

Family Services Committee Meeting Minutes - 6/9/26

In attendance: Lori Chaves, HCS Head Start, Sarah Cloutier, Way Finders, Selly Coulou, Catholic Charities, Mayra deJesus, Shriners, Erin Forbush, Stefany Garcia, Holyoke Schools, Darcy Gauthier, BHN, Joscelyn Gonzalez, North Citizens Council, Christy O'Brien, CHD, ServiceNet, Darlene Malone, HCS Head Start, Lizzy Ortiz, Town of Ludlow, Aida Rivera, Holyoke Public Schools, Xiomara Sanabria, Valley Opportunity Council, Jodi Smith, Way Finders, Sahira Torres-Vazquez, Springfield Public Schools, Rachel Trant, DCF, Janette Vigo, Way Finders, Carla Zhingre, Community Action

Shelter updates

- HLC extended all family shelter contracts to end of July. All is status quo until further notice.
- Anecdotal sharing about families who are struggling to access Emergency Assistance; some families give up trying because the barriers feel insurmountable; some families are staying doubled up or in cars as they wait for their applications to be processed.

RAFT update

Jodi Smith of Way Finders reported 953 applications came in last week; noting an increase in homeowners (172 homeowner applications last week, typical number is under 100). Assuming many are tied to utility payments. Currently 3,300 applications are in process; another 500 are waiting for the landlord to match the application. Trying to expedite shut-off cases as quickly as possible but it's virtually impossible to keep up with the level of demand.

Network Updates

Pamela reported on the following:

- **The Network's Annual Gathering on 5/29 was a great success** - 125 people in person, 45 on zoom; many state legislators and mayors and state officials; compelling speeches, good media coverage - you can [check it all out here](#)
- **The FY27 state budget** is in the Conference Committee where the differences between the House and Senate budget are resolved. This is a time to push for the highest possible funding for our key programs. [Go here to take quick action.](#)
- **Stop HUD's undoing of the Equal Access Rule - comments are due by June 29.** HUD's proposal would require shelter placements based on biological sex instead of gender identity and permit requirements of "proof" of gender. State and nationwide organizing is underway to generate as many comments as possible (comments slow down the process of enactment). [Go here to learn how to comment by June 29.](#) **Please add your voice!**

Next meeting date: Tuesday, July 14 (we will not meet in August)

