

Meeting Notes: General and Emergency Housing Taskforce meeting 10/8/2024

In Attendance:

Taskforce Members	Organization/Role	10/8/2024
Shaun Gilpin	Agency of Commerce and Community Development – Appointed by ACCD Commissioner	Absent
Lily Sojourner	Department for Children and Families, Office of Economic Opportunity - Appointed by DCF Commissioner	Present
Miranda Gray (Nicole Tousignant)	Department for Children and Families, Economic Services Division	Present
Elizabeth Gilman	United Way and Vermont 211	Present
Molly Dugan	Appointed by - Long-Term Care Crisis Coalition	Present
Brenda Siegel	Appointed by - Vermont Center for Independent Living	Present
Frank Knaack	Housing and Homeless Alliance of Vermont	Present
Elise Greaves	Vermont Housing and Conservation Board	Present
Amy Johnson	Vermont Care Partners	Present
Sarah Russell	Experience operating an emergency shelter program	Present
Jubilee McGill	1 Person with lived experience	Present
Shelby Lebaron	1 person with lived experience	Present
Christopher Louras	Homeless Response Coordinator, City of Rutland- Appointed by Vermont Leagues of Cities and Towns	Present

Meeting Overview:

- **Facilitation:** Sarah Russell facilitated the meeting, starting with member introductions.
- **Approval of Meeting Notes:**
 - **8/27/2024 notes:** Brenda Siegel motioned to approve; Miranda Gray seconded. Elise Greaves abstained; all approved the notes.
 - **9/17/2024 notes:** Brenda Siegel motioned to approve; Christopher Louras seconded Elise Greaves abstained; all approved the notes.

- **Public Forum:**

- **No Public Requests:** The co-chairs opened the floor for public comments. No requests or topics were raised during the forum.

Joint Fiscal Committee Testimony (9/25/2024):

- **Update by Jubilee McGill and Sarah Russell:** They shared updates with the Joint Fiscal Committee (JFC) about the taskforce's progress.
 - **Key Topics:**
 - No final decisions had been made yet; all discussions were ongoing.
 - **Coordinated Entry System:** Requires updates and collaboration across agencies, including AHS and designated agencies, which may require outsourcing contracts.
 - **Shelter Needs:** Frank Knaack is preparing a report on statewide shelter needs.
 - **Challenges:** Time constraints (only 8 meetings total) to address complex tasks.

Program Eligibility, Length of Eligibility, and Communication Recommendations:

Program Eligibility:

1. **Expansion to Foster Care Leavers:**

- **Proposal:** Jubilee McGill proposed expanding eligibility to include individuals aged 23-24 (will confirm exact age) exiting foster care, similar to the Youth Development Program (YDP) criteria.
- **Support:** Supported by Brenda Siegel, Amy Johnson, and Sarah Russell.
- **Discussion:**
 - **Miranda Gray:** Adding categories would strain limited resources, especially hotel rooms.
 - **Practical Considerations:** Those under 19 face more difficulty securing hotel accommodations due to age.
 - **Lily Sojourner** asked if we are making suggestions or if we are making decisions today?
 - **Jubilee McGill** confirmed that today is discussion and at a later time, the taskforce can make decisions.
 - **Frank Knaack** asked if there could be a working document with the charges, recommendations and decisions that would be. Frank Knaack would be creating this.

- **Miranda Gray** shared that members of the Agency would need to see the full recommendations before sharing any agreements on topics.
- **Proposal:** Using ADA definition as disability was presented by Brenda Siegel with Amy Johnson's and Shelby Lebarren's agreement.

2. Income Contribution and Resource Test:

- **Brenda Siegel, Amy Johnson and Shelby Labarren prepared a Proposal outlining income contribution, eligibility criteria, length of stay, and participant requirements (which will be posted along with the minutes):**
 - Eliminate the resource test and possibly the income contribution or align the contribution with Section 8 housing rules. If required, income contributions could be directed to savings accounts for future housing needs. Income contribution should allow for medical and childcare deductions.
- **Discussion:**
 - **Nicole Tousignant:** Clarified that current income contributions are 30% of income, but without deductions available in other programs such as Section 8. Adjusting contributions to include deductions would be administratively complex.
 - **Frank Knaack and Sarah Russell:** Removing the resource test would reduce barriers to permanent housing, avoiding a "spend-down" similar to Medicaid and other benefits and increase eligibility, possibly putting more pressure on limited resources. (See below discussion.)Nicole Tousignant shared that currently 30% above the Reach Up benefit amount is counted toward the income contribution requirements. The 30% of the income is rounded down to cover the hotel room. Example, if the 30% is \$100, the person would self-pay for 1 night as nights cost \$80.
 - Sarah Russell asked how does it work with the child support payment and fluctuating income levels?
 - Nicole Tousignant shared that ESD recalculates as often as the person receives payment. Also shared that any types of verification could hold up eligibility determination.
 - Jubilee McGill shared that HUD-type financial contribution calculations are very complicated and time consuming.
 - Brenda Siegel asked that the taskforce to look at the section 8 calculations and how it could work if income contributions will remain part of the program.
 - Sarah Russell asked how could could be saved in an escrow-type account?
 - Nicole Tousignant shared that it would likely have to be done via partners.
 - Lily Sojourner shared that it is administrate and ongoing challenge.
 - Brenda Siegel would like to explore savings accounts more.

3. Resource Test Discussion:

- **Current Policy:** There is a \$0 resource limit.
- **Challenges:** Members, including Frank Knaack, Brenda Siegel and Shelby Lebarron, agreed that the resource test often forces people to deplete their savings, making it harder to secure permanent housing.
- **Discussion:**
 - Sarah Russell asked how people feel about the recommendations to remove the resource limit?
 - Lily Sojourner said she doesn't feel comfortable agreeing yet.
 - Nicole Tousignant shared that removing the resource limit could allow more people into the eligibility group for limited resources.
 - Frank Knaack asked if in the chart it would say "all members aligned"
 - Elizabeth Gilman doesn't agree to use the "all members aligned" as it is too broad and the full scope hasn't been seen yet.
 - Christopher Louras asked that the taskforce looks at the whole package and to make recommendations based on size of the area and what resources are available.
 - Sarah Russell asked how would the taskforce like to make decisions?
 - Members discussed that getting a sense along the way would be helpful, but not always possible. Ideally, for the following 3 meetings, the members could see it in writing what they need to make recommendations on, and what they would like to vote on.

Length of Eligibility:

1. Shelby Lebarron, Brenda Siegel and Amy Johnson's Proposal:

- Six-month eligibility with a review process to assess client progress and identify additional support needs. This would not aim to exit clients but to ensure that necessary barriers are being addressed, especially if housing stock is the only barrier.

2. Frank Knaack's Proposal:

- Suggested using data from the coordinated entry system to determine the appropriate length of stay, rather than imposing arbitrary time limits like 80 days. Vulnerable populations should remain in shelter indefinitely under GA if they remain eligible.
- **Discussion:**
 - Lily Sojourner shared that GA is a benefits program without case management and future length of stays. Would have to analyze if there are enough case managers in the community to help 1500+ people.
 - Sarah Russell likes the collaborative way Shelby proposed and consistency for clients. Idea was shared that the GA program could shift to a shelter program and not a benefit program. Feels that there is a need to expand the

housing case management services for clients experiencing homelessness by ensuring that AHS staff (DAIL, ESD, FSD, VDH, DMH, etc.) and contractors (DAs, PCCs, CIS, AAAs, etc.) provide housing-focused case management services to expand workforce and remove pressure from limitations providers face (staffing, funding, etc.).

- Amy Johnson shared that the case management pieces are very important. While they are housed/sheltered it is much easier to provide services. Once someone is out in the streets, it's much more difficult to help them. Amy Johnson would like to see a robust effort to make this a better program, and to build a runway to permanent housing. Infuse funding to service providers.
- Brenda Siegel recapped that they (Brenda, Amy Johnson and Shelby Lebarron) are in favor of removing the cap from length of eligibility.
- Nicole Tousignant asked what is the recommended for those who are eligible but do not have space.
- Brenda Siegel said that she doesn't feel making recommendations around that right now and would want the legislation to make it but could have more meetings about it.
- Frank Knaack stated that this is our way to ask for what is needed and not limit our recommendations to the limited funding that the program has now.
- Sarah Russell asked the taskforce is if the recommendations are very "high in the sky" would it be even considered without guardrails.
- Molly Dugan agrees that the taskforce has to ask what is needed, but shared that there are priorities within similar services and needs. Feels that there needs to be some realism to what is being recommended.
- Brenda Siegel reiterated that she would like to ask what is needed to avoid what the law change brought on.

Communication and Notification Improvements:

1. Shelby Lebarron's Proposal:

- Clients should receive notification letters at approval, at each recertification, outlining time remaining and tasks to be completed. She also recommended 30-day notices, a denial letter and a 6-month review.

2. Technological Solutions:

- **Sarah Russell and Nicole Tousignant:** Discussed the potential for using app or text notifications, although concerns were raised about the accessibility of technology for all clients.
- **Frank Knaack** will research what technology the justice department is using to connect with people and will report out at the next meeting.

Next Steps:

- **Next Meeting:** 10/29/2024, rescheduled to 11 AM - 2 PM. The next three meetings will focus on voting on recommendations, based on a spreadsheet of charges and decisions prepared by Frank Knaack.