

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 8/9/22

In attendance: Ateinna Alicea, DCF, Nancy Alvarado, Three County CoC, Melissa Blisset, Square One, Hilary Cronin, VA, Shaundell Diaz, Three County CoC, Brenda Garcia, BHN, Anthia Elliott, DV Impact at BHN, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Erin Hartwiger, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Dora Lambertus, BHN, Nicki LaValley, NEFWC, Jane Lindfors, DTA/DV Unit, Luis Martinez, STCC, Donna Nadeau, DHCD, Theresa Nicholson, Center for Human Development, Monique Osborne, YWCA, Stacy Parsons, North Adams Schools, DESE School Liaisons, Omayra Quinones, Salasin Project, Sarah Rivera, New North Citizens Council, Brett Rogers, Head Start, Sarah Slautterback, DESE, Sonya Sadoway, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Jennifer Santos, Way Finders, Elizabeth Soto, Way Finders, Amanda Wallace, Way Finders

Shelter Updates

All EA shelters in the region are at capacity. Center for Human Development (CHD) is working closely with DHCD to set up overflow hotel capacity (serving roughly 33 families over the last 6 weeks); one other motel set-up in the Eastern part of the state. Most guests are from other areas of the state but some from Western MA. Also notable is an increase in Haitian refugees (seen at all shelters).

Discussed possible factors causing increased demand: COVID suppressed demand and now that COVID is more normalized, the demand is returning; also seeing more buildings being sold and turned over to market-rate housing and seeing rents increase.

COVID incidence: not significant (Way Finders has had 3 positive families in large congregate shelter; providing isolation within the shelter itself - no other state-provided options).

FY23 Budget and Legislative Session Updates

Please see [this Network blog post](#) for the report-out on the FY23 budget and the 2021-2022 formal Legislative Session.

Good news on the budget this year - many advances for many housing and homelessness programs, especially with regard to funding for our individual shelter system. Additionally, the HCEC's received a funding boost to assist in the administering of RAFT and other housing programs.

Less good news on legislative outcomes. While we gained more legislator co-sponsorships and statewide attention on many of our priorities - eviction record sealing, right to counsel in evictions, tenant opportunity to purchase act, transfer fee for affordable housing - these bills did not pass. We are well-positioned to continue the effort during the next legislative session in concert with our statewide partners and we will!

Big thanks to our Western MA delegation for their leadership and/or co-sponsorship of many of our priorities. We look forward to continuing the work together.

Other announcements/updates

- Sarah Slautterback of DESE noted that they are finishing their numbers for 2021-2022. Roughly 22,000 students have been identified as homeless across the state; the number of students in foster care is at approx. 8,000 (a comparatively high number).
- In the community-based DV community, there is an increased need for diversion funds in order to keep families housed. There is no available housing and/or rents have increased markedly - big need for the flex funding from DTA but the funds have been delayed
- Three County CoC is seeking housing navigators to assist with DV-related housing search. Has received one applicant but must fill two positions. Still working out issues with databases so that privacy can be adequately protected and it can comply with HUD requirements (getting there).
- Three County CoC is recruiting people with lived experience to work with the CoC. See the flyer here: <https://conta.cc/3NZASWf>
- Head start is enrolling children for September – see www.hcsheadstart.org or call 413-417-7779

Next meeting date: Tuesday, September 13, 11 am