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Stanley: Moving to economic opportunity housing

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By Rep. Thomas Stanley
Guest Columnist

To the Editor:

Working closely with the Metropolitan Boston Housing Partnership (MBHP), I recently filed legislation to establish “Moving to Economic Opportunity Housing,” a five-year program that links rental subsidy to stabilize a tenant’s housing to education, training and other job supports to help tenants increase income, build assets and leave welfare.

If passed, the bill will create a program to help tenants focus on increasing income and building a savings account to reduce the dependence on state-funded subsidy. The program itself is designed after a successful, federally-funded program and will target families and individuals who are extremely low-income or homeless.

Many people currently living in public housing and receiving state subsidies do not want to get jobs for fear of losing the benefits they are receiving from the state. When state aid runs out or renters lose government financial assistance, many folks are simply unable to pay rent and face potential homelessness. This program is different from many other state-funded rental assistance programs because it encourages people to increase their incomes to move away from subsidized housing.

First, the program will offer rental assistance. Specifically, the tenant will pay 30 percent of their total income to rent; the subsidy makes up the difference. Second, the program will offer employment support, starting with tenants developing five-year plans outlining educational and career goals. Third, the program will help individual and families build assets. As a tenant’s income increases, their portion of the rent increases. The increased rent amount is set aside in an escrow account. As income increases, savings increase and at the end of the five-year program, the participant will no longer need financial help from the state.

Eligibility in the program is dependant on the applicant’s work history and gross annual income. Participants must be presently working or looking for a job and have a gross annual income not exceeding 30 percent of the area median income. The MBHP will administer the program and its staff will be available to help participants develop a financial goal and reach these goals through assistance job training, education, transportation, childcare opportunities and financial planning.

Housing assistance subsidies may help individuals and families meet their housing needs. But in addition to providing safe and clean affordable housing, it is imperative that policy makers assist low-income tenants to become

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economically, self sufficient and leave welfare.

Sincerely,

Thomas M. Stanley

Rep. Thomas Stanley, D-Waltham, is also a city councilor.

