**Statewide Homeless Council**

March 8, 2016

Augusta, ME

**Council Members Present:** William Higgins, Wes Phinney, Cullen Ryan, Donna Kelley, Don Harden Josh D’Alessio, Dave McCluskey (phone), Jon Bradley (phone), Elizabeth Szatkowski, Rowena Griffin (phone), and John Gallagher.

**Council Members Not Present:** Sheldon Wheeler

**Guests:** Ginny Dill ; Paula Paladino, Cindy Namer, Craig Phillips (phone), Al Monier (phone), Yvonne Mickles (phone), and Susie Whittington (VA).

**Minutes:** Paula Paladino, M.A.

**Introductions and Announcements:**

**Announcements:** Friday, March 18 is Homeless Voices for Justice (HVJ) Date at the State House. HVJ will be touring the Maine State Museum, and meeting with their Senators and Representatives at lunch. They will conclude with a tour of the state House and a meeting with the Governor. Preble Street will be providing transportation and they will be leaving at 8:30 am from Preble St. FMI, contact HVJ at 775-0026 x. 1220.

**Review of Agenda:** Sheldon is unable to attend the meeting. John Gallagher will attend the meeting from 12:15 to 12:45. No other changes were noted to the agenda.

**Review Minutes:** Cullen made a motion and Josh seconded it to accept last month’s minutes. Motion passed. **State Plan for Workplace innovation and Opportunity (WIOA) Act:** the SHC comments developed to submit as part of the public comment period were submitted by the due date and Aaron and Paula were thanked for working on the comments.

**State and Federal issues/Public Policies Issues:**

Cullen provided this update which was reviewed by the policy committee when it met last week. The update is attached to these minutes. There was no other input on state /federal issues and public policy updates.

**CoC Updates:** A suggestion was made to change the MCoC and PCoC Update section of the Agenda to the Joint CoC Board and leave room for input from both CoC’s because in practice the Joint Board should report out on the CoC updates. Another suggestion was to rename this agenda item to “CoC updates.”

**Portland COC updates**: They meet this week, there are no updates.

**Maine CoC updates:** The Resource Committee is having a training from 9-10:30 on March 11 at MaineHousing. The focus of the training is DHHS resources. There will be a panel of five speakers discussing different initiatives and programs sponsored by the Department of Health and Human Services designed to assist children, youth and families.

**CoC Leadership:** Ginny provided an update on the new officers voted upon at the last meeting. The next meeting of this group will be on March 10 at the Refugee Conference room at 192 Lancaster St. at 1:00 pm in Portland. Also, there is a pilot that will be in Bangor this spring on Coordinated Entry.

**SHC Membership:** There is no update on memberships. The folks nominated by the Senate and House are good to go with their membership, however the nominations from the regional councils are up to the Governor’s office on whether they will be approved. In the fall, the Governor’s office started showing some interest in SHC memberships, so perhaps now is the time to strike on this.

**GOAL Three of the Plan: Ensure Physical Health, Mental and Chemical Health:**

There is no DHHS update today as Sheldon was unable to attend the meeting.

**Section 17 Updates:** It was brought up that consumers of Section 17 MaineCare services received a letter in the mail about new changes including eligibility requirements, which will be in effect on April 8, 2016. This may have an impact for PATH Providers and other Section 17 providers as well. Those present would like to know the implications of this; however Sheldon is unavailable to discuss this today. It was decided to table this discussion for now as one member needed to leave the meeting and would return later.

**Maine Plan to End and Prevent Homelessness:**

**Long Term Stayers and Targeting resources and update on ESAC LTS and Bangor efforts:**

There has been a group in Portland that has been meeting since May on a weekly basis to try to house LTS at OSS and they have expanded to Milestone and those sleeping outside. The original list went from 70 to 10 and there are 4 people who they now have momentum for in terms of getting them housed. The remaining people on the list are challenging to house for various reasons.

The second list in January was 72 and it went down to 54 as of last Thursday, so there were a total of 16 people housed in the first two months in 2016. 39 people were from OSS and the rest a combination from Milestone and those sleeping outside. Some of the numbers have increased and this may be due to Preble Street increasing public awareness of those staying outside that are unsheltered. Some members have heard that some of these folks are being told they need to go into a shelter to be documented as homeless and people sleeping outside don’t want to. There are some thoughts that the numbers are not moving because folks are concentrating on doing the VI- SPDATs on the new people in shelters rather than focusing on the LTS. One member noted that they are trying to do outreach to people who thought they were banned from shelter so that may be part of why the numbers increased. Another member stated they are hearing that some folks think they need to be counted in shelter to be eligible for SPC and BRAP. However, it was clarified that they don’t need to go to the shelter to get housing they can go from unsheltered to housing and bypass shelter.

HUD’s new definition in the way of counting is in totality and when we start data sharing, we will be able to see all the occasions (episodes) of homelessness. One member noted that the HUD definition of CH (Chronically Homeless) has significant flaws. Because it is 4 occasions (formerly known as episodes), people are trying to fix/put people into boxes. Cullen is meeting with a group on Friday in Boston, the New England Housing Network and they have some influence with HUD. They may be discussing the issues homeless service providers have with the final CH definition. Cullen is going to Washington in May for meetings and the SHC has time to prepare comments for the CH definition and perhaps this can be discussed in a future meeting. One thought was to eliminate the number of occasions and focus on the entire cumulative length of homelessness.

One member noted that the LTS in HMIS are the ones physically in shelter and suggested that we need to change the algorithm and the definition, need to work people who are working with the net or active people. The LTS definition is now outdated: the 180 days in 1 year definition is skewing the numbers. The people who are unsheltered may be enrolled in PATH. Josh, Rob and Brian have been working on the LTS report and they have found people are not showing up on the reports, i.e. people who are outside the past year, i.e. if someone had two episodes 18 months ago, they won’t show up on the LTS report because they don’t meet the LTS definition even if they are CH.

At the time we started running the LTS reports, everyone was included. The way the report was run, if a person’s total homelessness occurred over a period of time spanning several years, it may not show up in the current LTS report. If the current LTS report was for more than one year, i.e. 2-3 years there would be more people who show up as a LTS. One member noted that they have someone with 1000+ days of homeless who does not qualify as a LTS right now. So, this person is not prioritized as homeless but since subsides are available, they think they will be able to work with this person. Some people go from homeless to housed but can easily re-enter homelessness.

We should look at cumulative homelessness and the people with the longer histories of homeless have the most significant needs. One person suggested that the person staying night after night in a shelter is a bigger crisis than someone who just came in shelter and had a long history of homelessness in the past. It is important that we make a conscientious decision about what to do, it’s not in a vacuum and we need to talk it out. If we take our eyes off those currently on the LTS report and focus on those others, the shelters will continue to be crowded and unable to have beds available for others.

We need to look systemically at the individual issues of shelters. In some shelters they have a big crisis right now with people who are LTS and to empower shelters to target their resources in the way that makes best sense. The prioritization and vulnerability and the LTS initiative is to get people into housing as quickly as possible. We have tried to help people see it is bigger than 180 days in shelters. One challenge is that HMIS does not capture outside homeless stays.

It’s important to empower shelters to work on the issues they are seeing and not all shelters are alike. Elizabeth: to some degree with the LTS, the shelters have been able to do this in their own way, in different parts of state the shelters are run differently, and they have different criteria. Right now we are still in a state where we don’t have a unified shelter system, so if we say do what you want to do based on your needs we won’t have consistent standards. We are approaching a place where we have the most work to be done in Portland, but Bangor is close to ending LTS and Region II is as well and what are the next steps for Region II and Region III? Perhaps we need to look at smaller shelters who are turning away some of the LTS because of the issues i.e. MH/SA and behavioral issues that present issues for shelters for example with young children.

As a result of this lengthy discussion, there are several important things on the table:

1. What to do to better count people outside? It is 2% of the homeless population that is outside. It is a finite number in Portland, Bangor and everyone else. At the end of this month, when we have our quarterly brush of data, we will see number of people outside, and we have categorized shelters by 4 subpopulations, low barrier, family, youth, DV, etc. and they are using a subset of HMIS to enter data for these populations.
2. Folks that we know to be long term homeless not showing up in a 1 year window (a report design issue).
3. Different shelters having different experiences with LTS i.e. rural vs urban.
4. Prioritization by vulnerability: this is part of the CoC Board and the written standards for the Coordinated Entry System (CES).

The question was asked what to tackle first and it was suggested to address the issues in order.

**1:** People outside: the question was asked do folks generally agree that it is 1-2% of the homeless population? Two percent would be high. When we count them, they need to meet the homeless definition. So as we cull through the PIT data and there are stacks of surveys done that can’t be used in the PIT Count because they don’t meet the HUD definition but the groups in Portland they want to count these individuals. So how do we count the people staying outside who meet the homeless definition? Some shelters say there are people who won’t come into shelter but are going to resource centers. These shelters are given access to enter this into HMIS in a separate place. So, right now there are less than 2%, for people who meet Homeless Definition and they are being entered into HMIS and when CES is fully implemented all will be counted.

**2-3-4:** People not showing up on reports: It is a reporting definition. This is people who we know have been to homeless who should be a LTS, but they don’t have the full time in the year period. There is a fine line with autonomy with STEP and HCV because at the boots level, there are tools that can be used to help them. The second issue is how we report it. We should work on LTS definition because it will need to be re-worked.

Why can’t we take the LTS definition and change it to the person who is homeless the longest? This would solve a lot of problems and it would allow provider to work with people who are staying the longest and have a 2nd column for purpose that would show cumulative stays. This is the design one member uses and gives them the cumulative column, which gives a measurable ability to show they are making progress. One member reports that for their agency, this is the first winter he recalls continually having room at his shelters. Other than that they were under capacity last March. So they are housing the people staying the longest period of time, doing a vulnerability index, and they utilizing their resources and are getting people housed.

After much discussion it was decided that the LTS definition could be amended today. Cullen made a motion, seconded by Jon, to amend LTS definition for the entire state of Maine except Portland. The Motion is **“The new definition of LTS will be people staying the longest in homelessness whether inside or out for everywhere in Maine except the City of Portland.”** In the discussion that ensured, it was decided to add vulnerability issues to the definition at a later point. Many concerns about vulnerability were addressed and people felt more at ease because the shelters can use MaineHousing resources (i.e. HCV and STEP vouchers) for those who are vulnerable in shelters as determined by the VI-SPDAT. The goal is to approach ending homelessness in two ways: utilizing HCV and STEP vouchers for the most vulnerable but use the LTS resources for those who are homeless the longest.

After the discussion, there was a vote on the motion above. **MOTION Passed. This definition will be in effect immediately.** Cullen offered to disseminate this information to the regional homeless councils. It was noted also that the current reports will need to change and HMIS and it will take about a month to revise the reports.

**GOAL 3: Ensure Physical Health, Mental Health and Chemical Health:**

There was a letter sent out to consumers, not providers which says on April 8th, there will be changes to Section 17. The definition change means some people may not be eligible for Section 17 which is currently used for PATH and some other programs. There are a number of providers that saw a draft of the re-write and submitted comments during the public comment period. There are huge implications for providers.

The good part is that the new rule has information about homelessness and criminal justice but does not say who else is eligible. Eligibility for Section 17 will be a primary diagnosis of schizophrenia or schizoaffective disorder. Questions that the group has includes unintended consequences for grant funding, implications this has for the PATH program and whether eligibility has tightened for clients who may be eligible for PATH. The Maine Association of Mental Health Services (MAMHS) has a meeting this Thursday and there has not been a lot of chatter on this, so it will be discussed then. People are being directed to MaineCare Provider Relations for any questions they have.

The discussion focused around the fact that there is no communication to providers, rather a letter was sent to consumers only. There are questions about when proposed rule will be final and what the process will be to transition clients who may no longer be eligible for services. Also, APS has not made any comments on the change. This change will impact BRAP as one eligibility requirement is that people enrolled in BRAP must be enrolled in Section 17 services. Over 50% of BRAP clients enrolled may be no longer eligible for BRAP because they won’t be eligible for Section 17 services.

The SHC is very concerned that the narrower definition of Section 17 will inhibit our ability to end homeless because it will remove support services through Section 17 and rental subsidies through BRAP and this will dramatically reduce or slow our process to end homelessness and it will contribute to potential unintended consequences for this population. The SHC is left with many questions about this change and how it impacts the people in Maine who are homelessness. We should ask that the date be delayed until we determine how to address the potential unintended consequences and work with providers to develop an implementation plan. Cullen offered to send a letter to Sheldon Wheeler with the concerns that members expressed today and to copy the Commissioner and Stefanie Nadeau of MaineCare Services.

**GOAL TWO of Plan: Adequate Supply of Housing and Rental Subsidies:**

**Housing Trust Fund:** John Gallagher gave an update on the Housing Trust Fund. Staff at MaineHousing has met internally and Denise Lord is starting to put together outside meetings to talk about use of the funds. John was in Washington, DC last week and the National Low Income Housing Coalition Executive Director felt that we will probably get the minimum set aside of $3 million dollars, so MaineHousing will be looking for input which may look like 3 months of outreach and outside meetings in April, May and June. This will include invitations to meetings for groups with interest in this funding. John anticipates the process will end with a public meeting in June to ensure everyone has an opportunity to participate. Denise is unavailable today John offered to have Denise come to the next SHC meeting to discuss this topic further which was well received. Denise will be added to next month’s agenda. John said it will be interesting to figure out how to make this finding work as there are certain regulations with how the money needs to be spent. It was noted that one of the biggest goals is to make the program sustainable so that they are set up for success. Also, when you implement programs with no Project Based Vouchers (PBV) it is a challenge.

John said we received good reception for the DHHS section 8 waiting list program from the Affordable Housing Work Group and they were complimentary of the work done. The report came out as 12 unanimous in support of the recommendations and hopefully this will have further reaching results when it comes to the Legislature. The Universal Application intention was not to redirect this to SPC and BRAP and that there should be an addendum for them. John was asked if there was anything new or different on housing beyond the proceedings? No, they had a discussion with the Governor about the bonds and he asked them to present why and how they would be used. The Governor is not in favor of spending GO bonds. It was noted that HVJ will have a meeting with the Governor and they can put some verbiage about on the bonds.

In house, John is moving forward with the 4% program and is cautiously optimistic we will have funds to run it. John noted that he anticipated we will get State Home funds and they will be larger in scope than originally budgeted for. They have met with the Budget office and clarified that our interpretation is that the overage should go to us…and Richard Rosen (of the budget office) said he would look into our interpretation and get back to MaineHousing. We are hopeful that the overage will come back to MaineHousing but they need to get through the first quarter to determine the exact amount. Finally, Deb Keller in Bath Housing Authority has started a program for elderly which is successful. MaineHousing would like to emulate it however; the issue with MaineHousing is if we fix a house, we have to bring all of it up to code. So, we are still working on developing the pilot.

**HUD COC Award notices:** There was a press release today that announced the Tier 1 HUD CoC grants for both CoC’s. It appears that all Tier 1 projects were awarded full funding; however the projects that straddled Tier 1 and 2 were not announced. In addition both CoC’s received the Planning Grant awards. HUD will announce Tier 2 awards later this spring. Paula will post the press release and the funding amounts today on the [www.mainehomelessplanning.org](http://www.mainehomelessplanning.org) website.

**Peer to Peer Meeting Follow Up:** Cindy presented an update onfeedback from the Accelerated ESHAP Peer to Peer Meeting on February 19th, which Josh facilitated. There was no indication from providers that the guideline for administering the VI-SPDAT to clients that have total or cumulative stays >14 days was causing any challenges. We did remind providers that this requirement is a “minimum” and that they should review their own process and subpopulations to determine the best time to administer the tool for housing prioritization. In regard to outcomes and benchmarks for funding, the VI-SPDAT for clients that have stays >14 days must be reflective within the funding quarter.

One member noted that with Region II it is a little more work on the front end to do the VI-SPDAT, but it is not a problem and once the initial catch up is done, it’s just a matter of integrating this in day to day practice. Josh stated that he was surprised by the tone of the Peer to Peer meeting as everyone had worked the kinks out in the first month and things had smoothed out. There was a lot of positive feedback from staff who participated in the meeting. Also, monthly Rob is doing a one page communique about the importance of data and reports. Rob is proactively sending out these to encourage people to enter data into HMIS regularly and to run reports to monitor their data for their performance measures. The meeting was positive and folks were able to troubleshoot items and those that couldn’t be resolved were followed up afterwards in meetings.

A suggestion was made to have the Portland shelters sit down and look at what is working and how to work better as a system especially for LTS. It is worth nothing that Portland needs to partner together and some agencies are doing more case management and or navigation. A suggestion was made to have a follow up meeting with the Portland shelters and to continue to look at how they can successfully coordinate the ESHAP assessments with the LTS initiative.

**Goal 4: Linkage to an Effective On-Going Support System:**

Adria Horn was invited to attend the meeting and present information on her organization. She noted that she is **NOT** with the VA; she is the Director of Maine Bureau of Veterans Services. She is relatively new, it’s been about a year, but she is exploring all the ways the state Bureau can best be represented across the state for issues that affect Veteran issues. A new Commission to Strengthen and Align services to Veterans who are homeless was developed and this group was formed out of the legislature. Cindy and Adria met and talked about Veteran homelessness. The Maine Bureau of Veteran Services has not been engaged in Veteran homelessness because they are not mandated to but she would like her agency to become more involved. She is coming to the table with compassion and desire to be a voice at the SHC for Veteran issues.

There was a bill introduced called LD 1611: “Goal to create a separate interagency council on homelessness for Veterans issues”. Adria asked not to create another council, but rather to make her a member of the SHC instead. Cindy suggested Aria come to this meeting and brainstorm about how they can be more involved. Adria said she is not an expert on anything homeless related. How can her bureau engage in this? There was a suggestion from one of the groups she attends that they add another staff who is just a person who addresses homeless issues. So, if it passes, she said someone from her office would attend the SHC regularly.

Nationwide, there is a state agency for Veterans services, so all states have one, but they are all structured differently. They can take powers of attorney and take claims for Veterans. They have an office at Togus. They operate the 4 state Veteran cemeteries. They have a repository of DD 214’s (discharge documents). They have 130,000-140,000 Veterans in Maine and have access to DD 214’s or they can assist in getting them. She belongs to the National Association of State Bureaus of Veterans Services which helps her get DD 214’s more quickly.

Adria is on the board of the VA. Members gave Adria a thumbnail sketch of the issues. Back in 2005, there was only one homeless staff at the VA, then the Grant Per Diem (GPD) Program was created, and a brief overview of the culture of the VA and what they provided: affordable housing and supportive housing (i.e. HUD VASH, GPD, and other housing) but other than the flexibility we have lacked support services from the VA which looks like case management. The way it manifests is that Veterans can make appointments and come to the VA which does not work. One of the ways to fix this is through the three SSVF Programs that has flexed in terms of adapting to fix the short term VA issues. The VA does not move fast by getting vouchers or housing and has not followed through on who need supports so other groups step in and care take of the case management .This could be cured by having a paradigm shift by having VA staff outreach to people and go out to their homes. They need to mobilize and arranged support Veterans in their housing.

It was noted that SSVF is supposed to target people for RRH and then the VA changed its mind and said it is for people who don’t need long term supportive services, it is temporary shorter term assistance. The VA has vouchers and case management services and their target is CH and supposed to be longer term. In Maine there are not enough HUD VASH workers and the geography is large. VISN has been told that Maine is the slowest state in rolling out HUD VASH vouchers and that is embarrassing. As part of this meeting and her role as an advocate, it is hoped that there will be clear expectations on how VASH will be worked going forward.

**Data sharing update:** Cindy has finally gotten all of the documents and they were sent to the VA last week. All the providers are listed on this document and how it will be implemented. There may be another issue to our goal of ending functional homelessness is to have a by-name listing but for some reason, it has been a nightmare to get VA Togus to get this done although it is happening across the country.

Adria concluded by stating that her Bureau has played a role with the lack of information; however, they are re-doing their website so that it is a one stop site for information for all things Veteran related. It has taken a lot longer than thought, almost 300 resources, including education, finance, etc. goal is that the Maine Bureau of Services is a conduit for resources and advocacy. Their website is: <http://www.maine.gov/dvem/bvs/>. She encouraged SHC members to reach out to her with questions or concerns and looks forward to being a part of this group going forward.

The meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm.

**Next Meeting: April 12, 2016 9:30-2:00 pm**

**Location: MaineHousing, 353 Water St. Augusta, ME**

**Policy/Advocacy Update – March 2016**

**Federal Legislation Update:**

* **The President released his FY 17 budget proposal on February 9th.** In addition, HUD announced a legislative proposal where it will seek $11 billion in mandatory spending over the next 10 years to serve a total of 550,000 families with additional vouchers, permanent supportive housing, and rapid rehousing assistance.

Proposed HUD budget items of note:

* + **$18.447 billion for Section 8 Tenant Based Rental Assistance renewals**, an increase from the $17.681 billion enacted FY 16 funding.
	+ **$7 million for VASH, a decrease compared to the FY 16 enacted level of $60 million.**
	+ **$88 million for new/restored TBRA (Veterans, FUP, DV, etc.) – *New***
	+ **$15 million for the Voucher Mobility Demonstration Program – *New –*** Designed to help families with housing vouchers move and stay in areas of opportunity.
	+ **$10.816 billion for Project-Based Rental Assistance,** an increase compared to the FY 16 enacted level of $10.62 billion.
	+ **$2.664 billion for Homeless Assistance Grants**, an increase compared to the FY 16 enacted level of $2.25 billion.
	+ **$950 million for HOME funding**, level funding compared to the FY16 enacted funding level. However, the proposed budget also make the traditionally $10 million stand-along Self-Help Homeownership Opportunity Program a set-aside within the HOME program.
	+ **$2.8 billion for CDBG**, a decrease from the FY 16 enacted level of $3 billion.
	+ **$355 million for Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA)**, level funding compared to the FY 16 enacted level.
* **H.R. 3700, the Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act (HOTMA) passed the House on 2/2 through a unanimous vote of all present**. It will move on to the Senate for consideration. CBPP explains that the bill would:
* Provide more flexibility to “project-base” vouchers to support affordable housing development and preservation and enable more homeless families or individuals with disabilities to live in appropriate housing.
	+ It would raise the percentage of a housing agency’s voucher assistance that the agency can project-base from 20 percent to 30 percent, if the agency uses the added 10 percent: (a) for developments in areas where vouchers are difficult to use; (b) to house homeless people or veterans; or (c) to provide supportive housing to people with disabilities and the elderly. In addition, H.R. 3700 would permit agencies to provide project-based vouchers in 25 percent of a development’s units or 25 units in a development, whichever is greater, thereby allowing higher concentrations in small developments.
* Help address homelessness by 1) allowing local housing agencies to make greater use of project-based vouchers to assist the homeless (as well as veterans, the elderly, and people with disabilities); 2) revising the rules for inspecting units that families with tenant-based vouchers wish to rent in order to get vulnerable families into homes more quickly, while protecting them from eviction if subsidy payments to an owner are suspended because a unit has developed housing-quality violations; and 3) strengthening voucher assistance for former foster children, a group that faces a high risk of homelessness.
* Streamlining housing quality inspections in the voucher program to encourage more private owners to participate and enable families to occupy their homes more quickly and avoid a precipitous loss of housing if their homes fall into disrepair.
	+ H.R. 3700 retains the inspection requirement for all units where vouchers are used but streamlines and improves the inspection process. It would allow agencies to make initial subsidy payments to owners even if the unit doesn’t pass the initial inspection, as long as the failure resulted from non-life-threatening conditions; defects would have to be corrected within 30 days of initial occupancy for payments to continue. It would also allow families to occupy units that have passed inspection under certain other federal programs (such as the HOME program, which funds housing development and rehabilitation), so long as the housing agency later inspects the unit under voucher program rules.
* Simplifying rules for setting tenant rent payments, while continuing to maintain key affordability protections.

Importantly, H.R. 3700 would make these improvements while leaving in place the core characteristics that have made federal rental assistance programs effective. It also would do so without raising costs; in fact, the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that H.R. 3700 would reduce program costs by $311 million over five years, with $195 million of that reduction stemming from the bill’s rental assistance provisions. (These figures do not reflect amendments that the House approved, but those will likely have only a modest net impact on costs)

* **S.993/H.R.1854, The Comprehensive Justice and Mental Health Act,** Introduced by Senators Franken (D-MN) - Cornyn (R-TX) and Representatives Collins (R-GA)-Scott (D-VA). The Comprehensive Justice and Mental Health Act (CJMHA) recently passed the Senate and the House Judiciary Committee with bipartisan support. It has beneficial provisions from the prospective of ending homelessness.  In Maine we have always seen a pattern where people with mental illness are swept into jails, as well as homeless shelters.  The people would be much better served and at far less cost in permanent supportive housing. The bill includes provisions around screening people who interact with the criminal justice system for mental health conditions and connecting them with services, at all points in the justice system from intake to transition.

**State Legislation Update:**

* Bills of note:
* **LD 873, Authorizes a General Fund $4M bond issue for housing for homeless veterans at Togus** – Assigned to the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee.
* **LD 1188, An Act To Implement a Rental Assistance Program for Low-income Households and Individuals.** The Affordable Housing Workgroup presented its recommendations, followed by a public hearing on Tuesday, 1/26/16.
* **LD 1607**, **An Act To Implement the Recommendations of the Maine Affordable Housing Working Group,** was reported out by the Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development for the purpose of turning the working group's recommendations into a printed bill.  **The bill will have both a public hearing and a work session on 3/3**.  The bill would direct MaineHousing and local housing authorities to develop a single universal application to apply for tenant-based Section 8 and establish a state-wide, centralized waiting list for tenant-based rental assistance as well as a method for applicants to submit and update applications for rental assistance by electronic means.  The bill would provide that MaineHousing and DHHS ensure that this application may be used to apply for BRAP and Shelter Plus Care.  The bill would also direct MaineHousing to explore options to increase access to affordable housing for Extremely Low Income (30% AMI) households.  Finally, MaineHousing would work with local PHAs to identify “unused vouchers” under HUD’s HCV Program and use these vouchers to establish a pilot rental assistance program.  MaineHousing would implement the program based on “best practices and evidence-based research to provide a comprehensive approach to prevent homelessness and promote housing stability, family well-being and self-sufficiency for families at risk of homelessness.”
* **LD 1473, Resolve to Increase Access to Opiate Addiction Treatment in Maine.** Work session held on 2/10.
* **LD 1496, An Act to Support Maine People in Recovery.** Work session held on 2/10.
* Senator Tom Saviello says he is sponsoring a bill to expand MaineCare to what he calls 70,000 low-income, hard-working Mainers.