

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 11/10/20

In attendance: Barbara Agosto, New England Farm Workers Council, Lynneanne Brown, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Christine Cullen, Holyoke Chicopee Family and Community Program, Jen Dieringer, Community Legal Aid, Cheryl LaChance, Way Finders, Anthia Elliot, BHN, Fran LeMay, ServiceNet-Greenfield Family Inn; Jane Lindfors, DTA-DV Unit, Alaina Mango, Safe Passage, John Manzi, Behavioral Health Network (BHN), Synthia Mithcell, Springfieldl Partners for Community Action, Theresa Nicholson, CHD, Stacy Parsons, North Berkshire School-Housing Partnership/Regional MKV Liaison; Stephen Plummer, Springfield Partners for Community Action Ana Rodriguez, Care Center, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Brianna St. Peter, Head Start, CAPV, Jennifer Sunderland, Springfield Public Schools, Janna Teatreault, Community Action Pioneer Valley (CAPV), Persis Ticknor-Swanson, CLA, Bryan Torres Rosa, Community Legal Aid, Janette Vigo, Way Finders, Lauren Voyer, Way Finders, Amanda Watson, FCRHRA

October EA Data Review: See attached. There was some discussion about obtaining data on domestic violence shelters. Tamicha Colon of WomanShelter was going to look into this.

FY21 Budget Update; Post-eviction moratorium work

Pamela reported out: The House Ways and Means Committee released its proposed FY21 budget last week, which is now being debated this week (note: debate on housing provisions will continue on 11/12/20). This is for the budget that covers July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021 but was delayed due to COVID-19 (partial budgets have been passed between 7/1 and now). The proposed budget contains several positive provisions to address homelessness (including a provision to prevent eviction if a tenant is in the process of applying for RAFT). You can read more about the [proposed House budget here](#) and the Network's priority budget amendments to it [here](#).

The Network organized an **Emergency Legislative Briefing on Nov. 9** to discuss the eviction crisis post the end of the eviction moratorium and its impact here 9 Legislators/Offices attended along with 70 Network partners. Regional Housing Authority Directors presented on the overwhelming demand for RAFT homelessness prevention resources and advocates presented on the threat tenants are facing right now to their housing stability. [Click here](#) for the summary of the data presented.

The Network is advocating for adoption of [RAFT reforms](#) to streamline the process (in partnership with the regional housing authorities) and for adoption of the [Housing Stability bill](#) which will provide comprehensive protection for tenants, homeowners and small landlords. Pamela encouraged everyone to [join the Network blog](#) and be part of this advocacy effort.

Discussion:

- Amanda Watson noted that landlords in Franklin County were advised that they must start the eviction process in Springfield Housing Court (Greenfield Housing Court is not open due to COVID); this could explain the relatively low numbers of Notices to Quit

(34 in Franklin County since eviction moratorium ended). Amanda predicted the number will rise as landlords make it to Springfield.

- Janette Vigo reported over 2,500 RAFT applications since moratorium lifted; they have shifted and increased staffing but it's not yet enough to keep up with the demand; Way Finders is also making staff available to help in the court, meeting with legal services, mediators and TPP to build collaborations through this
- It was noted that the RAFT application is extremely long, taking as many as 6 hours to complete
- Community Legal Aid encouraged people to apply to RAFT as soon as they get a Notice to Quit; also noted that CLA has hired two case managers - one for Hampden, one for Hampshire/Franklin - to assist with RAFT applications

Announcements:

- Head Start Holyoke Chicopee: offering children supplemental learning and support - contact Christine Cullen at ZaskeyC@headstart.org
- Community Action's Head Start & Early Learning Programs is enrolling children and families into new Head Start at Home program! FLEXIBLE virtual learning with experienced and caring Head Start staff! Please share our Facebook post <https://www.facebook.com/CAPVHeadStart/posts/2769199290027967>
- Apply for services from Community Legal Aid by calling or applying online at <http://community.legal.org>. Any questions, contact jdieringer@cla-ma.org (Jen Dieringer). We can now help with RAFT applications as well as provide legal services.
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- CHD is seen a decrease in the number of referrals for shelter; still housing people primarily using HomeBASE (although that number is down too). Seeing an increase in domestic violence incidents (presumably due to stress and close proximity due to COVID).
- NEFWC: no positive cases - continuing to work with families about remote learning for children
- WomanShelter has 20 rooms, at capacity

Next meeting date: Tuesday, December 8, 11 am - 12 noon