

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Charles D. Baker, Governor ♦ Karyn E. Polito, Lt. Governor ♦ Jennifer D. Maddox, Undersecretary

To: Regional HomeBASE Administering Agencies and EA Shelter Providers
From: Ita Mullarkey, Acting Assistant Undersecretary, DHCD
Subject: Reminder of HomeBASE Benefit Level Adjustment Procedures and New Termination
Guidance During COVID-19
Date: April 8, 2020

DHCD would like to remind all regional HomeBASE Administering Agencies and EA Shelter Providers of the procedures surrounding HomeBASE benefit level adjustments during this unprecedented public health crisis. We anticipate that many participants in the HomeBASE Household Assistance program may lose income and/or have increased expenses over the next few months, if they have not already.

HomeBASE Benefit Level Adjustment Procedures

The HomeBASE Household Assistance benefit remains capped at \$10,000 per program year. However, we remind all HomeBASE Administering Agencies that they, along with the participant household and the stabilization provider, have the ability and the responsibility to adjust the amount and timing of participants' ongoing benefit payment amounts if necessary, depending on the total benefit level and configuration of scheduled payments. DHCD anticipates that most adjustments will be for stipend payments. We anticipate that some households will choose to have the HomeBASE agency pay a higher stipend amount for rental payments in the short term. If the participant family had previously been allocated an amount below the full maximum \$10,000 benefit, loss of income and/or increased expenses may warrant a higher total amount up to the \$10,000 cap. In addition, both for those households and for participant families that had already been allocated the full maximum \$10,000 benefit, Administering Agencies may adjust the timing of their benefit, "frontloading" payments so that the family will receive a higher stipend amount now, but the benefit payments at the end of the program year will have to be reduced to stay within the statutory cap.

There is no "one size fits all" approach here; rather, each participant family should make a decision along with their stabilization agency and HomeBASE Administering Agency to determine the best course of action. If benefit amounts and/or schedule are adjusted, property owners and participant families must be notified of the changes in writing. All requests for benefit adjustments should be considered and, if possible, honored.

New Termination Guidance

DHCD is also implementing new guidance around HomeBASE terminations due to stabilization plan violations. Although HomeBASE Administering Agencies and EA shelter providers will continue to provide stabilization services during this time, due to the move to virtual operations and the economic uncertainty faced by program participants, DHCD expects that some elements of the stabilization plan will not be easily accomplished. Therefore, beginning retroactive to March 9, 2020, and until new guidance is issued by DHCD, any HomeBASE participant will be presumed to have made a good faith effort to follow their housing stabilization plan as long as the family has maintained some form of contact with the stabilization provider. The form of contact with the stabilization provider may include telephone, email, text, mail, or other forms of communication depending on the family's access to technology.

Because of this policy, DHCD expects that in general, HomeBASE agencies will not issue terminations for violations of the stabilization plan during this time. Terminations for stabilization plan violations that have already been issued between March 9, 2020 and today should be reviewed and rescinded if the family maintained some form of contact with the stabilization provider.

Please contact Amy Mullen at amy.mullen2@mass.gov or Virginia Griffin at virginia.k.griffin@mass.gov with questions about this guidance.