

## Individual Services Committee Minutes - 12/19/23

*In attendance: roughly 30 Network partners, including shelter and housing providers across the 4 counties*

### Individual Homelessness updates:

- **HLC has released its RFP of \$6 million** to expand winter shelter capacity. Go here for the application and information: <https://www.commbuys.com/bs0/external/bidDetail.sdo?docId=BD-24-1076-OCDE-HS003-95688&external=true&parentUrl=close>. ALL interested parties should apply - while certain regions are prioritized, EVERY region is in a good position to receive funds if they have a site and staff capacity to make it happen (acknowledging that both are also in short supply). We exchanged briefly on western MA partners who we know are applying, e.g., ServiceNet, CSO, CHD. We'll look forward to learning more. Pamela expressed hope for a fair share of these resources getting to our region!
- **Winter Emergency Hotel Shelter Resources:** The Network has compiled a list of points of contact for winter weather emergency hotel resources: <https://www.westernmasshousingfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Winter-Emergency-Hotel-Resources-and-Protocol-WMA-December-2023.pdf>. Franklin and Hampshire County resources are funded by HLC; Hampden and Berkshire are funded by the Western MA Network to End Homelessness (\$10,000 per county to start). Due to limited resources, winter hotel shelter is a referral-only system, i.e., providers should make the initial contact on behalf of a person in need.
- For a **list of emergency shelters** in the region, please go here: <https://www.westernmasshousingfirst.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/Western-MA-individual-emergency-shelters-12.18.23.pdf>
- **The Annual Point in Time Count is scheduled for Jan. 31** for both the Hampden and Three County CoC. Please get connected to your CoC to support this important event. This count forms the basis for HUD's report to Congress and ultimately funding allocations to our region.
- Last year's Point in Time Count analysis was just released. See [HUD's press release here](#). The count showed a 12% increase in homelessness from 2022 with a total estimated count of over 650,000 people. It also showed a marked increase in unsheltered individuals.

### Shelter and Housing Updates:

- **Pittsfield:** ServiceNet has a move-in date for its new shelter ("The Pearl" on Pearl Street): January 8! This is a long-awaited development, albeit with some bittersweet emotions as capacity is only 40 and the shelter of the last 3.5 years at St. Joe's High School has much larger capacity (last night with 60 individuals). ServiceNet is continuing to look for warming center sites but not having an easy time finding a site that the building inspector will allow. The search continues. But meanwhile: CONGRATS on the new shelter!
- **Greenfield:** CSO had a very productive IN PERSON meeting earlier in the day with Franklin County partners to plan for winter weather response. Great

collaboration. Working with the Franklin County Sheriff's Dept. to create a warming center on the coldest nights. The City of Greenfield is funding additional emergency beds.

- **Northampton:** CSO is also planning a partner meeting soon to plan for a weather response.
- **Amherst** (via Pamela from previous meeting): Craig's Doors is using the Econolodge as needed for overflow beds; also taking over the 15 unit low threshold housing program previously run by Amherst Community Connections.
- **Springfield:** CSO is reviewing its housing outcomes and aiming to set new and higher goals for 2024!
- **North Adams** (via Pamela from Kathy Keeser): the City of North Adams has contributed \$30,000 to support emergency hotel placements through the winter.
- **CSO Low Threshold Housing Program:** Jane Banks reported the hiring of a new director, Pedro Rodriguez and a new property coordinator for Franklin/Hampshire, Holly Florek. Hampden is already staffed by Anna Mitkevicius. Currently CSO is funded for 125 LTH units and roughly 83 units are occupied. Looking to both fill all units and expand the program. As the program gets up and running again, Jane urged providers to ensure they provide support for their client through the screening/application process. Jane will provide Pamela summary phone numbers, application, other guidance when it is ready for distribution.

### **Veterans Update:**

Veterans Health Care for the Homeless produced [this brochure](#) on its outreach and support services. For additional data on the population being served in this region, please see this brief [powerpoint presentation](#) (initially offered at the Network's Veterans Services Committee meeting, fyi).

### **Housing Bond Bill (Affordable Homes Act):**

Pamela reported out on the Western MA Housing Coalition's hosting of a legislative briefing to share its recommendations around the housing bond bill (also called the Affordable Homes Act). See the [full report here](#) and the [summary recommendations here](#). This bill offers an extraordinary investment in more affordable housing and in funding to support public housing. It also offers substantial policy recommendations. With thanks to the Western MA Housing Coalition, our region has coalesced around specific recommendations to improve the bill to make it more responsive to western MA needs. For example, the transfer fee for affordable housing as currently written requires a minimum of \$1 million home sale for it to be applied, thereby canceling out western MA's ability to use it (the Coalition proposes adopting Sen. Comerford's bill provision which allows for using the threshold of the county median home sale price when the median is below \$750,000). The eviction record sealing provision as written in the bill requires tenants to petition the judge to seal the record in all cases, creating a serious barrier for tenants. The WMHC urges amendments to this as well.

Senator Comerford and Representative Gonzalez are circulating a western MA delegation sign-on letter urging the Housing Committee to adopt the recommendations of the WMHC. Stay tuned for legislative hearing dates - likely mid-January. Let's show up for this bill!!

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**WMNEH Legislator Meetings** to discuss FY25 budget priorities and legislative priorities: Pamela announced that the Network is planning its meetings with the western MA legislative delegation on a county basis (Hampden, 2/2, 9:30 am; Hampshire, 2/2, 12 noon; Berkshire, 2/9, 9:30 am; Franklin, 2/12, 10 am). We look forward to this opportunity for Network partners and their legislators to discuss the most pressing needs for FY25 and for the end of the Legislative Session.

**Next meeting date: Thursday, January 23, 1 pm**