



# The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

## General Court

State House, Boston, Massachusetts 02133

Friday, November 12, 2021

Gordon Calkins, Director of Individual Homelessness  
MA Department of Housing and Community Development  
100 Cambridge Street #300  
Boston, MA 02114

Delivery: By Email

RE: Individual Shelter System and RTI RFI

Dear Mr. Calkins:

We greatly appreciate this opportunity to respond to the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development's (DHCD) Request for Information regarding the procurement of the emergency shelter system for individuals experiencing homelessness.

First, we want to express our deep concern about the current capacity issues our region is facing right now. Several areas have no access to shelter at all or are completely full even before winter sets in. We appreciate your efforts to meet the current emergency needs as you plan for a future system that addresses these significant gaps.

Over the past 18 months, we have participated in the Western MA COVID-19 Task Force for Housing First, convened by the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness. As a result, we have learned a great deal about our region's shelter system, its strengths and weaknesses, and what best serves our most vulnerable residents.

On behalf of our constituents, we urge you to consider the effective use of hotels in sheltering people facing homelessness. We heard repeatedly the stories of our residents who were previously unable to enter congregate shelter due to various mental health and substance use challenges but were able to accept the offer of a non-congregate site. We also heard about their increasing stability and resulting engagement with case management that resulted in permanent re-housing.

The data underscores this model's efficacy: in Western Massachusetts, over a 15 month period, from July 1, 2020 to September 30, 2021, 52% of the people residing in non-congregate sites were re-housed as compared to a rate of 16% in congregate sites. We urge DHCD to integrate this proven success in its procurement and **ensure a robust mix of non-congregate and congregate sites.**

We also ask DHCD to **address the inequity of shelter resource distribution** to Western Massachusetts. We know that as the shelter system grew through various earmarks, Western Massachusetts' share of the shelter funds did not keep up with the number of people it serves. An analysis conducted in 2013 showed that Western Massachusetts received 7% of statewide shelter funds while sheltering 13% of the total population. Given that increased funding in the shelter system since then has largely been based on these initial earmarks, the inequity continues. We look forward to this procurement as a vehicle to right size the system so that it is equitable and adequately meets our residents' needs.

Finally, in order for our communities to treat people experiencing homelessness with the decency they deserve, shelters must be **adequately funded to operate 24/7, year-round**. Until the pandemic, due to limited funding, many shelters in our region were only seasonal and required people to leave the premises first thing in the morning until 6 at night. This public health emergency for all of us - not just the most vulnerable - exposed the illogic and inhumanity of such an arrangement. Warmer weather should not be a reason people are required to sleep on the street. We ask that **DHCD fund a true Housing First shelter model that maximizes access to shelter at all times to all who need it**.

We greatly appreciate your hard work serving our most vulnerable residents. We look forward to continuing the work together on behalf of all our communities.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Best,

Representative Carlos González  
10<sup>th</sup> Hampden

Senator Jo Comerford  
Hampshire, Franklin & Worcester

Representative Brian Ashe  
2<sup>nd</sup> Hampden

Senator Anne Gobi  
Worcester, Hampden, Hampshire & Middlesex

Representative John Barrett  
1<sup>st</sup> Berkshire

Senator Adam Gomez  
Hampden

Representative Natalie Blais  
1<sup>st</sup> Franklin

Senator Adam Hinds  
Berkshire, Hampshire, Franklin & Hampden

Representative Dan Carey  
2<sup>nd</sup> Hampshire

Senator Eric Lesser  
First Hampden & Hampshire

Representative Mindy Domb  
3<sup>rd</sup> Hampshire

Senator John Velis  
Second Hampden & Hampshire

Representative Patricia Duffy  
5<sup>th</sup> Hampden

Representative Tricia Farley-Bouvier  
3<sup>rd</sup> Berkshire

Representative Michael Finn  
6<sup>th</sup> Hampden

Representative Jake Oliveira  
7<sup>th</sup> Hampden

Representative Smitty Pignatelli  
4<sup>th</sup> Berkshire

Representative Lindsay Sabadosa  
1<sup>st</sup> Hampshire

Representative Bud Williams  
11<sup>th</sup> Hampden

Representative Paul Mark  
2<sup>nd</sup> Berkshire

Representative Kelly Pease  
4<sup>th</sup> Hampden

Representative Angelo Puppolo  
12<sup>th</sup> Hampden

Representative Susannah Whipps  
2<sup>nd</sup> Franklin