

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 10/8/24

In attendance: approximately 25 shelter, housing and community providers

Family Shelter Updates

- overall seeing housing placements on the rise; thanks to Janette Vigo for this data point: in western MA, the total number of placements in the first quarter is 1/2 of the total number over the entire year last year. Great work everyone! Factors include: amazing commitment of staff (!), developing and strengthening relationships with landlords and their seeing value in the stabilization services; in some areas a slight softening of the housing market (but others just as tough)
- re: time limits: so far no family has been removed from shelter due to reaching the 9 month time limit (extensions have been granted in most cases; and where not, the time limit has not been reached quite yet) It was noted that the time limit creates additional anxiety on top of the ongoing trauma of homelessness (i.e., this is not a trauma informed approach). It also has created additional urgency. Too early to evaluate the real impact of these time limits on the rehousing effort. Still great concern about what will happen when extensions are not granted and time limits are reached.
- discussion of the additional challenge posed for rural families where HLC has no physical office; referrals are going unanswered (in all areas, not just rural). Pamela and Erin will follow-up re: feedback to HLC around the rural challenges.
- overall noting the increase in number of calls, website inquiries, walk-ins of people saying they are homeless RIGHT NOW and in need of housing. Cities, churches are calling. People are sleeping in cars. We discussed the value of tracking these "anecdotes" because they are the reality as much as any cumulative data and very important for us to be able to share in our advocacy conversations.

Update from MA Coalition for the Homeless

Thanks to Kelly Turley of the MA Coalition for the Homeless for providing HLC's EA report to the Legislature. We reviewed the interesting data and you can too [here](#).

Kelly also flagged that the Special Commission on Emergency Housing Assistance will be at the State House next Tuesday, 10/15 (details to be posted on the Legislature's website). There will also be a Commission-related listening session focused on EA and Temporary Respite Center (TRC) providers this Wednesday. [Details here](#).

RAFT Update

- Way Finders: 1,700 applications in progress, 1,200 applications in draft, awaiting submission; last week received 802 applications; week prior 818; average of 18 days to process; seeing roughly 25 shut-offs/day; lobby seeing 120+ people/day; many people need help with the technology; also experiencing some staff vacancies and trying to fill

- Franklin County Regional Housing: rate is continuing to be high; seeing an increase in moving and utility applications; average processing of 19 days; also hiring a RAFT administrator

Network Budget and Policy Updates:

Pamela reported on the conversations that are underway about the FY26 budget (to be formally launched by the Governor's budget filing in mid-January) and the new 2 year legislative session that will also begin mid-January (when roughly 6,000 bills are filed!). The Network continues to represent western MA in these statewide conversations regarding our housing and homelessness priorities. Pamela will be in touch with more detail at our November and December meetings; our Network Steering Committee will collect this committee's feedback to help inform its decisionmaking regarding our priorities for FY26 and the next legislative session.

Announcements:

- Franklin/Hampshire and Western Hampden Counties: Head Start & Early Learning Program: Enrollment Coordinator: we offer quality early education and care and services to support expectant parents and children birth to five in Franklin, Hampshire, and Western Hampden Counties at low or no cost to families.
Visit HSELP/CAPV to learn more or refer a family
Please call/email with questions 413-387-1250 hselpenrollment@communityaction.us
- Holyoke Chicopee Head Start: If you have families interested, please have them apply online at HCSheadstar.org or call our office (413) 417-7779
If you are interested in referral forms please contact us at enroll@headstart.org and we can send you the forms.
- Nurturing Children program for families with babies and young children in shelters in Holyoke. Thursdays beginning Oct. 10. Free door to door transportation. Contact zaskeyc@headstart.org

Next meeting date: Tuesday, Nov. 19 (NOT the usual 2nd Tuesday - due to a scheduling conflict we are moving our meeting by a week!)