



# TREIG E. PRONSCHINSKE

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 92<sup>nd</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

**Testimony on Assembly Bill 236  
Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform  
April 18, 2017**

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on Assembly Bill 236.

Senator Darling and I have brought forth this proposal as a part a bill package aimed at helping to end homelessness in Wisconsin. Assembly Bill 236 would allow the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority (WHEDA) to pilot a program which would prioritize those who are arising out of homelessness for Housing Choice Vouchers. This is an innovative proposal which would give WHEDA real flexibilities in how the program would operate.

According to WHEDA reports, there approximately 4,900 individuals on the waitlist for the Federal Housing Choice Vouchers, commonly known as Section 8 vouchers. The wait to receive a voucher can last anywhere from a few months to five years.

In many cases, individuals on the path from homelessness spend time in a facility that offers intensive wraparound services, including programs for those struggling with addiction, mental health issues, or disabilities. Because space is limited in these facilities, if those who are ready to move out do not have a place to go, it holds up everyone else that is in need of the facility or program. This proposal would help to free up existing space in those programs, while also allowing for a smoother transition from homelessness to stable housing.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this proposal.



REBECCA KLEEFISCH  
Lieutenant Governor  
STATE OF WISCONSIN

**Written Testimony for April 18, 2017, Hearing  
Assembly Committee on Public Benefits Reform**

Dear Members of the Committee,

I am very pleased to see the Assembly Committee on Public Benefits Reform take up a number of bills that will better connect participants in our public assistance programs to the resources and opportunities that will give them a new shot at a better life. Over the past year, I have traveled across our state, and occasionally our country, on a mission of compassion. At a time when many in our society and state are experiencing prosperity and success, there are still those on the margins of our communities, in the shadows and the forgotten places of our world, where poverty persists, sometimes in its ugliest and most debilitating forms.

I have had my heart broken time and again meeting those currently living this life, pushed from home or family by violence, addiction, mental illness, job loss, unanticipated medical emergencies. But I've also been encouraged by the spirit of service that animates the many professionals and volunteers who lay down their days to be the hands and feet of mercy at some of the hardest moments of life.

I've talked with leaders and residents at services run by churches, non-profit organizations, and governments. All of these conversations convince me that serious reform is necessary across state government's assistance programs if we're ever to achieve our goal of ending and preventing poverty. These bills take a number of important steps forward toward that end.

Assembly Bill 234 creates an Interagency Council on Homelessness. The complete alphabet soup of government touches this issue. A homeless mother of two could be enrolled in W-2 (Department of Children and Families), might be on Food Stamps and Medicaid (Department of Health Services), has kids in public schools (Department of Public Instruction), currently has a roof over her head at an emergency shelter (Department of Administration), and has some credits at a technical college but no degree and no job (Department of Workforce Development). Only a comprehensive approach that incorporates all of those agencies will give her the services she needs to reach a point of independence where she no longer relies on all those taxpayer-funded programs. Bringing agencies together and breaking down siloes is crucial to ensuring that we maximize our impact by providing the highest quality wrap-around services.

Assembly Bill 235 gives us greater flexibility to ensure housing grants are invested in programs with a proven track record of success based on need.

Assembly Bill 236 allows WHEDA to prioritize housing vouchers ("Section 8") to chronically homeless individuals. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has circulated guidance authorizing public housing authorities to establish preferences for homeless individuals on housing choice voucher waitlists.<sup>i</sup> A number of communities, including Washington (DC), Denver (CO), Tucson (AZ), Tempe (AZ), Salt Lake City (UT), and Asheville (NC) have established local preferences for homeless individuals.<sup>ii</sup> Many individuals currently on the waiting list already have some form of housing, even if it is not their preferred housing (such as living with a family member).<sup>iii</sup> This bill would allow WHEDA to prioritize vouchers to people who are chronically homeless over those who do have housing even if it is less than ideal, and provides for intensive case-management services for enrollees.

Assembly Bill 237 creates a municipal employment outreach for homeless individuals modeled on the Albuquerque "Better Way" initiative. The Albuquerque program has drawn positive news stories nationally with headlines like "This Republican mayor has an incredibly simple idea to help the homeless. And it seems to be working" (Washington Post) and "Albuquerque, Revising Approach Toward the Homeless, Offers Them Jobs" (New York Times).<sup>iv</sup> Think of it kind of like the well-regarded "The Joseph Project" in Milwaukee, but for homeless people.

Assembly Bill 238 would seek a federal waiver to add a work requirement to the housing choice vouchers administered by WHEDA. Several communities across the country already have work requirements attached to housing choice through the Moving to Work demonstration project.<sup>v</sup> One academic study from the University of North Carolina on Charlotte's work requirement concluded, "[F]ollowing work requirement enforcement, the percentage of households paying minimum rent (a proxy for employment) decreased relative to the comparison group. Analysis of additional data on both employment and hours worked indicates similar employment gains, but no increase in average hours worked. We find no evidence that work requirement sanctions increased evictions, and only modest evidence that enforcement increased the rate of positive move-outs. Surveys of CHA residents indicate that a large proportion support work requirements in public housing... [O]ur findings clearly support the effectiveness of the CHA's work requirement..."<sup>vi</sup> In Wisconsin, we have the additional evidence from the Food Share Employment & Training program, which created a similarly structured work requirement for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance, and which has shown strong positive results.<sup>vii</sup>

Assembly Bill 241 would ease the child-care earnings cliff in Wisconsin Shares. This reflects a problem across our programs, where government isn't moving levers in the right direction to incentivize work. In fact, a paycheck from work may even jeopardize some families' abilities to make current ends meet, forcing them into perpetual poverty. Time and time again I hear complaints about the "benefits cliffs" that trap working families in poverty and make it nearly impossible to truly work your way out of being

poor. These cliffs are created when government programs provide money to people and then cut off the flow of assistance completely at a certain dollar amount. If government gives an earner \$10 as long as he earns \$5 or less, why would that guy want to take the pay raise to \$6 knowing he'd then get kicked out of the government program? His \$5 paycheck was pulling in an extra \$10 in government assistance: he had \$15. Take a promotion to earn \$6 and you lose the \$10 completely because the cutoff is like a cliff. \$15 versus \$6. People are rational, and they usually make the most efficient choice in each instance, which has the long-term effect of freezing people in low-wage, low-responsibility jobs. We cannot remove rungs on the ladder to the American Dream and make upward mobility a near impossibility. We must work together to see that everyone in our state realizes the rewards that come through hard work and a paycheck.

Assembly Bill 243 studies creating mobility grants for UI beneficiaries to embrace opportunity outside their current location. Traveling all over our great state, I often hear about the challenges facing our rural communities. We know we have a skills gap in Wisconsin, where people don't have skills in jobs like computer-numerical machining or welding. But we also have a geography gap, where people don't live in the same places as the jobs are located.<sup>viii</sup> Although much attention has rightly been focused on solving the "skills gap" in Wisconsin, we need to take seriously the geography gap by encouraging a new generation of pioneers to move to opportunity.

AB 243 also embraces the possibility of using a "pay for success" (sometimes also called a social impact bond) model for solving an issue, where the private sector comes in as a partner to tackle a challenge. I'm very interested in the possibilities that "pay for success" partnerships could create to ensure that taxpayers only spend money on programs that actually work in achieving their goals.

These are problems we can work together to solve. Finding the right solutions starts with identifying the right first principles, like inclusion in the economy, community, accountability, and work. From there, we need to move to good policies, like the ones discussed above. I'm grateful to Majority Leader Steineke and members of both parties in the Legislature for their leadership in sponsoring and co-sponsoring these bills. Solving poverty in the lives of real people takes a team approach, with the support of family, friends, employers, and social services. Tackling poverty as a policy matter also requires a team, including the state, local government, for-profit employers, educators, and non-profit and faith groups. This package of bills combines that team-based approach with those essential first principles to move our state forward.

  
REBECCA KLEEFISCH  
Lieutenant Governor

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<sup>i</sup> HUD Notice PIH 2013-15 (HA), June 10, 2013, <https://portal.hud.gov/hudportal/documents/huddoc?id=pih2013-15.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup>

[http://www.azceh.org/Resources/Documents/Whitepaper\\_2\\_Local\\_Preferences\\_in\\_Housing\\_Choice\\_Voucher\\_Programs\(1\).pdf](http://www.azceh.org/Resources/Documents/Whitepaper_2_Local_Preferences_in_Housing_Choice_Voucher_Programs(1).pdf) and <http://www.csh.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/CSH-PHA-Profile-Asheville.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> [https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/for-many-the-citys-housing-waiting-list-offers-little-more-than-hope/2012/11/04/e092348a-19f8-11e2-aa6f-3b636fecb829\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/for-many-the-citys-housing-waiting-list-offers-little-more-than-hope/2012/11/04/e092348a-19f8-11e2-aa6f-3b636fecb829_story.html) and <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/how-win-homelessness-9772.html>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/inspired-life/wp/2016/08/11/this-republican-mayor-has-an-incredibly-simple-idea-to-help-the-homeless-and-it-seems-to-be-working/> and

<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/08/us/albuquerque-revising-approach-toward-the-homeless-offers-them-jobs.html> and <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/albuquerque-mayor-heres-a-crazy-idea-lets-give-homeless-people-jobs/>.

<sup>v</sup> <https://curs.unc.edu/files/2015/01/The-Moving-to-Work-Demonstration-Center-for-Urban-and-Regional-Studies-Report.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> <http://curs.unc.edu/files/2015/09/Work-Requirements-in-Public-Housing.pdf>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/foodshare/fset.htm>

<sup>viii</sup> <http://www.bizjournals.com/milwaukee/news/2016/11/23/is-the-skills-gap-more-of-a-geography-gap-in-the.html>

# **Alberta Darling**

## **Wisconsin State Senator**

**Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance**

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC BENEFIT REFORM

Senator Alberta Darling

Tuesday, April 18, 2017

Thank you, Chairman Krug and committee members for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bills 234, 235, 236, and 237. It's my hope this package of bills will be instrumental in ending and preventing homelessness in Wisconsin.

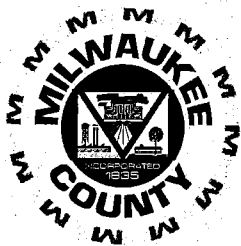
In 2016, the Federal Housing Administration estimated that at any given time there are approximately 5,685 citizens in Wisconsin who are experiencing homelessness. In order to combat this problem, the bills focus on collaboration, allowing agencies more flexibility to work together to best fight homelessness, and ensuring that resources are going to those most deeply in need.

The first step to addressing homelessness is to provide stable housing for our most vulnerable citizens. That's why Assembly Bills 235 and 236 reform WHEDA's waitlist and grant systems. Assembly Bill 235 strikes the word "transitional" from the statutes relating to housing in order to create more flexibility in the administration of housing grants. Assembly Bill 236 creates a two year pilot program to prioritize Wisconsin's chronically homeless population on the waitlist for the Federal Housing Choice Voucher Program. Both of these bills work in tandem to enable housing resources for those who are most deeply in need.

While it is crucial to provide a stable place to sleep, this does not go far enough to address the underlying traumas affecting Wisconsin's homeless families. Assembly Bill 234 and 237 focus on creating partnerships and collaboration to provide wraparound services. Assembly Bill 237 creates a \$75,000 grant for a municipality to connect homeless individuals with permanent employment and additional support services. Assembly Bill 234 creates the Interagency Council on Homelessness to ensure that all of our agencies work together to combat homelessness, instead of working in different silos. Both of these bills will facilitate delivering wraparound services to Wisconsin's homeless in the most efficient way possible.

I'd like to thank Lieutenant Governor Kleefisch and Representatives Steineke, Rodriguez, Pronschinske, and Snyder for their leadership in developing this important package of bills.

Thank you again committee members for your time and consideration. I hope I can count on your support for Assembly Bills 234, 235, 236, and 237.



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

# Milwaukee County

CHRIS ABELE • COUNTY EXECUTIVE

Testimony of Eric Peterson, on behalf of Milwaukee County Executive Chris Abele  
AB 234, 235, 236, 237 – Homelessness Legislative Package  
Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform  
Tuesday, April 18, 2017

Chairman Krug & members –

Thank you for offering this opportunity to testify on the four bills before you today that comprise the Homelessness Legislative Package. On behalf of County Executive Abele, I am here today to offer support for the intent of the package of bills and its goal of ending homelessness in Wisconsin.

In September of 2015, County Executive Abele declared a goal to end chronic homelessness in the county within 3 years. The County Housing Division and Executive both adopted Housing First, the model of using permanent housing, as the appropriate pathway towards eliminating chronic homelessness in Milwaukee County. Using the permanent housing model we have been working to place the homeless in supportive housing across the county. This includes the real estate development of such housing. With WHEDA's support & in conjunction with the City of Milwaukee, the County has developed and built the Thurgood Marshall apartments, a 24 unit complex on the north side of Milwaukee. WHEDA and the County also partnered on Highland Commons in West Allis which offers 50 units of supportive housing for those with severe and persistent mental illness.

This work has culminated in a dramatic reduction in homelessness in Milwaukee County. Before we adopted Housing First, the County's homeless work centered on support of shelter operations. Our annual point-in-time count of the homeless hovered between 1400 and 1500 persons. This past January's point-in-time count demonstrates the proven ability of the program to reduce and end homelessness. **This year we have 950 persons homeless, a 38% reduction in less than 2 years.** Permanent housing through Housing First works to reduce homelessness.

There is also great results for the individual persons in our program. Before coming into Housing First, our residents' average time spent homeless was greater than 7 years with an average time spent in an emergency shelter of greater than 180 days. By prioritizing Housing First, these residents experienced a 99% reduction in emergency shelter use and 77% of the residents have experienced an increase in income, including employment. Housing First has proven its ability to end homelessness as we expect to achieve a functional zero in this year of the number chronically homeless persons in the County. I have distributed to you the

presentation of the Housing First coalition, delivered to the Legislature last month, which highlights Housing First's successes and savings for both local and state government.

Our experience in Milwaukee County brings us here today to thank the Legislature for its recognition and action on the issue of homelessness. It has been far too long since the issue has received the prioritization that it is due. The bills before the committee – AB 234, 235, 236, and 237, open the door to what we consider the best path forward for the state – Housing First. We are supportive of the package and the intent of ending homelessness in Wisconsin. Each of these bills is born of the right intent and goals. We support AB 235 - a codification of best practice. AB 236 opens the door for outstate communities without Section 8 vouchers to do the things we have been able to do, which we support. AB 237 is a good start for connecting the homeless to work. We support the bill and suggest that the bill be amended to allow counties to make a similar match and utilize the program. On AB 234 the County Executive remains neutral, but is supportive of greater collaboration across the agencies for ending homelessness.

Going forward from today, it is important to recognize that we, the State and the County, must be vigilant to focus these efforts, the funds, and the prioritization, on permanent housing and Housing First and not on the growth of emergency shelters. Ending homelessness involves building and operating supportive permanent housing units. Shelters will always be necessary but the goals of these bills and of Milwaukee County are best achieved by housing the homeless. Housing First, in our opinion and experience, is the proven model of results that the State should expect its funds and policies to support.

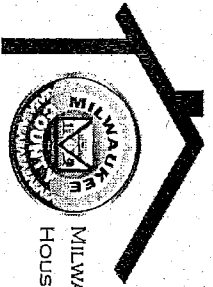
Thank you for your support of Housing First and these bills which work to end homelessness in Wisconsin.



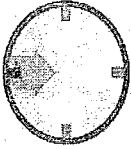
# Ending Homelessness: A Housing First Approach



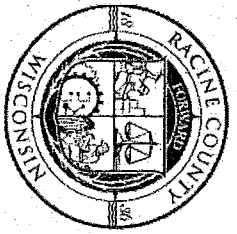
**WHEDA**



MILWAUKEE COUNTY  
HOUSING DIVISION



SHELTER AND  
TRANSITIONAL HOUSING  
TASK FORCE



Housing First Coalition



# WHEDA Strategic Plan 2017 to 2020

WHEDA will expand homeownership, increase housing independence, and assist in revitalizing communities while continuing to grow and preserve affordable housing

Expand  
Homeownership

Increase Housing  
Independence

Revitalize  
Communities

Grow and  
Preserve  
Affordable  
Housing

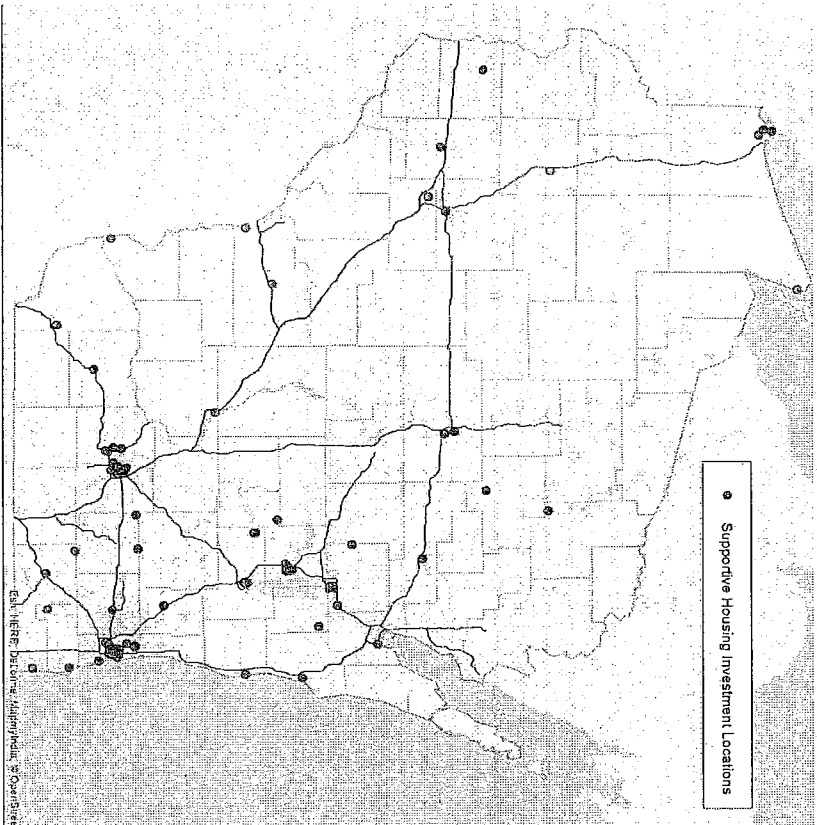


## WHEDA Strategic Plan

- ▶ Leverages WHEDA's mission, unique capacity and core competencies
- ▶ Builds upon and adds to WHEDA's primary financial products
- ▶ Begins a new business paradigm to de-risk WHEDA from federal-based funding sources
- ▶ Creates a framework to develop and implement a new, expanded portfolio of financial products



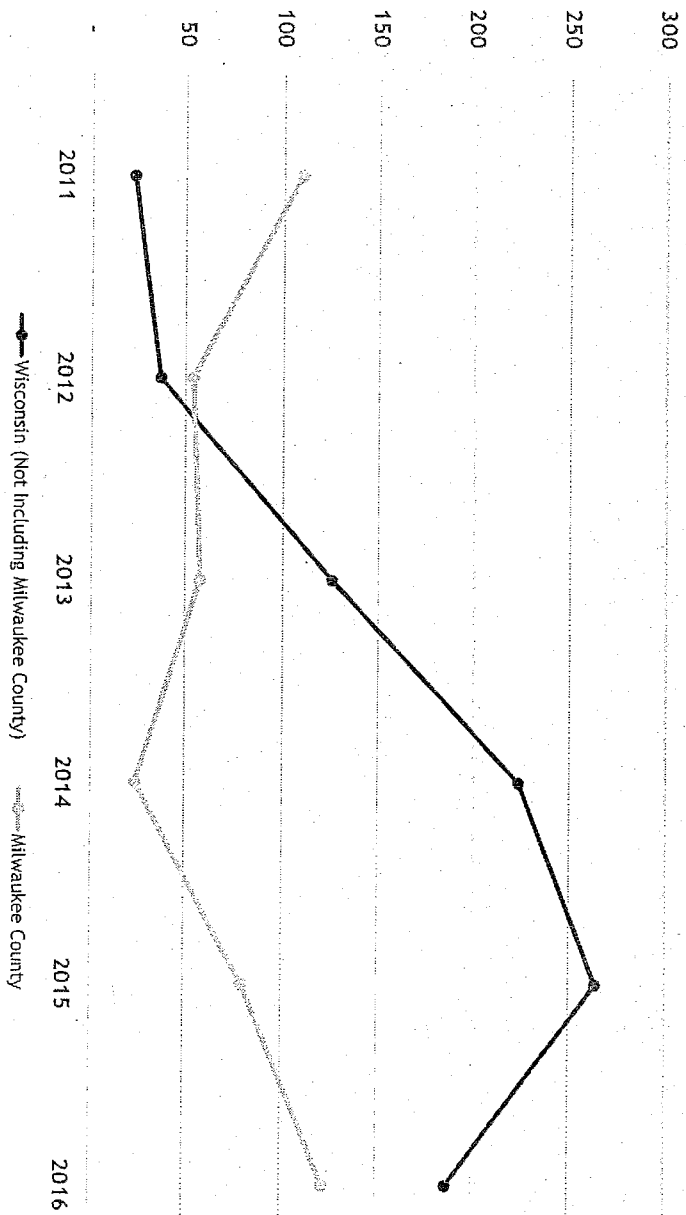
# WHEDA Supportive Housing Investments 2011-2016



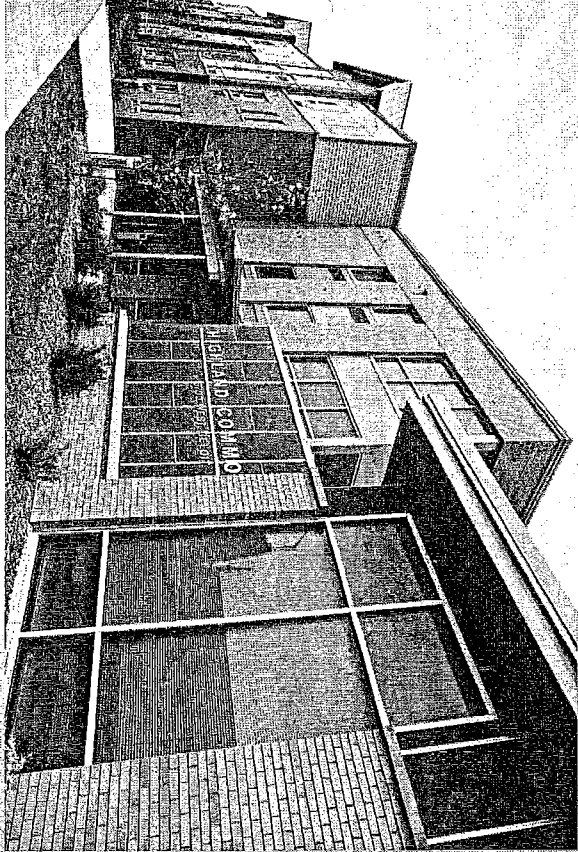
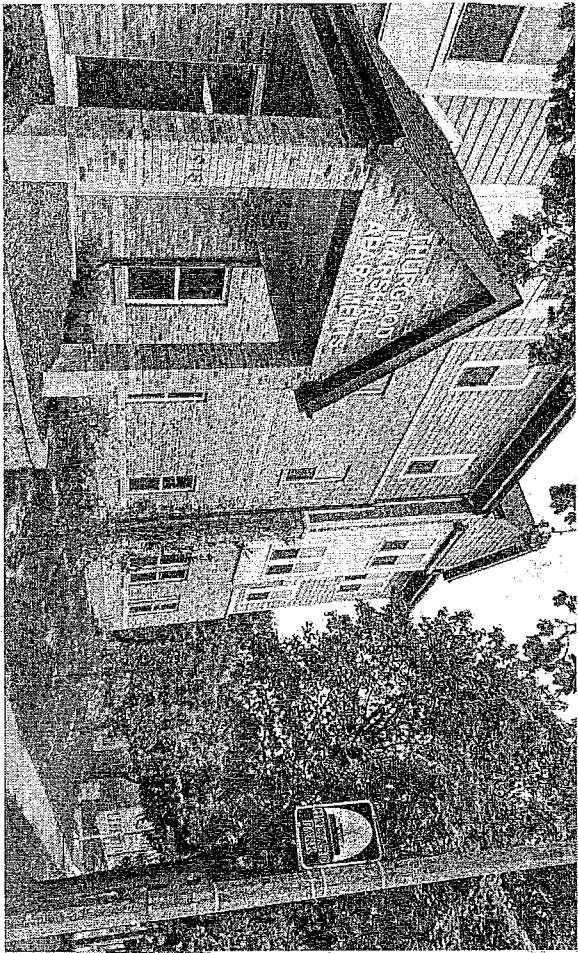
- ▶ Total LIHTCs awarded to supportive housing: \$47.6M
- ▶ Total number of projects statewide: 90
- ▶ Total number of projects in Milwaukee County: 24
- ▶ Total supportive housing units statewide: 1,308
- ▶ Total supportive housing units in



# WHEDA Supported Housing Units Created 2011-2016



# WHEDA-Financed Supportive Housing in Milwaukee County



# Supportive Housing in Milwaukee County

Thurgood Marshall

- 24 units of supportive housing in Milwaukee since October 2016
- Serving very low-income adults who are chronically homeless and who may also suffer from substance abuse
- Funding resources: \$273K in WHEDA LIHTCs, \$500K Milwaukee County Innovation Grant, \$385K City of Milwaukee Housing Trust Funds, \$300K Milwaukee County Housing Division
- Serves as a model for the City/County Housing First initiative



# Supportive Housing in Milwaukee County

## Highland Commons

- ▶ Serving individuals with severe and persistent mental illness since 2012
- ▶ 50 units of supportive housing in West Allis
- ▶ WHEDA financing: \$6.5M construction loan, \$785K permanent loan and \$9.76M LIHTCs
- ▶ Supportive services funded by a grant from the Housing Division of the Milwaukee County Department of Health and Human Services
- ▶ 80% of residents remained free from psychiatric hospitalizations and unnecessary emergency room visits, which exceeded the projected level of 70%





# Housing First Coalition

- ▶ Newly formed coalition established by a group individuals working hard in the field of permanent housing. Through their work they have seen Housing First work as a cost-effective tool to drastically reduce homelessness in Wisconsin.
- ▶ Mission: Ending homelessness through effective, sound policies and practices that promote the Housing First model.

# Housing First

- ▶ Housing approach that focuses on housing stability, reduction in emergency services utilization, income acquisition and permanently ending cycle of homelessness
- ▶ Triage into housing allows for quick stabilization and mitigates issues directly related to homelessness.
- ▶ Access to income, improved health outcomes, and addressing the underlying causes that led to homelessness, are all key components of the Housing First model. Once someone is housed, the focus on self-sufficiency and self-determination begins.
- ▶ Housing First contributes to drastically reducing the public cost of services (health, mental health, substance abuse, emergency shelter, and incarceration).

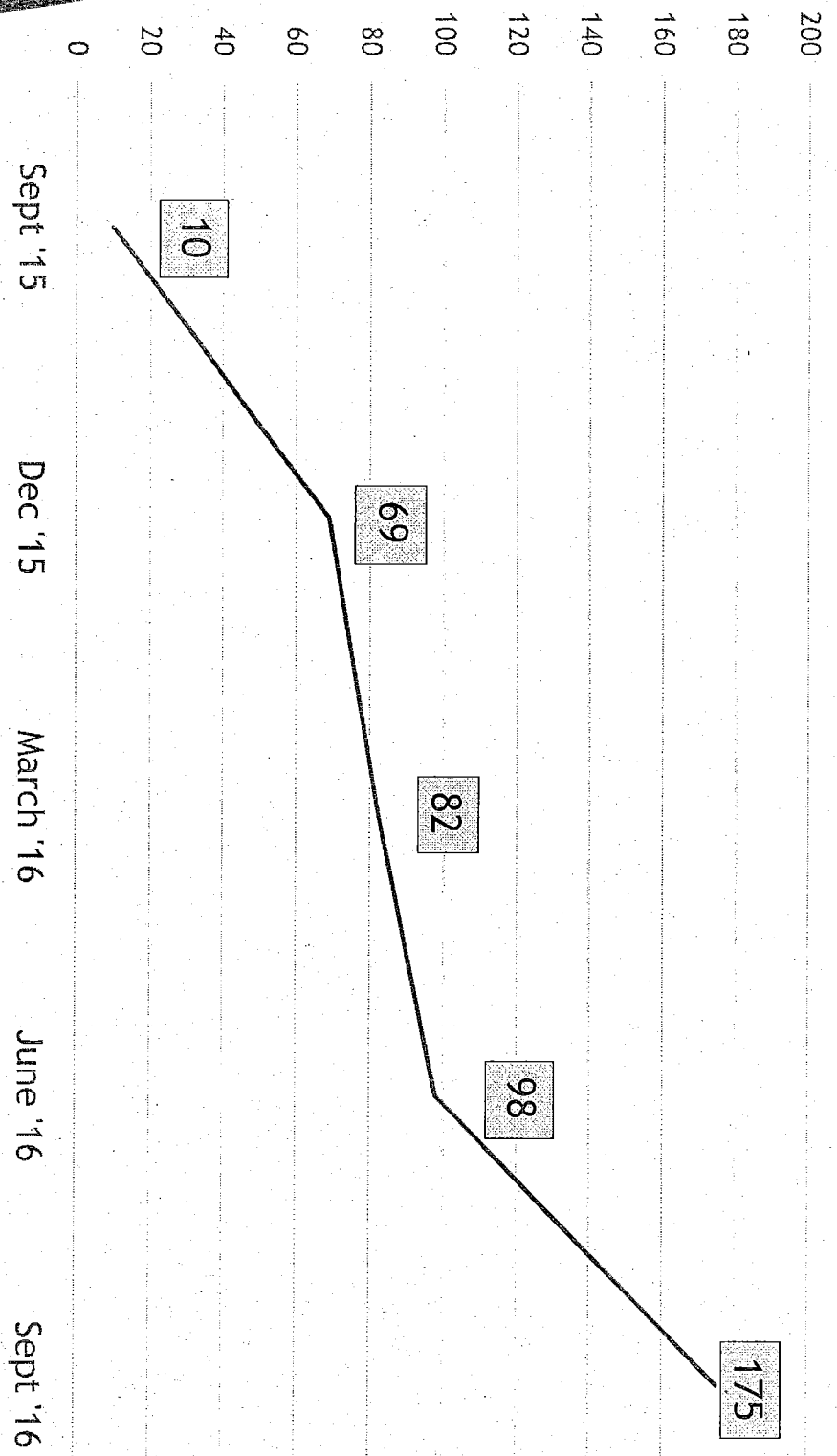
# **Key Principles of Housing First**

- ▶ Immediate Access to Housing
- ▶ Ending cycle of homelessness
- ▶ Solution focused Case Management
- ▶ Improve health outcomes
- ▶ Social & Community Integration
- ▶ Social mobility
- ▶ Community Development
- ▶ Cost savings associated with housing retention

# Coordinated Entry for Permanent Housing

- ▶ Coordinated Entry streamlines into services.
- ▶ Assessment for need and vulnerability
- ▶ Prioritization of people based on need
- ▶ Ensuring only those eligible get the service
- ▶ Review of people currently utilizing services to ensure they still need it
- ▶ Focus on prevention & Diversion
- ▶ Collaboration with Milwaukee County's plan to end chronic homelessness


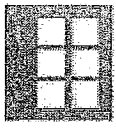
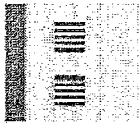


# Total Residents



# OTR Pathways to Housing PA

Housing First: Doing More With Less

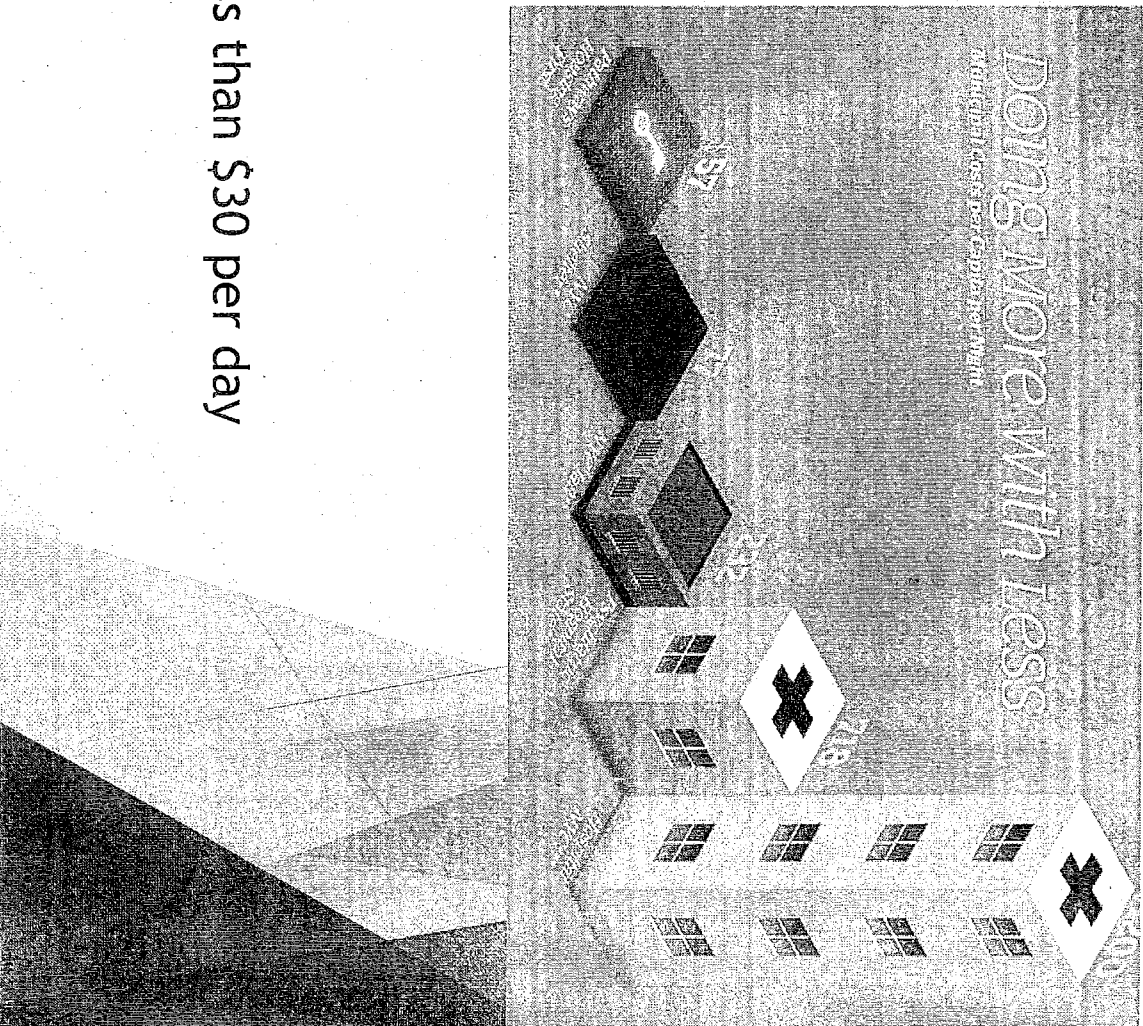
Number of persons per facility

Pathways Housing First	Transitional Housing	Jail	Emergency Room	Psychiatric Hospital
 \$76	 92	 \$164	 \$519	 \$1185

Pathways PA = \$76 per day

Pathways NY = \$57 per day

HF Milwaukee = Current numbers at less than \$30 per day



# **Impact: Local Emergency Services**

- ▶ Psychiatric hospitalizations = 100x more often for Chronically Homeless individuals
- ▶ Any Hospital Stay = 4x longer for Chronically Homeless individuals
- ▶ Behavioral Health Division Psychiatric Crisis Services = **\$605.00** per visit (non-admission)
- ▶ Behavioral Health Division Psychiatric Crisis Services = **\$1,829** per visit (admission)
- ▶ Behavioral Health Division Detox Medicaid Cost = **\$506** per visit
- ▶ Behavioral Health Division Crisis Mobile Medicaid Cost = **\$1,245**
- ▶ Behavioral Health Division Psychiatric Inpatient Medicaid Cost = **\$2,145**
- ▶ Average Emergency Room Medicaid Cost = **\$2,235**

Housing First residents utilized crisis mental health services significantly less during their first year in housing.

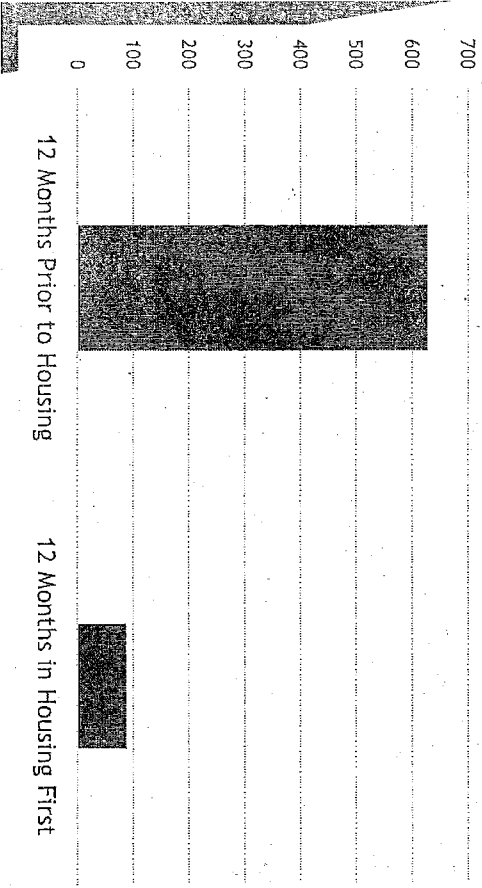
Compared to the previous year spent homeless, during their first 12 months in housing, Housing First resident utilized 539 fewer mental health crisis services resulting in a cost savings of more than \$714,600.

42 additional programs were utilized at lesser rates

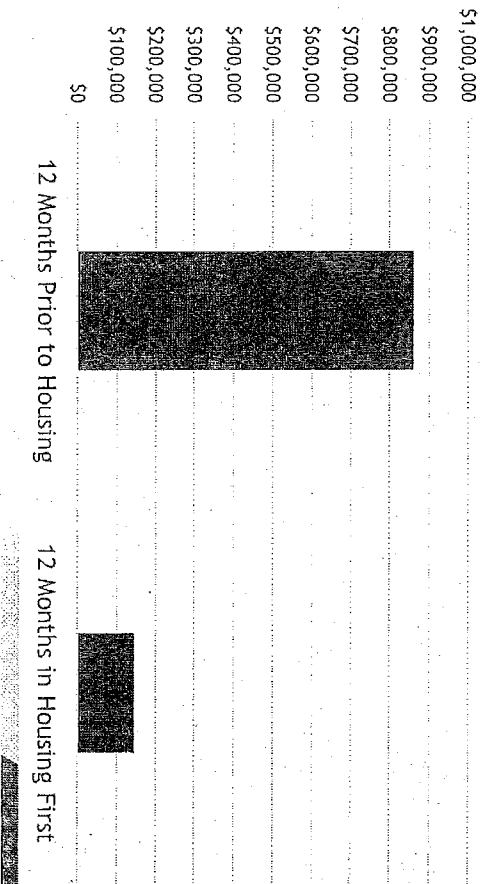
- Top 4 Utilized Programs:
- Crisis Mobile
  - Detox
  - Psychiatric Crisis Services
  - Inpatient Services

Previous Year: 627 episodes; \$860,985  
 Year in Housing: 88 episodes; \$146,347

Mental Health Crisis Services Utilization  
 Top 4 Programs



Mental Health Crisis Services Costs  
 Top 4 Programs

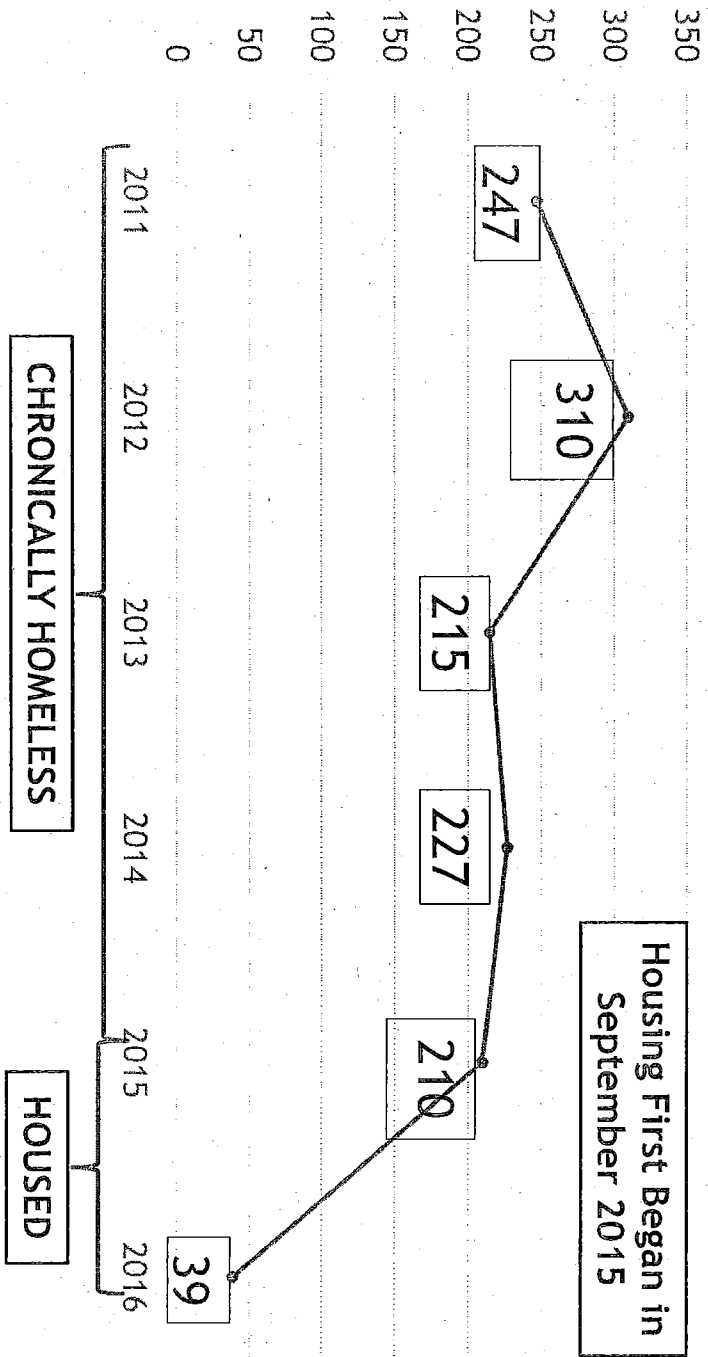




## **Impact: The Justice System**

- ▶ Overnight Jail: According to a two-year survey of homeless individuals, each person cost the taxpayers \$14,480 per year, simply for the nights they were in overnight jail.
- ▶ call for service (average cost): \$950.15 per call
- ▶ Court Security: \$43.30 per case
- ▶ Public Defender: \$718.86 per case
- ▶ District Attorney: \$718.86 per case
- ▶ Prison: A typical cost of a prison bed in a state or federal prison is \$20,000 per year.

# Immediate Impact: Total Municipal Court Violations Each Year Among Housing First Residents



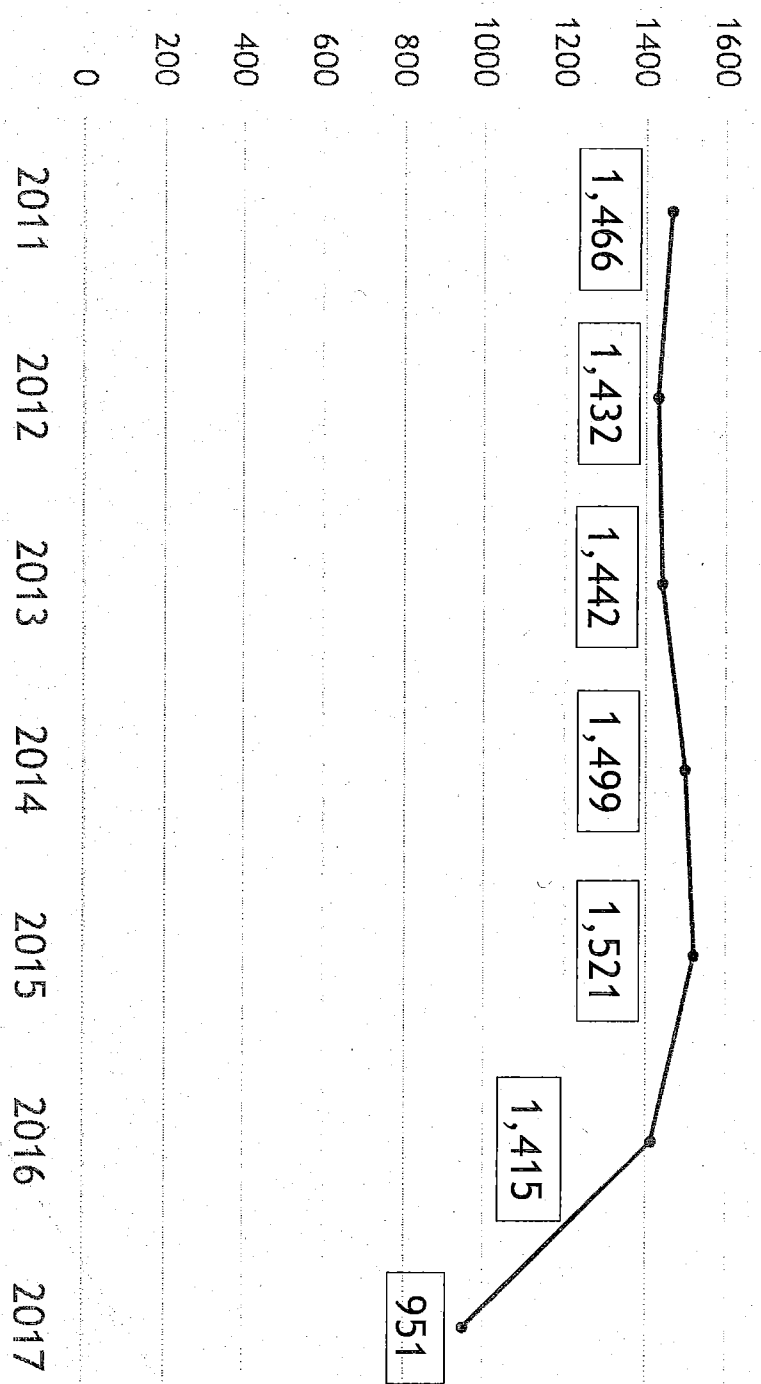
## **Impact: Local Homeless Shelter Organizations**

- ▶ Housing First residents' average time spent homeless is greater than 7 years. Some more than 20 years.
- ▶ In the 12 months prior to Housing First, the average time spent in shelter was greater than 180 days. Many slept in a shelter every night.
- ▶ Our residents experienced a 99% reduction in emergency shelter use.
- ▶ 77% of Housing First residents have experienced an increase in income, including employment.

## **Impact: Point-in-Time Count**

- ▶ Point-in-Time Count:
- ▶ From The Department of Housing and Urban Development:
- ▶ Point-in-Time counts are a critical source of data used to measure homelessness on a local and national level and are published annually to HUD funded organizations and the general public.

# Immediate Impact: Total People Experiencing Homelessness in Milwaukee County – Point-in-Time Count



# How can other communities have success?

- ▶ Levels of government working as a team.
  - ▶ “Milwaukee County’s Housing First model has had an immediate and notable effect in addressing nuisance behavior stemming from individuals affected by mental illness, alcohol or substance abuse addiction” - Adam Stephens, Deputy City Attorney, City of Milwaukee
  - ▶ “As District Attorney, I recognize that not only is the Housing First model a step in the right direction for our most vulnerable citizens, it also aligns with our primary mission of public safety” - John Chisolm, District Attorney, Milwaukee County
- ▶ Clean data
- ▶ Program evaluation
- ▶ Public/private partnership
  - ▶ “Since Housing First began, we’ve seen decreases in nuisance behaviors, police contact and constituent complaints revolving around homelessness in the downtown area. Close to 50% of the long term homeless population that previously resided downtown have been housed through Housing First” - Beth Weirick, CEO, Milwaukee Downtown BID #21
- ▶ Coordinated entry outreach
- ▶ Partnership with police department

# Contacts:

- ▶ Contacts:
- ▶ James Mathy: [james.mathy@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:james.mathy@milwaukeecountywi.gov)
- ▶ Emily Kenney: [ekenny@impactinc.org](mailto:ekenny@impactinc.org)
- ▶ Wendy Wecker: [wendyw@hopehousesnke.org](mailto:wendyw@hopehousesnke.org)
- ▶ Wyman Winston: [wyman.winston@wheda.com](mailto:wyman.winston@wheda.com)
- ▶ MT Boyle: [mtboyle@racinecounty.com](mailto:mtboyle@racinecounty.com)
- ▶ Andi Elliott: [andi@communityadvocates.net](mailto:andi@communityadvocates.net)
- ▶ Eric Collins-Dyke: [eric.collins-dyke@milwaukeecountywi.gov](mailto:eric.collins-dyke@milwaukeecountywi.gov)
- ▶ Ted Hanrahan: [hanrahan.ted@gmail.com](mailto:hanrahan.ted@gmail.com)

## **Thorson, Randy**

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**From:** Borgerding, Nicole  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 18, 2017 7:48 AM  
**To:** Thorson, Randy  
**Cc:** Fabick, Abbey; Luckey, Michael  
**Subject:** FW: Today's Hearing  
**Attachments:** Pam Anderson Testimony 4 18 2017.docx

Good morning Randy,

Attached is testimony I was sent this morning in support of the homeless bills that you will be hearing today (AB 234, 235, 236, 237.) **Pam Anderson, the co-chair for the Housing and Homelessness Coalition of Marathon County**, was planning on being here today, but unfortunately is sick (see below.)

I will make copies of this and distribute to committee members this morning. If you choose to include testimony in the ROCP, please include her testimony as well.

Please let me know if you have any questions. See you shortly.

Best,

Nicole

**From:** Pam Anderson [mailto:pamsanderson10@gmail.com]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, April 18, 2017 6:57 AM  
**To:** Borgerding, Nicole <Nicole.Borgerding@legis.wisconsin.gov>  
**Subject:** Today's Hearing

Hi Nicole!

Attached is my document supporting the 4 homelessness bills and bills LRB 2747 and 2750.

I really wish I felt well enough to come down and participate in person but I think I'm better off (and probably everyone else) focusing on getting better and not spreading whatever it is that I have.

Please let me know how things go and please also provide me with any feedback on my comments.

I'll be down in Madison in mid-May for a conference and will make it a point to come to the Capital and meet you.

Thanks!!



I submit these comments as a community member of Marathon County – more specifically the greater Wausau area.

My involvement in the homelessness issue is a result of my parents becoming homeless due to a car accident. My parents were driving to Shawano to visit my father's mother when they were hit head on by another car trying to pass a truck. This accident resulted in my father sustaining injuries so severe he was unable to return to his job. My mother remained in a coma for a period of time and also sustained injuries which affected her throughout her entire life. As a result, they lost their apartment and what little money they had due to hospital bills.

My grandfather was able to have them to move into his house in Milwaukee. The only space available was the attic (yes, it was truly an attic with no amenities). This was the only option as my mother's sister, husband and their two children already resided in the house occupying the remaining two bedrooms. A mattress was placed on the attic floor and that is where they stayed for a total of four years. During that time, I was born and joined my parents in the attic.

I grew up watching my parents recover from their injuries and my father going to MATC to learn new skills which enabled him to once again gain employment. But this did not happen overnight. My mother eventually did return to her job but this also did not happen overnight. It was due to these wonderful parents that I grew up with a sensitivity and awareness that just one incident can put a person and/or family in a situation they never thought they would be in – homeless – and how difficult it can be to recover.

Currently I co-chair the Housing and Homelessness Coalition of Marathon County. In November 2015, the Coalition implemented its 10 Year Plan to eradicate homelessness in Marathon County. I am also a member of the leadership committee of the Veteran's Resource Coalition in Marathon County and volunteer at the Community Warming Center in Wausau which allows me to meet individuals who are currently homeless and struggling, as my parents did, to get back on their feet and be self-sufficient.

Homelessness is here in Marathon County and the root causes for homelessness are numerous. In 2014, we had 553 unduplicated people stay at our shelters (Salvation Army, the Women's Community, and the Warming Center). This was an increase of 13.6% from 2013. In 2015, that number increased 23.3% to 682 individuals and in 2016, we're currently at approximately 650 individuals. This is not a final number for 2016 as our Warming Center's season ends on April 30<sup>th</sup> and we're still welcoming new guests. Many individuals are coming from larger cities outside of central Wisconsin due to the high number of jobs available here. Public transportation to jobs is an issue here as many individuals do not have their own transportation. In 2014, a one week snapshot of public transit access to jobs in the greater Wausau area, revealed 248 (58.6%) of the 423 available jobs were not available by bus. This study is being updated and will reflect the further reduction of public transportation to areas outside of the city proper where many jobs are located. By the numbers, 10% of Marathon County households are in poverty and 41% of Marathon County households are identified as working poor living paycheck to paycheck.

Thank you for the opportunity and allowing me to share my thoughts on the bills being presented today.

Pam Anderson, [pamsanderson10@gmail.com](mailto:pamsanderson10@gmail.com)

Cell phone: 414-840-1952

As a result of my current community involvement, I support the implementation of the following bills.

### **AB 237**

On a survey that is completed on an annual basis at the Wausau shelters, our homeless population lists employment as one of their top priorities along with transportation. While they take the initiative to find a job, the hiring process many times takes longer than expected or they find the jobs elusive especially if they do not have transportation (either their own or public) which will get them to a job outside of the city of Wausau and/or on the weekends. In the meantime, they are encouraged to volunteer their time as that will also show work ethic and involvement and can be placed on their resume.

Initiating a program such as Albuquerque's There's a Better Way, will show their initiative and commitment to work, provide income, and for some it will be able to provide the soft skills needed for interviews and future employment. The success of this program is proven due to it being replicated in other cities.

### **AB 236**

Rents in the Wausau area for many are unaffordable. A study looking at affordable housing in Marathon County between the years of 2011 – 2013 (the most current information available) showed that there were 4,048 extremely low income renters while there was a total of 1,083 adequate, affordable housing units. This correlates to 27 affordable units per 100 people. This situation has not improved over the years. One of the major goals of the Housing and Homelessness Coalition is to increase the availability of affordable housing units.

Individuals often obtain employment and will jump on renting an apartment they feel is affordable but run into the obstacle of having the security deposit along with first and last month's rent. In addition, when evaluating what they are earning to the rent of an "affordable" apartment, it's not enough for long term success. Recently one local landlord who has affordable apartments indicated he was raising rents which would eliminate several affordable units. Implementing this pilot program will assist with reducing the number of evictions due to inability to consistently pay the rent which has a negative effect on an individual's future rental opportunities and which places a financial strain on the landlord.

I support identifying and giving priority status of Section 8 housing vouchers to individuals who are chronically homeless. This will provide them with housing, counseling and case management which will provide housing stability and ability to focus on other areas of need. Placing those most in need in housing using the Rapid Rehousing/Housing First model has been proven to also reduce the financial strain on a community for health care and other needs.

Looking for an apartment can be overwhelming for many especially if they have not had a history of stable housing. The case management may also allow them to learn how to identify what would be affordable given their income. I would suggest including an educational program such as UW-Extension's Rent Smart which teaches how to determine what is affordable given a person's income, what to look for in a lease, along with soft skills of being a good tenant.

#### **AB 235**

As mentioned previously, there is limited affordable housing units along with limited shelter space in the greater Wausau area. Within our shelter system, only Salvation Army has space available for homeless families – and that space accommodates one family. On occasion that space is divided into 2 spaces but then becomes extremely small. Our Women’s Community shelter accommodates individuals and families who are victims of domestic violence. We also have a six month, four-unit family transitional housing program called Hand In Hand.

No one likes to hear there are unused or underutilized funds. The passing of this bill would allow for more immediate housing options for individuals and families in need and allow local communities to identify where the funds are most needed. Removing the time limitation would allow a person and/or family the time needed to become stable and independent. As I mentioned, it took my family four years to become stable again. In addition, we’re seeing more homeless individuals coming to the Wausau area because they feel it is a safer community than some other cities and offers more job opportunities. Removing the five-mile distance factor would allow movement to areas that might be more accommodating to their employment needs allowing them to become financially stable and independent.

#### **AB 234**

Creating an Interagency Council on Homelessness would create awareness among agencies, reduce unnecessary duplication of services by building collaboration, identify priority areas, monitor implementation of programs, and result in a reduction of the number of homeless individuals/families while increasing their financial stability. I strongly support having a person identified as the primary contact person to ensure consistent communication on homelessness issues.

In addition to agency representation on the Council, it might be advantageous to consider creating a subcommittee made of individuals who work directly with the homeless population. There are numerous nonprofits and/or individuals throughout the state who would not be directly affiliated with the Council agencies but who provide services to the homeless population or who have successfully themselves worked through their own homelessness struggles who may bring “feet on the ground” insight to the Council.

#### **AB 238**

Searching for employment can be overwhelming to some. My understanding is that through this pilot program, assistance would be provided to voucher recipients identified as having the ability to work which would be a positive. However, for some, looking for a job can be frustrating, overwhelming and/or intimidating due to the lack of direct assistance and/or understanding of the process. I support a program which would also be flexible to provide direct one on one assistance in this process for those that might need more direct assistance.

#### **AB 243**

Within recent years, we've seen businesses close, relocate, or downsize. For those who identify job opportunities outside of where they currently reside, the cost of relocating can be substantial. A study to determine if there is an existing successful relocation assistance program in another community or an opportunity to develop a relocation assistance program would be a positive. Given the number of job openings within Marathon County, a program such as this may provide an employee base that may not otherwise be available to local companies.



**SHELTER AND  
TRANSITIONAL HOUSING  
TASK FORCE**

April 17, 2017

Members of the Assembly:

The Milwaukee Shelter and Transitional Housing Task Force (STTF) is encouraging you to support the efforts of the State of Wisconsin and Majority Leader Steineke, to provide service dollars to assist those experiencing homelessness in our region. Ending homelessness is the primary goal of the STTF, and it is an ambition we share with the State of Wisconsin as outlined in the 2007 strategic initiative - *Homeward Wisconsin Plan to End Homelessness*.

The STTF is a self-constituting group that provides advocacy, planning, service coordination, public education and resource development for emergency shelter and transitional housing on behalf of its clients and members. We are passionately committed and driven to providing a full continuum of services to the homeless population through a Housing First model.

Beyond the obvious benefit of stabilizing homeless families, taxpayer dollars are saved by housing people experiencing homelessness. A recently launched Housing First program in Milwaukee County showed that in the first 12 months of housing, residents utilized crisis mental health services 539 fewer times. This resulted in a cost savings of more than \$714,000. The allocations that we are advocating for in the 2017-18 budget would allow the State of Wisconsin to stay true to the goals we laid out in the *Homeward Wisconsin* plan and have a meaningful impact on the problem of homelessness throughout the state.

We are finally seeing consistent success in our efforts. This is not the time for the State to reduce funding for proven programs that are having a real impact. This is the time for the **State to increase this investment, ensuring that *no one*—no man, woman or child spends another night on the street, in a vehicle or in a temporary shelter.** We commend previous efforts that have reached toward the goals laid out in 2007. We are making a difference. We strongly encourage members of the Committee to support the Housing First dollars in the budget to continue these efforts to effectively end homelessness.

Thank you,

Wendy Weckler  
Executive Director, Hope House  
STTF Chair

Testimony in Support of AB 234, 235, 236, 237

Shelter is a basic human need. For most people it is closely linked with a sense of safety and human dignity. I applaud the 4 bill legislative package addressing homelessness in Wisconsin as a good start in speaking to the needs of the estimated 27,000 homeless people in our state. My deep hope is that Democrat and Republican lawmakers together will look at homelessness in full measure and work with communities to find practical, creative and solid solutions.

We need to consider the following realities inextricably linked to homelessness: a distinct shortage of low income housing, making even working adults find housing with friends, family or in shelters; low wages which preclude some, especially families, access to available lower/moderate income housing; available lower income housing that does not consistently provide necessities such as heat and electricity; a shortage of transitional housing and supportive services for those whose physical or mental health, job loss or lack of job skills and habits preclude their working at any given time.

We should also consider the social and economic costs of putting children of homeless families at high risk for future problems because of the disruptive effects of frequent moves, including educational and peer bonding deprivation.

The proposed legislation brings homelessness into the governmental and public awareness. It offers some ideas for solutions and spotlights the necessity of broad based coordinated efforts to meet all citizens' basic need for housing.

Respectfully,

Jean Fisher, Wausau, WI