

Western MA COVID-19 Task Force Meeting Minutes - 5/18/21

In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, Office of Rep. Pat Duffy, Rep. Natalie Blais, Kathryn Buckley-Branwer, Catholic Charities, Kevin Chambers, Office of Sen. Velis, Corinne Coryat, Office of Rep. Blais, Rep. Pat Duffy, Keith Fairey, Way Finders, Wayne Feiden, City of Northampton, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Ethan Flaherty, Office of Rep. Pease, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Clare Higgins, Community Action Pioneer Valley, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Jay Levy, Eliot Services, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Gerry McCafferty, City of Springfield, Bill Miller, Friends of the Homeless/CSO, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, Anthony Moore, Office of Senator Gomez, Rep. Jake Oliveira, Theresa Nicholson, CHD, Kevin Noonan, Craig's Doors, Christy O'Brien, FOH, Kate O'Brien Scott, Town of West Springfield, Kaitlyn O'Leary, Office of Rep. Mindy Domb, Keleigh Pereira, Katelyn Reardon, Franklin County Housing Authority, Jack Redman, Northampton Housing Authority, Keith Rhone, FOH, CSO, 3 County CoC, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Gina-Louise Sciarra, Northampton City Council, Connie Scott, Pittsfield Housing Authority, Joyce Tavon, MHSA, Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless, Janette Vigo, Way Finders, Amanda Watson, Franklin County Housing Authority, Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves/Homes for All, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton

Governor Baker's Ending State of Emergency 6/15

Governor Baker announced yesterday that MA will lift its state of emergency on 6/15. This means that MA will no longer be eligible for FEMA reimbursement for emergency shelter or hotels. It also means that the eviction protections (Chapter 257) passed as part of the FY21 budget in Dec., 2020, which were predicated on the state of emergency, would cease to exist. This protection includes the continuance of an eviction if a rental assistance application is pending.

The CDC eviction moratorium is due to expire on 6/30 but it is currently facing court challenges (still in effect as an appeal is pending).

DHCD has previously made clear that no one should be discharged from a hotel to the street. Unclear how the end of FEMA reimbursement on 6/15 will bear on

The group acknowledged the significant impact the end of emergency status could have on the at-risk and homeless population. Rose Webster-Smith shared the pending amendment to the Senate budget - [#371](#) - that would extend CDC protections on a state level. **This week is the time to ask our senators to co-sponsor this amendment** (among others - see the complete list of Network priorities [here](#)). Find your legislator [here](#).

Eviction filings, executions and foreclosures update

Rose Webster-Smith of Springfield No One Leaves/Homes for All reported: Since the lifting of the state moratorium on October 17, the number of eviction filings for non-payment of rent include:

- Hampden County - 1,602, 989 in springfield
- Hampshire - 160

- Franklin - 95
- Berkshire- 256

In all of Western MA, 117 executions of possession levied; 89 judgments entered (next step is execution); 51 families have agreed to vacate or have already left; 18 families forcibly removed by sheriff; 18 families forcibly removed by sheriff; 409 properties in danger of foreclosure; 30 post foreclosures filed in Western MA

all of Western MA:

- 117 executions for possession levied
- 89 judgments for waiting their executions
- 51 families have agreed to vacate or have already left
- 18 families forcibly removed by sheriff
- 409 properties in danger of foreclosure, 30 post foreclosure filed in western MA

With the end of the state of emergency and the lifting of Chapter 257, we're at risk of thousands more evictions and further housing destabilization.

More on the FY22 State Budget:

Pamela reported on the Senate Ways and Means budget and how it compares to Network priorities. [Go here for the comparative analysis.](#) Overall, the Senate Ways and Means budget meets a lot of the Network priorities. Of note in particular is the additional \$1 million in funding for the Safe Havens program, an intensive shelter/housing program for long-time unsheltered people with multiple barriers. This funding would provide for 7 beds in Franklin/Hampshire County (where there are currently no beds). Big thanks to our Senate delegation and to our House delegation for their advocacy on this issue.

This week is the time to ask senators to co-sponsor our [priority amendments](#); next week the budget will be debated and voted on; then the budget would go into Conference Committee to resolve differences between the House and Senate budgets, with a goal of completing the budget by the end of the fiscal year on June 30.

Shelter/hotel updates:

Springfield:

- Friends of the Homeless - status quo
- Catholic Charities (hotels): moving people into permanent housing (at least 20 so far) - now uncertain about the implications of the Governor's end of emergency in terms of timeline for exiting hotel

Holyoke:

- CHD reported on hotel: 35 people currently residing; rehousing efforts are underway; at least 20 people face difficult barriers such as CORIs or substance use, trying to tackle

how best to move forward. Also needing to understand the implications of the lifting of the state of emergency re: use of hotel.

- Re: possibility of hotel acquisition and conversion into permanent supportive housing - in very preliminary conversations, including with a developer; talking to Holyoke's interim mayor right now, receiving input. We will all stay tuned.

Amherst (Craig's Doors):

At capacity:

- Congregate site has 14 beds and can remain open until 7/31 (church then wants it back)
- University lodge has 20 rooms and through ESG funds can remain open until 6/202
- Econo-Lodge is funded through FEMA reimbursement and is under pressure from DHCD to ramp down occupancy; now unclear with lifting of state of emergency what will happen as of 6/15 because FEMA reimbursement is contingent on a state emergency declaration.
- In very early conversations re: the prospect of purchase and rehab of Econo-Lodge, all unclear but exploration is happening.

Northampton (ServiceNet):

First Churches site is closing 6/30, currently averaging about 17 people (with capacity for 30); when Church closes ServiceNet will re-use cot shelter space with a capacity for 10 beds.

Greenfield (ServiceNet):

Wells Street shelter is at capacity.

Was using one motel that decided they wanted to end shelter on 5/1 - at the time 7 people residing there, moved them back into Wells St.

Pittsfield (ServiceNet): will continue to operate from St. Joe's High School - with capacity for 30-35 people

North Adams (Louison House): a total of 45 people used motel rooms through the winter season. 6 rooms are currently occupied. Unclear how they will be re-housed (lack of resources + barriers). Worried about this. will continue to operate from old high school - 30-35 people at capacity

The group acknowledged the impending threat of increased street homelessness up and down the 91 corridor with closing of Holyoke hotel, closing of Amherst shelter/hotel, closing of larger Northampton shelter, and Greenfield currently being at capacity. We will talk further with DHCD and try to problem-solve together.

Federal Emergency Housing Vouchers

As part of the American Rescue Plan Act, Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) are being issued to 5 housing authorities in the region with a total of 114 vouchers potentially available at Holyoke, Springfield, Northampton, Franklin Regional and Greenfield. HAs have until 5/24 to accept the vouchers. HAs must work with CoCs on coordinated entry to ensure maximum coordination and best use of resources. These vouchers also come with flexible support dollars

and do not have to be used only by chronically homeless, allowing for a greater focus on equity. Rent levels can be higher than Section 8 or MRVP. This is a very unique opportunity!

DHCD has also been issued over 900 vouchers to allocate to communities that did not receive the direct option. We will stay tuned to learn more on the distribution.

We can consider as a region how to use these vouchers in relation to the loss of shelter capacity - can we rehouse instead?

RAFT/ERAP Update

Way Finders: receiving roughly 70 applications a day; turn-around time is approx. 4 weeks; averaging distribution of \$630,000/week; able to take advantage of ERAP flexibility - can pay for arrears over \$10, accrued over a period longer than 6 months. Noted seeing an increase in foreclosures.

Franklin County Regional Housing Authority: Also seeing an increase in foreclosures. RAFT funds have been expended (the only resource for homeowners).

Berkshire Housing Development Corp (via email): RAFT funding has served 262 households so far; ERAP 80 households. Nearly 200 active applications being processed at this time.

Network event 6/4: Be sure to register! [See flyer and link here.](#)

Next meeting date: Thursday, June 10, 9 am