

## **Western MA COVID-19 Regional Task Force for Housing First Minutes - 8/26/21**

*In attendance: MJ Adams, City of Greenfield, Keith Benoit, City of Northampton, Juan Anderson-Burgos, Office of Rep. Patricia Duffy, Rep. Natalie Blais, Kathryn Buckley-Brawner, Catholic Charities, Kevin Chambers, Office of Senator John Velis, Angelica Core, Office of Rep. Carlos González, Justine Dodds, City of Pittsfield, Lisa Fletcher-Udel, Office of Rep. Tricia Farley-Bouvier, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Tom Guerino, Greenfield Housing Authority, Jeff Harness, Cooley Dickinson Hospital, Rick Hart, Friends of Hampshire County Homeless, Denise Jordan, Springfield Housing Authority, Kathy Keeser, Louison House, Mayor Nicole LaChapelle, City of Easthampton, Jay Levy, Eliot Services - CHS Homeless Services, Kathleen Lingenberg, City of Chicopee, Gerry McCafferty, Hampden County CoC/City of Springfield; Jennifer Metsch, Office of Senator Eric Lesser, Peter Miller, City of Westfield, Brooke Murphy, Three County CoC, Kelly O'Reilly, Office of Rep. Dan Carey, Keleigh Pereira, Three County CoC/CAPV, Rep. Jake Oliveira, Phil Ringwood, DIAL/SELF, Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Joyce Tavon, Mass Housing and Shelter Alliance, Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless, Rose Webster-Smith, Springfield No One Leaves/Homes for All MA, Alan Wolf, City of Northampton*

### **Eviction Crisis/Homelessness Prevention Update**

The State Legislature's Joint Housing Committee held a public hearing on the [COVID-19 Housing Equity bill](#) on August 12. See [this Network blog post](#) for more info and [Network testimony](#) here. It was a great show of support from Western Massachusetts, led by 20 Western MA legislators signing on to [a letter in support](#), and close to 60 organizations and 5 Western MA mayors signing on to the [Homes for All advocacy letter](#). The hearing lasted 5 hours and included very powerful testimony from people who have experienced the trauma of threatened or actual eviction during this time. Thanks to State Representative Lindsay Sabadosa who shared her experience testifying as well, and thanks to all of our Western MA legislators for pushing this bill forward. When the Legislature reconvenes in September, we will continue our advocacy for a favorable report out of the Joint Housing Committee. Please stay tuned for next action alerts.

Rose Webster-Smith of Springfield No One Leaves/Homes for All provided the latest figures on foreclosures and evictions across the region:

**Re: foreclosures:** since the state moratorium lifted in October:

Hampden County - 180 auctions, 178 petitions to foreclosure

Hampshire County - 30 auctions, 33 petitions

Franklin County -27 auction 31 petitions

Berkshire County - 75, 64 petitions

**Re: eviction filings:**

Hampden - 2,119, 1276 Springfield

Hampshire - 212

Franklin 141

Berkshire - 369

**Executions pending** in Western MA - 237

The week after 7/31, when the federal moratorium was initially expiring, the state saw a huge spike in executions being issued, 100 in Western MA alone in that one week.

The federal eviction moratorium was extended until October 3. It is currently facing a court challenge (survived one challenge so far, now pending before the US Supreme Court, a decision could come down any day). And even if it stays intact, there are still deep gaps that leave tenants unprotected and there is no protection at all for homeowners. The COVID-19 Housing Equity bill is the state-level solution.

**Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) updates:**

Way Finders: 90-100 applications each day, as many as 600 per week. As of this day in August, there have been 2,200 applications. Emergency utility shut-offs are coming in at 10-12/ each day and they are treated on a priority basis, seeking resolution immediately. Processing time is roughly 5 weeks. Paying tenants directly when necessary (roughly 5-7/week).

Berkshire Housing: application requests averaging 15-20/week; applications being processed at a pace of approx. 15-25 per week; processing 2-3 recertifications each week; turn-around time is between 6-8 weeks. Since program start ERAP has paid nearly \$1.6 million in funding, stabilizing 223 households.

**New HUD funding application for Continuums of Care (CoCs):** Gerry McCafferty provided this summary: the Continuum of Care is the HUD mandated vehicle for distributing federal homelessness dollars. We have two in our region: Hampden County CoC (based at the City of Springfield) and the Three County CoC (Hampshire, Franklin, Berkshire, based at Community Action Pioneer Valley). CoCs provide housing and supportive services funding (not shelter). HUD has issued a new Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) that is due on November 16. In addition to being a competition for funding (many projects seek renewal, there is room for new projects as well), HUD requires the CoCs to treat the application process as a planning process for each CoC community. Applications are scored on the basis of that engagement. So our work together as cities and towns and housing authorities is critical; it is also expected to leverage housing resources, coordinate around the new federal dollars (Emergency Housing Vouchers, ARPA, etc.). And there is about \$1 million on the table for new projects that address the intersection of domestic violence and homelessness. This task force can be a vehicle for further discussion and coordination as this application process unfolds. We will keep you posted.

Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) allocation processes: Pamela reported on the convening of cities and towns to discuss local ARPA funding processes (each city and town received their own ARPA funds). Justine Dodds of Pittsfield provided a brief recap of the series of 4 meetings held thus far for community input, including a session on housing needs. Each city/town is determining their local process and we will continue to be in touch about how and where we as a Network and Task Force can participate. Additionally, the State Legislature held its first hearing on July 27 to hear recommendations on the \$5 billion of state ARPA – see the Network’s written [testimony here](#). When the Legislature reconvenes in September, we will be in touch on additional opportunities to weigh in.

## **Housing Development Updates:**

The following news was shared:

- Home City Housing is in process of developing 30 units of permanent supportive housing in Springfield for chronically homeless individuals – a long time-line ahead but in process!
- MA DPH Bureau of Substance Abuse Services awarded a total of 30 housing slots in Western MA (subsidy plus intensive support) for homeless individuals – 20 slots to River Valley Counseling, 10 to SMOC. Big push is to find units for these vouchers, as well as the new federal Emergency Housing Vouchers.
- Very preliminary: a local landlord in Holyoke owns a property with 47 units and is discussing the possibility of rehab and partnering with CHD to house homeless individuals
- Hadley hotel (Econo-Lodge) – discussions continue with owner, led by Valley CDC. Will know more in the next couple of weeks.

Winter shelter/motel planning: Joyce Tavon of MHSA provided the relevant background of the Governor's proposed supplemental funding package that includes \$16 million to expand winter shelter capacity by 800 beds. Non-congregate sites are also an option. (Additionally, the proposal includes \$5 million for a new line-item that would allow providers to master lease a large number of units and then sub-lease to tenants – this will especially be useful for people with difficult rental histories and \$1 million to increase salaries for front line workers so they are in line with EOHHS rates).

Shelter updates include:

Friends of the Homeless - 162 people in shelter last night; concerned about the future given the need for COVID protocols.

Holyoke Motel 6 – contracted with DHCD so will be open until June, 2022, currently 45 beds and they are full (just transferred individuals from West Springfield motel)

Amherst: searching for congregate site for the winter (UU closed). Currently University Motor Lodge has 29 people residing and is funded through June, 2022.

Northampton: actively seeking a winter solution; currently at capacity (Grove Street 15, Interfaith 10).

Greenfield: last winter increase by 10 so 30 bed shelter, starting now to get a wait list. Will have to make winter plans.

Pittsfield: seeing double the numbers compared to any other summer. Able to shelter 40-50 people at the old high school there; working on getting new shelter up.

North Adams: needing hotel capacity for this winter; currently people are camping.

Youth update: DIAL/SELF reported seeing increase in need for emergency housing and lack of hotels to meet the need (lack of capacity).

We will start with this agenda item at our next meeting in order to ensure communities have sufficient time to discuss.

Other announcements:

- **Organizational [Sign-on letter](#)** by the National Low Income Housing Coalition to support \$3.5 trillion infrastructure and economic recovery package (\$332 billion for housing and transportation!)
- [Amherst housing forum 9/2](#);
- Three County CoC's annual membership meeting will be held on zoom, September 23rd, from 1-2:30pm. Visit website's news and events page to find information on the agenda and link to register. <https://www.threecountycoc.communityaction.us/news-events>