



## **Written Testimony for April 23, 2019 Hearing Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform**

Dear Members of the Committee,

I would like to thank you for hearing Assembly Bills 119 and 124 today. These two bills, along with the other six bills authorized by your colleagues and being heard today in different committees, represent the culmination of work done by the Wisconsin Interagency Council including the "A Hand and a Home: Foundations for Success" statewide action plan presented last fall. The plan specifically calls for \$3.75 million in new state spending annually. This would more than double the state's current investment in the homeless crisis response system.

My name is Carrie Poser and I am the Wisconsin Balance of State CoC Director. Currently, I serve on the Wisconsin Interagency Council as a member, representing the Balance of State CoC. I realize the term CoC might not be familiar to those outside of the homeless service sector. A CoC (or Continuum of Care) is a geographically defined territory recognized by HUD and required to create and maintain a homeless crisis response system. In Wisconsin, there are four of these CoCs: Dane, Milwaukee, Racine, and everything else falls into the Balance of State. The Balance of State Continuum of Care is a 501c3 non-profit organization with a twenty-one coalition membership. Each coalition represents a specific smaller area – some made up of one county (such as Kenosha, Waukesha, and Brown). Others, covering multiple counties (such as Dairyland – Eau Claire, Jackson, Trempealeau, and Buffalo; or North Central – Marathon, Wood, and Lincoln). There are three paid staff (including myself) and a volunteer Board of Directors. The purpose of our organization is to ensure efficient and effective delivery of housing and supportive services to people experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and provide leadership to the twenty-one local homeless coalitions that cover the BOS territory. I am responsible for the day-to-day activities and operation of the organization. In partnership with the local coalitions and Board of Directors, the goal is to end homelessness in Wisconsin.

To end homelessness, a CoC brings together people working in a variety of sectors in order to develop a community-wide plan or homeless crisis response system. The system should address what happens when people are at risk of homelessness and experiencing homelessness. The system must include prevention, diversion, outreach, assessment, housing search, housing assistance, case management, and follow up services. To maintain this type of system, it requires the input and resources beyond homeless service providers. It is critical that a variety of people with different skills sets, knowledge, and experience are brought together, including law enforcement, social service providers, mental health agencies, public housing authorities,



hospitals, school districts, victim service providers, faith-based organizations, businesses, government agencies and officials, affordable housing developers, universities and colleges, people with lived experience, and other private sector organizations. HUD requires CoCs to carry out a variety of additional tasks, such as set prioritization policies and standards for services, use coordinated entry, conduct point-in-time counts, monitor and evaluate performance, conduct an annual gaps analysis, and consult with the Division of Energy, Housing, and Community Resources (DEHCR) as the ESG grant administrator for the State. In addition, the CoC participates annually in a nationwide competition for federal funds. There are approximately 400 CoCs in the country. The competition requires the CoC to explain their structure, data collection, adherence to HUD requirements, and progress in ending homelessness for veterans, people experiencing chronic homelessness, families, and youth. Individual member organizations can apply for projects that will provide housing assistance funds and case management.

The strength of a CoC comes from the tireless efforts of local leaders, skilled case managers, and dedicated staff committed to preventing homelessness, diverting those that present for homeless shelter when possible, providing shelter and crisis services, connecting people to available mainstream resources, finding housing for people. Providers across the State have maximized the available federal and state resources, using nationally accepted best practices, and radically altered the way they do business - embracing a housing first philosophy and tailoring housing assistance and services to people's unique needs and strengths. Despite all of this, the number of people experiencing homelessness in WI continues to drop by less than 6% a year.

On any given night, there are over 4,900 people in Wisconsin without a place to call home. They are sleeping in a shelter, in their car, under a bridge, in a cave, or in a storage unit. Some may be sleeping in a transitional living program. But all of them lack a safe, stable, and permanent home. Homelessness is a statewide, nonpartisan issue. It impacts every single county in Wisconsin. In 2018, over 20,000 people in Wisconsin received some type of homeless assistance. 59% of those people were served outside of Dane, Milwaukee, or Racine counties. As of yesterday, there were over 2,600 households waiting for housing assistance identified through our coordinated entry system (over 2000 households without children and 618 households with children) in the 69 counties covered by the Balance of State CoC. This also includes 390 chronically homeless households and 124 veteran households. One of the remarkable things about our system is that we have data that can demonstrate the need, identify gaps, and illustrate the performance of our system. We can quantify the need at a CoC level and local coalition level. We can show how many people are identified, what type of interventions are needed, and which tools are missing to meet those needs.



For example:

In North Central, which includes Lincoln, Marathon, and Wood counties – there are 70 households (7 families and 63 singles) homeless and waiting for help; 19 are chronically homeless and 5 are veterans. This is 3% of the Balance of State CoC's homeless population.

In Winnebago land, which includes Fond du Lac, Green Lake, and Winnebago counties – there are 201 households (46 families and 155 singles) homeless and waiting for help; 28 are chronically homeless and 8 are veterans. This is 8% of the Balance of State CoC's homeless population.

In Waukesha – there are 411 households (33 families and 378 singles) homeless and waiting for help; 57 of them are chronically homeless and 15 are veterans. This is 16% of the Balance of State CoC's homeless population.

While each of these communities have a variety of housing programs and emergency shelter services, there remains a need for different tools and more resources to address the growing need. Lack of affordable housing is certainly a reality, but so is working and negotiating with current landlords as well as creating different types of programming that will help address barriers faced by people precariously housed or in need of more intensive case management than current programming or funding levels will allow.

People cannot contribute to society, achieve their potential, or create lasting change in their lives unless and until they have a safe and stable place to live. I strongly believe that the two bills here today will provide critical support to the homeless crisis response system designed to address the needs of everyone by tailoring help (whether it is housing assistance, case management, or connection to mainstream services) and taking into account an individual's resiliency and strengths. Never before has state funding sought to support multiple components of the system or across a continuum of services. Many of which cannot be paid for with federal funds. Taken as a whole, these efforts will be a monumental movement toward ending homelessness in Wisconsin.

**Assembly Bill 119 – Increase Funding for State Shelter Subsidy Grant**

Although shelter is not a solution to homelessness, it remains a vital component of the homeless crisis response system. This bill would provide an increase of funding to the State Shelter Subsidy Grant (SSSG) grant. For the last 25 years, this grant has remained at the same level of funding despite the immense increase in homelessness and barriers people face in obtaining and maintain permanent housing.

Not all emergency shelters are created equally. Some are specifically designed to provide programming that assists people in crisis resolve those barriers and find housing on their own.



Some are specifically set up only to provide a safe place to sleep for the night. This grant supports a variety of activities including renovation or expansion of existing shelter facilities, expansion of shelter services, and operating expenses. In other words, this funding can be used to repair a room, provide case management services, and pay for an electric bill. Currently, the only criteria to determine funding level is the number of shelter days provided. The new funding proposed provides an opportunity to create an outcome-based framework. The new funding levels can be influenced by performance-based metrics such as high rates of positive exits to permanent housing, a reduction in the average length of stay, low rate of return to homelessness, and increasing connections to employment or income.

### **Assembly Bill 124 – Increase Funding for Homeless Prevention and Diversion**

To end homelessness for everyone, there must be an investment in a variety of interventions. Entering the homelessness response system should be a last resort and prevented whenever possible. However, services are needed to help people in crisis navigate through community supports, problem solve, and connect to mainstream services. Investing financial assistance into situations in which a household can keep their current housing is less traumatic for everyone involved; especially when finding a new unit will be even more challenging with an eviction on their record or a negative landlord reference in addition to whatever barriers to maintaining stable housing exist. Unfortunately, funding for prevention is rare and limited. The services must be targeted and intentional in order to truly prevent homeless episodes from occurring. This bill increases prevention funding through an already existing grant, the Homeless Prevention Program, authorized under Wisconsin Statute 16.303. By identifying specific funding for targeted prevention services with the intended outcome of resolving the crisis and preventing the household from entering the homeless system, prevention can be a very effective tool.

In addition, this bill would add diversion as an eligible activity under the Homeless Prevention Program. Diversion prevents homelessness for people seeking shelter by helping them maintain their current housing arrangements or identify safe and acceptable alternatives, connecting them with mainstream and community resources, and when needed, provides limited financial assistance to return to permanent housing. Diversion prevents entry into emergency shelter for those with safe options. To engage in this intentional problem solving activity, funding is necessary to hire dedicated and trained staff. As a result of this type of programming, people that enter emergency shelters will be those identified as having no safe alternative housing or options rather than the traditional first-come, first-serve shelter approach.

Prevention and diversion progress can be reviewed, adjustments made, and targeting enhanced by using data to track outcomes.



**These two bills will create or expand a component of the homeless crisis response system across the state for people who slept in their car or a shelter last night.**

(1) By increasing funding for state shelter subsidy grants, emergency shelters can provide additional services and/or increase operational capacity based on funding levels attributed to performance. Investment in emergency shelter is imperative to ensuring people experiencing homelessness have a safe place to sleep. Expanding funding to those emergency shelters that demonstrate success shows commitment to positive outcomes, exits to permanent housing and retention efforts.

(2) Ending homelessness requires investment in a variety of interventions and tools including prevention and diversion. Preventing a household from sleeping in a shelter or their car by providing limited financial services and case management assistance to retain the apartment is a critical component to reducing the number of people that enter homelessness each day. Diverting those households from entering shelter who have safe alternative options and natural supports is also key to reducing the number of people that enter homelessness. Targeted prevention and problem solving conversations involve investments in trained and qualified staff.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carrie Poser".

**Carrie Poser**

CoC Director  
Wisconsin Balance of State CoC



**WIBOSCO**

[www.wiboscoc.org](http://www.wiboscoc.org)

<https://www.facebook.com/wiboscoc/>

### **Overview**

Beginning in 1992, our group met under the leadership of the State of Wisconsin, Division of Housing and a member-based Advisory Board to address the issue of homelessness, organize trainings, and complete the HUD CoC annual application. In 2009, the State stepped aside and the BOS became an unincorporated association. In 2011, the BOS became a 501c3 non-profit organization with a volunteer Board of Directors.

The BOS CoC:

- Covers 69 of Wisconsin's 72 counties (except Dane, Milwaukee, Racine) with the largest county being Waukesha (396,488) and the largest city being Green Bay (105,207)
- Geography covers over 62,000 square miles
- Has a population of approximately 3.8 million people
- Is bordered by the Mississippi River, Lake Superior, and Lake Michigan
- Takes almost 6 hours to travel north to south, 4 hours to travel east to west
- Includes 11 Native American tribes
- Includes 15 different consolidated plan jurisdictions

The membership of the BOS is comprised of 21 local coalitions. Each coalition is required to meet locally a minimum of 4 times a year, although most meet monthly or every other month. Modeling after the BOS construct, local coalitions are asked to bring together local partners, stakeholders, community members to identify barriers, tackle local issues, and address gaps in housing and services. Each coalition appoints 3 leads: Coalition, Point-in-Time, and Coordinated Entry.

The BOS CoC has met regularly since its inception, rotating locations around the state in an effort to bring people together. Quarterly, the BOS hosts a two-day meeting that includes both training and best practices as well as an organizational business meeting. Anyone with an interest in ending homelessness is welcome and encouraged to attend.

### **Funding**

The total CoC FY2018 funding from HUD to the Balance of State and agencies was \$10,365,263. The Balance of State CoC organization receives two direct HUD awards: CoC planning (\$294,945) and the Supportive Service Only (SSO) grant for Coordinated Entry (\$640,469).

The total EHH FY2018 funding from the State of Wisconsin, Division of Energy, Housing & Community Relations (DEHCR) is **\$3,657,448**. These funds support 20 lead agencies (including the Balance of State CoC) and 58 sub-recipient organizations. Services include emergency shelter, rapid-rehousing, prevention, HMIS, and outreach.

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For Veterans, there are 5 different Veteran Affairs Medical Centers with 10 housing authorities and one Tribal Housing Authority administering HUD-VASH Vouchers (**343 vouchers**). There are 3 different non-profits administering Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) funds across the Balance of State (**\$3,192,107**)\*. *\*This numbers includes some funding for Milwaukee and Racine.*

### **Point-in-Time**

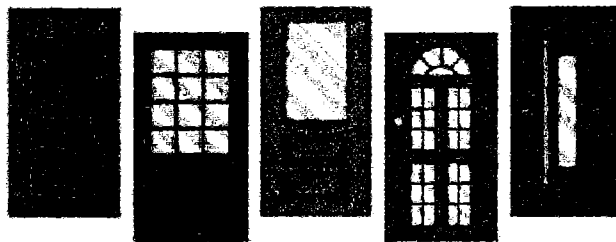
The Balance of State's total homeless population has been decreasing for the past 4 years: 2015 (**3597**), 2016 (**3445**), 2017 (**3348**), and 2018 (**3147**).

The Veterans experiencing homelessness has also decreased: 2015 (**246**), 2016 (**236**), 2017 (**180**), and 2018 (**165**).

Unfortunately, chronic homeless has been increasing: 2015 (**238**), 2016 (**187**), 2017 (**232**), and 2018 (**285**).

### **New for 2019**

The focus for the BOS CoC for 2019 has been expansion of coordinated entry and fidelity of housing first. Additional areas include diversion and prevention. Ongoing collaboration needs include PHAs (homeless preference and development of "Move On" strategies), Childhood Education Providers, School Districts and Human Services.



### **CoC Funded Agencies (as of FY2018)**

ADVOCAP  
Central Wisconsin Community Action Council (CWACAC)  
City of Appleton  
Community Action Coalition for South Central Wisconsin (CACSCW)  
Community Action Inc. of Rock and Walworth Counties (CAI)  
Couleecap  
Family Services of Northeast Wisconsin

Golden House  
Hebron House of Hospitality  
Housing Partnership of the Fox Cities  
Institute for Community Alliances (ICA)  
Kenosha Human Development Services (KHDS)  
Lakeshore CAP  
Lutheran Social Services  
Newcap  
North Central Community Action Program (NCCAP)  
Northwest Wisconsin Community Services Agency (NWCSA)  
The Salvation Army  
Walworth County Housing Authority  
West Central Wisconsin Community Action Agency (West CAP)  
Western Dairyland EOC  
Wisconsin Balance of State CoC  
Women and Children's Horizons  
YWCA of La Crosse

**CoC Committees**

**Coordinated Entry**

- Implementation Team
- 8 workgroups – Marketing, Youth, Evaluation, DV, Veterans, Other Systems of Care, Prevention, Outreach

**Discharge Planning**

**Executive Committee**

**Emergency Shelter and Diversion**

**Gaps and Needs**

**Financial and Audit Committee**

**Public Awareness and Advocacy**

**System Performance Committee**

**Veteran Advisory Board**

**Youth Advisory Board**

**CoC Staff**

As of 2018, there are three full-time BOS staff:

**Carrie Poser**

CoC Director

[Carrie.poser@wibos.org](mailto:Carrie.poser@wibos.org)

715-598-3301

**Meredith McCoy**

Monitoring & Compliance Coordinator

[Meredith.mccoy@wibos.org](mailto:Meredith.mccoy@wibos.org)

608-385-6543

**Ryan Graham**

Coordinated Entry System Specialist

[Ryan.graham@wibos.org](mailto:Ryan.graham@wibos.org)

715-225-0164

**Balance of State Mailing Address**

PO Box 272

Eau Claire, WI 54702

\*In 2019, the CoC is in the process of hiring a 4<sup>th</sup> staff – Grant Specialist.





All households in Dane County should have the opportunity to secure and maintain safe, stable, affordable housing.

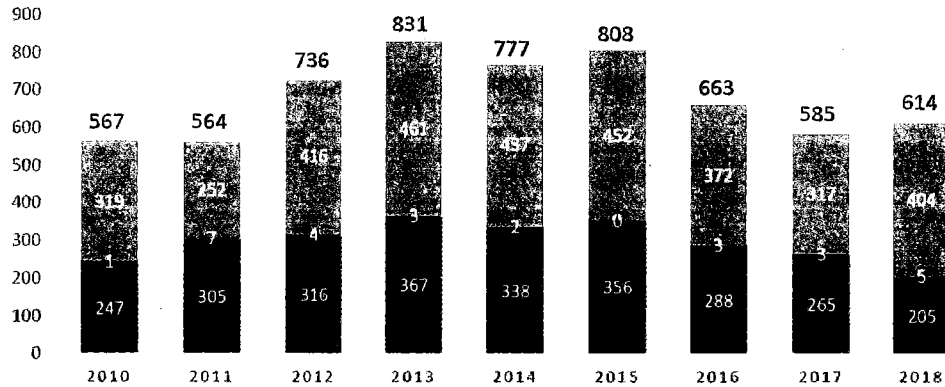
Homeless Services Consortium of Dane County is a partnership of agencies, funders, advocates, and formerly homeless persons committed to preventing and ending homelessness.

### How many people experience homelessness in Dane County?

There are three data points we use to answer this question:

1. Point in Time Count: An unduplicated count on a single night of people experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness
2. Annual number of people experiencing homelessness as reported to the Department of Housing and Urban Development
3. Community-wide Priority List: A list of households identified as experiencing homelessness and in need of a housing program intervention

JANUARY PIT COUNTS: 2010-2018



■ Singles: Persons in Households without Children  
 ■ Unaccompanied Youth: Persons in Households with only Children  
 ■ Families: Persons in Households with at least one Adult and one Child

### Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR)

AHAR	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Individuals	1914	1922	1950	2044	1986	1895	1981	1818	1789
Families	1157	1193	1235	1316	1446	1344	1214	1169	1207
Total	3071	3115	3185	3360	3432	3239	3195	2987	2996

### Housing Priority Lists

	Families			Single Adults		
	1/15/19	2/12/19	3/15/19	1/15/19	2/12/19	3/15/19
Total	141	144	140	832	822	813
Chronic	23	23	20	250	232	227
Veteran	0	0	0	37	38	36
Youth (18-24)	24	23	23	61	58	54



Members of the Homeless Services Consortium work to prevent homelessness and when it is not prevented, work to make homelessness, brief, rare and a one-time experience. This is achieved through a continuum of services including: prevention, diversion, street outreach, emergency shelter, transitional housing, and permanent housing (rapid re-housing and permanent supportive housing). The solution to homelessness is permanent housing. Each step of the continuum works with the participant to obtain permanent housing.

The Homeless Services Consortium examines the homeless services system to find areas of improvement and implement change. This work is accomplished through a variety of committees. All committees are open to the public and new members can join at any time. Committees include:

- Education and Advocacy Committee
- Core Committee
- Funders Committee
- Shelter Providers Committee
- Committee to End Youth Homelessness
- Point in Time Committee
- Nominating and Governance Committee
- Community Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness Oversight Committee
- Youth Action Board



For descriptions of committees and times of meetings, please visit our website, [www.danecountyhomeless.org](http://www.danecountyhomeless.org) or e-mail [hsc@cityofmadison.com](mailto:hsc@cityofmadison.com).

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# Hope House of Milwaukee, Inc.

209 West Orchard Street  
Milwaukee, WI 53204

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*Ending homelessness and creating healthy communities*

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Testimony of Wendy Weckler, Chair, Milwaukee Shelter & Transitional Housing Task Force, & Executive Director, Hope House of Milwaukee, Inc.  
AB 119, 124—State Shelter Subsidy Grant & Homeless Prevention Program  
Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform  
Tuesday, April 23, 2019

Chairman Krug & Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak on the 2 bills before you today that will increase resources for the Homeless Crisis Response System throughout the State of Wisconsin. On behalf of the Milwaukee Shelter and Transitional Housing Task Force, it is our hope that these bills will be a key step in the journey towards ending and preventing homelessness in our state.

As you know, AB 119 adds \$500,000 annually to the State Shelter Subsidy Grant program, this is a 50% increase to current funds, and the first major increase since the program's creation in 1994. The costs of running this type of 24-hour programming are high, and have increased exponentially with rising staffing, benefits, and food costs in the last 25 years. Additionally, this bill adds in performance metrics which will incentivize shortened lengths of stays in shelter and placements into permanent housing. Shelters are a vital component in the emergency response to homeless singles and families throughout our system.

AB 124 adds \$500,000 per year to the Homeless Prevention Program (HPP) and an additional \$300,000 for the purpose of diversion. HPP works to help individuals and families avoid evictions and remain in their current housing. The Diversion fund will provide short-term assistance to get people into stable, safe housing outside the traditional housing system, preventing the time, expense, and life disruption a shelter stay can cause. There are many times that an individual or family may be in a safe, but overcrowded situation. This is not viable long term, and these important diversion funds would keep them from needing to enter a shelter in order to meet the proper "definition" of homelessness and access further resources in the system.

My agency, Hope House of Milwaukee has run since 2015, a HUD funded Rapid Rehousing Program. The 3-year data for this program shows us that moving the most vulnerable families quickly into their own unit, providing a rent subsidy based on income, and intensive supportive services allows them to succeed. At the one-year mark, 90% of our families remain permanently housed either in the

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unit they rented through us or another of their choosing, and at the 3-year mark, 85% of our families have not touched the shelter system again. Allowing individuals and families to access this type of assistance, without the traumatization of having to first enter the shelter system, would not only save money, but have a hugely positive impact on the well-being of the household.

These 2 bills are a part of a \$3.75 million total proposal to the Homeless Crisis Response System. In Wisconsin homelessness is not just an urban or rural problem. Service providers throughout the state, including all of those that receive current state funding, enter their data into the Homeless Management Information System, operated in Wisconsin by the Institute for Community Alliances. Their most recent report from July of 2018, containing the 2017 data, shows us that:

- 21,906 clients experiencing homelessness received services and shelter
- 17,905 men, women, and children stayed in an emergency shelter
- 56% of the clients in emergency shelter were outside of Milwaukee, Dane, and Racine county.
- 42% of persons experiencing homelessness were members of a family
- 494 children, under the age of 18, received services as a homeless, unaccompanied youth

While these numbers seem high, across the country we are seeing that an investment in housing first, prevention, and diversion can end homelessness. In 2017, the Wisconsin Legislature created the Interagency Council on Homelessness to help guide our state towards this goal using a Housing First Model. Now is the time to take further action and begin ending homelessness in our State.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and please support AB 119 and 124.

# Wisconsin Community Action Program Association



April 23, 2019

TO: The Members of the Committee on Public Benefit Reform  
The Members of the Committee on Workforce Development  
The Members of the Committee on Housing and Real Estate

FROM: Brad Paul,  
Executive Director

We want to thank the Committee Chairs & Members for accepting our testimony.

WISCAP is a statewide association of Wisconsin's 16 Community Action Agencies and two single purpose agencies working to fight poverty in Wisconsin. WISCAP and its members are committed to creating economic opportunity and supporting community-based solutions to poverty. As a leader in efforts to address poverty in Wisconsin, we keenly understand the need for policies that promote economic equality and that provide pathways for the Community Action network and its many partners to address needs of Wisconsinites with low income. Community Action Agencies work in urban, rural, and suburban communities alike – operating in 69 counties. Local agencies are governed by a tripartite board consisting of low-income individuals, elected officials or their representatives, and community members from among business, industry, labor, religious, law enforcement, education, or other major groups and interests in the community served. This unique structure helps to ensure the whole community is involved in prioritizing, designing and implementing services that are responsive to local needs.

Our comments on the proposed package of legislation fall into two categories; [1] the broad perspective on homelessness policy and [2] specific comments with respect to the individual bills.

## [1] Homelessness in Wisconsin

Homelessness and the deep poverty that underlies it is a serious issue in Wisconsin. The Institute for Research on Poverty reports that more than 1 in 10 Wisconsinites live in poverty, including 16.9% of all children in the state; 37.5% of Wisconsinites struggle to afford the necessities of housing, child care, health care, food, and transportation, according to the 2018 United Way *ALICE Study of Financial Hardship*. And, while unemployment remains low, housing costs have increased out of proportion to income. Although certainly a vast undercount due to its limited scope and methodology, the 2018 Point-in-Time estimate reveals that there are close to 5,000 homeless individuals on a single night in Wisconsin. Within that, the Balance of State Continuum of Care catchment area includes the country's 4th highest number of homeless families with children (1600+) in rural areas. Other counts and public systems, including our schools and Head Start programs, report significant increases in children and youth homelessness. Last year, the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction counted over 19,000 homeless children and youth enrolled in public schools. Seventy-seven percent were staying with others temporarily due to lack of alternatives, and 7% were in motels when they were identified as homeless. Put differently, 84% of the homeless children and youth in Wisconsin schools are not considered homeless under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) narrow definition. And, despite a national prioritization and targeting of resources, the

number of homeless individuals considered “chronic” by HUD increased for the second consecutive year. In short, these realities are felt across Wisconsin. Any “rural-urban divide” tends to collapse when viewed through the lens of poverty. But cruel data aside, we have barely moved beyond a now 20-year discussion over how to “end” homelessness. Whether we put our trust in public or private-sector solutions we must at least be honest about just how many of our neighbors struggle and how any meaningful response must include all sectors of society. Poverty and homelessness inflicts a near-constant stress that silently assaults one’s dignity, health and emotional well-being. All people of our state who struggle in these circumstances deserve our respect — and our boldest, most innovative efforts to find solutions. To do otherwise amounts to nothing less than cruel indifference — and fails to reflect the deeply caring and compassionate nature of the people of Wisconsin.

With regards to the statewide response to homelessness, local Community Action Agencies provide a wide range of programs and services, including emergency shelter, eviction prevention, transitional and permanent housing, job training, and a range of supportive services. In 2017, Community Action Agencies across the state helped 6,115 people obtain or maintain affordable housing. In addition, 4,025 low-income households were provided with emergency rent, mortgage assistance, and temporary shelter through our network. For their part, local housing authorities in Wisconsin occupy a key place in homelessness prevention through the operation of publicly-owned housing for low-income households. Similarly, housing authorities and private market owners’ alike contract to secure both project-based and tenant-based Section 8 rent subsidies that help families and individuals both exit and avoid homelessness altogether. DOA’s administration of HUD supportive housing resources and WHEDA’s execution of the Federal LIHTC provides further support for the creation of units targeted to low-income households. Additionally, the state’s four Continuum of Care systems (CoC’s) provide coordinated services in alignment with HUD mandates. These include delivering on housing first and rapid rehousing models as directed by HUD and administering the HMIS data tracking system requirement. Finally, a broad and informal network of faith-based, community-based and non-profit organizations that operate outside of the “homeless system” provide crucial support and services that often go unnoticed, uncounted, and largely unfunded by government sources. Taken together, this formation of public and private groups collectively provides emergency and longer-term relief in addressing the very complex and stubbornly persistent crisis of homelessness.

Yet, many of these same agencies are often unable to provide further critical assistance due to restrictive definitions. Since 2001, “ending homelessness” has become a watchword at the national, state, and local level. Unfortunately, this goal has been pursued through federally imposed-priorities that conflict with local realities, forcing communities to adopt housing models targeted to “chronically” homeless adults while ignoring other vulnerable populations such as children and youth, many of whom do not fit HUD’s overly narrow definition of homelessness. Research shows that these children are next in line to become “chronically” homeless adults if we do not step up efforts to help them.

Effective legislation, therefore, must consider - and address - the full realities of who is homeless and the many obstacles that homeless families and individuals face, such as lack of transportation, lack of affordable housing, and limited access to affordable child care, as well as the skills training needed to access well-paying jobs. In bringing together workforce development, case management services, and emergency and permanent housing, these bills help move us off a “one size fits all policy” that has regrettably characterized national policy and the requirements of the “homeless system” to date. As such, WISCAP is supportive of each piece of proposed legislation being discussed in the three committees today. Should these bills move forward, given the complex geography of homelessness in our state and the diverse nature of affected populations and service provider organizations, we encourage maximum flexibility in departmental rule making and the implementation process.

## [2] Comments on AB 119-125 and AB 144

### **Assembly Committee on Housing and Real Estate:**

#### *Assembly Bill 121 creating a new \$300,000/year appropriation to help hire housing navigators*

Housing first and rapid rehousing approaches by themselves do not create new units or open tight rental markets. Adding additional resources to help identify and secure housing options can play a meaningful role in reducing housing insecurity. Moreover, for a variety of reasons, including past evictions, criminal convictions, and credit history, landlords can be resistant to renting to homeless families and individuals. This bill will add important resources to allow local housing navigators to work with housing providers, prospective tenants, and case managers to identify available units for those seeking affordable housing.

#### *Assembly Bill 123 adding \$900,000 per year to the Housing Assistance Program (currently funded at \$300,000 per year)*

The Housing Assistance Program provides grants to private, nonprofit organizations; Community Action Agencies; and county or municipal governments for operating housing and associated supportive services for the homeless. Through this funding, Community Action Agencies and other entities have been able to provide a range of activities in support of housing operations, including case management, rental assistance, and transportation. Flat funded in recent years, however, the program would benefit from an increase to allow for an expansion of housing assistance.

#### *Assembly Bill 125 creating a new program to assist landlords in bringing units up to federal standards for the purpose of renting to low-income*

The American Community Survey identifies more than 685,000 occupied units of "inadequate housing" in Wisconsin. Additionally, more than 63% of all housing units in urban areas and over one third of all units in rural parts of the state were built before 1960. Providing loans to housing providers to satisfy quality standards is an important step in bringing more affordable units on line. In addition, we would urge the committee to work with DOA to explore ways to incentivize participation from landlords who do not currently rent to low and moderate income families.

### Assembly Committee on Workforce Development

#### *Assembly Bill 120, adding \$500,000 per year to the Homeless Case Management Services Grant program for certain case management at homeless shelters*

This has proven to be a successful program and we are fully supportive of its expansion. These services form an especially important integrated strategy when paired with the proposed increase in State Shelter Subsidy Grant as contained within AB 119. We are also pleased to note the proposed flexibility in awarding both the number of grants and amounts.

#### *Assembly Bill 122, requiring that the state identify homeless populations in its workforce plan under the federal WIOA, and that all workforce boards statewide contain a representative of a local homeless response team.*

As noted in the Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness *A Hand and a Home: Foundations for Success 2019-2022 Statewide Action Plan* "the best way to prevent a slide back into homelessness once the temporary supports of subsidies and case management are no longer available is through gainful employment." Broad

representation on Workforce Development Boards would improve collaboration among housing networks, job agencies, and employers.

***Assembly Bill 144, adding \$250,000 per year to the Skills Enhancement program***

The program helps low-wage workers who are employed at least half-time get the training they need to obtain better paying jobs, greater housing stability, and economic self-sufficiency. Skills helps participants, mainly low-income parents, to overcome educational barriers by providing comprehensive case management, as well as financial assistance with tuition & fees, child care & transportation to attend classes. In 2018, program graduates increased their average annual income by \$15,544. Additionally, SEP graduates reported a 400% increase in access to employer sponsored health care. Adding \$250,000, as proposed in this bill, would enable Community Action Agencies to serve more low-wage workers and expand services to more counties. WISCAP estimates over 5 years an additional \$250,000 in annual GPR would enable 370 more participants to complete training - of which 285 (77%) would be expected to obtain new jobs within nine months of graduation. By 2022 the cumulative increased earnings of additional graduates are projected to total over \$8 million – 6 times more than the state’s investment.

Although not under discussion, we urge the committee to draft and forward legislation to similarly increase the Job and Business Development (JBD) program within DWD. This is the only business development program in the state that provides technical assistance solely to low-income entrepreneurs to successfully start or expand small businesses in Wisconsin. Through this program, Community Action Agency staff assist clients to develop business, financial and marketing plans and to access capital through commercial lenders and agency-operated revolving loan funds. JBD began in 1989 under Governor Thompson and has had bi-partisan support for nearly 30 year because JBD directly creates & preserves jobs – over 6,000 since its inception. Since 2006, JBD has leveraged nearly \$11 million in loans to small businesses in over 40 counties and nearly \$5 million in other business development funding. Initially funded at \$250,000 annually, the program sits at \$200,600 a year, a 20% drop.

**Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform**

***Assembly Bill 119, adding \$500,000 per year to the State Shelter Subsidy Grant, attaching performance metrics to be determined by DOA on the new money and gradually adding performance metrics to the entire grant, cleaning up administrative code.***

The State Shelter Subsidy Grant was established in 1991 and has remained at nearly the same funding level since despite inflation rising by 80%. Emergency shelter plays a critical role in the response to homelessness. Data from October 2016 – September 2017 reveals that 90% of all homeless persons counted through HMIS data were served in emergency shelters. WISCAP supports this bill to provide critically needed resources for Wisconsin emergency shelters, many of these operated by an informal patchwork of community and faith-based providers. In attaching and developing new performance metrics, WISCAP urges lawmakers and DOA to allow for maximum flexibility to ensure that smaller shelter providers, particularly those outside of the CoC system, are not disenfranchised by the new criteria. DOA might consider a set-aside for shelters to continue to operate as they exist or developing appropriate rule language for smaller shelters.



*Assembly Bill 124, adding \$500,000 per year to the Homeless Prevention Program for the purpose of prevention funds, and another \$300,000 per year for the purpose of diversion funding.*

We strongly support an expansion of homelessness prevention funds which can be used for rent payments, utility deposits and payments, housing placement, case management and individualized services to facilitate housing stability, and mediation and legal services to prevent the loss of housing. With respect to "diversion programming," while there are many examples of successful diversion, we are concerned that diversion can also go wrong in the effort to keep someone out of a shelter. For example, a situation where a homeless family might return to an abuser or a motel with a sex offender. In such cases, shelter and other assistance is the appropriate path. As such, we ask that DOA be given maximum flexibility in designing diversion program rules and grant distribution.

# WISCONSIN COALITION AGAINST HOMELESSNESS

## THE WISCONSIN HOPE ACT Ending Homelessness in Wisconsin

### A Discussion Paper

#### INTRODUCTION

Despite best efforts on the part of a variety of administrations and strategic methods that advocate for and implement the latest homelessness prevention model, it never seems to be enough. Enhancing supportive services, utilizing a rapid re-housing approach, or promoting the Housing First model may bring about time limited success, but in the end, individuals and families often, due to a variety of factors, becoming homeless again. Immediate shelter needs can provide a roof over one's head – hence the value of Housing First or rapid re-housing. Behavioral issues also endanger long-term housing stability; that is the role of supportive services. But – in the end, it is financial literacy coupled with a consistent, family supporting income that will maintain housing stability and mitigate circumstances that pull people back into homelessness. According to the State Homeless Management Information System only 34.21 % of non-disabled adults entering the homeless service system in Wisconsin are employed and that number increases only marginally to 37.24% upon exit from the system. (Please see the full employment report attached)

All the services above are necessary to reduce homelessness – but those efforts need to have a tie that binds the whole approach together, and that tie is employment. For work able individuals, increasing their personal experiences and values associated with decent employment; preparing them for the current job market; providing appropriate supports so that they can focus on and keep their jobs, as well as developing an understanding of basic personal finances and budgeting, will keep them out of the homeless system. Employment and money management is the “bookend” to all the upfront supports and services in place. **This paper postulates that the main pillars of Wisconsin's strategy to end homelessness should be prevention, affordable housing with appropriate supporting services, and employment with needed service supports. (For example, supportive employment opportunities)**

For 20 years human service advocates and affordable housing advocates have endeavored to create an integrated model to move their clients through a chain of services and supports. This effort has been both laborious and complicated! Human service providers had to move out of their area of expertise, learning new lexicons about the production of affordable housing. Meanwhile it became incumbent on those on the development end to learn about how to produce a quality shelter product that includes a comprehensive service support system.

These efforts have resulted in the creation and advocacy of strategies such as supportive housing, rapid rehousing and Housing First. However, let us consider the following scenario:

If today, we had the resources to provide shelter to every homeless individual and family in the State of Wisconsin would homelessness be eliminated?

The answer would be a qualified YES in that Wisconsin would achieve the HUD defined fanciful paradigm of functional zero. However, if individuals and families time out of their short-term rent subsidies, or they are unable to financially support themselves, or they make decisions that impede their ability to pay their landlords, they run a high risk of once again becoming homeless.

Low-income people often have the cards stacked against them. A family cannot economically survive on W-2 supports and individuals cannot survive on sporadic, temporary day labor. Efforts to move non-disabled persons and families from the streets to permanent housing is really nothing more than a short term solution if that strategy does not involve employment. Without a wage income to pay the rent, rapid rehousing and Housing First programs become a complicated and elongated emergency shelter stay.

Traditionally, homeless advocates have not integrated employment strategies into the quest for ending homelessness. Why not? There are some obvious reasons:

- First, the focus has been on persons with disabilities because of the HUD mandated focus on the chronically homeless and the circumstances that

surround a disability eliminate the “if they would only get a job” sink hole. Disabled persons, by the nature of their limitations become “worthy” of assistance.

- Second, advocates for low-income individuals sometimes become defensive when engaged in conversations about policy that impacts on those who are poor and unemployed. There is the often-voiced lament that, “they’re not lazy-they want to work but...”. And all too often we have seen employment initiatives aimed at the poor be of a punitive nature-the goal being to reduce specific benefits that assist low-income individuals and their families rather than really seeking to help people find and keep meaningful employment.
- Finally, just as advocates once possessed little or no working knowledge of the rules, regulations and implementation needs of housing development, there is not a full understanding of workforce development approaches and practices. In addition, advocates are apprehensive when the subject matter includes ideas such as offering tax incentives to private employers for job creation.

This lack of integration of workforce development solutions into the homeless paradigm has caused a paucity of information about the employment history and employment status of the homeless in Wisconsin. While we have attached the report on homelessness/employment status from the State homeless data system, it is important to note that it does not collect the type or length of employment, time between employment, wage rates and education and training levels – all very important, even imperative, information required to design and implement program approaches that infuse homeless persons and families into the workforce.

However, if there is a commitment to permanently ending homelessness in Wisconsin, a new paradigm must be implemented; a model in which service and support within emergency shelter, rapid rehousing, supportive housing, and Housing First are entrenched at the front end of prevention strategies and at the back end by workforce development and financial literacy; an integrated, seamless model. We believe that the Wisconsin Hope Act lays the ground work for that new paradigm and in the weeks and months ahead we will be focusing on producing an approach that ends homelessness rather than the “fanciful” HUD functional zero goal.

## COMPONENTS OF THE WISCONSIN HOPE ACT

### **PREVENTION:**

In practice and reality practitioners, policy makers, researchers and advocates agree that prevention of homelessness makes sense. If one or two months' rent payment provided to a family prevents evictions, the loss of possessions, mitigates children's educational disruption as well as a host of other potential deleterious events, it is the clearest path for stabilization.

This approach, does offer some significant challenges. If not well designed and administered, it becomes a quick solution to every individual who has a five day eviction notice in hand. Not all of those who receive an eviction are appropriate recipients. Fortunately, Milwaukee has a past history of a model implemented in a successful and accountable approach to this conundrum. For instance, one Milwaukee program funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA), successfully target prevention funds to households when landlords actually filed eviction actions and focused on those tenants experiencing a temporary loss of income which had been, or would shortly be, restored. This model recognized that first 5 day notices are routine. It does not mean that the household cannot pay the rent. The process also recognized that households with no income, or drastically inadequate income, would be unable to provide sufficient funds for future payments. This model was tested and evaluated in Milwaukee during the height of the last recession and data indicated that the approach reduced evictions in Milwaukee. (Evaluation is attached)

### **SUPPORTIVE SERVICES:**

Homeless persons and families need a variety of supportive services, both free standing and attached to permanent housing in order to maintain housing and familial stability. The lack of funding for supportive services has inhibited the development of permanent supportive housing projects throughout the state. It is hoped that the soon to be proposed federal Medicaid waiver will provide the necessary resources for such services as mental health outreach, AODA services, housing search, housing retention, case management and other supports. These important services must be integrated into affordable housing developments that provide long-term supports for individuals and families most at-risk for homelessness.

**HOUSING:**

Affordable housing is of course a key component to any strategy to end homelessness. Financing these kinds of projects is still very difficult and new creative sources of revenue need to be considered. We suggest that the state pursue a social impact bond strategy and/or establish a state based Low Income Housing Tax Credit Program to attract private sector resources and a "pay for performance" structure wherein private capital could see a return on investment for their participation. In this structure, a for profit entity, perhaps one which has workforce needs, would partner with a nonprofit to invest in housing that would serve their own employees.

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SERVICES:**

Just as homeless persons and families have barriers to stable housing they also experience barriers to employment. These barriers can be overcome with intensive job coaching and other employment support services. One suggested course of action is that Medicaid funding resulting from the homeless waiver request funds some of these workforce services.

**TAX CREDITS:**

A tax credit designed to specifically target efforts to employ homeless persons could be provided by the state to employers who wish to be involved in an integrated service model that would include housing, supportive services, and workforce development services.

**INTEGRATION OF SERVICES:**

A viable model would focus on the integration of a private entity or company with workforce development needs would meet vacancies and employment gaps by creating workforce housing that would include a menu of supportive services that would assist those most at-risk of homelessness.

For example: Foxconn would partner with a nonprofit housing developer and invest in supportive housing developments for the homeless. The State, through Medicaid, would fund the required support and workforce development services. Foxconn would receive tax credits for the number of homeless persons employed. All of this, the housing, services, and employment could be wrapped within a pay for performance model insuring that the housing investor, nonprofit

housing developer, services providers, and employer is held accountable for specific outcome measures. It would not be necessary that the private entity investing in the housing be the same private entity which participates in the employee tax credit program.

**CONCLUSION:**

So, what if we had a bigger-better magic wand where we have a robust prevention model in place AND moved homeless persons and families from the street into housing provided the supportive services needed AND provided them with employment with the appropriate supports? Could there really be something beyond functional zero?

**ADDENDUM:**

Upon reflection WCAH would like to reiterate its long-standing support for increased supports directed towards emergency shelters. While shelter services are not currently the homeless service "flavor of the day", they play a vital role in the provision of homeless services throughout the state and are the first line of defense in our battle to end homelessness in Wisconsin. Current data suggests that 90% of individuals and families entering the homeless system in Wisconsin enter through shelters. Yet, emergency shelters for the homeless have been prohibited from a share in CoC funding and have had to rely on the small State Shelter Subsidy Program which has seen no increase since the early 1990's. Why would we want the "emergency room" of the homeless system to be underfunded when it is at this first point of contact that homeless persons and families when they are the most traumatized and require emotional support?

Yes, we need to fund prevention, supportive housing and job opportunities for the homeless, but in Wisconsin, especially during its harsh winters, we need to support immediate and comprehensive services which can literally save lives!

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON WCAH GO TO [WCAHWI.ORG](http://WCAHWI.ORG)

## Percent of Eligible, Employed (at entry) Homeless Persons in Wisconsin: 10/1/16 - 9/30/17

*Eligibility determined by person being 18 years of age or older and not having a disabling condition.*

### By Clients:

% of Employed Clients in WI	34.21%
Type of Homeless Assistance	Employment %
Coordinated Assessment (HUD)	%
Day Shelter (HUD)	100%
Emergency Shelter (HUD)	29.42%
Homelessness Prevention (HUD)	51.5%
Other (HUD)	21.43%
PH - Housing only (HUD)	61.54%
PH - Housing with services (no disability required for entry) (HUD)	58.47%
PH - Permanent Supportive Housing (disability required for entry) (HUD)	28.03%
PH - Rapid Re-Housing (HUD)	37.25%
Safe Haven (HUD)	0%
Services Only (HUD)	32.17%
Street Outreach (HUD)	16.67%
Transitional housing (HUD)	40.5%

### By Households: (single clients each have an individual household, each family is combined into 1 household)

% of Employed Households in WI	36.22%
Type of Homeless Assistance	Employment %
Coordinated Assessment (HUD)	0.00%
Day Shelter (HUD)	66.67%
Emergency Shelter (HUD)	31.25%
Homelessness Prevention (HUD)	58.7%
Other (HUD)	22.37%
PH - Housing only (HUD)	60.71%



## Percent of Eligible, Employed (at entry) Homeless Persons in Wisconsin: 10/1/16 - 9/30/17

*Eligibility determined by person being 18 years of age or older and not having a disabling condition.*

Type of Homeless Assistance	HH Employment %
PH - Housing with services (no disability required for entry) (HUD)	58.04%
PH - Permanent Supportive Housing (disability required for entry) (HUD)	28.32%
PH - Rapid Re-Housing (HUD)	39.75%
Safe Haven (HUD)	8.82%
Services Only (HUD)	33.33%
Street Outreach (HUD)	17.22%
Transitional housing (HUD)	41.99%

Type of Homeless Assistance	Singles/Families	HH Employment %
Coordinated Assessment (HUD)	Singles	0.00%
Day Shelter (HUD)	Singles	66.67%
Emergency Shelter (HUD)	Families	34.98%
Emergency Shelter (HUD)	Singles	29.58%
Homelessness Prevention (HUD)	Families	59.43%
Homelessness Prevention (HUD)	Singles	57.12%
Other (HUD)	Families	38.46%
Other (HUD)	Singles	19.05%
PH - Housing only (HUD)	Families	60%
PH - Housing only (HUD)	Singles	61.11%
PH - Housing with services (no disability required for entry) (HUD)	Families	55.56%
PH - Housing with services (no disability required for entry) (HUD)	Singles	60.34%
PH - Permanent Supportive Housing (disability required for entry) (HUD)	Families	25.29%
PH - Permanent Supportive Housing (disability required for entry) (HUD)	Singles	29.69%
PH - Rapid Re-Housing (HUD)	Families	42.13%
PH - Rapid Re-Housing (HUD)	Singles	35.82%
Safe Haven (HUD)	Singles	8.82%
Services Only (HUD)	Families	46.67%
Services Only (HUD)	Singles	30.07%
Street Outreach (HUD)	Families	29.82%
Street Outreach (HUD)	Singles	16.75%
Transitional housing (HUD)	Families	43.59%

**Percent of Eligible, Employed (at entry) Homeless Persons  
in Wisconsin: 10/1/16 - 9/30/17**

*Eligibility determined by person being 18 years of age or older and not having a disabling condition.*

Type of Homeless Assistance	Singles/Families	HH Employment %
Transitional housing (HUD)	Singles	40.17%

Singles/Families	HH Employment %
Families	44.79%
Singles	30.14%

**Percent of Eligible, Employed (at exit) Homeless Persons in Wisconsin: 10/1/16 - 9/30/17**

*Eligibility determined by person being 18 years of age or older and not having a disabling condition.*

**By Clients:**

<b>% of Employed Clients in WI</b>	
37.24%	
<b>Type of Homeless Assistance</b>	<b>Employment %</b>
Coordinated Assessment (HUD)	0.00%
Day Shelter (HUD)	100%
Emergency Shelter (HUD)	33.74%
Homelessness Prevention (HUD)	51.05%
Other (HUD)	24.19%
PH - Housing only (HUD)	65.38%
PH - Housing with services (no disability required for entry) (HUD)	62.7%
PH - Permanent Supportive Housing (disability required for entry) (HUD)	26.92%
PH - Rapid Re-Housing (HUD)	47.06%
Safe Haven (HUD)	0%
Services Only (HUD)	37.99%
Street Outreach (HUD)	18.18%
Transitional housing (HUD)	51.62%

**By Households: (single clients each have an individual household, each family is combined into 1 household)**

<b>% of Employed Households in WI</b>	
39.74%	
<b>Type of Homeless Assistance</b>	<b>HH Employment %</b>
Coordinated Assessment (HUD)	0.00%
Day Shelter (HUD)	66.67%
Emergency Shelter (HUD)	35.3%
Homelessness Prevention (HUD)	58.46%
Other (HUD)	22.39%
PH - Housing only (HUD)	64.29%

**Percent of Eligible, Employed (at exit) Homeless Persons in  
Wisconsin: 10/1/16 - 9/30/17**

*Eligibility determined by person being 18 years of age or older and not having a disabling condition.*

Type of Homeless Assistance	JH Employment %
PH - Housing with services (no disability required for entry) (HUD)	68.87%
PH - Permanent Supportive Housing (disability required for entry) (HUD)	28.22%
PH - Rapid Re-Housing (HUD)	50.17%
Safe Haven (HUD)	10%
Services Only (HUD)	37.75%
Street Outreach (HUD)	18.16%
Transitional housing (HUD)	52.53%

Type of Homeless Assistance	Singles/Families	JH Employment %
Coordinated Assessment (HUD)	Singles	0.00%
Day Shelter (HUD)	Singles	66.67%
Emergency Shelter (HUD)	Families	41.02%
Emergency Shelter (HUD)	Singles	32.68%
Homelessness Prevention (HUD)	Families	60.8%
Homelessness Prevention (HUD)	Singles	53.75%
Other (HUD)	Families	29.41%
Other (HUD)	Singles	20%
PH - Housing only (HUD)	Families	66.67%
PH - Housing only (HUD)	Singles	63.16%
PH - Housing with services (no disability required for entry) (HUD)	Families	69.09%
PH - Housing with services (no disability required for entry) (HUD)	Singles	68.63%
PH - Permanent Supportive Housing (disability required for entry) (HUD)	Families	23.2%
PH - Permanent Supportive Housing (disability required for entry) (HUD)	Singles	32.1%
PH - Rapid Re-Housing (HUD)	Families	52%
PH - Rapid Re-Housing (HUD)	Singles	46.89%
Safe Haven (HUD)	Singles	10%
Services Only (HUD)	Families	51.52%
Services Only (HUD)	Singles	33.9%
Street Outreach (HUD)	Families	35.19%
Street Outreach (HUD)	Singles	17.58%

**Percent of Eligible, Employed (at exit) Homeless Persons in  
Wisconsin: 10/1/16 - 9/30/17**

*Eligibility determined by person being 18 years of age or older and not having a disabling condition.*

<b>Type of Homeless Assistance</b>	<b>Singles/Families</b>	<b>HH Employment %</b>
Transitional housing (HUD)	Families	55.47%
Transitional housing (HUD)	Singles	48.87%

<b>Singles/Families</b>	<b>HH Employment %</b>
Families	50.03%
Singles	32.38%

**Evictions in Milwaukee County 2008 – 2009:  
Estimating the Impact of Aid from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**

A Policy Report Prepared for Community Advocates  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

by

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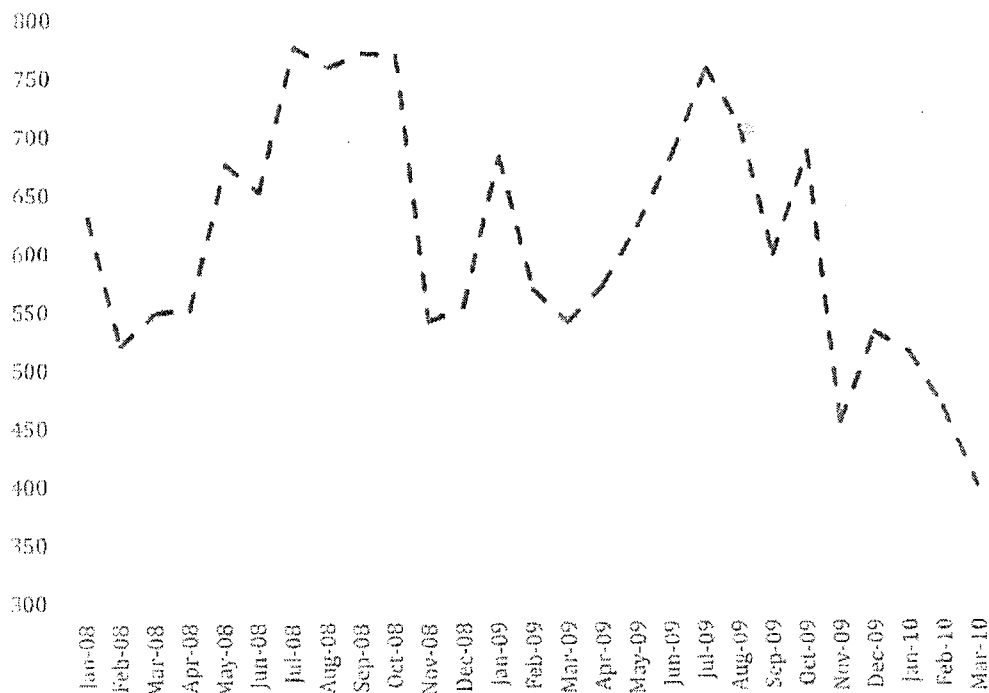
July 2010

### Evictions in Milwaukee County: January 2008 to March 2010

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 allocated \$1.5 billion for rental assistance and housing relocation, nationwide. In Milwaukee, Community Advocates began distributing stimulus funds in August 2009 in the form of eviction assistance aid. Did evictions decrease after aid began to be dispersed?

Figure 2 graphs the number of defendants in closed eviction cases from January 2008 to March 2010. The purple line springing from August 2009 indicates the approximate time stimulus aid began to be distributed in Milwaukee.

**Figure 2.** Defendants in Closed Eviction Cases, Milwaukee County, January 2008- March 2010



Source: Milwaukee County Eviction Records, 2008-2010; Milwaukee County Clerk of Circuit Courts

It is clear that the number of evictees in Milwaukee County decreased considerably after August 2009. In most years, the number remains high until around October. (Figure 2 shows that this was the case in 2008, for example). In 2009, however, the number of evictees declined after August. It peaked in October and again in January (following a normal seasonal pattern), but the overall shape of the pattern was that of a decline.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The number of evictees for March 2010 should be viewed somewhat skeptically. Although the data were extracted from Wisconsin Circuit Court Access (CCAP) in June 2010, presumably giving the system enough time to record eviction cases that occurred in March, the relatively low count for March may in part be a reflection of a lag in the system (and thus an underestimation of the total number of evictees for that month).

**Table 1. Defendants in Closed Eviction Cases,  
Milwaukee County, January 2008- March 2010**

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
January	629	680	511
February	519	566	463
March	547	538	396
April	550	569	
May	674	620	
June	650	681	
July	774	755	
August	757	705	
September	769	595	
October	767	683	
November	539	451	
December	552	528	

Source: Milwaukee County Eviction Records, 2008-2010;  
Milwaukee County Clerk of Circuit Courts

### **Conclusion**

We have seen that there has been a drop in the number of defendants in eviction cases in Milwaukee County since August 2009, the month aid from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act began to be distributed, and that this drop cannot be explained by the normal eviction cycle. Data limitations prevent us from attributing this decline solely to aid from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. But the fact that the number of evictions began to decrease at the exact time stimulus aid began to be dispersed cannot be ignored.





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## Testimony on Assembly Bill 119

### Grants to homeless shelters and modifying administrative rules promulgated by the DOA

Chairman Krug, Ranking member Subeck and members.

I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to talk about the issue of homelessness in Wisconsin, Assembly Bill 119, and the crucial steps we've put forward to move towards the end goal of everyone in Wisconsin having a place to call home.

In April of 2017, I joined Representatives Pronschinske, Rodriguez, and Snyder in releasing a series of bills to address homelessness in a statewide, comprehensive way. It was the first major attention the issue had received at the state level in decades.

One of the bills introduced created a new statutory body, the Interagency Council on Homelessness. The Council contained secretaries or directors of eight state agencies, the four continuum of care organizations in Wisconsin, and a designee of the governor. The creation of the council was seen by advocates and stakeholders as a turning point for combatting homelessness in Wisconsin, as it would allow for coordination of the state's resources and goals.

After the Assembly passed the first set of bills, we set out to learn more about the issue of homelessness around the state. We held bipartisan tours of homeless facilities, warming shelters, food pantries, and more throughout the summer of 2017. These experiences reinforced what we as legislators already knew to be true: continuing the conversation beyond our initial bills was going to be crucial in addressing this state-wide issue.

In the fall of 2017, the bill creating the Interagency Council on Homelessness was signed into law. Exactly one year later, the council released its 2019-2022 action plan, "A Hand and a Home: Foundations for Success," which was touted as the state's "most coordinated, deepest attempt to prevent and curtail homelessness." From the plan, I worked with my Republican colleagues in the Assembly to identify eight distinct legislative priorities, including new programming and \$3.75 million in new spending.

Among those eight bills is AB 119, which adds \$500,000 annually to the State Shelter Subsidy Grant program, a 50% increase to the fund and its first major increase since its creation in 1994.

Shelters are a crucial piece of the homeless response system. Most recent data from 2017 shows that of the 21,906 individuals around the state that year that received homelessness services, 17,905 of them stayed in shelters. Even further, more than 10,000 individuals utilized shelters outside of Milwaukee, Dane and Racine counties.

The State Shelter Subsidy Grant program is the sole funding source the state uses to support shelters, making AB 119 a critical component to combatting homelessness in Wisconsin.

As we look to continue our state's efforts to provide safe, reliable housing for every man, woman and child, I believe this legislation helps move us closer towards that goal.

I would be happy to answer any questions you have regarding AB 119 and how we can end and prevent homelessness here in Wisconsin. Thank you for your consideration of AB 119 and hearing my comments today.

**Alberta Darling**  
**Wisconsin State Senator**  
Co-Chair, Joint Committee on Finance

Testimony before the Assembly Committee on Public Benefit Reform

Tuesday, April 23, 2019

Assembly Bill 119

Thank you Chair Krug and committee members for taking the time to hear Assembly Bill 119. The bill before you today is part of the homelessness package. This important package of bills derive from the recommendations of the Interagency Council on Homelessness's preliminary report, *A Hand and a Home: Foundations for Success*.

In 2017, a total of 21,906 people experiencing homelessness received services and shelter in Wisconsin. The Interagency Council on Homelessness also reported that 17,905 people stayed in emergency shelters in 2017.

Wisconsin currently funds a State Shelter Subsidy Grant (SSSG) program. This program provides funds for a shelter's operating budget, the expansion of existing shelter facilities, and renovation of existing buildings into a shelter. Currently, this program is funded at \$1,000,000 per year.

Assembly Bill 119 increases the funds to this important program by \$500,000 per year. Notably, this increase in funds is the only true increase to the program over the past 25 years. Additionally, the bill creates performance metrics for the new money in order to incentivize shelters to responsibly transition individuals into permanent housing.

Emergency shelters are critical to our state's homeless population. As a true safety net, these shelters provide a meal and safe space to sleep, particularly during Wisconsin's frigid winter months. Assembly Bill 119 is critical to continuing to invest in our emergency shelters, enable them to renovate and expand, while still creating accountability and transparency in how these state dollars are spent.

I'd like to thank Representative Steineke, the Interagency Council on Homelessness, and Wisconsin's many advocates for the homeless for their work on this initiative. I hope to count on your support for Assembly Bill 119.



**21,906**

Individuals experiencing homelessness received services and shelter.

**17,905**

Individuals stayed in an emergency shelter.

**56%**

Of those staying in emergency shelters were outside of Milwaukee, Dane and Racine Counties

**494**

Minors received services as unaccompanied homeless youth.

*Figures cover 2017 and are based on most-recent data submitted to the Homeless Management Information System, operated in Wisconsin by the Institute for Community Alliances.*



*Rep. Pat Snyder (Wausau) meets with constituents to discuss local homelessness services and ways to improve outcomes.*

## A Cohesive Approach to Combatting Homelessness in Wisconsin...

In April of 2017, the Wisconsin Legislature released a series of bills in tandem with 2017-19 state budget priorities to address homelessness in a statewide, comprehensive way, the first major attention the issue had received in decades.

One bill created a new statutory body, the Interagency Council on Homelessness. Formerly chaired by Lieutenant Governor Kleefisch, the council contained secretaries or directors of eight state agencies and the four Continuum of Care organizations in Wisconsin – federally mandated collaborative zones of housing and service providers and homelessness advocates.

One year to the day of its authorizing bill becoming law, the council released its 2019-2022 action plan, *A Hand and a Home: Foundations for Success*, which was “perhaps the state’s most coordinated, deepest attempt to prevent and curtail homelessness.” The bills in this package were identified as legislative priorities in the plan. They include new programming and \$3.75 million in new spending, more than doubling the state’s current commitment.

## State Government’s Action on Homelessness

- September 9, 2016: *Homelessness identified in Assembly Republican’s Forward Agenda;*
- April 12, 2017: *Assembly Republican’s release legislation to address homelessness;*
- September 21, 2017: *Gov. Walker signs state budget into law — includes homelessness funding;*
- November 27, 2017: *Homelessness legislation signed into law by Walker, including creation of Interagency Council;*
- February 12, 2018: *Interagency Council holds inaugural meeting;*
- April 16, 2018: *Interagency Council hires first director;*
- November 27, 2018: *Interagency Council releases first action plan with a number of policy recommendations;*
- February 21, 2019: *Assembly Republicans introduce legislation based on Interagency Council’s policy recommendations, Gov. Evers appoints himself as the new chair of Council*

# A Hand for the Homeless

Based on policy recommendations made in the report issued by the state's Interagency Council on Homelessness, the following eight bills include a mix of new programming and a total of \$3.75 million in spending. The legislation detailed below represents a multifaceted approach that has been called "the state's most coordinated, deepest attempt to prevent and curtail homelessness" by the Wisconsin State Journal and further demonstrates legislative Republican's further commitment to providing a hand for the homeless.

## **Assembly Bill 119**

**Rep. Jim Steineke &  
Sen. Alberta Darling**

Adds \$500,000 annually to the State Shelter Subsidy Grant program, a 50% increase to the fund and its first major increase in 25 years. It also cleans up administrative code. Most significantly, it adds performance metrics to incentivize shelters to responsibly transition individuals into permanent housing.

## **Assembly Bill 120**

**Rep. Jesse James &  
Sen. Luther Olsen**

Adds \$500,000 annually (a 100% increase) to the Homeless Case Management Services Program to assist families in shelter with gaining employment or increasing their income.

## **Assembly Bill 121**

**Rep. Barb Dittrich &  
Sen. Kathy Bernier**

Creates a Housing Navigation Grant, funded at \$300,000 annually, to work with landlords to find available permanent housing units for individuals experiencing homelessness and to mediate any disputes that may arise.

## **Assembly Bill 122**

**Rep. Jessie Rodriguez &  
Sen. Dan Feyen**

Directs the Department of Workforce Development to identify and create programs for homeless youth (age 18-24) and adults, catered to those populations' specific needs. It also mandates collaboration between local Workforce Development Boards and their corresponding homeless response systems.

## **Assembly Bill 123**

**Rep. Pat Snyder &  
Sen. Kathy Bernier**

Adds \$900,000 annually (a 300% increase) to the Housing Assistance Program, the state's most flexible funder of Permanent Supportive Housing, Rapid Re-housing, and Transitional Housing.

## **Assembly Bill 124**

**Rep. Jon Plumer &  
Sen. Luther Olsen**

Adds \$500,000 annually to the Homeless Prevention Program to help avoid evictions, and creates a new program funded at \$300,000 to begin diversion. Diversion is short-term assistance to steer those who present as homeless into stable housing outside the traditional homelessness system.

## **Assembly Bill 125**

**Rep. Treig Pronschinske  
& Sen. Kathy Bernier**

Creates an innovative forgivable loan program, funded at \$500,000 annually, to renovate existing units for use as affordable housing.

## **Assembly Bill 144**

**Rep. Tony Kurtz &  
Sen. Alberta Darling**

Adds \$250,000 annually (a 100% increase) to the Skills Enhancement Program to help low-income individuals receive job training and technical skills.

