

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 2/8/22

In attendance: Sarah Bridges, Christina House, Jill Fijal, Chicopee Public Schools, Kristina Foley, Gandara Center, Brenda Garcia, BHN, Kerri George, Franklin County Regional Housing Authority, Lynn Guertin, BHN, Erin Hartwiger, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Doral Lambertus, BHN, Matt Montanaro, Greenfield Family Inn, Donna Nadeau, DHCD, Monique Osbourne, YWCA, Omayra, Quinones, Salasin Project, Brett Rogers, Head Start, Stacy Parsons, North Berkshire School Housing Coordinator, DESE liaison, Paula Kularski, BHN, Jessica Sastre, NEFWC, Pamela Schwartz, Network, Sarah Slautterback, DESE, Jennifer Sunderland, Springfield Public Schools, Rachel Trant, DCF

EA Data Update: See [here](#).

Shelter Updates:

- Seeing a slight uptick in Greenfield Family Inn numbers.
- COVID numbers are down, consistent with statewide trends.
- Working with new guidance on no visitors in shelters until 3/1.

Schools Update:

- Statewide: 19,000 students identified as homeless, shelter accounts for 35% of that number; doubled-up numbers are much higher. Schools are seeing an influx of new arrivals, including those who are homeless, work continues to connect them to services. Substantial ARPA funds have been allocated to schools to provide additional support during this time.
- Springfield: assisting students who are arriving from Afghanistan.
- Several liaisons noted issues with students' attendance. Donna Nadeau will follow-up on that to ensure maximum shelter support around this issue.
- North Adams region reporting increase in doubling-up, family tensions due to covid-induced close quarters. Seeing a surge in referrals for youth services and a small uptick in pregnant and parenting youth.

Rental Assistance Updates

- **Way Finders** (Hampden/Hampshire Counties) (shared via previous meeting report): 3,900 households served for the month of January; continuing to see 100-120 applications/day; process time is 7-8 weeks.
- On homeowners assistance, Way Finders supports homeowners to apply for federal funds and to provide counseling sessions and a legal referral to CLA if it is needed. Their contact information for help is 413-233-1621; homeownership@wayfinders.org.
- **Franklin County Regional** (shared via previous meeting report): struggling due to staff shortages and sickness, trying to bring processing time down from 9-10 weeks. Also on Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV): noted that people who were issued these vouchers

in Sept. are unable to find affordable and available units, at risk of losing the voucher. This is a pervasive problem through the region and state.

- **Berkshire County** (shared via previous meeting report): reported similar challenges to processing time (estimated 9-10 weeks on turn-around); also noted the challenge in finding units

FY23 Budget Update: The Governor released his proposed FY23 budget last week. The Governor's Budget includes \$80 million for RAFT, which advocates immediately recognize will not be sufficient to meet the extraordinary demand as federal funds are depleted. The statewide advocacy request is likely to be \$250 million. The Network Steering Committee is meeting next week on its FY23 budget priorities and will bring these to our next meeting on 3/8. (and be sure you are subscribed to the [Network blog](#) to stay connected to related actions!).

Legislation Update: The Joint Rule 10 day was 2/2 - the date by which legislative committees needed to determine next steps of its bills - reported out favorably, extended, or "sent to study" (which means not in play for the remainder of this legislative session). [See here](#) for a quick snapshot of the Network priority bills and how they fared. Much more advocacy to come!

Announcement: The new Executive Director of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness is Jeff Olivet, a person this region knows very well as he has consulted with our two CoC's and trained many of our partners around racial equity work over these past 3 years. Read all about it [here](#). Congratulations to Jeff, congratulations to all of us - he will serve our cause exceedingly well!

Network Annual Event, May 6! [Register HERE](#). DHCD Undersecretary Jennifer Maddox will be joining us, along with Jeff Olivet in his new capacity as Director of the US Interagency Council on Homelessness, and more. Please get it on your calendar now!

Next meeting date: Tuesday, 3/8, 11 am