

### **Family Services Committee - 9/19/23**

*Melissa Blisset, Square One, Tana Bloom, Franklin County Regional Housing Authority, Christine Cullen, Head Start, Anthia Elliott, domestic violences, BHN, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Cheryl LaChance, Way Finders, Nicky LaValley, Way Finders, Matt Montanaro, Greenfield Family Inn, Stacy Parsons, North Berkshire/DESE, Sara Peña, Way Finders, Amarys Perez, Way Finders, Dorothy Prieto, CAPV Head Start, Brett Rogers, Holyoke/Springfield/Chicopee Head Start, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders, Heather Roy, DTA DV unit, Jolanta Rumierz, DCF, Carlton Smith, Way Finders, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Elizabeth Soto, Way Finders, Janette Vigo, Way Finders, Amanda Wallace, Way Finders, Melissa White, Valley Opportunity Council*

### **Family Shelter Updates**

**Way Finders:** continuing to see high numbers in their Springfield shelters (not running hotels); openings filled immediately; more difficult to get access to translators given the demand.

Statewide HLC is issuing an additional 1,200 Section 8 vouchers for families who have resided in shelter for over 18 months ("long-stayers"). These vouchers will be released in installments over the coming weeks. The first allocation included 36 vouchers for Way Finders. This is good news, and it's also in the context of 300 families at Way Finders (alone) already in housing, i.e., obtaining an affordable apartment is as great a challenge as ever. It was also noted that landlords are meeting the top allowable rent under Section 8, which is raising rents overall. And tenants have 60 days to use the voucher (and a 30 day extension, so total 90) and many families are not finding housing within that time.

It was also noted that DV shelters are full and they are not part of this voucher pool. Very little movement out of DV shelter, many long stayers.

**ServiceNet** - the Days Inn in **Greenfield** has 45 families. The Greenfield Family Inn and the **Pittsfield** family shelter are full as well; units are filled as soon as available.

**Valley Opportunity Council:** 103 families are at the Quality Inn in **Chicopee**, as well as 120 families in shelter and 17 in scattered site apartments - this is especially challenging given the needs of migrant families. Making steady progress in setting up systems to address immigration and medical issues. The families in hotels have greater access to services than those in scattered sites (e.g., the MIRA Coalition has a contract for supportive services for families in hotels only). There is a gap in service that should be addressed.

### **Reminders on how to apply for family shelter:**

<https://www.mass.gov/how-to/apply-for-emergency-family-shelter-ea>

HLC EA Intake number: 1-866-584-0653

### **RAFT Update**

**Way Finders** (for Hampden/Hampshire Counties):

RAFT applications are at a rate that is second highest in the state. Last week's total number of 675 applications was higher than the week prior. Currently, 2,600 applications pending. 30%

are homeowner applications. Lobbies are seeing a total of 100-150 walk-ins each day; 15-20 utility shut-off notices each day.

Demand in Franklin and Berkshire Counties also continues to be very high.

**Network news - sign-on letters; legislative updates, etc.**

**Low-Income Tax Credit Increase organizational sign-on**

**letter:** [https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe5lhipztwCdwj3F6-gXIYIKfox\\_mJCTJtP9tajs\\_vfx0APw/viewform](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSe5lhipztwCdwj3F6-gXIYIKfox_mJCTJtP9tajs_vfx0APw/viewform)

**Act to override Governor's vetoes of housing/homelessness programs:**

<https://www.westernmasshousingfirst.org/advocacy/2023/take-action-to-override-governors-vetoes/>

**Federal funding for homelessness sign-on letter:**

<https://www.westernmasshousingfirst.org/advocacy/2023/sign-on-letter-for-lihtc-by-fri-9-22/>

Federal Homelessness action:

<https://endhomelessness.org/actions/take-action-to-build-support-for-the-senate-fy24-thud-bill/>

**MA Joint Housing Committee Hearing - Sept. 27** - Access to Counsel, MRVP, RAFT - please sign up to testify (remotely) or submit written testimony - stay tuned on the Network blog for more details

<https://malegislature.gov/Events/Hearings/Detail/4692>

**Senate Chair Lydia Edwards' tours Western MA:**

<https://www.westernmasshousingfirst.org/advocacy/2023/senate-housing-committee-chair-lydia-edwards-tours-western-ma/>

**New Yorker Article/Podcast by Jennifer Egan on Homelessness and Supportive Housing:**

<https://www.westernmasshousingfirst.org/resources/2023/recommended-author-jennifer-egan-on-homelessness-and-supportive-housing/>

**Next meeting date: Tuesday, October 17, 12 noon**