Western MA Task Force for Housing First Minutes - 9/29/26
In attendance: roughly 50 partners, including housing and homelessness providers, legislators, legislative aides, and city and town staff

Shelter and encampment updates

- all shelters in the region report being at capacity
- encampments: there was extensive discussion regarding the large encampments in Northampton and Greenfield and the urgent public health emergency posed by each. Northampton has an encampment of roughly 65 tents, Greenfield roughly 40, both on the flood plain, both seeing untenable increases in criminal or hazardous activity, threatening all individuals living there. Both cities are reaching out to HLC for emergency intervention, i.e., assistance to their local provider, CSO, so they can expand their shelter capacity (year round, as opposed to winter only, is critical).
- The winter shelter NOFA is out - due on 10/16 - see this blog post for more info. The Network is convening a coordinating meeting on 10/6.

Family homelessness update
Thanks to Kelly Turley of the MA Coalition for the Homeless for this update:

- many family shelter units are coming off line due to the reprocurement that is shrinking the system overall.
- While there is a legislative cap of 4,000 families in the system, the extremely narrow eligibility criteria have resulted in just over 1,500 families in the system. It has also resulted in many families who are in need of shelter not being able to access it.
- Families are also timing out due to time limits (currently 6 months)
- A supplemental budget is still making its way through the Legislature that would shift the time limit from 6 months to 9 months (plus eligibility for extensions). Continuing to push on that.

RAFT update
Hampden/Hampshire Counties (Way Finders): last week there were 851applications, 20% of which were from homeowners. Averaging 850-900 applications each week over the last many months. This region has the highest number of applications in the state.

The Housing Consumer Education Center (HCEC) has reduced lobby hours but is still seeing the same volume, roughly 180 people walking in each day.

Berkshire and Franklin Counties are also seeing proportionally high numbers.

HUD/CoC Update
Catch up on the status of the litigation against HUD here. After the Appeals Court allowed HUD to proceed with its Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO), HUD issued a very fast deadline of Sept. 30 for CoC applications. Our CoCs have filed their applications. The litigation by National

Alliance to End Homelessness against HUD continues. Meanwhile, our region's supportive housing units will stay intact under their applications.

But for other CoC's in MA and nationwide, the threat of losing supportive housing units is very present. Already in MA, 200 permanent supporive housing units are estimated to have been lost (landlords are hesitant to lease up given the funding uncertainty); as many as 1,000 units in MA may be at risk.

Housing News

- Valley CDC: housing development behind Northampton City Hall received state funding to move forward, building 30 studio rental units, 20 set aside for people exiting homelessness - construction slated to start next March with housing ready a year after that. Will keep community posted about when the lottery opens.
- Valley CDC: opened 30 units in Amherst - 15 duplexes for first time home buyers. People have started to move in.
- Winslow in Greenfield: starting renovations in October, expect them to be done in June - will renovate current units and add additional units

MA ID Bill Advocacy:
Kelly Turley of MA Coalition for the Homeless shared the advocacy to pass the Access to ID bill that still has a chance of passing this session (before 12/31/26). See the factsheet here. Please sign on here to the action to communicate with our legislators.

Upcoming events

- CHAPA's Regional Listening Sessions - 10/21 and 10/22 for western MA. Read more here.
- Mass Housing and Shelter Alliance Surviving the Storm series (1st installment on supportive housing). Read more here.

Next meeting date: Thursday, October 29, 9 am