

Western MA Task Force for Housing First Meeting Minutes – 8/27/24

In attendance: Jane Banks, CSO, Keith Benoit, City of Northampton, Amy Cahillane, City of Greenfield, Kevin Chambers, Office of Sen. Velis, Sen. Jo Comerford, Kristin Cuddy-Pease, Franklin County Opioid Task Force, Steve Connor, Central Hampshire Veteran Services, Shaundell Diaz, Three County CoC, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, Annette Duke, Mass Law Reform Institute, Cathi Emery, Franklin County Opioid Task Force, Luray Fladd, YWCA, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Tricia Farley-Bowvier, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Robin Frechette, Office of Rep. Brian Ashe, Brad Gordon, Upside 413, Jon Gould, Office of Senator Mark, Gina Govoni, Franklin County Regional Housing Authority, Jen Hohn, North Adams Housing Authority, Denise Jordan, Springfield Housing Authority, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Shyla Ruffer Matthews, CEDAC, Gerry McCafferty, Hampden CoC, Tim McCarthy, Craig's Doors, Rachel McMahon, Office of Rep. Susannah Whipps, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, Christy O'Brien, CHD, Anna Oltman, City of Greenfield, Lizzy Ortiz, C3, Eileen Peltier, Hearthway, Rep. Lindsay Sadosa, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Emma Sawtell, Office of Rep. Carey, Phil Ringwood, DIAL/SELF, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Rosa Tobin, Mass Fair Housing Center, Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless (and more, totaling roughly 55 attendees)

Shelter and Housing Updates

- Clinical & Support Options (CSO): individual shelters full across the region (Springfield, Northampton, Greenfield); seeing an increase in substance use and mental health issues; seeing an increase in undocumented immigrants - clearly a consequence of the EA family shelter crisis, creating an additional stressor on the system
- Center for Human Development (CHD): individual and family shelters full
- Springfield Housing Authority: seeing unprecedented demand; families in urgent need of housing with nowhere to go
- Springfield-Hampden CoC: with HOME ARP funds, creating 90 units of permanent supportive housing (PSH); now issuing another RFP for \$1.5 million for more PSH development
- Craig's Doors (Amherst): individual shelter is full; turning away 6-10 individuals every day; working on winter expansion to the extent possible; working with Town of Amherst on new shelter/housing at the VFW site; working with PVTA on transportation pilot program for transportation to work places
- ServiceNet: individual shelter (Pittsfield); family shelter (Greenfield and Pittsfield) - individual shelter is full with a wait list; housed over 60 individuals last year, but largely through vouchers which have now all been utilized; on family shelter rehousing efforts, seeing a small uptick in housing success thanks to the HomeBASE funding resource
- Louison House (Northern Berkshires): unprecedented use of overflow space (cots in living room and dining room); has a couple of apartments coming on line shortly which will be utilized through the CoC coordinated entry system

Housing and Livable Communities (HLC) update (from last providers meeting on 8/26):

The combined estimates of unsheltered folks is 2,147 statewide. That's 520 more than were counted during the Point in Time count in January. Providers were asked how many additional beds they could stand up this winter. They estimated 782 beds. This data will inform HLC's ask for additional revenue to support an increase in winter shelter beds. However, HLC noted that there is no guarantee of additional funding, especially given the lower-than-predicted revenue projections. We will stay tuned.

RAFT Update

Way Finders (Hampden and Hampshire Counties):

- 611 applications came in last week, 150 from homeowners (a marked rise in homeowners seeking assistance)
- 120-130 people in the lobby every day seeking assistance
- Unprecedented demand for utility assistance - seeing over 400 shut-off notices in a day

Access to Counsel Update (with thanks to Annette Duke, attorney with Mass Law Reform Institute): The FY25 budget included \$2.5 million for a pilot access to counsel program, providing full legal representation to low-income tenants and landlords living in owner-occupied units. The total cost for this program to provide representation to all who would be eligible is estimated to be \$26 million, i.e., this is a small pilot, but it is an important start (and a big deal to get a new budget line-item!). The program will be run through the Massachusetts Legal Assistance Corporation (MLAC) which will create criteria for the pilot and issue an RFP for service in a few communities. We'll stay tuned for more information.

Affordable Homes Act Update

With thanks to Eileen Peltier for reviewing the Affordable Homes Act outcomes (and thanks to CHAPA for use of their [summary presentation](#) as a guide). Please review the [presentation here](#) for the information!

Thanks, too, to Annette Duke for summarizing the win around eviction record sealing. Please learn more from the [factsheet here](#).

Another important win on the adoption of the Supportive Housing Pool Fund, which will create a critical vehicle for making it more possible to develop more supportive housing by braiding together all the different components in one fund, with both public and private monies. More to come from the Supportive Housing Coalition soon.

The next focus is implementation! Stay tuned for how the Network can participate in the process to turn the new law into concrete outcomes.

EA Family Shelter Update

Special thanks to Kelly Turley of the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless for providing us with an update on the continually more dire situation homeless families are facing right now. With the adoption of 9 month time limits in EA shelter and 5 day time limits in overflow shelter, families are increasingly sleeping on the streets. Last night outside of the Wollaston T

stop in Quincy, 47 people (families with nowhere to go) were sleeping on the sidewalk. Kelly noted the 7,500 family cap on shelter that the Governor implemented earlier this year; right now, there are 7,190 families reported in EA shelter while there are 762 families on the wait list. See the latest family homelessness report from

HLC here: https://www.mahomeless.org/files/ugd/6c63ec_1198fb05042649ccaa160e0f95f248e4.pdf

Connect to MA Coalition for the Homeless advocacy efforts

here: <https://www.mahomeless.org/protect-access-to-shelter>

Announcement: Congratulations to Shaundell Diaz on her becoming the new Program Director for the Three County Continuum of Care. We're so thrilled you're in this position!

Next meeting date: Thurs., Sept. 19, 9 am