



## Meeting Public Safety Needs: Housing for Registered Sex Offenders

### BACKGROUND AND MISSION STATEMENT

#### Network Participants Include:

Amherst Community Connections  
Berkshire County Sheriff Department  
Church in the Acres/Lion's Den  
City of Northampton  
College Church  
Congregation B'Nai Israel  
Cooley Dickinson Hospital  
Diocese of Springfield  
Eliot CHS-Homeless Services  
Franklin County Home Care Corporation  
Franklin County Sheriff's Department  
Grace Church  
Hairston House  
Hampden County Sheriff's Department  
Hampshire County Friends of the Homeless  
Hampshire County Sheriff's Department  
Haydenville Congregational Church  
Housing for All  
Jewish Community of Amherst  
MA Adolescent Sex Offender Coalition  
MATSA  
Mercy Medical Center  
Northampton Police Department  
Salvation Army  
ServiceNet  
Soldier On  
South Middlesex Opportunity Council  
Springfield Police Department  
Veterans Administration Medical Center  
Veterans Services

In March, 2009, the Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness launched the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness, one of ten networks across the state. Its mission is to prevent and end homelessness with a "housing first" approach, facilitating rapid re-housing and stabilization services to create permanent and stable housing.

Through the ongoing work of the Network's Individual Services Committee, one issue continued to rise to the surface: the lack of housing options for registered sex offenders. With the larger group's recognition that this issue deserved focused attention, in May 2011, the Western Massachusetts Network created the Work Group to House People with Sex Offense Histories. In so doing, it adopted the following mission:

***The mission of the Western Massachusetts Network's Work Group to House People with Sex Offense Histories is to maximize the safety of children, women and vulnerable others by minimizing the potential for re-offense through the identification and development of stable housing options for registered sex offenders who are committed to a positive and offense-free life.***

PLEASE VISIT [HTTP://WESTERNMASSHousingFIRST.ORG](http://WESTERNMASSHousingFIRST.ORG) FOR MORE INFORMATION.

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

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*The Work Group thus far has accomplishing the following:*

- Expanded its coalition to include police departments, all four western county Sheriff Departments, numerous faith congregations and victim advocacy groups;
- Hosted Work Group trainings with guest trainers, including: Laurie Guidry, Psy.D., clinical and forensic psychologist and President of MATSA<sup>1</sup>, who quickly became a co-leader in this group's efforts; Richard Mercurio of the Sex Offender Registry Board; Fred Smith of St. Francis House in Boston and Rosa Blair, manager of private housing for people with sex offense histories in Springfield;
- Convened two community-wide summits on Housing for People with Sex Offense Histories in 2012, involving over 50 participants, close to a dozen of whom were representatives from places of worship from across the region.
- Produced a Guide for Congregations to assist faith leadership in supporting sex offenders while responding to congregational concerns;
- Produced an action plan that focuses on training and education for area housing providers that currently ban housing for all sex offenders;
- Developed qualifying criteria for housing provider use when reviewing a housing application from an individual with a sex offense history<sup>2</sup>;
- Convened a series of meetings in 2013-2014 of the region's largest housing providers to provide education and training on this population and discuss adoption of the proposed criteria. Identified barrier of SORB labeling of offenders as "dangerous" as major obstacle to policy reform amid ongoing community opposition to affordable housing in general.

## GOALS MOVING FORWARD

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*The Work Group's goals include:*

- Reform state policy on leveling and related language so that it incorporates evidence-based best practices to better serves the public interest;
- Continue expansion of the coalition and promote broader community education on the issue of housing people with sex offense histories;
- Aid in the development and establishment of housing options for this population, both among non-profit housing providers and the private housing market.

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<sup>1</sup>MATSA (MA Association for the Treatment of Sexual Abusers) is the Massachusetts chapter of an international organization whose mission is to end sexual abuse and sexual violence through the effective management and treatment of sexual abusers.

<sup>2</sup> Criteria for housing includes: on probation and/or parole; attached to treatment services as deemed necessary;; committed to living an offense-free life; designated agency contact person for communications regarding tenancy .