

# Safe Havens Program for Franklin and Hampshire Statement of Intent

## Goal:

To address the service and housing resource gap experienced by some individuals with significant mental illness who are homeless and sleeping “rough” in Franklin and Hampshire County. These vulnerable individuals, many of whom are chronically homeless, are unable to access current support due to their disability and may be living outdoors, or in other places not suitable for habitation. This “low threshold” supervised housing option would function as a bridge from living in unsuitable environments to permanent housing by providing stabilization in a way that would allow for longer term trust building engagement with service providers.

## Rationale:

- *Rough Sleepers with Mental Illness and Co-Occurring Disorders Data:* Data for 2020 PIT Count reports **75** people sleeping outdoors in Franklin and Hampshire Counties during the most extreme weather putting people at serious risk of severe injury or death. Of these 75, at least **55** are among the chronically homeless and lack access to safe shelter and/or housing.
- *Lack of Access:* In Calendar year 2020, there were 535 people enrolled in shelter in Hampshire and Franklin County alone, yet very few of these beds are ever accessed and maintained by Rough Sleepers due to the impact of high levels of trauma and adaptation to unrestricted environments. This problem has been magnified by COVID 19 where the requirements for accessing shelter have increased (required COVID tests), the supports have decreased (less access to outreach workers), and the overall number of people who are homeless has increased.
- *Underutilized Resource:* Shelter Plus Care is a housing first model that provides a voucher and support services for chronically homeless individuals living with mental illness. Unfortunately, in Hampshire County due to a tight housing market and strong tenant screening practices, it has been extremely difficult to utilize these vouchers. Without a Safe Havens program that can temporarily house and stabilize this targeted group of individuals, they are unable to maintain connections with Eliot Outreach and the Shelter Plus Subcontractor for long enough to utilize the Shelter Plus Care housing and service resource.
- *Eastern, Central and Western MA Comparison:* Based on the 2019 HUD PIT Count, Central and Western MA have similar numbers of unaccompanied Homeless Adults. Despite the similarity of need, Central MA has **75%** more program beds (**27** beds in Central Mass; **7** in Hampden County) targeted to unsheltered population. Even more disparate, **85%** of Safe Haven beds (**73**) are located in Boston.
- *Outcomes:* As of December 31, 2020, Hampden County’s 7 bed Safe Havens program in Westfield served 38 people since its 2016 inception. Twenty-one were discharged with subsidies to independent housing, 1 discharged to independent housing without a subsidy, 2 discharged to nursing home, 1 incarcerated, 2 discharged to hospital level of care, 4 to substance use treatment and only 1 person discharged for non-compliance. This reflects a high rate of successful rehousing.

## Request:

The annual cost of a 7 bed Safe Havens program totals \$422,000. We request that the Legislature increase the Department of Mental Health line-item 5046-000 by that amount in order to make this critical resource an option in Hampshire and Franklin Counties.