

## **Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 4/8/25**

*In attendance: Iomay Caban, Salasin Project, Sarah Cloutier, Way Finders, Joscelyn de Tejada, New North Citizens Council, Will Dávila, CHD, Mayra de Jesus, Shriner's Hospital, Luray Fladd, YWCA, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Brenda Garcia, BHN Project FIT, Stefany Garcia, Holyoke Public Schools, Ivelisse Gonzalez, New North Citizens Council, Victoria Martin, Franklin County Regional Housing, Lizzy Ortiz, Community Care Cooperative, Dorothy Prieto, Xiomarra Sanabria, Sahira Torres-Vazquez, Springfield Public Schools, Janette Vigo, Way Finders, Melissa White, VOC*

### **Shelter updates:**

#### **Discussion summary:**

Overall across all providers, they are seeing a marked increase in open units that are not being filled. This is clearly a consequence of the policy decision to reduce the total # of families in the EA system from 7,000 to 4,000 (or is the new goal 5,800 families? some lack of clarity about that). This raises questions about where families are going (presumed no diminishment in demand, just access) and what will happen to vacant units and provider contracts.

The stabilization case load has grown in turn, such that it is now larger in some instances than the shelter case load. Perhaps there will be a shift in resources from shelter units to stabilization management (this would make sense!). And overall, there is grave concern about what happens after the HomeBASE subsidy is spent down - how will families afford their homes?

More detailed reports include:

- **CHD:** hotels closing - Quality Inn, Northampton - closing on 4/30 - down to 2 or 3 families; West Springfield - moved deadline up from end of June to end of May hotel closing - concerned about the timeline in relation to the demand (a couple dozen families still need to be housed), but staff is working incredibly hard and they will ensure all families stay safe
- **Way Finders:** no hotel management; preparing for the implementation of new rules, e.g., 6 month length of stay; working closely with refugee agencies to serve migrant families. Concerned about temporary protected status for Venezuelan and Haitian families.
- **Valley Opportunity Counsel** - down to 28 families in hotels; initially 99; initially close date was December, but likely to be sooner
- **ServiceNet:** census is low; many openings

Friday, April 11 begins new EA regulations:

- maximum length of stay to 6 months
- eliminating presumptive eligibility

- requiring proof of lawful immigration status
- CORIs
- reduction of hardship waiver from 180 days to 30 days
- good news: longer lease bridge - 30 days to lease up instead of 2 weeks

The impact of these new regulations remains to be seen. There is concern for families' safety in the face of these new barriers.

**RAFT applications** continue to be very high - roughly 600 each week in Hampden and Hampshire Counties alone.

#### **Network budget and policy updates:**

- On April 8, the Joint Ways and Means Committee held a public hearing for people to weigh in on fiscal priorities. Pamela planned to submit testimony in support of our [budget priorities](#).
- Pamela is reaching out to legislators on behalf of the Network to request co-sponsorship of our [2025-2026 Legislative Priorities](#). Be sure to stay connected via the [Network blog \(subscribe!\)](#) around upcoming legislative hearings and opportunities to advocate.
- Be sure to register for the upcoming [Network annual event](#), **Friday, May 30, 9:30-11:30 am**, Holyoke Community College.

**Next meeting date: Tuesday, May 13, 12 noon.**