MASSACHUSETTS COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS

33 Farnsworth Street • Boston, MA 02210 • (617) 451-0707

For Immediate Release
February 13, 1989

For More Information:
Sue Marsh, 451-0707
Barbara Sard, 357-5757
Judy Kelliher, 262-3285

HOMELESS ADVOCATES SUE TO ENFORCE
HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION PLAN

The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless filed suit in Suffolk Superior Court today against Amy Anthony, Secretary of the Executive Office of Communities and Development, charging her with failure to obey a legislative direcive to prevent homelessness. The suit was announced at a 1 p.m. press conference at the Family Service Association building, 34½ Beacon Street, Boston.

Basing their court action upon a law enacted in July 1988 directing Anthony to leverage rental subsidy certificates for families at risk of homelessness, the Coalition was joined by the Shaffer family of Malden, who face the imminent loss of their home.

A January 30, 1989 report released by Anthony admitted that the administration's much-vaunted homelessness prevention plan had not begun, despite the existence of legislative direction to do since July of 1988.

"Over one year ago, we stood with Governor Dukakis and Secretary Anthony as they announced their plan to prevent family homelessness," said Sue Marsh, exeuctive director of the Coalition. "EOCD has failed to carry out what vulnerable families were promised by the Governor and the legislature. While the executive branch stands idle, we've seen a 24% increase in the number of homeless families sheltered at state expense in the last year."

plan to leverage 2000 turnover c.707 and section 8 rental subsidy certificates from local housing authorities in FY89, for use by homeless families in EA-funded shelter and families at risk of homelessness and placement in emergency-assistance-funded hotels, motels, or shelters in FY89, Secretary Anthony has violated the mandate of item 3722-9007.

The plaintiffs expect a court hearing on their motion for a preliminary injunction shortly. Attorneys for the Coalition include Barbara Sard of Greater Boston Legal Services, the lead attorney in <u>MCH v. Secretary of Human Services</u>, the landmark welfare benefits case.

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The number of homeless families sheltered by the Commonwealth, at a daily cost of $70,000 hit a historic high in recent months, with more than 500 households living in temporary shelters, and an additional 730 in state-paid hotels.

"EOCD's lack of action is particularly disturbing as they could undertake a homelessness prevention program through the directed use of existing federal and state resources without additional funding," Marsh continued. "In a year when resources to meet   survival needs are very tight, it is outrageous that Secretary Anthony has not aggressively pursued no-cost initiatives to assist families at risk of homelessness."

The Shaffer family of Malden faces the imminent loss of their apartment as a result of a recent doubling of their rent and the father's inability to continue working after his second heart attack in two years. "I really don't want to go into a motel or shelter," said Raymond Shaffer. "My doctor said my heart condition is so bad, in part because of all the stress I'm under. This whole situation — of not knowing where we're going to be living or when we'll be able to get our own apartment — is making everything much worse. I know if we just had a subsidy certificate we could find an apartment and not have the stress — or waste the state's money on the cost of a motel."

Item 3722-9007 of Chapter 164 of the Acts of 1988 requires EOCD to leverage at least 2000 runover chapter 707 and section 8 rental subsidy certificates during FY89 from local housing authorities for use by homeless families in hotels, motels or shelters under the emergency assistance program and for families at risk of such homelessness. To date, EOCD admits that it has at most leveraged 600 such certificates, and intends to leverage only a total of 1000 such certificates, all for use only by already homeless families. By failing to leverage or develop any