

## **Western MA Task Force for Housing First Minutes - 4/29/24**

*In attendance: roughly 50 Network partners, including legislators, legislative aides, city and town leaders and staff and dozens of community providers across the 4 western counties*

### **Update from Rep. Lindsay Sabadosa:**

Special thanks to Rep. Sabadosa for sharing comments during the House budget week (and for her support of all of the Network budget amendment priorities and her leadership on the Network earmark amendment). She provided context to how the process unfolds, including the following information:

- the budget debate began on Monday, and always starts with revenue decisions
- then there are what's called "348 meetings" when Reps discuss the various issue areas prior to voting on consolidated amendments
- the housing related 348 meeting took place last night, and the consolidated amendment that includes housing will be voted on today
- advocacy has limited value after the 348 meetings take place (except in rare instances), i.e., the time has passed to push for our amendments (until we take them up in the Senate, depending on what is adopted or not)
- fyi on some anti-immigrant and anti-trans amendments that have been proposed and received push back - not adopted

### **Discussion of Key House Budget Amendments** (see complete list of Network budget amendment priorities [here](#))

- **HCECs** - Keith Fairey of Way Finders (with Gina Govoni of Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority and Eileen Peltier of Hearthway) shared what's at stake with the House budget's 44% cut to Housing Consumer Education Centers (HCECS), which serve as the access point to programs for renters (RAFT, MRVP), homeowners and landlords. This cut would cause significant reduction of staff and possibly some satellite office closures, seriously impacting service to people seeking assistance.
- **Home and Healthy for Good** - Caitlin Golden of Mass. Housing and Shelter Alliance shared the Ways and Means budget cut of \$500,000 to this important program and the system change work around supportive housing
- **RAFT and HomeBASE** - Kelly Turley of MA Coalition for the Homeless reported on the amendments that would increase funding, move the benefit level back up to \$10,000 and create access further upstream prior to receipt of a Notice to Quit. The HomeBASE amendment would create more flexibility in allocating the subsidy and also create access further upstream. For their FYY26 budget tracking chart, with House amendments in Column E, and known amendment outcomes in Column D: <https://tinyurl.com/mchfy26>

## **Shelter updates**

### **Family Shelter:**

- **State-level report** - from Kelly Turley of MA Coalition for the Homeless: seeing a decrease in # of families in the shelter system statewide, largely due to time limits (families timing out of shelter); since the passage of the last supplemental budget, there are fewer opportunities for extensions (if families don't leave at their end time, they lose the opportunity to reapply; HLC has reported that they are not seeing a significant number of reapplications); families are scrambling to find housing and an increasing number of sleeping in places not fit for human habitation. The current state law cap on # of families in shelter is 5,800 - the number is now well below that because of families timing out; state seeking to reduce the cap to 4,000. Advocacy will continue in the Senate to remove this cap.
- Opportunity to comment on new EA regulations: Go here to read more - please comment! <https://www.mass.gov/doc/42525-notice-of-public-comment-for-proposed-regulation-760-cmr-6700/download>
- **Center for Human Development** - Northampton hotel shelter has closed; West Springfield is in the process of closing - working extremely hard to rehouse families (no one has been exited without a place to live) - very concerned about the lack of extensions being granted; concerned about more families sleeping in cars; seeing more families with nowhere to go; some families are receiving letters from the Dept. of Homeland Security notifying them they have to leave the country

#### **Individual shelter:**

- all individual shelters in the region are full
- seeing an increase in encampments
- concern expressed about DMH and SAMHSA cuts - impact on services to individuals
- CSO opening a new Safe Havens program in Pittsfield (2-year transitional housing for high need individuals - 7 beds) - this program will complement two others in the region currently operating, one in Hampden County by Mental Health Association, the other in Franklin County (serving Franklin and Hampshire) by CSO

**RAFT Update:** Jodi Smith of Way Finders reported they are continuing to see on average 600 applications a week - demand is as high as ever. They have reduced processing time to 13 days - staff is working extremely hard!

#### **Federal Budget Update**

In short: everything is uncertain! To learn about the role the federal budget plays in the state budget (\$16 billion worth!), please see [Mass. Taxpayers Foundation presentation to CHAPA here](#). To learn more about the potential impact on HUD and its housing programs, please see [National Low Income Housing Coalition's action page here](#).

#### **Locally:**

- the Three County CoC has not yet received 2 of its grants - for planning and for DV expansion. Told they are coming soon but they were due in February, so there is some concern.

- Valley CDC noted the consequence of tariffs on increased construction costs - all housing developments are likely to be impacted
- HUD's Boston office staff is severely reduced, which almost certainly means longer processing times.

## **CoC Updates**

### **Hampden CoC:**

- a lot of people are being housed! CHD's rapid rehousing program; CSO's building start of new permanent supportive housing and expanded shelter; Holyoke Housing Authority providing new vouchers
- Working on a new coordinated entry system to increase access to resources
- May 16: all CoC meeting - will share more info on this and the Hampden PIT count. All are welcome.

### **Three County CoC:**

- coordinating trainings - [go here for the May listing](#)
- Annual gathering on June 9, GCC
- new housing news: Hearthway developing a total of 37 new permanent supportive housing units, 9 slated to open in Sept., 28 in Dec. - all referrals through coordinated entry
- Louison House is developing 6 new permanent supportive housing units for young adults opening in July

### **Other announcements:**

- MHSA is hosting a training with an immigration attorney for homeless service and housing providers on May 15 - Considering Immigration in 2025: The Effect of Recent Executive Orders, Law and Policy Changes - register here or email me at [cgolden@mhsa.net](mailto:cgolden@mhsa.net) for more info: <https://mhsa.zoom.us/meeting/register/tJ2VxJHGRni5uY7Lx1l5pw#/registration>
- MHSA is also cosponsoring a conference on May 13 on older adult homelessness: [Go here for more](#)

### **Next meeting dates:**

Network Annual Gathering - May 30 - [register here](#) for virtual attendance - in-person is now full  
 Next Task Force Meeting: Tuesday, June 17