

Western MA Task Force for Housing First Minutes - 10/17/23

In attendance: roughly 60 attendees, including many legislative offices, municipal offices and dozens of providers

Family Homelessness Update

Kelly Turley of the MA Coalition of the Homeless summarized the Governor's latest announcement regarding capping family shelter at 7,500 beds (predicted to be reached by the end of this month). After that point, there will be a "wait list." We are awaiting more details about how this would be implemented and the Network will continue to collaborate with statewide partners to ensure a coordinated response.

More details on the announcement are available here:

- Governor's office: Governor Healey Announces State's Emergency Family Shelter System Will Reach Capacity by End of Month, <https://www.mass.gov/news/governor-healey-announces-states-emergency-family-shelter-system-will-reach-capacity-by-end-of-month>
- Boston Globe: Healey says Mass. can no longer guarantee room in shelter system, state on 'verge of reaching capacity', <https://www.bostonglobe.com/2023/10/16/metro/maura-healey-caps-capacity-mass-migrant-shelters>

Meanwhile, the Working Group to Protect Migrant Families has released these two sign-on letters to push, in concert with Governor Healey's efforts, the Biden Administration and Congress to take action to address this crisis. **Please see here the letters (virtually identical) to the [Administration](#) and the [MA Congressional delegation](#).**

The Working Group includes Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless as well as partners from business, philanthropy, immigration, health care housing and direct services. The Jewish Alliance for Law and Social Action (JALSA) is providing staffing for the Working Group.

Please find the [google form](#) to sign on here. The deadline is Thursday at 3 pm.

Winter emergency shelter planning

Special thanks to our guest Gordie Calkins, HLC Director of Individual Homelessness, for bringing a statewide update to us on winter shelter planning. Gordie provided [this summary](#) of winter shelter beds across the state.

Discussion: the disparity between the # of winter shelter beds in the eastern vs. western part of the state is notable. Gordie explained that this is at least in part due to the providers submitting requests (the western MA requests that have come in have been met). He made clear that he welcomes additional requests, although those requests are contingent on state funding (awaiting news on PAC and supplemental funding). Contact Gordie to discuss possible winter shelter expansion: gordon.calkins@mass.gov.

We know now that there is not sufficient shelter bed capacity in the western region to meet the emergency winter needs. Providers will continue to discuss possibilities and follow-up with Gordie.

HLC Individual Shelter Listening Sessions Coming Up!

Gordie's office is hosting a series of listening sessions to assess the individual homelessness system. Western MA dates are **Oct. 24 and Nov. 14**, but there are additional issue specific dates as well and people are welcome to attend any and all sessions. Read more detail and get the zoom link by going [HERE](#).

Homelessness Prevention Updates

Hampden/Hampshire Counties (Way Finders): in the last four weeks 700-750 RAFT applications came in, up from the approx 600 applications the previous month. Highest caseload in the state with 1,700 applications.

Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority and Berkshire Housing Development Corporation reported proportionally similar demand.

Lt. Gov. Driscoll and HLC Secretary Augustus Visited Western MA/Housing Bond Bill

Anni Zhu of Way Finders reported out on Lt. Gov. and Secretary Augustus' visit to the Western MA Housing Coalition last Friday, 10/10. It was an excellent opportunity to present and discuss western MA' housing production needs, especially with regard to the Housing Bond Bill that will be released any day (note: it's just out now on Oct. 18!). Please see the [Housing Bond bill priorities discussed here](#).

Legislative Updates

The Joint Revenue Committee held a hearing on the Real Estate Transfer Fee for Affordable Housing bill last week. Pamela testified on behalf of the Network ([Network's testimony here](#)). Additionally, Pamela testified at the Joint Housing Committee hearing on 9/27 on a number of Network priority bills, e.g., Access to Counsel in Evictions, MRVP strengthening, Healthy Homes and Fair Housing. See the [Network's testimony here](#).

Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness Survey

We want YOUR INPUT! As the Network approaches its 15th anniversary, we want your feedback on its activities and effectiveness. **The survey is anonymous and will take less than 15 minutes to complete:** <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LG8ZBRH>. Responses due by **November 3rd**. Please help us chart our future! Thank you for your partnership!

Next meeting date: Thursday, Nov. 16, 9 am