**Statewide Homeless Council (SHC)**

August 11, 2015

Augusta, ME

**Council Members Present:** Cullen Ryan, Josh D’Alessio, Donna Kelley, Don Harden, Dave McCluskey, Sheldon Wheeler, Jon Bradley,

**Council Members Not Present:** Wes Phinney, Jeff Vane, Elizabeth Szatkowski, John Gallagher, Shawn Yardley

**Guests:** Thomas Ptacek, Carol Kulesza, Mary Frances Bartlett, Ginny Dill, Al Monier, Mike Merrill

**Minutes by:** Scott Tibbitts, MaineHousing

**Cullen Ryan** Chaired the meeting today.

**Review of Minutes:** Shawn Yardley should now be listed as a Member, Dennis Marble as a Guest.

Minutes approved as amended.

**State and Federal Updates** (from the Policy Com minutes)**:**

**Federal Updates:**

* **NAEH Conference:** Ten individuals from Maine attended. 3 workshops featured Maine presenters (Jon Bradley/Tom McLaughlin, Joannie Klayman, and Cullen Ryan)! The Capitol Hill visits went very well. The group had face-time with Senators Collins and King, and met with Congresswoman Pingree’s and Congressman Poliquin’s staff.
* The **messages from HUD** were clear and consistent with what Maine knows and practices:
* Housing longest term shelter stayers is an effective strategy and should be the priority.
* TH can be very effective for Youth, DV, and substance abuse treatment programs.
* Projects should be looked at on the whole, not just based on the HUD funding stream. If a CoC housing program is receiving service dollars from McKinney-Vento funds and operations from another source it is a true demonstration of the collaborations that HUD is looking for and illustrates an effective and efficient use of public dollars!
* **Senate T-HUD Bill:** The FY 16 spending bill would allocate $55.646 billion for the T-HUD Subcommittee. This is $376 million above the House spending bill. The full Appropriations Committee marked up and voted to approve the bill on 6/25. The bill would:
	+ Cut HOME funding from FY15’s level of $900 million to an FY16 level of $66 million; Increase funding for voucher renewals; Provide $75 million for about 10,000 new HUD-VASH vouchers; provide $20 million for about 2,500 new FUP (Family Unification Program) vouchers; provide $40 million for strategies to reduce youth homelessness; provide $330 million for the HOPWA program and include an updated formula for distribution of HOPWA funds; decrease funding for CDBG from FY15’s $3.1 billion to $2.9 billion for FY16; not amend the HUD definition of homelessness.
* **House T-HUD Bill:** The House approved the T-HUD bill on 6/9 in razor-thin 216-210 vote.

Among other harmful provisions, the bill would:

* + Direct ALL National Housing Trust Fund (NHTF) money into the HOME Program, and forbid Congress from putting any other money into the NHTF; cut HOME to $767 million from $900 million in FY15. HOME must be fully funded, in addition to, not at the expense of, critically needed funding for the NHTF; underfund tenant-based rental assistance (TBRA), by $665 million. In order to simply renew all vouchers in use in 2015, TBRA would need an increase of $850 million; underfund project-based rental assistance (PBRA). In order to renew existing contracts for 12 months, PBRA would need an increase of $1.2 billion. The bill provides only a $924 million increase; underfund Homeless Assistance Grants. The bill proposes funding at $2.185B. This would likely not be enough to renew existing grants.
* **Bill status updates:**
	+ **H.R. 1047: To authorize private nonprofit organizations to administer permanent housing rental assistance provided through the Continuum of Care Program under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, and for other purposes. Sponsor: Rep. Scott Peters [D-CA52]. – Passed the House by voice vote on 7/14/15.**

**State Legislation Update:**

* **Bill status updates:**
	+ **LD 443**, An Act to Help Stabilize Homeless Shelters in Maine, sponsored by Sen. Alfond (D-Portland), was folded into the enacted biennial budget and funded at $2M. The budget is now public law.
	+ **LD 369,** majority report and with Sen. Volk’s amendment, to allow asylum seekers and other “lawfully present” immigrants to receive General Assistance welfare benefits for up to 24 months, passed the Senate 29-5, and the House 81-63. Governor LePage did not veto the bill within the 10-day window so it is scheduled to go into law 90 days after the Legislature adjourned (7/16/15). The Governor has asked the Maine Supreme Court to consider the status of this bill (along with 60+ others). The case was fast-tracked and oral arguments were on 7/31. The Court provided its opinion on 8/6/15, stating that the bills had in fact become law, and that the Governor misinterpreted the Maine Constitution when he thought he had more time to veto the bills.

Additionally, Stavros Mendros and several lawmakers have filed an application for a “people’s veto,” which would put the issue out to the voters. In order to successfully get on the November ballot more than 61,000 signatures are required. If this occurs it would put the General Assistance law on hold until the outcome of the election.

**Discussion:**

* SHC requests that MaineHousing provide a presentation here and for the CoC’s detailing how the new proposed formula will distribute the $2M from LD443.
* There is currently a 1% vacancy rate in many parts of the state – we need more affordable housing, not just more vouchers.
* Asylum seekers – about 500 families would be displaced if LD 369 is overturned. SHC needs to follow this issue and work to address it.

**DHHS Updates:**

**-Youth Substance Abuse Grant** award announced by Senator Collins – Maine will get $800K per year for 5 years.

**-Governor’s Summit on Substance Abuse** set for August 26th. Sheldon’s office is collecting and analyzing data. Funding has not been fully expended for the last several years, which is more a problem of how the funds are used, managed, and delivered – not due to a lack of need. Currently Substance abuse funding is more often used at an agency level for things like salaries, facilities, etc., whereas Mental Health funds are more likely to be used on an individual fee for service basis. The department would like to move toward more of a ‘money follows the person’ model.

-**The Department received $400K to support a Drug Court** program in Penobscot County but they are having trouble find a Judge – several suggestions were made.

-A Draft of the **1915 State Plan Amendment** will soon be released for discussion.

-The 2013 change in the statues regarding Continuity of Care and the sharing of information has implications for data sharing and discharge planning. This is being reexamined now. Sheldon wants to move this discussion forward and will send the language to SHC.

-Another change Sheldon would like to implement is to allow workers 30 days from the start of service to finalize eligibility determination – so they could start providing services immediately, and not have to wait until a determination was made.

**SHC Blueprint for how DHHS can help end homelessness:**

Cullen organized the list developed at the last several SHC meetings into four general topic areas:

* Serve and meet the needs of the citizens of Maine
* Do not let harm come to vulnerable people
* Ensure collaboration, integration, communication, and accountability.
* Establish long term thinking and solutions to end and prevent homelessness.

**Discussion:**

-We should see how well these align with the items in the Statewide Plan.

-DHHS needs to look for better ways to work with and for the populations they are serving.

-The Blueprint should start with an introductory statement to add focus and clarify the intent, and end with a summary statement to bring it back around to the big picture.

-Some statements and terms may need more clarification.

-Some of the statements outline things that would apply to ALL peopleserved by the Department. We should focus on and emphasize what they can do for people experiencing homelessness.

-We do not want to sound like we are “telling them how to do their job” – the tone needs to be helpful and supportive, not negative or accusatory.

-“Medically compromised” need to be included.

-Identify and remove or reduce barriers.

Cullen will work these and other comments and feedback into a new draft and bring it next month.

**MaineHousing Update:** Neither John nor Cindy were able to attend today.

**Continuum of Care Update:**

- Still waiting for the NOFA to be released. There was a notice in the Federal Register today about some new language and a comment period, so it may be another 60 days before the NOFA is out.

**SHC Membership:** The legislative appointees were approved – still waiting for the Gubernatorial appointee approvals.

**Other:**

**-The National Commission on Hunger** was recently in Portland. This is something SHC should be more aware of and connected to. Part of their agenda is to promote SNAP as a better alternative to soup kitchens and food panties. Food security is a huge part of housing stability. Hunger and homelessness are clearly related topics. SHC can send a letter supporting these efforts, and will make this a standing agenda item.

-Preble Street just completed **6 SSVF funded sub-contracts with shelters for additional outreach** efforts beginning next month, with a focus on veterans. The shelters are Knox County Homeless Coalition in Rockland, Bangor Area Homeless Shelter, Homeless Services of Aroostook, Rumford Group Homes, Mid Maine Homeless Shelter in Waterville, and Milestone in Portland.

-**Maine’s first Homeless Youth Count found 263 total youth in 7 counties, 101 of them met the HUD definition.** The last PIT reported only 41 statewide. Some communities did not cooperate well and many areas even within the 7 counties had no coverage at all, so the real number is probably even higher. Some big differences were seen between rural and urban areas. Apparently this was the first Youth Count in a predominantly rural state, so it is getting lots of attention and Preble Street is getting lots of calls asking about their methodology and being asked to speak at several conferences. There is still lots of number crunching to do.

-We need to look more closely at our Annul Reports, and other sources like this. The PIT is way over rated, considering all its limitations.

-**Francine Stark will now be the Executive Director of the Maine Coalition to end Domestic Violence**. **Rebecca Hobbs is moving to Family Crisis Services in Portland, and Dorathy Martel will be taking over at The Next Step.**

-The **Portland ESAC group has housed 27** **more people from the LTS list** in the last few weeks.

-PCHC has brought their average Length of Stay down from 41 Days to 26! They are able to focus more on people now, meeting their needs, connecting them with resources, following them once they obtain housing to provide ongoing supports.

-The **current funding structure** is sort of like social security – the number of people in the shelter determines how much money goes to the agency. If the agency uses that to support moving people out, as we are being told we should, we will have fewer people at the shelter, and therefore less money to help move them out. The new proposed shelter rule should fix this situation.

**Next meeting:**

Tuesday, September 8, 2015.