtful adjustment will ensure RTAs can maintain current service and continue closing long-standing gaps for the communities that rely on them most.

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## 6. **\$15m for Grants to Local and Regional Boards of Health** – Line item 4512-2022

Municipal boards of health quietly protect each community in the Commonwealth by handling essential tasks that residents and policymakers rely on, including food and water inspections, responding to housing code violations, distributing vaccines, preventing youth substance use and overdoses, and more. Massachusetts is in the middle of transforming our patchwork of local public health systems into one that is better equipped to consistently serve all residents, but the federal public health infrastructure is weakening. As we face new threats like drops in vaccine rates, we very much need continued support from the state. [More info](#)

## 7. **\$28.5m for the Healthy Incentive Program (HIP)** - Line Item 4400-1004

As part of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), HIP makes it more affordable for recipients to consume fresh, healthy, local fruits and vegetables. At the same time, local farmers benefit from having more customers and the Commonwealth benefits by **keeping more dollars in the local economy**. [More info](#)

Thank you for considering our requests.

Sincerely,

Jessica Collins  
Executive Director

Andrea Freeman  
Policy Director