



# INTERAGENCY COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS

Housing for all = A Stronger Montgomery

[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/homelessness](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/homelessness)

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Virtual Zoom Webinar Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, May 5, 2021 | 3-5p

## Members

(Present or Represented)

Chesney, Amanda

Crowell, Raymond

Glass, Evan

**Goldman, Jeff** (Chair)

Habte, Asmara G.

Harris, Amanda

Hegel, Connor

Jochum, Kendra

(representing Angela Talley)

**Johnson, Ebony** (Vice Chair)

London, Sharan

Nigam, Aseem

Roynestad, Brian

Seidel, Stan

Sinclair-Smith, Susie

Zucker, Craig

## Members

(Absent/Excused)

Kauffmann, Louise

Reuben, Ruschelle

Spann, Stacy

## Presenters:

Berg, Steve

Glass, Evan

Harris, Amanda

Hegel, Connor

## **WELCOME | INTRODUCTIONS | REMARKS** – Jeff Goldman, Co-chair

*Jeff Goldman* convened the meeting with welcome and introductions.

## **REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF THE MARCH 10, 2021, MEETING NOTES** – Ebony Johnson, Co-chair

*Ebony Johnson* called for a motion to approve the minutes. *Amanda Harris* motioned to accept the minutes. *Susie Sinclair-Smith* seconded the motion. Meeting minutes for March 10 meeting were approved unanimously as written. Meeting agendas, notes and presentations are posted on the [Homelessness website](#).

## **HUD FUNDING AND CURRENT ADMINISTRATION PRIORITIES** – Steve Berg, Vice President Programs and Policy, National Alliance to End Homelessness

*Steve Berg* has worked on State level welfare reform and employment and specializes in employment, economic development, human services, and the cross over between those issues and housing. Before coming to Washington, Steve spent 14 years as an attorney in California and Connecticut working on housing government benefits, employment, and family integrity.

### **Funding that Congress has provided:**

Steve reported that Congress has provided three large Emergency Funding enactments:

	Passed	Amount	General Purpose
CARES Act	March 2020	\$4 billion	Specifically, for homelessness
Omnibus Spending Bill	December 2020	\$46.5 billion	Emergency Rental Assistance
American Rescue Planning Act (ARP)	March 2021	\$5 billion	Specifically, for homelessness

The CARES Act funding was used by communities to:

- make shelters safer during the pandemic
- provide temporary rent subsidies
- provide hotel rooms as alternate shelters
- implement rapid re-housing to move people to permanent housing

HUD will send guidance on how the *ARP Act* funds should be spent. The *ARP Act* will be a cross between homeless programs and the home program. Allowing communities to:

- **Purchase properties to use for permanent housing.**
  - Due to the pandemic, many hotels and motels are no longer economically viable, and owners are interested in selling.
  - The purchase of these properties would allow for rehabilitating them into permanent housing for people experiencing homelessness.
- Provide **emergency rental assistance** money
  - Between the Omnibus Spending Bill and the *ARP Act*, there will be \$46.5 for those who have lost their jobs due to COVID and are behind in their rent.
- **Pay rent for new housings**—The *ARP Act* will pay 1<sup>st</sup> month's rent for homeless individuals or families.
- Fund an increase in **Section 8 vouchers**:
  - \$5 billion will be allocated for Emergency Section 8 vouchers
  - Changes in the Section 8 program will increase eligibility
    - the VASH (Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing) program was expanded to increase eligibility for homeless veterans who were not eligible previously due to their discharge status
    - Young people aging out of the Foster Care System will be eligible for Section 8 voucher

#### **Future priorities of President Biden's Administration:**

The Biden administration has proposed an American Jobs Plan and an American Families Plan. The plans have housing components, but Mr. Biden has left it up to Congress to write the specific details on how the bills will be put into effect.

- The American Job's Plan is proposed to be an **infrastructure bill** that will provide dollars for housing (new housing and rehabbing old housing). The funding will include on-going rent subsidies, construction, utilities, upkeep and staffing to provide these services.
- The American Job's Plan also includes a proposal to spend through the Medicaid program to provide supportive services which will include **home and community-based services**. This Medicaid option allows aging homeowners to stay in their homes and not have to go nursing homes. The funding and services will have a huge impact on the chronically homeless who enter permanent supportive housing. This new allocation of money will provide every state who make these services available will get 100% reimbursement in their Medicaid Programs.
- Mr. Biden also campaigned on the platform changing the **Housing Choice Voucher Program** (Section 8) into a mandatory spending entitlement program. Currently, the voucher funds serve about a quarter of the people who are eligible and everyone else is placed on a waiting list that is often years long. Biden's proposal is that the voucher program works like other federal supports for basic human needs like the food stamps or Medicaid programs where everyone who is eligible receives the benefits. This change will take several years to a decade to build affordable housings and to find landlords willing to rent. If this change in the voucher program would pass Congress, this would mean the end to homelessness in the United States.
- The Biden administration has proposed a big increase in spending for the **HUD homeless program CoC Emergency Solution Grant**. The program would get a \$500 million increase going from \$3 billion to \$3.5 billion. This is significant because the \$500 million would go into the annual budget baseline and will be there year after year to build subsequent funding.
- Proposal for a large immediate increase in the voucher program to **fund an extra 200,000 vouchers** which is about a 10% increase in the size of the voucher Program.

*Amanda Harris* announced that HUD just announced new guidance that public housing agencies are required to partner with local coordinated entry systems for the emergency Housing vouchers.

<https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/PIH/documents/PIH2021-15.pdf>

## **MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL UPDATES** – Councilmember Evan Glass

Last Friday, the County Executive signed the **Housing Justice Act** into law. This means that in less than 90 days those who were formerly homeless or those who are exiting the criminal justice system and have committed victimless crimes will be able to find housing and will no longer be discriminated against. Evan thanked the ICH and his chief of staff, Valeria Carranza, for their work to support this Bill, introduced by Evan, Councilmember Sidney Katz and supported by the entire Council.

There is an additional \$30 million in **Emergency COVID Rent Relief** provided of Federal and State government. DHHS Staff is working to get COVID Rental Relief Phase 3 funds out to eligible residents. Constituents are free to contact Evan’s office and the Office of Senator Zucker to talk about their need for support during these difficult times.

The HHS and PFED Committees approved the expansion of the **Rental Assistance Program**. The support of \$200 a month, which has been provided for the last 20 years, is not enough today. The Council jointly agreed to increase the support to up to \$400 per month with direct focus on residents who are vulnerable and lower income.

Today, the HHS Committee meet and agreed with the County Executive’s proposal to include in the FY22 budget \$100,000 to create a **Homeless Court Docket**. The Docket will provide additional assistance for people who have committed victimless crimes by mitigating on their behalf. Hopefully, some people will have their criminal records expunged.

Six more positions for the **Mobile Crisis Team** have been approved. This will provide more non-law enforcement options to help people experiencing homelessness without penalizing them and introducing them into the legal system.

The **Panhandling Bill** which was sponsored by Councilmember Craig Rice has been indefinitely postponed because of the public response in opposition to the Bill. Evan invited members of the ICH and the community to share any constructive ideas regarding this issue with him or his chief of Staff, Valeria, as Council continues to discuss panhandling in Montgomery County.

## **POINT IN TIME UPDATE** – Amanda Harris, Chief, Services to End and Prevent Homelessness

The Point-in-time (PIT) count is an annual event that requires all communities to count people experiencing homelessness both in shelter and sleeping outside. The PIT count generally happens toward the end of January.

This year, due to the pandemic, Montgomery County conducted the count differently. Instead of gathering a huge network of community volunteers, we used experienced county and homeless services staff members. We are confident that we had good coverage and were able to provide an accurate count of unsheltered folks.

The PIT count is limited but helpful in identifying annual trends in a one-night snapshot, but it does not reflect all of the work that is being done. To get a deeper understanding, the department regularly looks at our coordinated entry list, system performance, and analyze our inflow and outflow to track what is going on in our homeless continuum.

The presentation slide can be viewed by clicking [Point-in-time PowerPoint Presentation 5.5.2021](#)

Highlights of the presentation:

- In 2021 the total number of literally homeless people was 577, which is a 10 year low representing a 14% decrease in homelessness between 2020 and 2021 and a 41% decrease in 10 years (2012 PIT counted 982 literally homeless individuals).
- There has been a 52% decrease in family homelessness and no families experiencing homeless are sleeping outside.
- Most people experiencing homeless are single adults living in shelter at 68% (12% of single adults are unsheltered sleeping outside).
- The count identified 4% young people or unaccompanied youths which is low because most young people are unstably housing (i.e., couch surfing) and could not be counted.

- During the PIT, 60% of singles adults and 78% of families identify as Black or African American. This is a disparity because Black or American Americans represent 18% of the population in Montgomery County. Among Latinos, 17% single adults and 9% families were counted.
- The PIT showed increases increase in those self-reporting mental illness, chronic health problems, domestic violence, and a huge increase in people reporting limited English.
- The County is sustaining a low number of veterans who are experiencing homelessness
- The chronic homelessness numbers are up from 2017 where the numbers were hovering between 10-11 and in 2021 the number was 51 people. The increase may be contributed to the ICH voting to shift from prioritizing permanent supportive housing to those with the most vulnerability over the Federal definition for chronic.
- The number of permanent housing has increased between 2017 and 2021 we have added 537 new slots/units of permanent supportive housing and rapid rehousing.

#### Future efforts:

- Deeper work to improve the coordinated entry system
- Reviewing the assessment tools
  - The creators of the VISPAT assessment tool have found that the tool shows some racial bias that disproportionately impact on people of color (particularly black women)
  - More analysis into the Acuity Scale Tool
- Addressing racial disparities starting with the housing justice bill and reform in the criminal justice system will have an impact on placing people in housing program proportionate to how they are represented in the homeless continuum.
- Expanding our participation with the Medicaid waiver project from the State that allows the use Medicaid dollars to bill for supportive services
- Amanda reported that we are optimistic that with the new HUD CoC competition will open the opportunity to increase our permanent housing units.

#### **MONTGOMERY COUNTY YOUTH SERVICES UPDATE** – Connor Hegel, Commissioner and Youth Services Representative

Homeless Youth Count has been extended from April to May to allow outreach providers extra opportunity to report on youth who are unstably housed and/or couch surfing.

The Youth Drop-in Center is schedule to open in August. This will be our contact and service center for youth experiencing homelessness. Hopefully, we will be able to have a ribbon-cutting ceremony.

The Youth Work Group convened for the first-time last month. Currently, there are 10 members and slots for 10 youth who are homeless or have experienced homelessness to join to provide their insights.

The Youth Work Group has created 4 sub-groups called action groups to focus on different issues:

- **Outreach Action Team**—focused on the youth count, outreach to other service providers and developing an outreach plan
- **Services Action Group**—identifies services that current available and where there are gaps in services.
- **Youth Coordinated System**—dedicated to developing the youth coordinated entry system
- **Organizing and Advocacy Group**—working on power mapping and developing flyers to serve as handouts of available services

#### **VACCINES FOR PEOPLE AND FAMILIES EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS**

- Public Health Services has streamlined access for vaccinations which is open to individuals and families experiencing homelessness. <https://montgomerycountymd.gov/covid19/vaccine/>

- Efforts are being coordinated to offer vaccines to single adults at the same time as testing twice a month at the four largest emergency shelters. Transportation has been arranged for people to get connected to testing and vaccinations.
- The big issue is vaccine hesitancy and a large part of the work over the next several months. Effort is being made to create a Peer Ambassador Programs of people experienced homelessness who have been vaccinated to have conversations with people who are hesitant about the vaccine.
- Another challenge is still getting the vaccines to the streets for those who are unsheltered.
- Everyone is welcome to come to any of the Community Clinics to get connected.

#### **ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

Ilana Branda announced that the Lead for Impact Leadership second 6-month leadership course is accepting application until Friday. The free course is to help participants develop leadership skills to help us on our goal to end homelessness in Montgomery County.

Ebony Johnson announced that the Governance Committee will be addressing workforce development in Montgomery County.

Aseem Nigam responded to a question in the Q&A by saying that the rent moratorium is in effect until June 30. If a renter gets a summons they must appear in court and show documentation that their income has been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and they the judge will give them relief. This will provide relief not forgiveness because the back rent is still due.

Amanda Harris announced that round three of the COVID-19 rent relief is in place and applications are open. The portal for applications is: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/HHS-Program/SNHS/rent-relief.html>

**Next meeting:** ICH Full Commission meeting Wednesday, July 14 at 3-5p Zoom webinar platform.

#### **Adjournment**