

Western MA Task Force for Housing First Minutes – 12/17/24

In attendance: roughly 50 shelter and housing and community providers, state legislators and legislative aides and city and town staff

HLC's winter overflow funding:

Please see the [HLC press release](#) here for the breakdown of awards.

Shelter providers offered this additional perspective:

- Craig's Doors received \$213,000 - opening 20 beds on the 2nd floor of the EconoLodge in Hadley - this will help ease the pressure on using one-time, one-night funds for emergency hotel stays.
- Louison House received \$102,000 for 12 beds.
- CHD received \$83,000 for 10 hotel beds in Hampden County.
- CSO received \$1 million for 22 beds (15 in Northampton and 7 in Springfield) and warming centers at each site in Springfield, Northampton and Greenfield (will serve 160 individuals)

Re: Pittsfield: ServiceNet did NOT receive funding for its warming center in Pittsfield (the HLC funds were already allocated) but they will continue to operate the center to the fullest extent possible.

Re: Springfield: Catholic Charities' proposal for emergency shelter beds in Springfield was not funded by HLC, but other funds via the City are being secured to open an emergency overflow space during severe weather.

In good news, while the City of Greenfield/Franklin/N. Quabbin Opioid Task Force did not receive HLC's winter overflow funds, it DID receive funds via CSBG grants of \$162,000 - their full application amount - that will be administered through Community Action Pioneer Valley. Big thanks to Sen. Jo Comerford for her efforts to secure these funds and to HLC and to CAPV. The funds will be utilized to support 4 hubs across the region, coordinating warming centers, supplies for basic needs and emergency hotel stays. See their [Resource Guide here](#).

Responding to Camping Bans for Unsheltered Individuals

Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa is joining with other state legislators to draft legislation - based on model legislation provided by the National Housing Law Center - to respond to the US Supreme Court case City of Grants Pass v. Johnson that made it possible to criminalize people for living unsheltered. This legislation would ban these local laws. Some camping ban laws have already been introduced in other parts of the state.

Joyce Tavon of Mass. Housing and Shelter Alliance spoke about the work they are doing to respond to threats of anti-camping bans, working to identify more effective and appropriate strategies to address this unprecedented rise in unsheltered homelessness.

Family Homelessness Update - More EA Changes

Thanks to Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless for this update

On November 22nd, the [Healey-Driscoll Administration announced](#) major changes to the state's response to family homelessness, including proposed restrictions on access to family shelter.

- The Administration plans to create a two-track system for access to shelter, starting on December 10th. Without legislative or judicial intervention, the Administration plans to assign families to

one of two tracks: Families either will receive up to 30 business days in Temporary Respite Centers combined with intensive case management ("Rapid Shelter Track") or access to longer-term Emergency Assistance shelter and supports for a maximum of 6 months ("Bridge Shelter Track.")

- The Administration will ask the Legislature to:
 - Restrict access to EA to 6 months, replacing the current 9-month limit
 - Narrow eligibility criteria for families seeking waivers to stay in shelter beyond 6 months
 - Increase HomeBASE benefits to \$25,000/year or \$50,000 over two years, up from the current cap of \$30,000 over two years, while eliminating the possibility for families to receive benefits beyond two years
 - Provide more than \$400 million in supplemental FY25 funding to create a new Family Shelter and Services Reserve Account to fund EA and related programs. On November 19th, the Special Commission on Emergency Housing Assistance Programs voted to approve its report on recommended next steps for Emergency Assistance (EA) family shelters and related programs. You can read the Commission's final report [here](#).

The Coalition is organizing with other statewide and local partners to ensure adequate protection of families. Contact Kelly@mahomeless.org to learn more.

Network FY26 budget and legislative priority-making

Pamela reported that the Network is currently meeting with its committees to discuss its FY26 budget and legislative priorities. [The Network Steering Committee](#) will be deciding its priorities in late January.

Next meeting date: Thursday, January 16