

## Western MA Task Force for Housing First Minutes - 6/8/23

*Approximately 65 people attended in total (in the interest of time, we will no longer list each individual).*

### Shelter and Housing Updates

- **New EA Family Shelter at Day's Inn, Greenfield:** Erin Forbush of ServiceNet reported on this new EA shelter site. ServiceNet is providing case management services to these families. Roughly 50 family members are residing there as of now. Many immigrant families from multiple countries. Much gratitude expressed to the City of Greenfield for its support during this process. This expansion to Greenfield is a reflection of the dramatic spike in family homelessness across the Commonwealth, in large part (but not exclusively) fueled by the arrival of refugee families. The expansion to Greenfield was due to MCLA's decision to not use its vacant dorm for EA shelter. The state Representative and the mayor of North Adams were not supportive.
- **Pittsfield (ServiceNet):** still operating out of St. Joe's High School but hoping to move into new shelter space very soon - it will be a decrease in capacity since new shelter holds 40 beds and St. Joe's holds more - already working on overflow space for the winter months
- **North Adams (Louison House):** emergency shelter and transitional housing are all full - wait list is not slowing down
- **Greenfield (Clinical and Support Options - CSO):** full but hoping to increase capacity in the next couple of weeks; currently planning for continuing services and use of building during renovation and expansion; when expansion complete will be at 40 beds
- **Northampton (CSO):** recently experienced a lot of movement with individuals moving out of the shelter into the new low threshold permanent housing in Holyoke (via CHD) - very exciting shifts (one individual had lived in shelter for 5 years and is now in permanent housing). Limited shelter bed availability.
- **Amherst (Craig's Doors):** moved out of University Motor Lodge to the bottom floor of Econolodge in Hadley - very exciting development for all involved - for guests it is a newer and nicer facility with better transportation (job, shop) access; for Valley CDC (the owner and developer), it is an occupied as opposed to empty hotel
- **Holyoke (Center for Human Development- CHD):** opened 46 units of low-threshold housing! Totally full this week. Congratulations to all for the incredible work to get to this moment! **Motel 6 shelter in Holyoke** is still full with 50 individuals. Also noted currently in process of obtaining contract for an additional 25 beds of transitional low-threshold housing.
- **Springfield (City of Springfield):** all individuals (roughly 40) in Catholic Charities' hotels have been moved out - thanks to great partnerships and provider support for making the transition as smooth as possible - several moved to CHD's new housing in Holyoke
- **West Springfield (CHD)** - managing 120 families in 3 hotels. Over 1,000 families in the Commonwealth. The demand is unabating.
- **Valley CDC Econolodge update:** still in negotiations with Hadley Zoning Board over permitting. Outcome unclear but the prospect of development into affordable housing is still alive!

**New Triage and Diversion Program in Process:** CHD is preparing to roll out a triage and diversion program for individuals across all 4 counties - will include a 1-800 # and resources to divert from homelessness. Program director hired and now hiring additional staff. Will be pulling together providers to provide consultation on the program. Stay tuned for more soon.

**Homelessness prevention (RAFT) update:**

Way Finders reported (for Hampden and Hampshire Counties): seeing roughly 150-200 people seeking rental assistance in their lobbies each day. Currently 1500 applications filed, 850 currently in progress, 700 being matched between landlord and tenant. Utility shut-offs are also high - roughly 15-20 people/day seeking assistance.

**FY24 Senate budget update**

Big thanks to Senator Jo Comerford for her reporting out on the recently passed FY24 \$55.9 billion Senate budget. Big picture points included:

- Joined the House in making permanent Chapter 257 so that evictions are paused while a rental assistance application is pending - however in the Senate an amendment to Chapter 257 was adopted re: "good faith application" in exchange for eviction record sealing - advocates' concerns around "good faith" definition and the need to refine that in Conference Committee
- Significant increased investments in MRVP, RAFT, Alternative Housing Voucher Program, Youth Homelessness - see the comparative chart at this [blog post here](#)
- Increased investment in Safe Havens that will provide an additional Safe Havens program in western MA

To see more on the budget as a whole, please see Senator Comerford's summary here: <https://senatorjocomerford.org/senate-finalizes-fiscal-year-2024-budget/>

The budget now goes to Conference Committee - this week is the time to weigh in! - then the full body votes on it and the budget goes to the Governor's desk for signature (or vetoes).

Pamela also noted thanks for the Legislature's support of the Network earmark for a total of \$100,000 (\$25,000 in the House - with thanks to Rep. Sabadosa's sponsorship; and \$75,000 in the Senate - with thanks to Sen. Mark's sponsorship). Thanks to the entire western MA delegation for its support!

**A New Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities and new Housing**

**Secretariat!** The change happened, DHCD is no more and EOHLC is its own executive office with its own Housing Secretary, Ed Augustus, former mayor of Worcester. The Network is part of statewide partner conversations about meeting with Secretary Augustus regarding our shared priorities. Stay tuned for more on that.

**Upcoming legislative hearings:**

Pamela raised the upcoming legislative hearings on our priority bills. Rep. Blais underscored the importance of western MA showing up and using the virtual hearing option - an outgrowth of covid and we want to make sure to use it - and of course we want to show up for these

bills! Please learn more and please

join: <https://www.westernmasshousingfirst.org/advocacy/2023/legislative-hearings-on-priority-bills-june-13-and-june-26/>

**Other discussion/announcements:**

- Rep. Pease raised the question around the challenges of the CHAMP system (new application system) for housing authorities (as informed by Westfield Housing Authority). Gina Govoni of Franklin County Regional Housing Authority noted that much work is being done on this issue and will continue the conversation off-line with Rep. Pease - will provide an update at next Task Force meeting.
- Joyce Tavon is the new CEO of Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA) - congratulations, Joyce!
- The Task Force gave BIG THANKS to Jay Levy of Eliot Services as he leaves for semi-retirement on July 7 after over 30 years in this work. We all acknowledged his extraordinary impact in the work of ending homelessness in this region and well beyond. THANK YOU, JAY!!!

**Next meeting date: Tuesday, July 11, 9 am**