

Hampden County Individual Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 1/19/21

In attendance: Grechar Aquino, FOH/CSO, Ric Avila, Eliot Services, Dallas Clark, HRIA, Lisa Connolly, CHD, Justin Journet, MHA, Heritier Kampew, Health Care for the Homeless, Mercy Medical Center, Nichole King, FOH/CSO, Jay Levy, Eliot Services, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield, Lizzy Ortiz, City of Springfield (YHDP), Marisabel Perez, CHD, Aurelia Pierce, CHD, Keith Rhone, FOH/CSO, Denise Rivera-Nunez, FOH/CSO, David Rodriguez, Viability, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Rosemary Surdyka, Kathy West, Eliot Services, Chris Zabik, DMH

Shelter Updates:

Friends of the Homeless: the shelter currently has availability for men and women (last week full for women but 5-7 spaces as of today). Reserving beds for people returning from isolation hotel. Testing is happening weekly. Awaiting news on getting vaccine supplies (and assistance to administer) for shelter guests. Staff vaccinated so far.

Catholic Charities hotel program - On the state-funded pieces of the program, DHCD has asked that the program follow the model statewide, which includes full staffing, a cap on numbers served and an end date of 4/30. The program was sheltering 123 people in the beginning of Jan., and is now aiming to reduce the number to 100 through 4/30 and use 2 hotels instead of 4. Friends of the Homeless is in collaboration and providing security overnight and daytime staffing. To reduce the numbers at hotels, the hotel rooms are now being allocated to people who will not go to shelter or for overflow after the shelters are full, which means there is now an effort to move people back into FOH and to fill the Samaritan Inn (sober only, men only). Intake for hotels is through FOH.

City funds for hotel program will continue past 4/30. It will be a smaller program than currently but will continue to provide a continuum of outreach to hotel shelter with case management to ultimately permanent housing. These funds will continue until 9/22.

Holyoke hotel: CHD is managing this hotel in Holyoke which is sheltering 43 individuals (currently full). Good news on people who are served being assessed with the vulnerability assessment tool (VI-SPDAT) and entered into the HMIS system. Last week, an individual was placed into a PSH unit in 3 county area.

Point in Time Count - It will take place on 1/27 - Shelters will update their HMIS; for street count, will do a service-based count (asking service providers to ask people they see to ask if they were homeless on the night of 1/27). Two small teams will go out the night of the count (to Loaves and Fishes, to Rescue Mission b/c they don't do HMIS). There will not be walking the streets that night b/c of COVID concerns. This is the first year where there are not a lot of unsheltered people b/c of the hotel program.

Youth Services Update: The hotline number is working. Exciting new pilot project in Springfield with DCF and youth services to help connect youth who reject DCF services at the choice point (to continue or not with DCF services) at 17.5 years, to help them connect to community based resources to prevent homelessness.

Legislative and Policy Updates:

- The Legislature passed the Economic Development bill on Jan. 6 which is now awaiting the Governor's signature. **NOW is the time** for us to write/call the Governor to urge him to sign the bill ASAP without any amendments. See [this Network blog post](#) for more information and contact info. [Note: the Governor signed the bill on 1/14/21 but vetoed two important tenant provisions: eviction record sealing and the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act.]
- The FY21 Budget, passed on 12/31/20, included important tenant eviction protections. See [this Network blog post](#) for the details. In short: a pending rental assistance application will suspend an eviction case for non-payment of rent. AND, a specific Notice to Quit must be issued - with very specific information around tenant rights and resources - or the eviction filing is not valid and the case cannot continue.
- DHCD has just issued new RAFT policies that will make RAFT more accessible, including a lifting of the "sustainability" requirement and more flexibility around documentation requirements. Please [go here](#) to see DHCD summary of program changes. DHCD has hired staff to assist with applications since the number of applications is extraordinary.

Next meeting date: 2/16, 1 pm - 2 pm