

Western MA Task Force for Housing First Meeting Minutes - 11/19/24

In attendance: roughly 60 Network partners, including legislators, legislative staff, city/town staff; shelter and housing providers and other community partners

Report Out on HLC Secretary Augustus Meeting of 11/18

As a result of our Task Force meeting last month, where deep concerns were raised over families sleeping unsheltered, Rep. Saunders reached out to HLC Secretary Augustus to schedule a meeting on behalf of the Network for these concerns to be aired. That meeting took place on Monday, November 18 in Ludlow, both in person and on zoom with roughly 50 partners present, including our EA shelter and individual shelter providers, our mayors and city and town staff and members of our legislative delegation and their staff. Our providers shared what they are seeing and requested interventions to address the unprecedented need among both families and individuals.

See the [Network recommendations to the Secretary here](#) (and the blog post with photo on it [here](#)). Big thanks to Rep. Saunders for initiating this meeting, to both him and Sen. Oliveira for hosting it, and to the many members of our delegation who were able to be there in support of our efforts. Thanks as well to our mayors and city leaders who attended. We demonstrated the true strength and unit of our Network. And the best news of all: we are already hearing follow-up actions have been taken and we anticipate more to come. We will keep you posted on next action steps.

One immediate take-away from the meeting:

Emergency HLC contact information if a family is at risk of living in a place not fit for human habitation:

Tyler Newall, HLC External Affairs
Tyler.Newall@mass.gov, 617-894-8237
and
Catia Sharp
Acting Deputy Director, EA Incident Command
Catia.Ruth.Sharp@mass.gov

We were invited to email both Tyler and Catia in the event of a family's emergency need (and calling Tyler works, too; I was not given a cell phone number for Catia).

Winter Overflow Shelter Updates

HLC's funding for winter overflow shelter/warming sites is in the process of being allocated now (applications are being reviewed and will be reviewed on a rolling basis). We reviewed what our region is seeking:

- Center for Human Development (CHD): seeking emergency hotel beds in Hampden County for 10 individuals
- City of Springfield: hoping to apply in the next week in partnership with faith groups for a congregate overflow shelter for up to 40 beds; the City's Health Dept. is also applying via a separate public health grant for overflow shelter

- Craig's Doors: expanding their Hadley site at the Econolodge by 20 beds; also utilizing other sources (e.g., City of Northampton's contribution of \$10,000) for emergency hotel beds
- Clinical & Support Options (CSO): expanding their Northampton site (to be opened in January) by 15 beds; also seeking funding for 5 overflow beds in Greenfield that are already operational (but part of their overflow); and funding for day shelter resources
- City of Greenfield/Opioid Task Force: Greenfield is separately operating an overnight warming center via the Salvation Army with the Medical Reserve Corps staffing; it is also applying for HLC funds on behalf of the Franklin/North Quabbin Opioid Task Force for their management of the "Hub Project" that will set up 4 different hubs for emergency support across Franklin County; it will also include some emergency hotel funds
- ServiceNet: seeking funds for an overnight warming center for up to 40 individuals in Pittsfield
- Louison House - seeking funds for 12 additional beds in Northern Berkshires, including expanded capacity in congregate site and hotel beds

Pamela will compile a list of resources as they become available and post on the blog.

New housing programs: Thanks to the City of Springfield's federal funds, CHD is launching a new multi-year program (until 2027) that will create 15-20 units of "bridge housing" for the unsheltered population who are chronically homeless. It will begin by December 1; the goal is to house people off the streets immediately as part of the winter response.

Other good news in Springfield: 3 permanent supportive housing (PSH) projects are in the works over the next couple of years that will create 90 new units of permanent supportive housing. Additionally, an application to HUD was submitted today for 40 PSH units. Congratulations to Springfield for this exciting progress!

Affordable Homes Act - implementation and western MA and statewide advocacy

- Senator Jo Comerford reported out on the work underway by her and members of the delegation to ensure equitable allocation of resources under the Affordable Homes Act and the Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP). Meeting with Secretary Augustus about this today. Thank you very much to our legislators for advocating for the region's needs.

Caitlin Golden of Mass. Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA) provided a statewide update:

- The statewide Supportive Housing Coalition (on which the Network serves as a co-convenor) is working to implement the Supportive Housing Pool Fund (passed in the AHA) that will streamline funding for PSH. Working closely with HLC on advancing its implementation.
- Unsheltered homelessness is rising across many MA communities. Even with the recent winter funding from HLC, estimates are that at best only 1 out of 3 unsheltered individuals will have access to shelter. Also seeing communities (most recently Brockton and Lowell) implement anti-homelessness ordinances. MHSA has met with the Lt. Gov, HLC and the Attorney General's office to raise concern about these issues and explore

solutions. Also pushing for more intensive engagement with HHS (particularly DPH) for more outreach and treatment.

- Addressing NIMBYism is also a focus for MHSA's work in order to address community opposition to siting of PSH and affordable housing. Working with the AG's office to utilize all tools, including the Dover Amendment. Putting together a toolkit and training to support developers, cities/towns and community members.

Family Homelessness Update

Kelly Turley of MA Coalition for the Homeless provided an update on the newly released Report of the Special Commission on Emergency Housing Assistance Programs. You can see it [here](#). (while it says "draft" it is very likely to be posted as final shortly [here](#)). The report includes 10 high-level recommendations to help ensure the family homelessness response system is sustainable.

Points of emphasis include focus on upstream prevention, limited use of hotels, moving to a system that is not "one size fits all" but is more trauma-informed.. Funding of the system, even the capped number of 7,500 beds, will require a supplemental budget to pay for this year and advocacy to meet the need for next fiscal year, especially given some concerning revenue projections.

Kelly noted that the Temporary Respite Centers are underutilized because families are banned from EA shelter for 6 months if they use them at all. Advocacy continues to shift this policy. Families are now being forced out of shelter due to time limits. Focus now turns to the Legislature to enact specific changes that will reflect these recommendations.

Incoming federal Administration: it was noted that the new Administration is likely to have a significant impact on people experiencing homelessness, most immediately immigrants. We are hearing from families in shelter expressing worry about whether they should "leave the country now." We will provide additional information about regional and statewide responses as the situation unfolds.

Next meeting date: Tuesday, December 17, 9 am