

The Welfare State:

How Massachusetts's Welfare Programs Have Grown Out-of-Control by Hayden Dublois



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Massachusetts continues to grapple with high taxes, domestic out-migration, and a massive state budget, the Commonwealth's various welfare programs require close scrutiny. For years, these programs have grown unchecked to a point where taxpayers can now no longer sustain them.

For example, in 2024, Massachusetts spent nearly \$30 billion in state and federal tax dollars combined on cash welfare (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, otherwise known as TANF), food stamps (the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, otherwise known as SNAP), Medicaid, and housing aid.¹ Well over one-third of this spending was directly financed by Massachusetts taxpayers.²

Unfortunately, this spending has also crowded-out other investments in Massachusetts's budget. Today, nearly \$1 in every \$4 out of Massachusetts's budgetary expenditures goes towards Medicaid alone.³

Meanwhile, costs to address homelessness have also exploded, even as caseloads have declined from their peak. At the same time, the SNAP and TANF programs have drifted from their original intent of promoting self-sufficiency, all while error rates, improper payments, and fraud have continued to skyrocket.

Getting Massachusetts's fiscal house in order starts with the long-overdue task of finally setting the Commonwealth's welfare programs on a more sustainable trajectory.



1 In 2024 alone, Massachusetts's spending on Medicaid totaled \$24.7 billion, \$2.6 billion for SNAP, \$1.25 billion for TANF, and nearly \$1.1 billion for housing and homelessness investments. Author's calculations based on data retrieved from the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, the Food and Nutrition Service, the Agency for Children and Families, and the Massachusetts Executive Office for Finance and Administration.

2 For example, the state-share of Medicaid spending in 2024 alone was nearly \$11.1 billion. See, e.g., Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, "Expenditure Reports From MBES/CBES," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2025), <https://www.medicare.gov/medicaid/financial-management/state-budget-expenditure-reporting-for-medicare-and-chip/expenditure-reports-mbes/cbes>.

3 National Association of State Budget Officers, "2025 State Expenditure Report," NASBO (2025), https://higherlogicdownload.s3.amazonaws.com/NASBO/9d2d2db1-c943-4f1b-b750-0fca152d64c2/UploadedImages/SER%20Archive/2025_SER/2025_NASBO_State_Expenditure_Report_S.pdf.

The Welfare State:

How Massachusetts’s Welfare Programs Have Grown Out-of-Control by Hayden Dublois



Introduction

Massachusetts has one of the most expansive welfare states in the nation, frequently ranking in the top five or ten states in terms of welfare benefit spending and generosity.⁴⁻⁵ Even compared to other New England states, many of which are also very generous with welfare benefits, Massachusetts stands out.

In 2024, Massachusetts had nearly 2 million Medicaid enrollees, more than 1 million SNAP enrollees, and over 86,000 TANF enrollees.⁶⁻⁷⁻⁸ And on a per capita basis, Massachusetts has the highest SNAP and TANF enrollment figures in New England, and the second-highest Medicaid enrollment in New England.⁹

Welfare Enrollment Per 100,000 Residents in New England States (2024)			
STATE	Medicaid	SNAP	TANF
Massachusetts	28,002	15,424	1,208
Vermont	25,913	10,135	537
Connecticut	29,239	10,373	337
Maine	26,629	12,241	674
Rhode Island	26,809	13,323	792
New Hampshire (model state)	13,008	5,398	360
Wyoming (model state)	11,604	4,498	202
New England Average	26,625	12,635	816
National Average	24,825	12,187	606

4 Rob Moore, “Which States Spend The Most On Welfare?” Scioto Analysis (2026), <https://www.sciotoanalysis.com/news/2026/2/23/which-states-spend-the-most-on-welfare>.

5 Brookings Institute, “State Safety Net Interactive,” Brookings Institute (2024), <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/state-safety-net-interactive/>.

6 Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, “Medicaid Enrollment Data Collected Through MBES,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2025), <https://www.medicaid.gov/medicaid/national-medicaid-chip-program-information/medicaid-chip-enrollment-data/medicaid-enrollment-data-collected-through-mbes>.

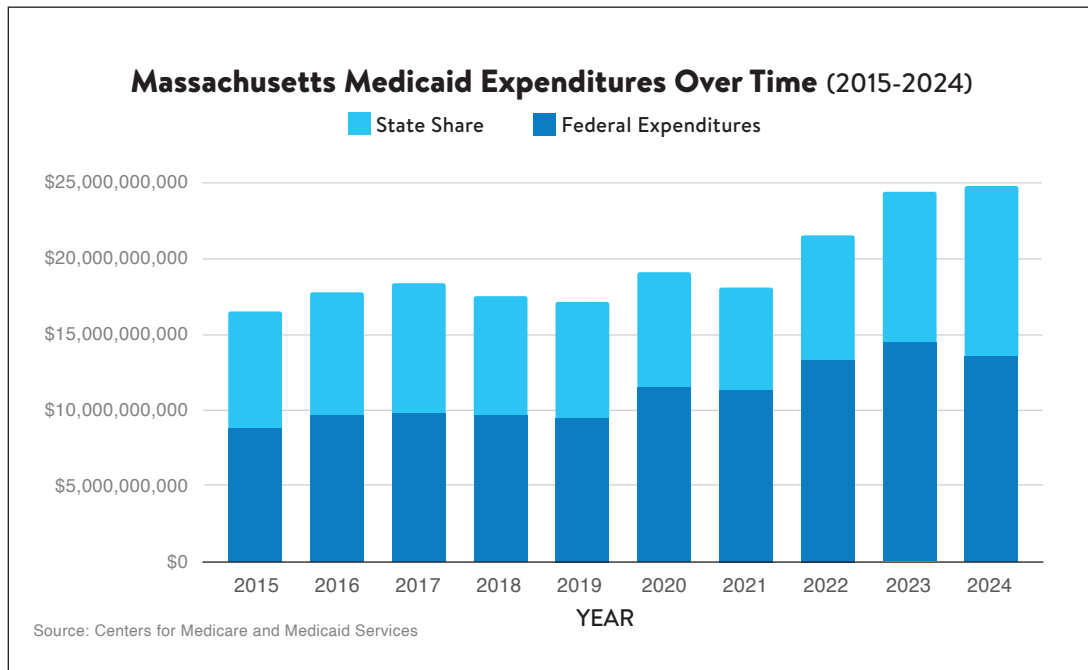
7 Food and Nutrition Service, “SNAP Data Tables,” U.S. Department of Agriculture (2025), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

8 Agency for Children and Families, “TANF Caseload Data 2024,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2026), <https://acf.gov/ofa/data/tanf-caseload-data-2024>.

9 Author’s calculations on welfare enrollment per 100,000 state residents in New England states, disaggregated by specific welfare program.

In some instances, these far exceed peer states. For example, Massachusetts’s rate of 1,208 TANF recipients per 100,000 residents is double the national average and nearly 50 percent greater than the New England average.¹⁰

Dissecting each of these concerning figures offers crucial insight into just how far Massachusetts’s welfare state has gone off-track.



1. An Unsustainable Medicaid Program

From 2015 to 2024, Massachusetts added nearly 200,000 enrollees to its Medicaid program.¹¹ But its Medicaid expenditures have grown at an even more alarming rate, rising by nearly 50 percent over that same period to nearly \$24.8 billion in 2024.¹²

Cumulatively, state taxpayers alone have financed well over \$83 billion in Medicaid spending over that time frame.¹³

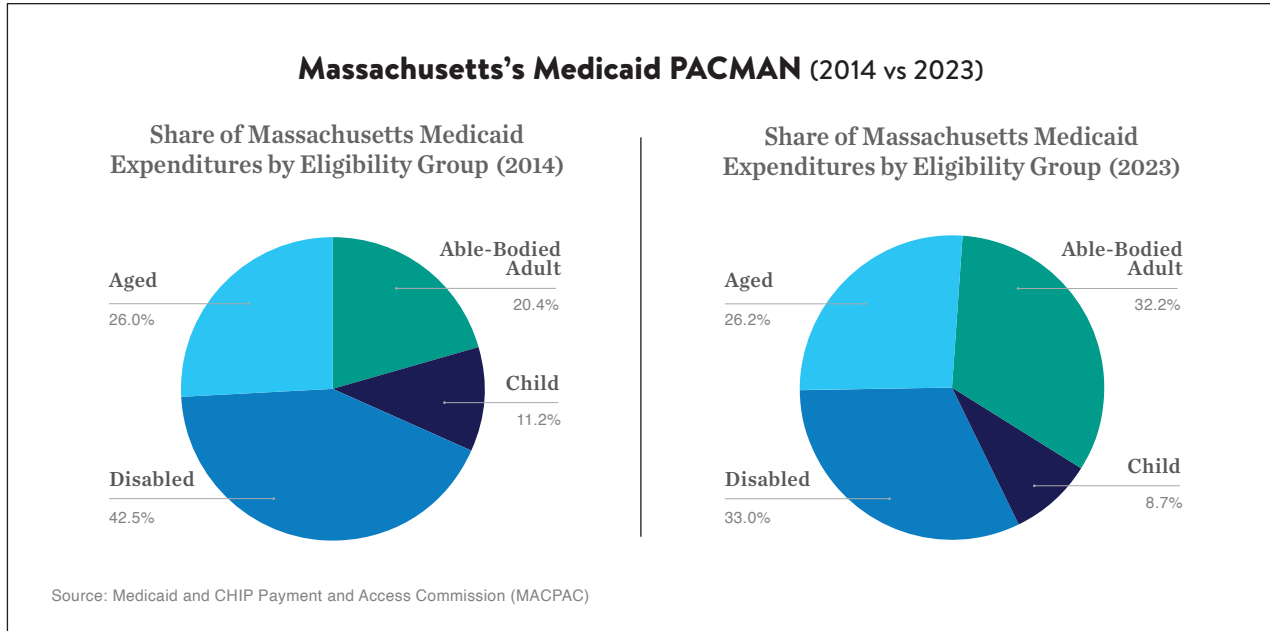
10 Author’s calculations on TANF enrollment per 100,000 residents.

11 Author’s calculations on the change in Medicaid enrollment in Massachusetts from 2015 to 2024. See, e.g., Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, “Medicaid Enrollment Data Collected Through MBES,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2025), <https://www.medicare.gov/medicaid/national-medicare-chip-program-information/medicaid-chip-enrollment-data/medicaid-enrollment-data-collected-through-mbes>.

12 Author’s calculations on the change in Medicaid expenditures in Massachusetts from 2015 to 2024. See, e.g., Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, “Expenditure Reports From MBES/CBES,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2025), <https://www.medicare.gov/medicaid/financial-management/state-budget-expenditure-reporting-for-medicare-and-chip/expenditure-reports-mbes/cbes>.

13 Ibid.

Driving these trends is a growing able-bodied adult population dependent on Medicaid. In 2014, able-bodied adults on Medicaid in Massachusetts comprised approximately 45.4 percent of program enrollment and 20.4 percent of program spending.¹⁴ But by 2023, those figures had increased to 53.4 percent and 32.2 percent, respectively.¹⁵



Another growing source of runaway enrollment and expenditures is inadmissible migrants and illegal immigrants receiving Medicaid benefits. Federal law requires that Medicaid cover emergency services for these populations. But from 2015 to 2024, Massachusetts experienced a 300 percent increase in expenditures on emergency care for inadmissible migrants and illegal immigrants, one of the largest spikes in the nation.¹⁶

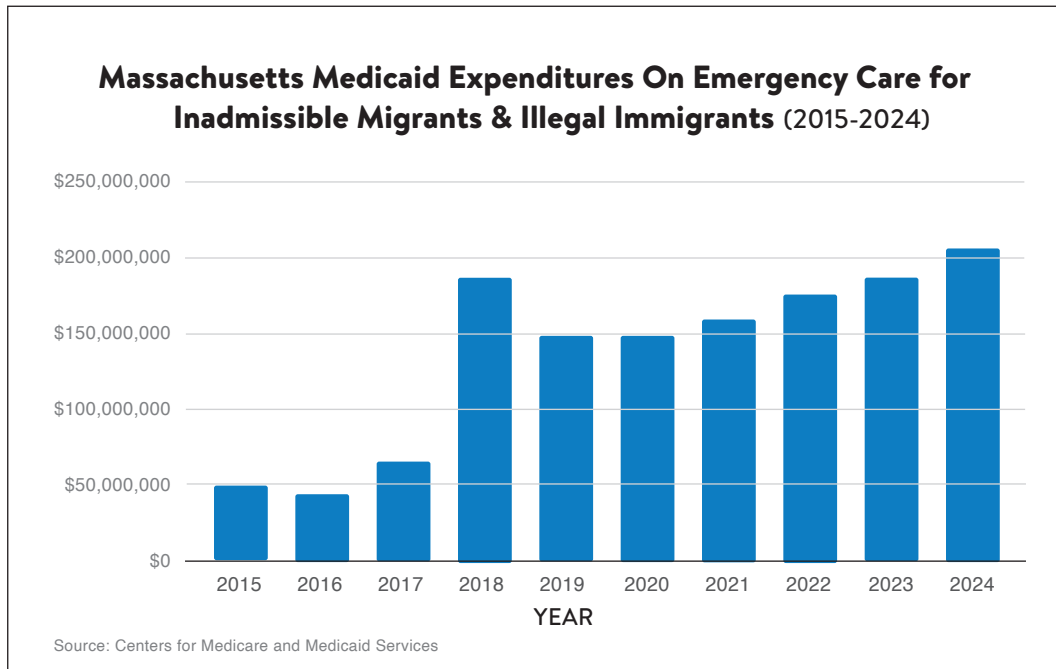
From 2015 to 2024, Massachusetts experienced a 300% increase in expenditures on emergency care for inadmissible migrants and illegal immigrants, one of the largest spikes in the nation.

14 Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, “MACSTATS December 2019,” MACPAC (2019), <https://www.macpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/MACStats-Medicaid-and-CHIP-Data-Book-December-2019.pdf>.

15 Medicaid and CHIP Payment and Access Commission, “MACSTATS February 2026,” MACPAC (2026), https://www.macpac.gov/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/MACSTATS_Feb2026_WEB_508.pdf.

16 Author’s calculations based on the change in expenditures for “emergency services for undocumented aliens” as reported in the annual Medicaid financial reports. See, e.g., Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, “Expenditure Reports From MBES/CBES,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2025), <https://www.medicare.gov/medicaid/financial-management/state-budget-expenditure-reporting-for-medicare-and-chip/expenditure-reports-mbes/cbes>.

Over that period, state taxpayers alone financed \$650 million worth of emergency care for inadmissible migrants and illegal immigrants.¹⁷ Massachusetts has also taken this policy a step further by expanding access to entirely state-funded, non-emergency medical care to certain classes of inadmissible migrants and illegal immigrants.¹⁸



Another out-of-control expenditure has been for adult foster care services, which has seen utilization skyrocket by 40 percent in just the last two years alone.¹⁹ These expensive services are putting pressure on an already-strained Medicaid program.

Meanwhile, waste, fraud, and abuse in Medicaid spending remain elevated. While the Massachusetts Medicaid improper payment rate in the most recent audit year (2023) was 7.1 percent, this figure was artificially low due to COVID-era flexibilities that the

17 Ibid.

18 Massachusetts Law Reform Institute, “Understanding Non-Citizen Eligibility for Health Coverage from MassHealth and the Health Connector,” Massachusetts Law Reform Institute (2026), <https://www.masslegalservices.org/system/files/library/Understanding%20eligibility%20of%20non-citizens%20for%20MassHealth%20and%20Health%20Connector%20%28January%202026%29.pdf>.

19 Allison Kuznitz, “‘Rate freeze across the board’ expected in MassHealth budget,” WWLP (2026), <https://www.wwlp.com/news/massachusetts/rate-freeze-across-the-board-expected-in-masshealth-budget/>.

state employed in calculating improper payments.²⁰⁻²¹ The true improper payment rate is undoubtedly much higher. Yet even with Massachusetts's artificially-depressed level of eligibility errors, the state could be on the hook for hundreds of millions of dollars in penalties as a result of a new provision in the 2025 federal reconciliation law intended to crack down on Medicaid errors, which will now begin imposing penalties on states with eligibility improper payment rates above 3.0 percent.²²

Additionally, within the last year, the Massachusetts State Auditor has identified multiple instances of Medicaid fraud, including:

- Nearly \$23 million in improper billing for telehealth coverage for foster care services;²³
- \$3.8 million in improper capitation payments made to enrollees with multiple IDs;²⁴
- More than \$1.6 million in overpayments for non-emergency transportation services;²⁵
- \$580,650 in expenditures for durable medical equipment (DME) that was ordered by excluded or unverifiable providers, or for enrollees who were deceased;²⁶ and
- \$465,683 in erroneous telehealth payments for the Adult Day Health program, including payments to 31 individuals who were deceased.²⁷

These are just small, periodic audits of a much larger program filled to the brim with waste, fraud, and abuse.

20 Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, "2023 Medicaid & CHIP Supplemental Improper Payment Data," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2023), <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/2023-medicaid-chip-supplemental-improper-payment-data.pdf>.

21 According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, improper payment rates were artificially depressed due in part to "reviews that considered certain flexibilities given to states during COVID-19, such as suspending eligibility determinations and reducing requirements for provider enrollment and revalidations, which were previously part of the improper payment reviews." See, e.g., U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, "Agency Financial Report: Fiscal Year 2023," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2023), <https://www.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/fy-2023-hhs-agency-financial-report.pdf>.

22 The 2025 federal reconciliation law eliminated the ability of the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to waive federal financial penalties associated with eligibility error rates in excess of 3.0 percent. In the latest artificially-depressed improper payment review, Massachusetts's eligibility error rate was 5.1 percent.

23 Medicaid Audit Unit, "Annual Report," Office of State Auditor Dianna Dizoglio (2025), <https://www.mass.gov/doc/office-of-the-state-auditor-annual-medicaid-report-2025/download>.

24 Ibid.

25 Medicaid Audit Unit, "Review of Transportation Services," Office of State Auditor Dianna Dizoglio (2025), <https://www.mass.gov/doc/audit-report-office-of-medicaid-masshealth-review-of-transportation-services/download>.

26 Medicaid Audit Unit, "Review of Durable Medical Equipment Providers," Office of State Auditor Dianna Dizoglio (2025), <https://www.mass.gov/doc/audit-report-office-of-medicaid-masshealth-review-of-durable-medical-equipment-providers/download>.

27 Medicaid Audit Unit, "Annual Report," Office of State Auditor Dianna Dizoglio (2025), <https://www.mass.gov/doc/office-of-the-state-auditor-annual-medicaid-report-2025/download>.

Put simply, Massachusetts’s Medicaid program is on an unsustainable trajectory. Without correction, fraud will multiply, enrollment will rise, and expenditures will continue to skyrocket.

2. Growing SNAP Errors

Over the last decade, SNAP enrollment in Massachusetts has spiked by an astonishing 40 percent, rising from just under 785,000 recipients in 2015 to more than 1.1 million in 2024.²⁸ While recent enrollment figures have declined slightly from their peak, they remain highly elevated over the mid-2010s.

Massachusetts’s high SNAP enrollment level is in part thanks to a series of poor policy choices. For example, in FY2024, as many other states were getting work-capable SNAP enrollees back to work following the pandemic, Massachusetts obtained a temporary geographic federal waiver from complying with SNAP work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents (ABAWDs) that covered nearly 40 percent of the state’s SNAP caseload.²⁹ For those not covered by the waiver, Massachusetts exempted tens of thousands of other ABAWDs from the work requirement using their stockpile of discretionary exemptions, which allows the state to exempt an ABAWD from work for any reason.³⁰ Unsurprisingly, the most recent data suggests that between 65 percent and 75 percent of able-bodied SNAP enrollees in Massachusetts do not work at all.³¹

While enrollment was exploding, programmatic errors were also compounding. From 2015 to 2024, Massachusetts’s SNAP error rate increased from just 5.25 percent to 14.10 percent.³²



Over the last decade, SNAP enrollment in Massachusetts has spiked by an astonishing 40%, rising from just under 785,000 recipients in 2015 to more than 1.1 million in 2024.

28 Food and Nutrition Service, “SNAP Data Tables,” U.S. Department of Agriculture (2025), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

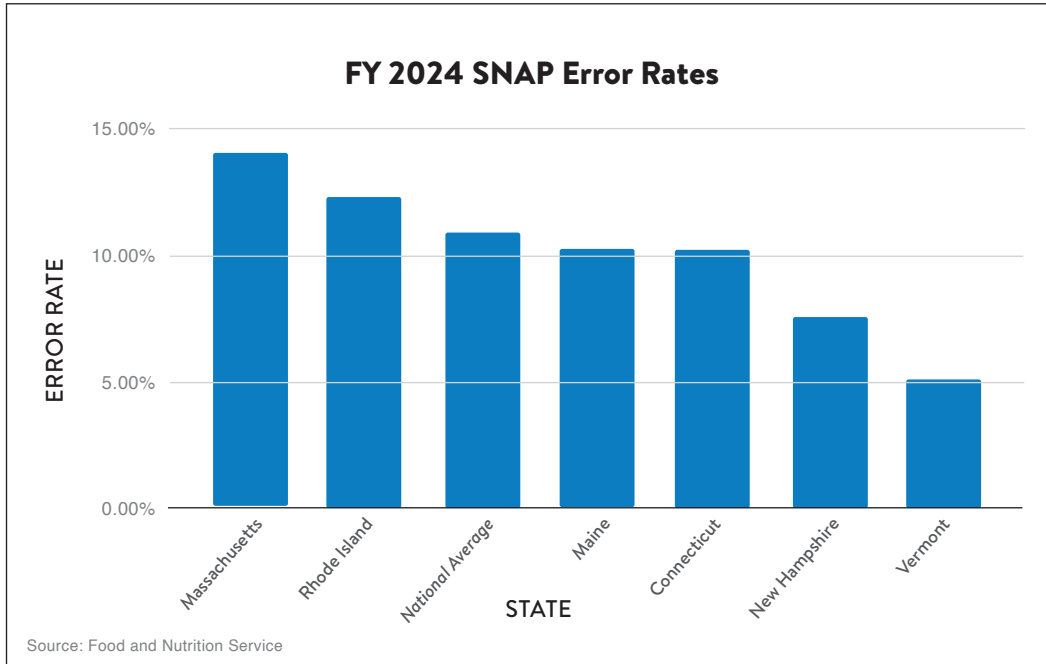
29 Food and Nutrition Service, “Massachusetts FY2024 ABAWD Waiver,” U.S. Department of Agriculture (2024), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/abawd/waivers/2025-2029>.

30 Food and Nutrition Service, “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) – Fiscal Year 2025 Allocations of Discretionary Exemptions for Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents,” U.S. Department of Agriculture (2025), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/work-requirements/policies/abawd-discretionary-exemptions-fy2025>.

31 Author’s calculations on the work status of able-bodied adults aged 18 to 64 receiving SNAP benefits in Massachusetts under various dependent scenarios using SNAP Quality Control data. See, e.g., Mathematica, “SNAP Quality Control Data,” Food and Nutrition Service (2025), <https://snapqcdata.net/>.

32 Food and Nutrition Service, “SNAP Payment Error Rates,” U.S. Department of Agriculture (2025), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/qc/per>.

Today, Massachusetts’s error rate is higher than both the national average and every other New England state.³³⁻³⁴



The Massachusetts Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) has attempted to ignore these concerning errors, claiming that “less than 1% of the Massachusetts caseload was found to have committed fraud in FY25.”³⁵ This is a complete misrepresentation of reality, and disregards any and all errors attributable to incorrect information provided by applicants, failures of state agency personnel to appropriately verify eligibility, retailer fraud, and much more.

In fact, one recent SNAP whistleblower working for DTA claimed instances of “rampant” and “unabated” fraud, while also suggesting that DTA staffers “are being discouraged from asking even the most basic and expected questions to verify

Today, Massachusetts’s error rate is higher than both the national average and every other New England state.

33 Food and Nutrition Service, “Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program: Payment Error Rates Fiscal Year 2024,” U.S. Department of Agriculture (2025), <https://fns-prod.azureedge.us/sites/default/files/resource-files/snap-fy24QC-PER.pdf>.

34 This also underestimates the true extent of errors, as 1) certain fraudulent activities are excluded from the error rate calculation and 2) the error rate formula disregards all errors that have a dollar value of less than \$698 per year. As a result, Massachusetts’s true rate of SNAP errors is even higher.

35 Tim Dunn, “Whistleblower details ‘rampant’ SNAP-EBT fraud in Massachusetts: ‘It’s just unbelievable’” Boston Herald (2026), <https://www.bostonherald.com/2026/02/15/whistleblower-details-rampant-snap-ebt-fraud-in-massachusetts/>.

identity.”³⁶ This comes on the heels of a \$7 million retailer fraud scheme in Boston, \$4.1 million in SNAP fraud uncovered by the State Auditor, and \$1 million in stolen benefits by a Fitchburg resident.³⁷⁻³⁸⁻³⁹

All told, even when excluding these egregious instances of fraud, more than \$1 billion has been erroneously spent in the Massachusetts SNAP program from 2022 to 2024 alone—a shocking statistic.⁴⁰

As fraud has mounted, state policymaking decisions need to be rigorously examined. For example, Governor Maura Healey refused to join most other states in sharing data with the federal government to address fraudulent SNAP enrollment. Already, with just a portion of states participating in this arrangement, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has identified nationwide instances of 300,000 deceased or potentially deceased recipients, and found as much as \$1.1 billion worth of annualized expenditures attributable to duplicate enrollment.⁴¹

Meanwhile, Massachusetts has continued its policy of allowing individuals to bypass federal asset limits while on SNAP, effectively making it legal for individuals to accumulate unlimited assets, including cash in the bank, and remain eligible for the program.⁴²

More than \$1B has been erroneously spent in the Massachusetts SNAP program from 2022 to 2024 alone—a shocking statistic.

36 Ibid.

37 Lance Reynolds, “Massachusetts SNAP benefit fraud scheme busted after netting nearly \$7M: Feds,” Boston Herald (2025), <https://www.bostonherald.com/2025/12/17/massachusetts-snap-benefit-fraud-scheme-busted-after-netting-nearly-7m-feds/>.

38 Colleen Cronin, “Mass man implicated in alleged \$1M SNAP, pandemic benefit fraud scheme,” Boston Herald (2026), <https://www.bostonherald.com/2026/02/03/mass-man-implicated-in-alleged-1m-snap-pandemic-benefit-fraud-scheme/>.

39 Tim Dunn, “Massachusetts Auditor’s Office uncovers nearly \$12M in SNAP, MassHealth, other public benefits fraud,” Boston Herald (2026), <https://www.bostonherald.com/2026/01/30/massachusetts-auditors-office-uncovers-nearly-12m-in-snap-masshealth-other-public-benefits-fraud/>.

40 In 2022, Massachusetts distributed \$3,135,922,211 in SNAP benefits and had a 11.77 percent error rate. In 2023, Massachusetts distributed \$3,090,708,314 in SNAP benefits and had a 9.86 percent error rate. And in FY2024, Massachusetts distributed \$2,617,666,701 in SNAP benefits and had a 14.10 percent error rate. Cumulatively, the total value of errors paid in those three years was \$1,042,932,889. Author’s calculations using SNAP error rates and expenditures by fiscal year. See, e.g., Food and Nutrition Service, “SNAP Data Tables,” U.S. Department of Agriculture (2025), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/pd/supplemental-nutrition-assistance-program-snap>.

41 State of California v. U.S. Department of Agriculture, “Exhibit Supplemental Declaration of Shiela Corley – Document #89, Attachment #1,” Court Lister (2025), <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/70945300/89/1/state-of-california-v-united-states-department-of-agriculture/>.

42 Food and Nutrition Service, “Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE),” U.S. Department of Agriculture (2026), <https://www.fns.usda.gov/snap/broad-based-categorical-eligibility>.

And recently, the Healey administration announced they are adding 80 new SNAP caseworkers and hiring to backfill 42 positions in order to reduce their error rate.⁴³ This is an incorrect response to Massachusetts’s SNAP error rate: instead of fixing the policy framework that enables waste, fraud, and abuse, the administration is simply throwing more bureaucrats at the problem. Merely adding more caseworkers—of which state taxpayers will have to pick up 75 percent of the tab for—without addressing the underlying causes of SNAP case errors is not a solution.

Given the state’s current error rate and the new provisions of the 2025 federal reconciliation law, Massachusetts taxpayers could be on the hook for nearly \$400 million in state penalties due to DTA’s inability or unwillingness to sufficiently root out SNAP waste, fraud, and abuse.⁴⁴ The Commonwealth desperately needs to address its systemic SNAP challenges in order to reduce its error rates and promote self-sufficiency.

3. Cash Welfare Focused On Dependency, Not Work

From 2015 to 2024, Massachusetts’s TANF caseload has ballooned by nearly 30 percent.⁴⁵ Unsurprisingly, spending also rose by about 30 percent on its TANF program to accommodate these new enrollees, but funds dedicated to work-related expenditures in TANF have actually declined by 4.3 percent over the same period.⁴⁶

In fact, only about 55.1 percent of work-eligible TANF adults in Massachusetts are working enough hours to meet the program’s work requirement.⁴⁷



In fact, only about 55.1% of work-eligible TANF adults in Massachusetts are working enough hours to meet the program’s work requirement.

43 Ella Adams, “State staffing up to bring down SNAP error rate,” WWLP (2026), <https://www.wwlp.com/news/massachusetts/state-staffing-up-to-bring-down-snap-error-rate/>.

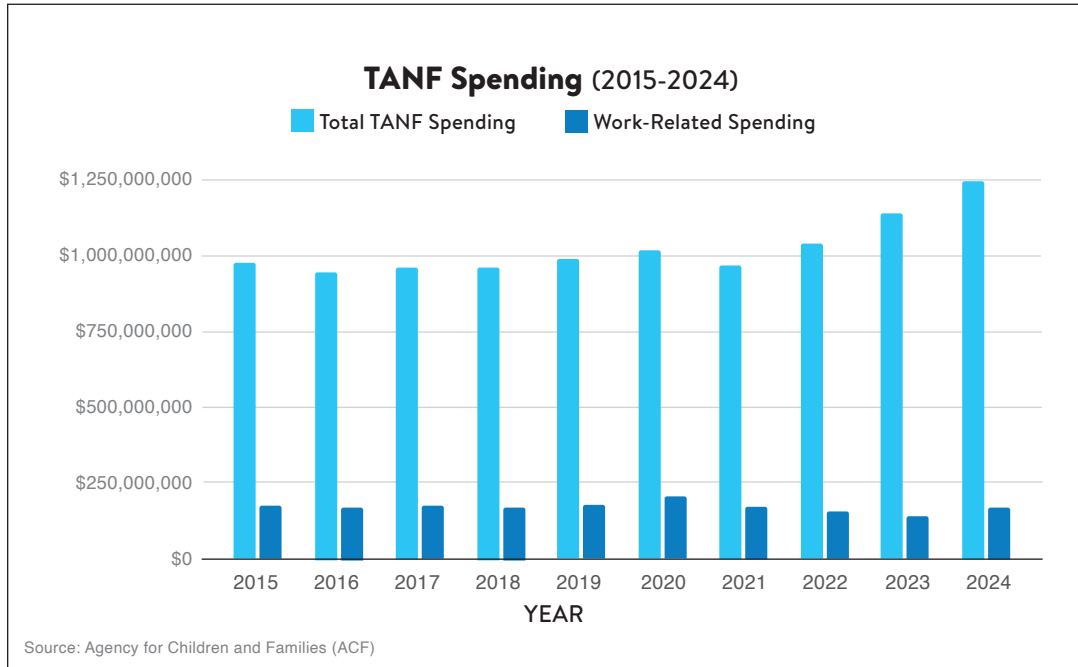
44 Paige Terryberry, “Food Stamp Program Integrity Measures Will Lower Costs For States and Preserve Resources for the Truly Needy,” Foundation for Government Accountability (2025), <https://thefga.org/research/foodstampprogramintegritymeasureswilllowercosts/>.

45 Agency for Children and Families, “State TANF Data and Reports,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2026), <https://acf.gov/ofa/programs/tanf/data-reports>.

46 Ibid.

47 Agency for Children and Families, “Percentage of Work-Eligible Individuals Participating in Work Activities for Sufficient Hours for the Family to Count as Meeting the All-Families Work Requirement Monthly Average, Fiscal Year 2023,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2024), <https://acf.gov/sites/default/files/documents/ofa/wpr2023table04b.pdf>.

On a per capita basis, Massachusetts’s TANF caseload is double the national average and 50 percent higher than the New England average, exceeding every single state in the region.⁴⁸ And yet just 13.5 percent of TANF/MOE expenditures go to helping move TANF families from government dependency through work or work-related activities.⁴⁹



Massachusetts’s TANF program needs to be re-focused towards work in order to stem ever-rising enrollment and reorient the program towards its original intent.

4. Out-of-Control Homelessness Expenditures

From 2022 to 2027 (proposed budget), Massachusetts’s housing and homelessness-related expenditures have more than doubled.⁵⁰⁻⁵¹ And for certain homeless programs, the increase has been even more dramatic.

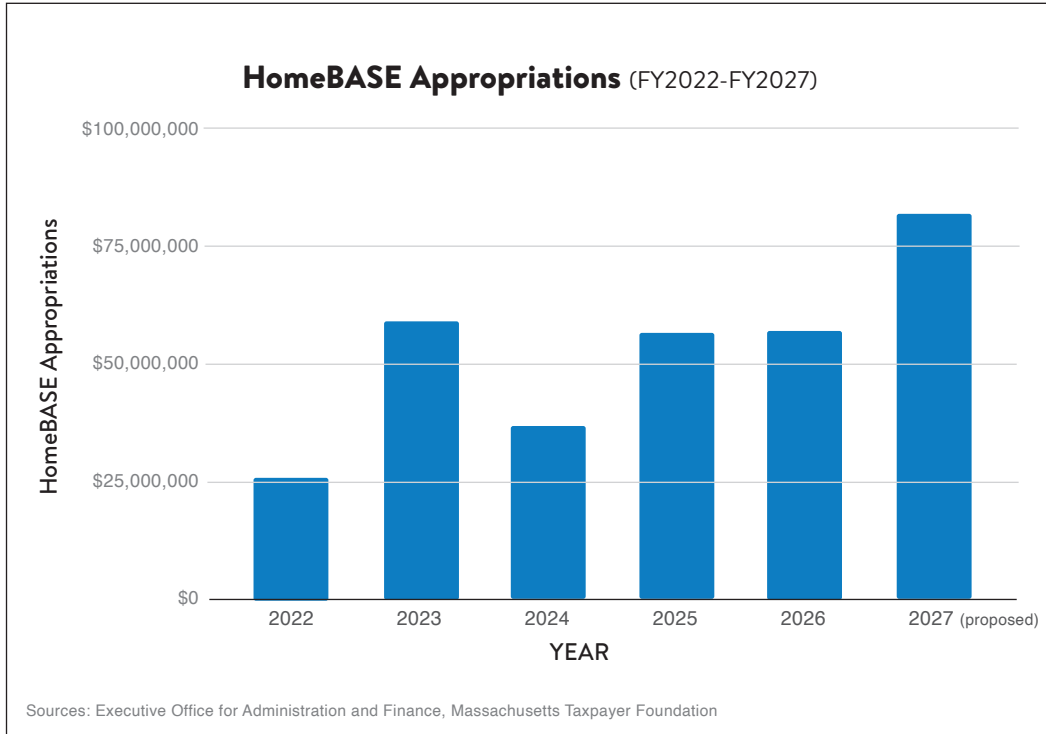
48 Author’s calculations on TANF enrollment per 100,000 residents.

49 Agency for Children and Families, “State TANF Data and Reports,” U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (2026), <https://acf.gov/ofa/programs/tanf/data-reports>.

50 Executive Office for Administration and Finance, “Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities,” Commonwealth of Massachusetts (2026), <https://budget.digital.mass.gov/summary/fy25/enacted/housing-and-livable-communities/?tab=historical-budget>.

51 Massachusetts Taxpayer Foundation, “Governor Healey’s Fiscal Year 2027 Budget,” Massachusetts Taxpayer Foundation (2026), https://www.masstaxpayers.org/sites/default/files/publications/2026-01/FINAL%20-%20FY%202027%20Governor%27s%20Budget%20Report_0.pdf.

For example, HomeBASE, the Commonwealth’s primary program to combat homelessness, has increased from roughly \$26 million in FY2022 to \$82.3 million in the FY2027 Governor’s proposed budget—a 217 percent increase.⁵²⁻⁵³



Last year, Massachusetts was spending an average of \$3,800 per family per week on the HomeBASE program, yet some participants were spending their entire two-year allocation in just 10 months.⁵⁴⁻⁵⁵

52 Executive Office for Administration and Finance, “Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities,” Commonwealth of Massachusetts (2026), <https://budget.digital.mass.gov/summary/fy25/enacted/housing-and-livable-communities/?tab=historical-budget>.

53 Massachusetts Taxpayer Foundation, “Governor Healey’s Fiscal Year 2027 Budget,” Massachusetts Taxpayer Foundation (2026), https://www.masstaxpayers.org/sites/default/files/publications/2026-01/FINAL%20-%20FY%202027%20Governor%27s%20Budget%20Report_0.pdf.

54 Chris Van Buskirk, “Mass. emergency shelter spending just shy of \$900M for FY25, latest state data shows,” Boston Herald (2025), <https://www.bostonherald.com/2025/07/15/mass-emergency-shelter-spending-just-shy-of-900m-for-fy25-latest-state-data-shows/>.

55 Jade Lozada, “Massachusetts resettled thousands of homeless families in apartments. Now some can’t pay rent.” Boston Globe (2025), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2025/08/02/metro/mass-homebase-rent-immigrants/>.

One of the largest driving factors behind the uptick in demand for homelessness services was the “migrant influx” during and immediately following the COVID-19 pandemic, which was in no doubt influenced by the fact that Massachusetts has the only “right to shelter” law in the nation.⁵⁶⁻⁵⁷

But even as caseloads have declined from their peaks as policymakers have adjusted eligibility, costs are still through the roof. By the end of FY2025, emergency shelter expenses were expected to reach nearly \$1 billion for the first time ever.⁵⁸ And the Governor’s FY2027 budget proposes to increase HomeBASE allocations by an astonishing 43.6 percent in a single year, pushing total housing and homelessness aid to more than \$1.2 billion.⁵⁹

A significant portion of this is shifting money around. For example, while elected officials can claim “savings” in the Emergency Shelter program, that money has simply been replaced by additional spending on programs like HomeBASE, Winter Beds, Family Shelter Diversion, and more.⁶⁰

This has created a spending and capacity crisis: Massachusetts is spending enough money on homelessness aid to cover 4,000 families, but just under 1,500 are participating, suggesting a vacancy rate of more than 60 percent.⁶¹

As a result, even though the Commonwealth has begun to adjust policies to reduce caseloads in order to stem the crisis “driven by the arrival of thousands of migrant families”, the budget hikes for homelessness aid continue with no end in sight.⁶²

56 Chris Van Buskirk, “Number of families, migrants in Massachusetts shelters down 30%, data shows,” Boston Herald (2025), <https://www.bostonherald.com/2025/03/31/numbers-of-families-migrants-in-massachusetts-shelters-down-30-data-shows/amp/>.

57 Julianna Hubbard, “Running Out of Room: The Right to Shelter in Massachusetts,” Boston University (2024), <https://sites.bu.edu/dome/2024/01/26/running-out-of-room-the-right-to-shelter-in-massachusetts/>.

58 Chris Van Buskirk, “Mass. emergency shelter spending just shy of \$900M for FY25, latest state data shows,” Boston Herald (2025), <https://www.bostonherald.com/2025/07/15/mass-emergency-shelter-spending-just-shy-of-900m-for-fy25-latest-state-data-shows/>.

59 Massachusetts Taxpayer Foundation, “Governor Healey’s Fiscal Year 2027 Budget,” Massachusetts Taxpayer Foundation (2026), https://www.masstaxpayers.org/sites/default/files/publications/2026-01/FINAL%20-%20FY%202027%20Governor%27s%20Budget%20Report_0.pdf.

60 Ibid.

61 Stephanie Ebbert and Deirdre Fernandes, “Maura Healey’s changes are keeping homeless families out of shelter. But the state is still paying for vacant rooms.” Boston Globe (2026), <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2026/01/22/metro/massachusetts-shelter-population-slashed-healey/>.


62 Ibid.

Conclusion

Massachusetts's various welfare programs are in dire need of reform thanks to elevated enrollment, out-of-control expenditures, low rates of workforce participation, and high improper payment rates. Not only do these stand out as concerning on their own, but in almost every instance Massachusetts's metrics are worse than the regional and national averages.

New federal opportunities from the 2025 reconciliation law will empower states like Massachusetts with additional tools to remedy these challenges. However, they also present new cost-sharing requirements that Massachusetts could face if the Commonwealth does not act swiftly to control its program error rates and bloated caseloads.

Massachusetts's various welfare programs are in dire need of reform thanks to elevated enrollment, out-of-control expenditures, low rates of workforce participation, and high improper payment rates.



Policy reforms for Massachusetts to consider include:

- **Multi-program reforms:**

- Ending the use of self-attestation of eligibility criteria for all welfare programs.
- Implementing identity verification procedures for all welfare programs, including but not limited to multi-factor authentication.
- Implementing Medicaid and SNAP crosschecks with available databases related to employment, wages, residency, out-of-state EBT transactions, incarceration records, death records, and more.
- Codifying and implementing key provisions of the One Big Beautiful Bill related to Medicaid and SNAP.
- Requiring annual audits and program integrity reports on all welfare programs.

- **Medicaid:**

- Repealing state-funded, non-emergency Medicaid expenditures for inadmissible migrants and illegal immigrants.
- Banning self-attestation of medical frailty status for impending Medicaid work requirements.
- Banning the use of geographic-based exemptions for impending Medicaid work requirements.

• SNAP:

- Repealing Broad-Based Categorical Eligibility (BBCE), which allows individuals with unlimited assets to enroll on SNAP in Massachusetts.
- Banning the use of future SNAP geographic waivers or discretionary exemptions from work requirements.
- Exercising a state option to request the use of photo IDs on EBT cards.
- Shorten SNAP certification periods to review eligibility more frequently.
- Move to full “change reporting” in SNAP to require households to report a change in circumstance that could impact their eligibility within ten days.

• TANF:

- Implementing an asset limit in the TANF program.
- Imposing a stricter lifetime limit on TANF benefits.
- Enact “full-family sanctions” for TANF households with work-capable adults that refuse to comply with work requirements.

• Homelessness/Housing:

- Requesting a federal waiver to implement work requirements for public housing programs.
- Repealing or tightening the “right to shelter” provision in statute.
- Considering further tightening the cap on shelter stays and/or income eligibility for emergency assistance.
- Refocusing housing policy towards supply-side reforms related to regulatory barriers in order to build new units, rather than subsidizing homelessness.

With billions in new welfare spending proposed, this is not the future that Massachusetts taxpayers want—they deserve better.

Until and unless these types of welfare reforms are implemented, Massachusetts’s budget will continue to be crowded out by welfare spending—with more than \$1 in every \$4 dollars of the state’s budgetary expenditures going to welfare programs. With billions in new welfare spending proposed, this is not the future that Massachusetts taxpayers want—they deserve better.