

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 7/13/23

Shelter Updates

Way Finders: sheltering 279 families. Demand for units is constant. Seeing a particular challenge in accessing health care for immigrant families, along with meeting other related needs.

CHD: shelter 165 families in congregate shelter; 145 families in hotels. When a bed opens, it is filled immediately.

ServiceNet: increased family units in Pittsfield by 4 so now serving 22 families there; Greenfield Days Inn is now sheltering 44 families, many immigrants. The Family Inn in Greenfield is also full and receiving calls every day seeking space

The family system is under immense pressure with continually rising numbers of families seeking shelter, many of them refugee families. Pamela noted that the state has opened 10 command centers statewide to meet immigrant families and address urgent needs and provide referrals. She noted that the Boston Medical Center's Emergency Room has roughly 100 families sleeping there every night with no alternative option.

RAFT update

Change in policy as of 7/1: benefit level down from \$10,000 total to \$7,000 and no longer able to pay forward on rent ("stipends" are not allowed). For people who applied as of June 30, their applications will be "grandfathered" into the prior rules.

Way Finders (Hampden/Hampshire Counties): demand continues to be high. In June, distributed \$3.35 million for 1,100 households. Received 4,000 calls to rental assistance center, 2,700 people entered their doors for assistance. Roughly 15 walk-ins/day for utility shut-offs.

Now Homeowners Assistance is also available at Way Finders (for Hampden/Hampshire). Berkshire Housing Dev Corp is administering homeowner assistance for Berkshire and Franklin Counties.

Berkshire and Franklin are in the process of closing out FY23 RAFT applications (must be completed by 7/30 in order to qualify under the more generous rules).

Noted the request for extensions for housing search in use of subsidies because there is no housing out there.

Also noted the challenge of reducing eviction prevention resources at a time when the need is so high. HLC (the new DHCD) is trying to make the resources reach as many people as possible;

the Network's response (in partnership with statewide advocates) is to increase the funding to the point where it does not need to be reduced and the needs are better met

FY24 Budget Update: The FY24 budget is still in Conference Committee, working out differences between the House and Senate budgets. The House is being called into session on Thursday so that may mean a Conference budget will be presented. Once the budget is voted on in the Legislature, the Governor will have 10 days to impose any vetoes. It is important for us to stay connected via the blog on any imminent advocacy.

Legislative Update: The Network testified on its priority bills on June 26, including RAFT, HomeBASE and Permanent Supportive Housing. [See the testimony here](#). It is unlikely we'll have hearings to attend in August but will use the blog to keep people informed.

Announcements:

HCS Head Start is enrolling for our 2023-2024 school year. We serve pregnant woman and children ages birth-5. We have homeless slots that offer free childcare from 8-2. Please call 413-417-7779 or visit www.hcsheadstart.org to apply

To learn about the MATCH program - access to new re-housing assistance - please [go here](#) to learn more about an upcoming webinar on July 20.