New Jersey Inter-Agency Council on Homelessness
December 17, 2013 Public Hearing
Sample Talking Points

Advocates for efforts to End Homelessness in the State of New Jersey should urge the New Jersey Inter-Agency Council on Homelessness to consider the following strategies in the statewide plan to end homelessness:

Best Practices in Homeless Services Delivery

1. **Adopt Housing First as a State Policy**

   Housing First is an evidence based best practice designed to end homelessness and support recovery by housing individuals as quickly as possible and then wrapping services around them as needed. This housing model has proven effective in housing a wide variety of homeless population subsets including chronically homeless households and families and the general homeless population. Within this model, housing is not contingent upon participation in services and services provided are designed to promote housing stability.

   The State of New Jersey should adopt housing first as its primary housing and supportive services strategy for ending homelessness. This proven strategy is not only the right thing to do but is also cost effective.

2. **Create a Rapid Re-Housing rate for boards of social services**

   Rapid Re-Housing is an emerging strategy that has proven successful in helping communities cost effectively reduce homelessness. Homeless households entering the emergency shelter and transitional housing system are immediately provided with services to connect them with permanent housing. Once housing has been located, households are provided with temporary rental assistance and short term, intensive case management to help them stabilize and maintain their housing.

   New Jersey is in a unique position to utilize Emergency Assistance (EA) funds to provide intensive case management to households placed in permanent housing through Temporary Rental Assistance (TRA) and create a statewide opportunity to implement rapid re-housing.

   The New Jersey Department of Human Services should set a rate for case management services connected to rapid re-housing programs funded through EA

3. **Support Local Efforts to Create Centralized and/or Coordinated Assessment Systems**

Centralized and/or Coordinated Assessment, also known as coordinated entry or coordinated intake, paves the way for more efficient homeless assistance systems by:

- Helping people move through the system faster (by reducing the amount of time people spend moving from program to program before finding the right match);
- Reducing new entries into homelessness (by consistently offering prevention and diversion resources upfront, reducing the number of people entering the system unnecessarily); and
- Improving data collection and quality and providing accurate information on what kind of assistance consumers need.

Coordinated assessment is ideally a system-wide process and can serve any and all populations. Systems may accomplish coordinated assessment through the use of a centralized phone hotline (e.g. a 2-1-1), a single physical point of assessment (through an emergency shelter or a dedicated assessment center, for example) or a decentralized coordinated system (with multiple assessment points all employing the same assessment and referral process).

The State of New Jersey should provide financial support for local Counties to develop coordinated assessment systems.

4. **Set a priority for homelessness with the State Public Housing Agency (PHA) and encourage the same from local PHAs**

Setting PHA priority for homelessness directs rental assistance voucher to households with the greatest housing need and savings money by keeping households out of the shelter system.

In a priority system, referrals for homeless households would come from pre-approved organizations. The referring organization accepts responsibility to verify homeless eligibility and keep referral information current. The referring organization can be required to follow up with and provide services to the household for one year. To be fair to those already on a waiting list, a cap of 20% for homeless households can be set.

The State of New Jersey's PHA can establish local preferences as part of its administrative plan and encourage the local PHAs to do the same.

5. **Assist local Continuums of Care (CoC) in retooling transitional housing**

Retooling transitional housing includes shortening the amount of time people stay in programs before moving into housing, shifting to rapid re-housing strategies, or providing permanent housing.

To improve homeless assistance, many transitional housing providers are retooling their programs by helping people move more quickly into permanent housing, while providing the support they need to remain stably housed. Retooling can take many forms, including shortening the amount of time people stay in programs before moving into housing, shifting to rapid re-housing strategies, or providing permanent housing.

The state should provide funding for planning work, housing and services, to CoCs interested in retooling their transitional housing.

Recommendations that would address impediments to the delivery of services

1. **Ensure that all agencies receiving state contracts for service funding are required to serve the most difficult to house homeless and focus their resources on solutions that work, while encouraging well-designed innovations for continuous improvement**

2. **Encourage all state agencies that receive funding to assist the homeless, including DHS and DCA, to coordinate funding for housing and homeless services.**

3. **Require participation of local Boards of Social Services in Continuum of Care (CoC) homeless planning activities**

4. **Coordinate with local CoCs and ensure that all grants for state funding for homeless activities require local CoC approval**

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