

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 12/9/26

In attendance: Melissa Blissett, Square One, Sarah Cloutier, Way Finders, Mayra de Jesus, Shriners, Erin Forbush, ServiceNet, Stefany Garcia, Holyoke Public Schools, Joscelyn Gonzalez, New North Citizens Council, Melissa Marlowe, FOR families, Daimarie Marques, CHD, Dorothy Prieto, Head Start, John Rodriguez, Alianza, Xiomara Sanabria, Valley Opportunity, Council, Pamela Schwartz, WMNEH, Jodi Smith, Amanda Watson, Rachel Trant, DCF

Family shelter updates:

- All shelters are facing a second round of reduction in units, effective January 1.
- Providers are seeing more families timing out based on the 6 month limit.
- Providers are seeing more families who are families but are not eligible for EA. ServiceNet is collecting data on these families and has documented a total of roughly 40 families who fit this description. Pamela stressed the value of this data collection for our advocacy.
- DCF noted they are seeing an increase in families having to leave shelter only to have to try to re-enter again - getting more referrals from families in cars or on the streets; DCF is trying to assist families before they have to exit shelter.

Pamela summarized the advocacy that is taking place to improve the EA system, specifically restoring presumptive eligibility and moving the time limit for shelter stays from 6 months back to 9 months. There is an EA improvement bill in the Legislature that captures these reforms and more - a legislative hearing just took place on the House bill (H.216) and the Senate version was already reported favorably out of committee. More legislators are speaking out in favor of this bill, including from our region (with a special nod to Sen. Adam Gomez for his lead sponsorship of the bill). We will keep pressing on this.

To see the Network's latest legislative testimony on this issue and other bills, [go here](#).

In addition, the FY26 supplemental budget will be another opportunity to advocate for EA changes. This will be coming up in the next month or two. We will stay tuned from our statewide partners on advocacy opportunities.

Pamela is representing the Network on the newly formed Interagency Housing and Homelessness External Advisory Council. At its first meeting, the issue of family homelessness was debated and concerns about the overly restrictive EA eligibility criteria and time limits were discussed.

HUD/CoC Litigation

Pamela shared the latest information regarding HUD's release of a new funding competition for CoCs that dramatically impacts the funding for permanent supportive housing, capping the allowable resources on PSH at 30% (our CoCs spend over 80% of HUD dollars on supportive housing). Litigation has been filed challenging HUD's actions and an hour before the court

hearing on Monday, HUD rescinded the funding competition. The next hearing is on Dec. 19. Read more about this [latest development here](#) and see the [latest action alert here](#). The western region provides HUD funded housing for over 400 individuals. The stakes here and across the country are extremely high.

RAFT Update:

Way Finders: the volume continues to be extremely high - 834 applications came in last week; 100-150 people in the lobbies each day.

Franklin County: also seeing high volume

Updated individual winter shelter directory: it is [now available here](#).

Announcements:

Dorothy Prieto (She/Her) Enrollment Coordinator

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Next meeting date: Tuesday, Jan. 13, 11 am