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WELFARE RECIPIENTS MOVE TO PUT STATE ADMINISTRATION ON TRIAL

BOSTON --- Today welfare recipients filed a motion in Suffolk Superior Court in an effort to put the State Administration on trial for failing to request appropriation for a significant increase in welfare grants, as ordered by Judge Charles Grabau last November. The Court order was the result of a lawsuit filed by the Coalition for Basic Human Needs and the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless which cited the Administration's failure to abide by one of its own state statutes. The statute required that welfare grants be sufficient to enable mothers to properly provide for their children within their own homes.

While filing their request for trial, the plaintiffs vowed that they will prove that the Administration attempted to mislead the legislature and bypass the court order with its recent Report on Standard Budgets of Assistance For the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) Program. The report, which outlined the financial need of AFDC families and two possible methods to close the gap between the new need standards and current welfare grants, was submitted to the State Legislative leadership last December. Withi this document, the Administration specifically recommended that welfare grant levels not be increased to the new standards. Alternatively, the report suggested that current services such as Employment Training, child support enforcement and drug rehabilitation programs will end poverty and homelessness. Today plaintiffs in the case contended that they will prove that the Administration's

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response is not adequate. CBHN member, Dottie Stevens said, "The Administration's report does not satisfy the court order. The Administration gave us nothing."

The Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless and the Coalition for Basic Human Needs charge that the State has neither met its legal obligation nor represented accurately the extent of the gap between current benefits and the amount necessary for families to raise their children within their own homes. They argue that the Administration, in its report, attributed resources available to AFDC recipients that most do not receive, in an attempt to minimize the problem and to mislead the legislature and the public. "The legislature's ability to prevent further family homelessness depends upon accurate, clear information by the Executive Branch," explained Sue Marsh of MCH, "and the Administration's effort falls far short of that mandate."

"Considering that the Governor's proposed 5.5% increase is about the same as the rate of inflation, said Colleen Costa, CBHN member, "the Administration is defying the law and pushing us backwards."

"We're not going to stop fighting," said Janie Gibbs from CBHN. "Why should we? Dukakis is trying to smooth the way for himself running for President, but he's making life harder for poor people in his own state!"

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IN LIGHT OF GOVERNOR DUKAKIS' PROPOSED 5.5% INCREASE IN WELFARE GRANTS . . . . CONSIDER THESE FACTS:

Given the current rate of inflation and the loss of Foodstamps which occurs with each grant increase, welfare recipients will suffer a LOSS of purchasing power under the Governor's proposed budget. His budget is a statement that the Administration does not intend for welfare grants to even keep up with inflation.

Right now there are approximately 700 AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependant Children) families living in hotels, motels and shelters in Massachusetts. This does not include families that are doubled up, living in the street or in cars. This month last year, there were about 500 AFDC families in hotels, motels and shelters.

Seventy-five percent of the homeless are families, and over eighty percent of those families have AFDC as their SOLE means of support.

Over the past two years, 900 children in Massachusetts were treated at hospitals for malnutrition. In the Commonwealth there are 10,000-17,500 chronically malnourished low-income pre-school children. Chronic malnutrition results in retarded growth, impaired learning ability and increased health problems.

Recent Department of Public Health statistics show an alarming increase in the infant mortality rate from 8.9 to 9.1 overall, with an especially grim increase from 15.1 to 22.1 per thousand for black children in Massachusetts (a 46% increase). A child born in Cuba or Costa Rica (where infant mortality rates are 21 per thousand) is more likely to survive its first year than a black child born in Massachusetts!!

