**Maine Homeless Policy Committee**

Meeting minutes 5/8/15

In attendance: Ginny Dill, Vickey Rand, Donna Kelley, Steve Ellis, John Joanette, Cullen Ryan

**I. Items of current focus.**

**Federal and State**. The group reviewed federal and then state policy issues.

Federal: The group discussed H.R. 576 & S. 256: To amend the definition of “homeless person” under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act to include certain homeless children and youth, and for other purposes. This bill would expand the definition of homelessness to include couch surfing for homeless youth. Though this may make sense there are no new funds that accompany this bill. This pits groups of people against each other who are trying to receive the same resources, which are already inadequately funded. Youth often aren’t counted because they are less likely to access homeless shelters. Additionally, in Maine with the new PATH eligibility as of 7/1/14, people have to be literally homeless to qualify. With this it is even harder to serve this group. The dilemma is there are limited staff to outreach this group because there isn’t a funding source that covers it.

The group also discussed H.R. 574: To prohibit contributions by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to the Housing Trust Fund and the Capital Market Fund while such enterprises are in conservatorship or receivership, and for other purposes.

Cullen will be in DC for the New England Housing Network representing homelessness. This will provide an opportunity to meet with Senate T-HUD staffers, House staffers, the Senate Banking Committee, the Office of Management and Budget, HUD, Rural Development, and other staffers.

State:

* It does not look like the part of the Governor’s budget that addressed taxing nonprofits has support.
* There was discussion regarding safety net bills. It appears as though the GA bill regarding fraud does have support. The bill requiring the State to administer GA also has substantial support.
* The bill establishing rental assistance for low income populations, funded with $3M from the HOME fund, was voted ought to pass out of committee.
* There public hearings on May 12th for welfare reform bills from both sides.
* The City of Portland is currently a co-plaintiff in a lawsuit regarding general assistance reimbursement due to the Governor’s directive for municipalities to stop administering GA to asylum seekers. If the City does not win the lawsuit, and the Governor’s budget passes, asylum seekers with expired I-94s will not be able to receive GA. Since shelters are funded through GA reimbursement this would also prohibit them from staying at the shelters. The City is unsure of the exact number of asylum seekers with expired I-94s, but it could be up to 500 households. This group agreed that the safety net should extend to all people including this group who seek shelter. There was discussion regarding the need for federal level advocacy regarding this issue.
* The City of Portland recently announced it will be closing its only remaining 75 bed overflow shelter (it will also stop paying for overflow hotels for families). ESAC developed a strategic plan to address this. ESAC members, and other members of the community, will be attending the May 12th City Council meeting to provide testimony against the closure of the overflow. This committee agreed to testify against closing the overflow shelter.

II. Proactive Strategies. The group discussed circulating Op-Eds for topics regularly. Previously, the group discussed strategizing which to cover when, and how to create a series of message that blend with and build on other recent ones. Incorporate an Investment Focused theme into each of the following topics:

1. Substance Abuse – What happens when you don’t treat it. **This topic is on hold, as some of the other topics are relevant and time-sensitive pertaining to the Governor’s budget.**

2. Prioritize one vulnerable group at the expense of another – that is not the only choice. **Who has interest in this topic? It is still timely and relevant to the Governor’s budget.**

3. Safety Net – What are the basic needs of a person/family? This budget cuts (all, some, most) of these. **Steve Ellis has written a well done Op-Ed on this topic. The Bangor Daily News has agreed to publish it, though the date of publication is unknown.**

4. It is a good investment to invest in people so they can do well. (“They” have decided we need to spend more on fraud, judges, incarceration; this gives the idea that people are criminals waiting to be caught.) **Shalom House expressed interest in an Op-Ed on this topic. More information on this is upcoming.**

5. Mental illness – what it means to be psychotic, and how we have chosen to serve people who experience it. **Cullen wrote an Op-ed on this topic that was published today in the Portland Press Herald.**

**III. What we are for, and why. (Why certain policies can work).**

**IV. Meeting Dates**. The group meets the Friday prior to the Statewide Homeless Council, which is typically the first Friday of the month, but sometimes is the second Friday, at 3pm. **The next meeting is scheduled for Friday, June 5th, at 3pm.**