

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 1/11/21

In attendance: Barbara Agosto, NEFWC, Sarah Bridges, Christina's House, Ellen Broadhurst, Hilary Cronin, VA, Christine Cullen, Holyoke Chicopee Family and Community Program CFCE Anthia Elliott, BHN, Brenda Garcia, BHN, Alexandra Gianquinto, Christina's House, Rolando Gorra, Community Action Pioneer Valley, Danielle Hartner, CHD, Jill Fijal, Chcoopee Public Schools, Cheryl LaChance, Way Finders, Jane Lindfors, DTA DV Unit, Emily Matney, Gandara Center, Theresa Nicholson, CHD, Monique Osborne, YWCA of Western MA, Stacy Parsons, North Adams Public Schools/DESE liaison, Connie Rickard, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Sonya Sadoway, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Rachel Trant, DCF, Morayma Vazquez, NEFWC

EA Family Homelessness Data Review: [Click here](#) for DHCD's December, 2021 report.

Discussion: Family shelters are reducing congregate shelter capacity to the extent possible; reserving scattered site apartments that become available for families needing isolation due to covid.

Rental Assistance update: Changes in ERAP as of 1/1 include: Can no longer combine ERAP and RAFT assistance (note: RAFT benefit lowered from max \$10,000 to \$7,000 per budget language passed last year); household must fall behind in rent before being eligible for assistance (previously could file based on anticipated arrearage); households are no longer able to recertify for additional assistance, must reapply entirely and fall behind in rent to start new application process.

The demand for assistance continues to be very high - 100-140 applications/day, served 5,500 households Oct through Dec, over \$21 million distributed. Turn-around time is at roughly 8 weeks (longer now due to staff shortages due to covid).

Advocacy update: Pamela shared that the Network is joining with statewide partners to advocate for remaining ARPA funds (\$2.25 billion still unspent) to be allocated to shore up funding for ERAP and RAFT to end the program reductions and restore previous policies. Please be sure to [subscribe to the Network blog](#) to stay in the loop on action opportunities.

Housing search: The group discussed the persistent and extraordinary challenge of lack of available affordable housing. Having vouchers or subsidies makes no difference when there is no place to use them. Pamela shared the information regarding the passage of the first ARPA budget that contains \$600 million in housing investments, including more for affordable rental housing. While this is not an immediate solution, at least there is promise of more housing on the horizon. We also must prepare to advocate for additional investments in the 2nd round of ARPA funding. Again, please subscribe to the Network blog to stay in the loop.

DV discussion: The group discussed the ongoing challenges with housing for domestic violence survivors, especially for individuals without children. It was also noted that ICAP funding - which provides support for individuals experiencing DV - ends on June 30. We should consider advocacy in the upcoming budget process for continued funding; Pamela noted there needs to be

a point person on this work and that she would be happy to provide a supporting role (contact Pamela if you want to discuss further).

Providers noted that they are seeing more survivors deciding to stay with their abusers due to lack of housing alternatives. This is yet another consequence of our housing crisis.

Next meeting date: Tuesday, 2/8, 11 am - 12 noon.