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GLOBE EDITORIAL

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## A bridge to independence

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GOVERNOR ROMNEY and Lieutenant Governor Healey support efforts to create housing and end homelessness, but Romney's budget includes a dangerous trapdoor. He has proposed a three-year time limit on the state-funded vouchers that help poor people pay rent. The Legislature should reject it.

To climb out of homelessness, people need a package deal: help with housing, food, healthcare, child care, and employment. One weak link in this chain can turn manageable problems into huge setbacks. As legislators craft next year's state budget, they should create a bridge of programs that arcs up out of poverty and toward economic independence.

Shawn Feddeman, the governor's spokeswoman, told the Globe that government aid should not become a "permanent lifestyle" and that time limits would help people lead "independent and fulfilling lives" without a "government handout."

Helping people become independent is a laudable goal. But time limits threaten to dump people on the sidewalk.

One question that Romney overlooks: How long does it take to become independent? The answer is that it varies. Some people may be able to earn enough to give up a housing voucher in three years or less. Others would need more time to get the training or education for a job paying enough to cover high rents, especially around Boston. It makes no sense to put an arbitrary time limit on rent vouchers unless there's a promise that more affordable housing will be available or that a proven jobs program can employ people in three years or less. Supporting a family in Greater Boston without any government subsidies requires a salary of \$40,000, according to the Massachusetts Family Economic Self-Sufficiency Standard.

State legislators in the House and Senate should pick up where Romney left off, funding diverse programs that tackle homelessness and strengthening people's economic resiliency. Rather than time limits on rental assistance, legislators should invest more in shelters, which have struggled with level funding and overcrowding. Residents need more and easier access to social and job services. Because college is one of the best paths to a higher income, higher education opportunities should be expanded. Funding should be increased for the new, \$2 million "RAFT" pilot program, which prevents homelessness by helping families with up to \$3,000 for expenses such as back rent or utilities.

This could be called a handout, but it's actually a smart, effective way to help people before a problem gets unmanageable. Preventing homelessness costs far less than putting families into shelters.

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