

## **Hampden Individual Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 6/29/21**

*In attendance: Tanya Alessi, Grechar Aquina, Farida Bature, Lynn Conway, Linda Cruz, Legheda LaPorte, SMOC, Jay Levy, Jenifer Luca, Gerry McCafferty, Bill Miller, Stephanie Tonelli, Kenyetta Wilson, Delphine Wray, Chris Zabik*

**Emergency Housing Vouchers** - 27 emergency housing vouchers (EHV) are coming to Springfield Housing Authority; DHCD has more than 1,000 EHV's to distribute (all must go through the CoC's coordinated entry or through a DV provider). The CoC is talking with DHCD to determine appropriate allocation to Hampden County - Gerry has suggested they could use at least 100 vouchers. DHCD is pushing for them to be utilized by November, 2021. The task now is to ensure people are "document ready" so the vouchers can be used as quickly as possible.

**Racial Equity work update:** The Hampden CoC is now focusing on the whole homelessness system (initial work focused exclusively on youth and young adults). It is working with the consultants at Racial Equity Partners, currently enlisted to do a deeper data analysis, which will inform how EHV's are allocated in order to maximize equitable distribution. The consultants are also leading focus groups among people experiencing homelessness - in shelters, hotels, and living outside the shelter system - to help identify gaps in services and other system needs. The goal now is to identify people to participate. Focus groups will each include 6-8 people, last 1.5 hours and participants will be paid \$25/hour. Please contact Gerry if you have referrals or ideas for outreach.

**HOME Funds** - This federally funded program has allocated \$6 million to Springfield and Holyoke, Chicopee, and Westfield also received funding. These funds are available to develop housing or purchase housing (to be used with vouchers) for people experiencing or at risk of homelessness. Planning is now underway. Gerry will continue to update the group.

**Built for Zero** - A small team is participating in planning with the BFZ group around ending veteran and chronic homelessness. After staring at the data, the biggest challenge was deemed to be the length of time people are on the by-names list. So the group is looking at the barriers to getting them housed, drilling down on what can be done - especially with money since BFZ just received a \$100 million grant! - to address these barriers. Once the needs are identified, BFZ may be able to provide flexible dollars to meet them.

**Eviction Protections:** The MA State of Emergency lifted on June 15 per the Governor's order. This would have ended eviction protections that were tied to the emergency order but for the legislature's passage of an extension of Chapter 257 laws that require the eviction to be paused if a rental assistance application is pending. The CDC Moratorium was extended by 30 days and the federal government is making a commitment to a "whole government" approach to preventing homelessness. This is good news and the Network is focused on state policy - the COVID-19 Housing Equity bill for instance - to ensure the state is closing the gaps that exist that currently threaten many tenancies.

**FY22 budget update:** The Conference Committee is continuing to meet to finalize the FY22 state budget (the Legislature just passed a supplemental budget to continue funding through July 31). The Network continues to advocate for housing/homelessness priorities. The additional \$422,000 funding allocation for 7 new Safe Havens beds in Franklin/Hampshire County is a very exciting victory this year.

**Next meeting: Tuesday, 7/27 - 1-2 pm**