

Family Services Committee Minutes – March 28 2023

In Attendance: *Maribel Acevedo, Farida Bature, WMNEH, DCF, Melissa Blissett from Square One, Tana Bloom, Franklin County Regional Housing Authority, Maria Chambers, BHN, Mitchelly Colon, Home Visitor, F.O.R Families/DPH, Tamicha Colon, Alianza DV Services, Jennifer Dieringer, Community Legal Aid, Anthia Elliot, BHN/DV & Patch Services, Erin Forbush, Service Net, Mary Gould, Cristina's House, Olga Kravchenko, Greater Springfield Habitat for Humanity, Becky L, Salasin Project, Cheryl LaChance, Way Finders, Luis M, Matt Montanaro, Service Net, Carmen Nieves-Alianza DV Services, Monique Osbourne, YWCA of Western Mass DV Shelter, Dorothy Prieto ERSEA (Enrollment) Coordinator Head Start & Early Learning Programs CAPV, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders, Heather Roy, DTA DV unit, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, , Jodi Smith, Wayfinders, Rachel Trant, DCF, Amanda Watson, Franklin County Regional Housing, Melissa White, VOC, Olivia Zinter, Hilltown Community Health center*

Shelter Updates

Wayfinders: The demand for shelter continues to be high, especially due to the increasing number of immigrant and family refugee arrivals.

Potential new shelter in North Adams: Conversations are happening between DHCD and MCLA (Mass College of Liberal Arts) re: using an empty dormitory for emergency shelter space for families. Erin Forbush of ServiceNet reported positive community feedback on the whole so far. ServiceNet would be the contracted provider if it happens. We will stay tuned.

State FY23 Supplemental Budget:

The State Legislature just passed an FY23 supplemental budget of \$388 million, including \$45 million for expanded emergency shelter assistance, \$40 million to support affordable housing for immigrants and refugees and \$130 million for SNAP food assistance benefits and more. DHCD released a procurement to expand shelter capacity. Providers do not need to be current EA providers and the procurement is open on a rolling basis. To see the procurement, please go [here](#).

RAFT updates

Way Finders (Hampden/Hampshire Counties): They are seeing 120-150 applicants each day; about 2,000 applications in process.

Franklin County Regional Housing Authority (Franklin County): Roughly 100 applications in process, about 60 waiting to be matched with a landlord. Worried about winter protection for utilities ending in April and the need that will follow.

Eviction Protection: Eviction protections under Chapter 257 will expire on March 31 (the protection requires the pause of an eviction process until a rental assistance application has been processed). An organization sign-on letter circulated—note Western MA comprised 18% of all signers statewide!—and now the Mass. Coalition for the Homeless is circulating an individual sign-on petition. Please go [HERE](#) to sign on and please relay to your network.

Hadley Econo-Lodge Update: Pamela reported that the Hadley Zoning Board denied Valley CDC's permit to convert the Econolodge to 50 affordable and deeply affordable units (25 set aside for people exiting homelessness). They denied the permit without allowing public

comment. Valley CDC is looking into next possible steps and community members are also exploring how to push further (possible Town Meeting vote to change the zoning by-laws). If people know people who live in Hadley who may want to get involved to support the project, please contact Pamela at pschwartz@westernmasshousingfirst.org.

Network Legislative Priorities Update: Pamela reviewed the Network's [Legislative Priorities](#) with the Committee. It's top 9 priorities include:

- Bill of Rights for People Experiencing Homelessness
- Access to Counsel
- Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act
- Local Option for Affordable Housing
- Real Estate Transfer Fee
- Local Option for Rent Stabilization
- Foreclosure Prevention Program
- Access to ID
- Emergency Assistance Omnibus
- Supportive Housing Subsidy Pool Program

Network's FY24 Budget Priorities: The Network is pleased to provide its FY24 budget priorities [HERE](#). These priorities will be the basis for the Network's advocacy in the upcoming House and Senate budget processes (final budget for FY24 –from 7/1/23 –6/30/24 –will be signed into law by 7/10).

Pamela noted that Gov. Healey's proposed FY24 budget substantially cuts the RAFT benefit from \$10,000/year to \$7,000 over 24 months. We will be joining statewide advocacy to prevent this from happening and to increase RAFT resources instead. To stay in the loop of upcoming advocacy, please subscribe to the [Network blog](#).

Mass Health Redetermination: Eligibility redetermination begins April 1. Please see the important information and tools to assist individuals [HERE](#)

Equal Access Rule Training: The Network in collaboration with the two COC'S are having a webinar on April 5 on the Equal Access Rule for the LGBTQ. To learn more, please go [HERE](#).

Virtual Series on Federal Plan to End Homelessness (and its impact on MA): The Network is joining to co-sponsor a series (4/14, 4/27, 5/10) to review the Federal Plan and discuss its use here in MA. Learn more and register [here](#).

Network Annual Gathering: May 12! Please see the [Annual Gathering Invitation HERE](#)
And please join!

Next Meeting: May 2, 12 noon