

Veterans Committee Meeting Minutes – 12/15/22

In attendance: Farida Bature, WMNEH, Steve Connor, VA, Shaundell Diaz, three county COC/ CAPV, Gumersindo Gomez, Bilingual veterans Center, Michele Lafleur, three county COC, Jay Levy, Elliot Services, Andy Klatka, Elliot Services, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Uri Strauss, Community legal aid VA, Kate Sweetser Owens, Sue White, VA, HUD Vash

By-name list updates:

Hampden County has not been holding case conferencing meetings recently, but the communication is ongoing among providers and the numbers are low.

Three County CoC has only 5 or 6 individuals identifying as veterans right now.

National decline in veteran homelessness: The group also noted the headline news around the drop in veteran homelessness nationwide over the last 2 years, a drop of 11% since January, 2020. Excellent news!

Three County CoC Veterans Data: Michele LaFleur, the Three County CoC data analyst, shared with us in-depth data on veteran homelessness – and its decline! - for the Three County area – check it out [HERE](#).

These low numbers- locally and nationally - are a direct consequence of the intensive federal resources allocated to ending veteran homelessness (i.e., investment works!). The HUD-VASH vouchers plus support services really work, plus the fact that veterans do not need to be chronically homeless to qualify for a voucher (noting a high number of young adults using VASH to get re-housed). Also noted the relative ease of “veteran status” for getting rehoused as compared with other populations experiencing homelessness.

Healthcare for the Homeless veteran program (HCHV): It was noted that this program is now getting more resources in western and central mass with a new case worker and social worker on staff who will be a first point of contact.

Network Policy Updates

Pamela noted the new Gov-Elect Maura Healey and Lt. Gov.-Elect Sharon Driscoll. Gov-Elect Healey appointed a Housing Transition Team, which includes Keith Fairey, CEO of Way Finders, as co-chair, as well as South Hadley Town Manager Lisa Wong and Eileen Peltier, ED of Berkshire Housing Development Corp.

We also have new legislators in our region: Rep-Elect Aaron Saunders (replacing Rep. Oliveira), Rep -Elect Shirley Arriega (replacing Rep. Wagner); Senator -Elect Jake Oliveira (replacing Senator Lesser); Senator -Elect Paul Mark (replacing Senator Hinds). The Network will reach out to connect with our new members and will schedule countywide meetings to discuss our legislative and budget priorities in early February.

The Network’s legislative priorities, including right to counsel, eviction record sealing, transfer fee for affordable housing and more, did not pass in the last session. The Network is working

with its statewide partners to discuss the potential to develop a “housing justice platform” that we can unite behind and advocate for together.

Wayfinders is facilitating a convening of local communities, providers and advocates (including the Network) across the 4 western counties to focus on housing production and supply. The group is creating a legislative agenda that we will also be integrated into our work this session.

Network’s Annual Event

This year’s annual Network gathering will take place in person (with a zoom option for the speaking portion of the event). It will take place on Friday, May 12 between 10am-12pm at HCC People’s Bank Room (space is available and reserved). Please mark your calendar now!

Next meeting: Tuesday March 14, 2023 at 12pm.