**MAINE STATEWIDE HOMELESS COUNCIL**

**July 13, 2021**

**9:30-12:30**

**Minutes**

**Virtual Location** [**https://meetings.ringcentral.com/j/1494236342?pwd=MHE2NW9vMnV6WWhrNjEzZjlodzZ6dz09**](https://meetings.ringcentral.com/j/1494236342?pwd=MHE2NW9vMnV6WWhrNjEzZjlodzZ6dz09) **Or Telephone: 1(646)3573664**

**Members:** Cullen Ryan (CHOM, RII), Cheryl Harkins (HVJ, RI), Lauren Bustard (MaineHousing), Alice Preble, (DHHS/OCFS), Emily Flinkstrom (Fair Tide, RI), Tracey Hair, (HOME Inc. RIII), Josh D’Alessio (PCHC, RIII), Donna Kelley (Waldo CAP, RIII), David McCluskey (Community Care, RIII), Donna Yellen (Preble Street, RI), Jared Greely (MBVS), and Steph Primm (KCHC, Chair)

**Guests:** Betty LaBua (MaineHousing), Scott Tibbitts (MaineHousing), Rota Knott (Tedford), Jenny Stasio (TTD), Bill Higgins (Homeless Advocacy for All), Chris Bicknell (New Beginnings), Sara Wade (OBH/DHHS), Vickey Rand (CHOM), Erin Kelly (Preble Street), Norm Maze (Shalom House), Boyd Kronholm (BAHS), Noelle Coyne (Safe Voices), Richard Hooks Wayman (VOA), Kate Easter (MCEDV), Kelly Watson (MaineHousing), Ginny Dill ( OBH/DHHS), Mike Shaughnessy (MaineHousing), Rindy Fogler (City of Bangor), Aaron Geyer (COP), Tara Hembree (MaineHousing), Awa Conteh (City of Bangor), April Reed (MaineHousing), Mary Wade (MaineHousing), Patty Lovell (WMCA), Bill Crandell (WMCA), Erin Healy (Community Solutions), Wes Phiney (YCSPI), Meredith Pesce (Amistad), Christina Dingus (MaineHousing), Emily Meade (WMCA), Joe Locke (MaineHousing), Jill Grazia (Shalom House), Robbie Feinburg (NPR), Kristin Lash (PATH), Terrence Miller (Preble Street), Teague Morris (Senator King’s Office), Abigail Smallwood (City of Biddeford), Sarah Michniewicz (Portland Resident), Kiana Plumer (TOA), Anna Brewer (Preble Street), Blake Hatt (Northern Light), Denise Lord (MaineHousing), Cara Courchesne (MaineHousing), Steven McDermott (MaineHousing), Ken Capron (Hope Harbor), Susan Randall (Homeless Advocacy for All), Roberto Rodriguez, and Lisa McLaughlin (HSA)

**Minutes:** Betty LaBua (MaineHousing) and Scott Tibbitts (MaineHousing)

**Welcome:** Stephanie opened today’s meeting by welcoming everyone in attendance. Cullen motioned to approve June’s minutes. Cheryl seconded the motion. The Regional Representatives will be updated as needed. June’s minutes were approved.

**CSH Final Report:** Stephanie and Lauren led the discussion on CSH’s final report by inviting all in attendance to share positive inputs about the plan, what works, what makes most sense, what needs to be addressed more fully, what is missing and what are the concerns, resulting in these statements:

* The system redesign is heading in the correct direction with the concept of multiple interventions being absolutely necessary
* Long term it’s good but the reduction in numbers when looked at out of context can be counter- productive and when looked at with a short lens
* Addresses the service gaps in Down East/Aroostook County
* Hub redesign is fabulous
* The report made clear there are not enough resources
* There is a need for a more coordinated way to distribute resources
* We need to be very careful with the term “deinstitutionalization”
* Diverting first time homeless is important
* Can’t subtract emergency shelters until rapid rehousing, diversion, more affordable units are in place within the system
* Need adequate safe and affordable housing before implementing the reduction in shelter beds
* There was not a number given in terms of right-sizing
* Numbers were from 2019, before the pandemic therefore we need to be careful looking at numbers
* When developing built for zero, real time data will be used and there will not be a reliance on the PIT count
* What is the role of prevention? Is the report too optimistic on diverting state wide?
* Fearful of political reality, concerned policy makers will use outcome to enforce reduction of shelter beds and will ultimately hurt funding for shelters
* Process was flawed- leadership team did not meet enough and was not provided ongoing data
* The values of the shelters was lost, for example, they are a front door and an integral part of the health system
* The 2,392 diversion needed and the % breakdown on pages 13 and 14 were concerning
* There should be a written disclaimer with the report that it should be used in a long term context
* There was a lot of staff turn-over at CSH and inconstancies with planning
* Too much time was spent on hubs and not enough on unpacking diversion
* Process abridged and was not vetted with the leadership group
* Case in Point, today’s Press Herald headline called for reducing shelter beds
* MSN/SHC and maybe the MCOC needs to counter point the headline
* We cannot lower the number of beds right now
* Too focused on gentrification
* Each person needs an IEP to addresses their needs for the next week, month, 6 months and longer
* Affordable units and operating costs are expensive
* There isn’t mention of data research methodology in report
* This is a five year plan to shift emphasis from shelters to diversion and affordable units, don’t overact to headlines
* This report is a complicated hypothesis and a forecast, and can be easily manipulated by the press
* This is not just another report, a lot of sweat equity went into it, look at it as a guideline for beginning the process
* Despite the headlines, there was collective work and new partnerships
* CSH left us with a dashboard for live data and the opportunity to make decisions on real time data
* Policy makers pay attention to headlines and now people are reading shelters offer the worst outcomes, how will it affect legislation that is being voted on in six days?
* Goal of reaching functional zero will involve the education of press and policy makers on long term process needs
* Thanks to MSHA for welcoming CSH and now Community Solutions, we have a lot to be optimistic about.
* It’s a long road to get to reducing shelter beds-when and if we can, the when and if should be part of the conversation
* The race equity lens is missing.
* The summary addresses race equity but does not give specific recommendations.
* 85% of homeless services go through the shelters and are held to system standards, redesign addresses racial disparity through looking at measurement standards
* More resources are needed for asylum seekers. There is a growing population in Portland and it continues to effect exits to permanent housing.
* Shelter attendants are educated in best practices and it sometime takes herculean efforts to keep people stabilized for one year
* Very few people stay in shelter more than 180 days
* Research shows supportive services work best once housed. The housing first approach

is successful, house first then work on challenges. The report shows need for funding supportive housing

* IMHO, you folks are being overly optimistic. And you need to shoot higher with higher expectations. I see a lot of shortcomings in this report. Most notable is the use of "affordable" which for the homeless is still far too high an amount to be meaningful.
* I have a lot of respect for CSH’s expertise and their work — it is very challenging to create realistic forecasts — the general shift makes sense, but timelines and investment shifts are hard to predict absent quality real time data. The system redesign recommendations are excellent. No report will solve this problem for Maine (and I know that wasn’t the intent or the assignment) - only data, action, and iterative problem-solving will do that. We will build on the momentum CSH created.
* Invest ARA $ in purchasing hotels for permanent supportive housing, not more shelters. This was raised at the last meeting of this group
* There isn't any designated funding stream for staffing new shelters. That's also why there has been more shelter closing than openings in the past decade or so
* The Section titled Homelessness through a Race Equity Lens simply states in the first sentence that homelessness is on the rise for BIPOC populations, with no further information about how that is accounted for in the recommendations.
* I'd be interested to hear from folks in the veteran community about this report. Anything new, different here?
* I am staying hopeful the homeless definition used in this report is adopted by HUD-VASH. This would allow case managers to engage earlier, possibly avoiding someone from going through homelessness altogether
* One of the most important parts of the report is a recommendation to MaineHousing that the Qualified Allocation Plan for Low Income Housing Tax Credit affordable housing development includes some heavy weighting of points for the inclusion of Permanent Supportive Housing. We are on track to create 12 affordable housing developments a year rather than half that as we have been doing in the past. If each contains 5 units of PSH that will be 60 units in our service center communities. That would be enormous. And affordable housing developers would quickly realize that PSH works and populations placed in housing with adequate support are among the most successful tenants.
* What can be done do counter act today’s newspaper headlines and how can we let the public know to look at the suggestions in the context of the long term?
* An editorial, press release or some form of written response needs to come from the council.

Josh, Stephanie and Cullen volunteered to write a press release. Josh moved to have a sub-committee prepare a statement. Tracy H. seconded. Donna will Review. No Objections. Passed unanimously.

**Encampments:**  Two documents, drafted by Bill H., Cullen and Josh to address the quandary on how best to support the needs of people in encampments while at the same time not creating permanent fixtures and preventing them from growing were presented to the council. One document was designed as a proactive position statement for municipalities, the second as a guide of best practices for serving people living in encampments targeted towards anyone interacting with the encampments. Cullen motioned for the council to approve the distribution of the first document. Josh seconded. Through discussion the following comments were voiced: *Document should mention managing public health concerns. “As a response to public health concerns”* was added. “*Police going rogue” is not accurate- sometimes they are responding to a real public safety emergency.* Document edited to change the negative scenarioaway from police by adding “*all branches of municipalities” and not using the word rogue.* *The need for mobile syringe supports should be addressed in documents.* *“Including mobile syringe* *exchange”* was added. *Can the two documents be approved together?* Josh amended motion to approve documents together as a living document to be distributed with the mentioned edits. Cullen seconded. All in favor. No objections. Motion passed.

**CES:** Kate updated the council by mentioning the committee will be finalizing the EHV assessment tool this afternoon during their weekly TAC meeting. The MCoC Board granted permission for the committee to fine tune and finalize the referral and assessment processes for EHV’s. Starting next week the CES Committee will work on developing an equitable assessment tool for the entire state of Maine.

**Retreat Planning:** Bob Wright will be the facilitator for a retreat to be held in October. Stephanie, Bob, Katie, Lauren and Betty will serve as a planning committee to assist with setting the stage for the early fall meeting. Upon Stephanie’s invitation for topic suggestions, the following ideas were shared.

* Map out a plan prioritizing goals for the next year.
* Organize a better way to communicate proactively as a council
* Goal is to meet in person but will continue to monitor the delta variant
* *How does it align with the Community Solutions kick-off?* During the fall the ground work on how the hub systems will operate as nimble command centers. The state teams will land in January, the local hubs will be invited to apply early next year and will be launched in spring 22.
* An area of focus should be on how CES will fit into the Hubs.
* Anyone with suggestions on outdoor venues were asked for them to be emailed to Betty
* Transparency and sensitivity to language is important.
* The brainstorming of key accomplishments and goals expressed during the 2019 retreat will be part of Bob’s facilitation.
* There should be a balance of inclusion and focus groups.
* A personalized invitation should be sent to DHHS including MaineCare
* Anyone interested in being on the committee or have suggestions for topics please contact Stephanie or Betty.

**Council Updates: Regional Updates Region I**-Mike joined June’s regional meeting to give an update on the work of the CES committee. There was also discussion regarding encampments and concerns over the CSH report and its de-emphasis on shelters. Cheryl announced the HJV has started conducting in person meetings and that the group just finished a training with the police cadets on how to engage with people experiencing homelessness. **Region II**-Shortage of affordable housing and difficulties hiring staff are both ongoing concerns of the region. **Region III**-Region III reported during their June meeting concerns with the Bangor hotel closing in September and made note that Catholic Charities has started placing refugee families in the Bangor area.

**MSHA:** Lauren started the update by mentioning MSHA is in the middle of a 10 day HUD audit of ESG/ESHAP funding and thanked all the shelters who have been assisting with the requested documentation. The Transition from Hotel Task Force continues to look for solutions to get as many people housed as possible before the September deadline and how to handle those who are left without shelter. What will quarantine and isolation in shelters post 9/15/21 look like are other topics of focus.. In order to make decisions on a case by case basis, DHHS will need a copy of each shelter’s admission policies. Lauren asked for the policies to be sent to her. For guidance, a representative from the CDC will be invited (by Noelle) to meet with the MSN.

**Legislative Updates:** **Federal-**Cullen shared his screen to give an infrastructure update and the Equitable Home Act. On 6/24, per the President’s announcement: “The $1.2 trillion Bipartisan Infrastructure Framework is a critical step in implementing President Biden’s Build Back Better vision. The Plan makes transformational and historic investments in clean transportation infrastructure, clean water infrastructure, universal broadband infrastructure, clean power infrastructure, remediation of legacy pollution, and resilience to the changing climate”. However, the proposal does not include the major investments in affordable, accessible housing needed for millions of households with the lowest incomes. On 6/29, Sen. Merkley reintroduced the Affordable HOME Act, a comprehensive bill that, if enacted, would provide robust resources for the construction of affordable housing and increase access to housing for millions of low-income people. The bill would also scale up tenant-based rental assistance, allowing for one million new vouchers for low-income households by 2031. If enacted, the bill would also repeal the Faircloth Amendment, allowing for the construction of additional units of public housing and providing $1 billion every year for ten years to the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Program to increase access to permanent supportive housing for those experiencing homelessness.

**State-** After clarifying that bills listed as being on the Special Appropriations Table can be funded off the table as bills and sent for signature or they can be incorporated within the budget, the following bills were mentioned as being currently on the SA table and are supported by the Maine Homeless Policy Committee: LD 211 An Act To Support Emergency Shelter Access for Persons Experiencing Homelessness, LD 654 An Act To Create a 24-hour Shelter Capital Project Funding Program, LD 1300 An Act to Require County Governments to Coordinate with Municipalities to Create Plans to Address Homelessness, LD 773 An Act To Assist Public School Students and Families Who Are Homeless,

LD 473 An Act To Create the Maine Rental Assistance and Guarantee Program, LD 415 Resolve, Directing the Department of Health and Human Services To Increase MaineCare Reimbursement Rates for Targeted Case Management Services To Reflect Inflation, LD 582 An Act To Support the Fidelity and Sustainability of Assertive Community Treatment, LD 512 An Act to Provide Intensive Case Managers to Counties That Do Not Have County Jails or Regional Jails and LD 910 An Act To Amend the General Assistance Laws Governing Reimbursement. A template letter for support of these bills will be sent to the SHC contacts.

**Stephanie adjourned the meeting by thanking everyone for their continued dedication to their work during the pandemic, their peer support, their collective problem solving and their input with CSH and System Redesign. The SHC will not hold a meeting in August. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 14, 2021.**