

THE MARYLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401-1991

JOINT COMMITTEE ON ENDING HOMELESSNESS

December 17, 2021

The Honorable Bill Ferguson, Co-Chair
The Honorable Adrienne A. Jones, Co-Chair
Members of the Legislative Policy Committee

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The Joint Committee on Ending Homelessness (JCEH) is pleased to submit a summary report of its 2021 interim activities. This report also serves as the joint committee's annual report detailing its seventh year of activity. The joint committee met virtually three times this interim to receive briefings on rental assistance and evictions, the intersection between homelessness and the corrections and health systems, and updates related to youth homelessness in Maryland. The joint committee remains concerned about the increasing levels of homelessness and housing insecurity in the State, and the exacerbation of these issues during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although data collection related to the interaction of the homeless population with State programs and institutions such as hospitals and detention centers is improving, there is more work to be done in expanding the availability of data that is necessary to understand and address housing instability issues in the State.

At the September 9, 2021 meeting, the joint committee heard updates on emergency housing relief programs and the status of eviction proceedings in the State from stakeholders such as the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), the Office of the Attorney General, the Eviction Lab at Princeton University, local advocacy groups, and the Department of Legislative Services (DLS). Presenters emphasized the importance of the adoption of best practices in emergency rental assistance distribution and encouraged modifications to the eviction process in order to better protect tenants who are at risk of losing their homes.

On October 5, 2021, the joint committee heard from the Department of Public Safety and Correctional Services (DPSCS) on its reentry process and available data on services provided to

returning citizens. DPSCS noted improved tracking of housing status at the time of release and documented 80 individuals who were released into sheltered or unsheltered homelessness (4.2% of all tracked releases), and an additional 168 individuals who were released into transitional housing (8.9% of all tracked releases). The St. Mary's County Detention and Rehabilitation Center provided a local perspective on combatting homelessness through pre-trial supervision and reentry programs. The joint committee also heard from the Health Services Cost Review Commission (HSCRC) on Maryland's community benefits reporting requirements as well as HSCRC data on hospital utilization by individuals experiencing homelessness. The Corporation for Supportive Housing presented on the topic of housing as a driver of health and the need for supportive housing resources. Lastly, the Maryland Multi-Housing Association provided a landlord perspective on rental assistance and evictions as a follow-up to testimony heard in the committee's September meeting.

The joint committee's meeting on November 9, 2021, examined issues related to youth homelessness in the State. DHCD updated the joint committee on the implementation of Chapters 108 and 109 of 2020 (Unaccompanied Minors in Need of Shelter and Supportive Services). The Fenix Youth Project and the His Hope Ministries Youth Advisory Board presented on the services they provide to youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness, and the barriers youth face to achieving housing stability. DHCD and DLS also provided updates on emergency rental assistance distribution as a follow-up to concerns raised in the joint committee's September meeting. Finally, the National Alliance to End Homelessness addressed the joint committee to provide insight into national trends in homelessness services and prevention.

Based on witness testimonies and briefings given throughout the 2021 interim, the joint committee recommends that the General Assembly, State agencies, and all relevant stakeholders consider the following actions related to addressing the needs of individuals who are experiencing housing instability or who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. The joint committee's 22 recommendations fall into the categories of (1) rental assistance and the eviction process; (2) State and local detention centers; (3) HSCRC; (4) youth; and (5) miscellaneous. With regard to Rental Assistance and the Eviction Process Recommendation No. 5, the chairs would like to emphasize that any options to limit the passing on of increased eviction filing fees to tenants in the form of increased rent and/or security deposits should be considered in the implementation of this recommendation. Further, in relation to Rental Assistance and the Eviction Process Recommendation No. 8, the chairs would also like to continue to research avenues for the State to establish additional mechanisms to help finance mortgages.

Rental Assistance and the Eviction Process

1. Improve timely distribution of rental and other financial assistance.
 - (a) Ensure DHCD is following relevant guidance from the U.S. Department of the Treasury and utilizing the Treasury's online resources.

- (b) Provide assistance with filling out rental assistance applications, including providing access to the internet.
- 2. Design and implement eviction diversion programs that divert landlord-tenant disputes away from court judgment by creating a clear, easily accessible continuum of services and prioritizing early resort to rental assistance and mediated negotiations.
- 3. Institute an eviction moratorium for renters with outstanding rental assistance applications.
- 4. Provide access to legal representation: advocate for the use of federal and State funds for the program created by Chapter 746 (House Bill 18) of 2021.
- 5. Disincentivize serial eviction filings by increasing filing fees and imposing other requirements that lengthen the eviction process.
- 6. Improve data collection and outcome tracking related to homelessness, eviction filings, warrants of restitution, executed warrants, and the rental market as a whole, including zip code data, renter demographics, rental cost, and lease turnover, in order to inform the development of housing stability strategies and improve the efficacy of programs and services.
- 7. Seal eviction case filing records immediately after a case is dismissed or settled, after three years from entry of judgment, or on showing of good cause.
- 8. Increase the supply of affordable and workforce housing through increased funding for construction, cash assistance or housing vouchers, or through policies to incentivize zoning for multifamily units.
- 9. Establish a statewide housing rental assistance/voucher program in order to provide assistance to additional renters beyond the limited number that are currently being served through federal programs.

State and Local Detention Centers

- 1. Reduce impediments to housing for individuals leaving incarceration. Local detention centers identified barriers such as lack of shelters or identifying and getting transport to shelters, housing options denying applicants based on criminal records, mental health issues, difficulty acquiring employment, and lack of case managers.
- 2. Improve data collection at State and local facilities related to housing status of returning citizens and require the reporting of relevant data to JCEH and the budget committees.
- 3. Provide resources for mental health and dual diagnosis transitional housing facilities.

4. Provide funding for case management for returning citizens without stable housing for at least a year following release.
5. Provide funding that can be used to house individuals who do not meet U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development requirements, which have restrictions based on criminal history and also consider individuals to not be homeless if housed in an institution for 90 days.

Health Services Cost Review Commission

1. Recommend HSCRC to encourage hospitals that see high levels of utilization from homeless individuals to invest in programs and supports to improve the health of this population, either directly or through support of social determinants of health like food and housing.
2. Evaluate data collected from HSCRC on hospital utilization by the homeless population.
3. Recommend HSCRC to adopt the “Revenue for Reform” policy, which will further align incentives to encourage hospitals to invest their retained revenue in community health initiatives (such as housing and other social determinants of health related to housing instability).
4. Schedule presentations from HSCRC on the progress of data collection and programs to support the homeless population.

Youth

1. Improve outreach to youth regarding rental assistance programs.
2. Provide funding for youth-specific shelters.

Miscellaneous

1. Continue to pursue the adaptive reuse of vacant commercial spaces:
 - (a) Reintroduce House Bill 877 of 2021 (Workgroup on Adaptive Reuse of Vacant Commercial Spaces), extend the timeframe on the bill for two years, and require an interim report and final report.
 - (b) Engage standing committees on research and ideas for legislation to pursue zoning reform and adaptive reuse.
2. Recommend that the Department of Human Services and DHCD evaluate case management best practices and make recommendations to the committee on how best to

December 17, 2021

Page 5

implement these practices into existing State programs that directly or indirectly work with persons experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness.

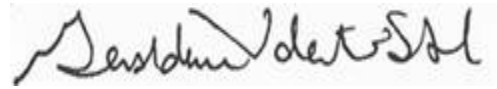
The joint committee looks forward to having a productive session on issues related to housing and homelessness, and to continuing our work next interim. In particular, the joint committee hopes to dedicate time next interim to further analyze homelessness and housing instability among veterans, which form a uniquely vulnerable subpopulation.

We wish to thank the joint committee members for their participation, representatives of public and private organizations who kept us informed, and our committee staff for their support.



Mary L. Washington
Senate Chair

Sincerely,



Geraldine Valentino-Smith
House Chair

MLW:GVS/HJC:TSE:ERH/mhr

cc: Ms. Alexandra Hughes
Mr. Jeremy Baker
Ms. Sally Robb
Ms. Victoria L. Gruber
Mr. Ryan Bishop