

Western MA Task Force for Housing First Meeting Minutes - 7/25/24

In attendance: roughly 55 attendees, including legislators, legislative aides, city and town staff and dozens of shelter, housing and community providers

Individual Shelter/Housing Updates

- **Center for Human Development (CHD)** - Great news on the new low-threshold housing program that is housing 20 individuals, mostly people who have been living on the streets in Springfield, many of whom suffer from substance use disorders and mental health challenges. all Springfield residents. Very meaningful for residents and staff alike to experience this seismic shift in the residents' lives. The neighborhood group in a residential neighborhood where the housing is situated has been exceptionally welcoming and supportive (more to lift up there for the broader region and state to see).
- **CSO Friends of the Homeless Springfield** - full at 175 beds - within 30 minutes of a bed opening, it is filled; concerning re: summer numbers since usually numbers go down and they have not. Need for more women's beds in particular. Permanently housed 8 individuals from shelter; temporarily housed 3. Also noted more refugees and the need to navigate language barriers.
- **Craig's Doors** - some staff changes, introducing Sarah Zim, the new director of operations and programs. Shelter is currently at capacity, working to grow the fare-free program for public transportation; running 15 units of low threshold housing - all leases renewed
- **CSO Grove St Northampton** - at capacity - triaging 12-15 individuals each day (unable to shelter but refer to services) - most are sleeping outside - in abandoned buildings or tents
- **Pittsfield ServiceNet Shelter:** 40 beds, all full with a waitlist. Seeing more people over 40 years old seeking shelter for the first time.
- **Northern Berkshires, Louison House** - sheltering 45 + people a night (several on emergency cots), while only paid to serve 32 individuals with state and federal funds. Many on waiting list who are either couch surfing or sleeping outside
- **Emerge Coalition** - organized by the 3 county CoC as a pilot for Hampshire/Franklin Counties to create an emergency response system to address encampment and other emergency needs. Convened recently for the first time with 24 organizations attending - will keep us posted on next planning steps

Family Shelter Update

Kelly Turley of the MA Coalition for the Homeless presented on Governor Healey's announcement earlier this week of new severe limitations on access to overflow shelter for children and families.

The summary from the MA Coalition for the Homeless is here:

Starting on August 1st, the Administration plans to limit families to five days of shelter at the four state-funded overflow sites in Cambridge, Chelsea, Lexington, and Norfolk. Families choosing to take the five days of overflow shelter (which will be rebranded as "temporary respite centers") will not be allowed to access EA shelter for at least six months. Instead, those families

will be offered transportation assistance to relocate outside of Massachusetts and the option to seek HomeBASE rehousing benefits within Massachusetts. See more details from the Governor's office here: [July 23rd press release](#)

Kelly noted that families already deemed eligible for shelter who have proven that they have no other safe place to go will be forced to make the impossible choice between immediate safety for their children and the hope of coming off of the waiting list and swiftly accessing EA shelter. The expectation is that families who will be most deeply harmed by this new policy will be families seeking shelter after being evicted for nonpayment of rent from a market-rate unit, newly arrived immigrant families who are resettling in Massachusetts, and others.

The MA Coalition for the Homeless and Mass Law Reform Institute, with the Homes for All MA Coalition, are organizing a protest in Boston at the State House and Springfield on Monday, 11 am - 12 noon. The Springfield protest will take place in front of the Western MA Governor's office at 436 Dwight Street, Springfield.

RAFT Update

Way Finders (serving Hampden and Hampshire Counties) reported consistent demand - roughly 120 applications each day; 4,000 calls in the last month, and they are seeing an increase in the number of homeowners seeking assistance. Franklin County reported consistent demand for their county as well.

FY25 Budget Update

The Legislature adopted its FY25 budget that is now at the Governor's desk. Great news on Access to Counsel's inclusion in the Legislature's final budget. Read about it on our [blog post here!](#)

Overall, housing and homelessness programs were level-funded (with the one glaring exception of an over \$400,000 cut in the youth homelessness line-item).

Rep. Sabadosa pointed out the significant wins resulting from revenues raised through the Fair Share Amendment. These revenues, which the Fair Share Amendment requires to be spent on transportation or education needs, is the basis for funding free community college for all and fare-free public transportation. Huge wins for the people we serve!

Affordable Homes Act Update

The formal legislative session ends on July 31. The Affordable Homes Act Conference Committee is making its final decisions about what will go in the bill. [Read more here](#) - there is still time to take action!

Upcoming Training Opportunities: Please see the [listing here](#).

Next meeting date: Tuesday, August 27, 9-10 am