

## Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 2/13/24

*In attendance: Lizmarie Baez, Tara Bates, Baystate Medical Center, Melissa Blissett, Square One, Maria Chambers, BHN, Jen Dieringer, Community Legal Aid, Anthia Elliott, Ware DV BHN, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Brenda Garcia, BHN, Lyn Guertin, Ware Family Center, Erin Hartwiger, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Dora Lambertus, BHN, Becky Lockwood, Salasin Project, Stacy Parsons, North Berkshire School Partnership/ DESE Regional Liaison, Mariz Perez, New North Citizens Council, Brett Rogers, Head Start, Aisha Rosario, Alianza, Jolanta Rumierz, DCF, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Carlton Smith, Way Finders, Ruth Tirado, Elizabeth Freeman Center, Sahira Torres-Vazquez, Springfield Schools, Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless,*

### **Shelter Updates:**

Multiple shelter providers discussed the fact that they are seeing families with longer stays, even when housing options may be available - anxiety about being able to sustain the housing due to lack of income, lack of support services, a lot of fear and uncertainty. This is happening alongside intense state pressure to move families into housing - navigating that tension.

Salasini Project reported the dire consequences of no available affordable housing. Seeing individuals who are victims of domestic violence and finally ready to leave their abuser but have nowhere to go, so are forced to stay. Also noted the consequences of mixed immigration status or no legal status at all and the barrier that creates to escaping an abusive situation.

It was noted that there are no DV shelters in Franklin or Hampshire Counties.

**Statewide EA report** - Thanks to Kelly Turley, MA Coalition for the Homeless, for this update:

- The state is still maintaining its 7,500 cap on EA shelter slots
- Approximately 700 families are on the wait list, eligible to receive EA and still waiting for placement
- There are roughly 400 overflow or safety net sites, leaving a gap of several hundred families with nowhere to go
- Families are on the wait list for anywhere from a week to a month; families are not told where they are on the wait list or what priority status they've been given; advocates are working on increasing information flow to families
- Governor Healey filed a supplemental budget request for FY24 - requesting \$215 million more just for this fiscal year - proposing to draw from an escrow fund to pay for it (in FY24 and FY25).
- HLC is searching for more overflow sites; communities are resisting - big challenges to find sites
- focusing expansion in Greater Boston area since most families entering system are based there but working with the United Way to expand sites statewide - understanding western MA families need some place to go
- Legislature is now looking at the Governor's FY25 budget request seeking almost \$1 billion to fund EA (along with housing preservation and production)
- Current legislative proposals are floating around further limiting access to shelters based on how long in MA or a citizen (troubling!)

- Legislators need to hear from US to counteract the fearmongering. **Join the Mass Coalition for the Homeless Lobby Day on March 7.** [See flyer here.](#)

#### **Network Budget and Policy Updates:**

- The Network just completed hosting a series of 4 county-based legislative meetings with dozens of Network partners to advocate for the [Network's FY25 budget priorities](#). Good conversations in each county. We will continue to advocate in the coming weeks. Please stay tuned on the Network blog for action opportunities. The House budget will come out in April.
- The Joint Housing Committee held a legislative hearing on the Affordable Homes Act on Jan. 18. The Network and others from Western MA testified. Please read all about it on [the blog post here](#).
- Be sure you're subscribed to the blog to stay connected! [Go here](#) to subscribe.

#### **Announcements:**

All homeless children birth to age 5 qualify for a free 8-2 slot in a classroom, as long as a space is available. Please reach out to HCS Head Start at [www.hcsheadstart.org](http://www.hcsheadstart.org) or call 413-417-7779

**Next meeting date: Tuesday, March 12, 12 noon**