

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 12/12/23

In attendance: Maribel Acevedo, DCF, Tana Bloom, FCRHRA, Maria Chambers, BHN, Kiirsten Cooper, Hilltown Community Health Center, Hillary Cronin, VA HUD VASH, Jen Dieringer, CLA, Christine Zaskey Cullen, CFCE Head Start, Shaundell Diaz, Three County CoC, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Joscelyn González, NNCC, Jennifer Gonzalez, Morales, Holyoke Schools, Nicky La Valley, Way Finders, Matt Montanaro, ServiceNet, Theresa Nicholson, CHD, Sara Peña, Way Finders, Dorothy Prieto, ERSEA, Brett Rogers, Head Start, Jasmin Rojas, Way Finders, Heather Roy, DTA DV unit, Jolanta Rumierz, DCF, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Carlton Smith, Way Finders, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Rachel Trant, DCF, Sahira Torres-Vazquez, Springfield Schools, Janette Vigo, Way Finders, Amanda Wallace, Way Finders, Amanda Watson, FCRHRA,

Family shelter updates:

Statewide: Pamela relayed the statewide update from the Mass. Coalition for the Homeless: As of last Friday, there were over 200 families on the wait list. HLC is using spaces in the dorms at Eastern Nazarene College (that previously had been used as a temporary emergency shelter site) and they set up a new hotel in Revere for overflow/clinical assessments. The MA Coalition for the Homeless is encouraging people to thank their legislators and the Governor re: the passage and signing of the supplemental budget. To read about the passage of the supplemental process, see the [Network blog post here](#). More from the Coalition's latest alert can be found here: <https://conta.cc/3TdoVIP>

Regional:

CHD experienced its first call at 4:45 pm from HLC regarding a Venezuelan family needing emergency hotel shelter. They were not presumptively eligible yet but they had nowhere to go. CHD did not have any discretionary dollars to shelter them. It's unclear what happened next. We all acknowledged that this experience is happening with much greater frequency in the eastern part of the state, is likely to increase here and there is intense concern over families' safety.

We discussed the need to clarify whether HLC will provide transportation to the overflow site at Nazarene College. Pamela will follow-up with HLC to find out.

We discussed the need to create a list of resources for families in crisis. Note: following the meeting, Shaundell shared the link to the Administration's resources: [Emergency Housing Assistance | Mass.gov](#)

Christine also shared the Administration's information on community based resources for families, which can be found [here](#).

We also noted the partnership with HLC and United Way Mass Bay, which has issued a **\$5 million RFP** to fund community based organizations to create additional shelter for families. Identification of a site is required. No western MA partner has applied yet (CHD was solicited to apply for a 5-bed shelter but it wasn't a viable project for them). Find more information and the application here: <https://unitedwaymassbay.org/impact/crisis-response/shelter-grant>

All other family shelters noted they are completely full with units being filled as fast as they are vacated - but for the challenge of needing to do repairs in units with long-stayers (seeking leeway on allowable turnover time in view of the challenge of getting repairs done quickly).

RAFT update

Way Finders (Hampden/Hampshire): the high volume continues - receiving roughly 700-750 applications each week (a recent 2 week reprieve where last week was "down" to 694). Since 7/1, 372 applicants have been denied due to having already maxed out on their benefits.

Franklin County: high volume also continues

Berkshire County: They have added staff to improve processing times for RAFT applications. They are seeing a larger volume of HomeBASE applications in recent weeks, resulting in doubling our HomeBASE stabilization caseload. They are increasing staffing to accommodate this increase. Fraud continues to be an issue statewide. Systems are being set up to identify fraud. Predominantly these fraudulent apps are being submitted on the landlord side of the portal.

Legislative update

Pamela described the significance of the \$4.1 billion housing bond bill, the leadership of the Western Mass. Housing Coalition in briefing legislators and advocating for amendments to better meet western MA needs. Read an overview of the bill on the Network blog post [here](#). Please stay tuned on how we can all get involved in the legislative hearing process in January. Be sure to be subscribed to the blog! Go [here](#).

FY25 Budget

The Network is planning its February meetings with state legislators to discuss its FY25 budget priorities and legislative priorities. We will follow-up on this in January.

Announcements:

If there are families in Holyoke with children birth to age 5- not in preschool or daycare, they can come to the Nurturing Children program at Head Start each week. Door to door transportation is provided. Please call Christine at (413) 348-4355

Next meeting date: Tuesday, January 17, 12 noon