

Three County Individual Services Committee Minutes - 4/12/21

In attendance: Keith Benoit, City of Northampton, Shaundell Diaz, Three County CoC, Steve Connor, Central Hampshire Veterans Services, Rose Facto, ServiceNet (Greenfield), Jen Glover, Life Path, Hwei-Ling Greeney, Amherst Community Connection, Jakob Harrison, ServiceNet (First Churches, Northampton), John Hornik, Amherst Affordable Housing Trust, Alyssa Golden, Community Legal Aid, Laura Hudson, Positive Place, Andy Klatka, Eliot Services, Michele LaFleur, Three County CoC, Jay Levy, Eliot Services, Brooke Murphy, Three County CoC, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Kate Shapiro, DMH, Chris Zabik, DMH

Presentation by Alyssa Golden, Staff Attorney, Community Legal Aid on CORI sealing and expungement

Alyssa offered a brief overview of legal services available regarding CORI sealing and expungement as it relates to housing. Legal representation is available to those who have been denied public or subsidized housing due to a criminal record.

- Bases for appeal include reasonable accommodation, e.g., the criminal record stemmed from a disability and therefore must be overlooked as part of the reasonable accommodation requirement.
- Another basis is "disparate impact theory" - because criminal records happen disproportionately to people of color, they must be examined under the discrimination lens and housing denial would be furthering discrimination.
- Another approach is mitigation, e.g., to look at the circumstances surrounding the record alongside more holistic information about the person, limiting the impact of that record in a housing application.
- Representation is also available to contest terminations from housing due to a criminal or substance use incident.
- Representation is also available for sealing and expunging CORIs. It is vital to understand what is on there to confirm it's accurate, and to understand what they must disclose and not and options for sealing and expungement.

To inquire about assistance, please contact directly:

Alyssa Golden, Staff Attorney, Community Legal Aid. agolden@cla-ma.org / 413-582-1377. And please spread the word!

Coordinated Entry Update:

Since our last meeting last month, the Three County CoC reported:

- 16 additions to by-names list
- 2 Permanent Supportive Housing move-ins
- 4 Transitional Housing move-ins
- DIAL/SELF joint component - 1 move-in, program now full, has been half-full for year prior
- 1 new family unit available through Hilltown

Continuing with weekly and bi-weekly case conferencing meetings across the counties.

Shelter Update:

- Craig's Doors in Amherst continues to be full (congregate and hotel)
- First Churches in Northampton is way down in capacity, at about 15 (with capacity for 30), people are outside during the day, very few people at shelter. Shelter site director left her position a couple weeks ago; in transition on staffing. Unclear what the plan is for First Churches site.
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- DHCD order not to accept anyone further from hotels; new case from COVID isolation unit

Discussion of DHCD policy to close hotels: DHCD issued a directive to no longer accept people at hotels as of 4/1 and to close by 6/30. Craig's Doors received the notice on 4/2. Uncertain what to do in the face of requests for shelter (from a couple leaving the I&Q hotel in Pittsfield). Pamela noted the statewide conversations happening around this issue and the plan to push back on the Administration's plan in view of the consequence - returning people to the streets. The data in our own region, not to mention statewide and nationally, shows the success of housing especially vulnerable people from hotels to permanent housing. It's also especially confusing since there is currently 100% FEMA reimbursement for the hotel costs. Pamela will keep people posted on the statewide conversations about this.

Jay noted that the I&Q hotel in Pittsfield is closing this week (very low enrollment). We will confirm the closest hotel (presumably Taunton).

Federal Resources Update:

Pamela noted the passage of the federal American Rescue Plan Act that will bring substantial resources to the state, region and cities and towns. Read more in this blog post. The Three County CoC, with Network support, is convening meetings on a county level among city/town officials, housing authorities and housing developers to discuss how to maximize these resources for more affordable housing and homelessness prevention. Please stay tuned for updates.

Racial Equity and Housing Forum - April 20. The Amherst Affordable Housing Trust is sponsoring this event. Please see [the flyer here.](#)

Network's Annual Gathering June 4 - please join us for this chance to take stock of lessons learned during COVID and what we can do next to prevent and end homelessness in Western MA. [See the flyer and registration link here.](#)

Next meeting date: Monday, May 10, 1:30 pm