

Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth

FY16 Status Report

June 2016

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Legislative Mandate

The following report is issued pursuant to Chapter 450 of the Acts of 2014, which reads as follows:

The commission shall submit an annual report by December 31 to the governor, the clerks of the house of representatives and the senate, the joint committee on children, families and persons with disabilities and the office of the child advocate. The report shall include, but not be limited to, the commission's findings and any recommendations for regulatory or legislative action, with a timeline for implementation, cost estimates and finance mechanisms, and shall detail the extent of homelessness among unaccompanied homeless youth in the commonwealth and the progress made toward implementing the commission's recommendations and any other efforts to address the needs of this population.

Background

The Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (the Commission) was reconstituted through Chapter 450 of the Acts of 2014. Following its previous directive, the Commission was established in statute for the purpose of studying and making recommendations relative to services for unaccompanied homeless youth and young adults¹, with the goal of providing a comprehensive and effective response to the unique needs of this population. The focus of the commission's work shall include, but not be limited to: (i) an analysis of the barriers to serving unaccompanied homeless youth who are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender; (ii) an analysis of the barriers to serving unaccompanied youth under 18 years of age; (iii) an assessment of the impact of mandated reporting requirements on unaccompanied homeless youths' access to services; (iv) the commonwealth's ability to identify and connect with unaccompanied homeless youth; and (v) recommendations to reduce identified barriers to serving this population.

In addition and subject to appropriation, Chapter 450 directs the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) to enter into performance-based contracts with organizations and agencies to provide housing and support services to address the needs of unaccompanied homeless youths in urban, suburban and rural areas. In entering into such contracts, the executive office of health and human services shall take into consideration the recommendations of the commission on unaccompanied homeless youth established in section 16W on identifying, connecting and serving unaccompanied homeless youth, in general, and unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 18 and youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender, in particular. Contracts authorized in this section shall include housing services for unaccompanied homeless youth which may include, but shall not be limited to: emergency shelter; kinship home placements; short-term housing; and transition to independent living programs. Programs shall provide any such unaccompanied homeless youth with stable out-of-

¹ The Commission defines "Unaccompanied Homeless Youth" as: A person 24 years of age or younger who is not in the physical custody or care of a parent or legal guardian and who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence

home placement, help to reunite any such youth with the youth's parent or legal guardian if family reunification is in the youth's best interest and help to create educational and residential stability. Additional support services may include, but shall not be limited to: individual, family and group counseling; access to medical, dental and mental health care; education and employment services; case management, advocacy and referral services; independent living skills training; and provision of basic needs.

Through the FY16 budget, the Legislature appropriated \$2 million to EOHHS to conduct such activities. EOHHS recently entered into contracts with 8 providers across the Commonwealth to administer these funds.

The Commission is pleased to submit this status report on the third year of our work. Following the 2014 first-in-the-nation statewide census of youth experiencing homelessness, the Commission conducted a second annual count in 2015. This report serves as a status update on the findings of the 2015 Youth Count, which details the extent of homelessness and housing instability among unaccompanied youth in the commonwealth. Over the course of the next fiscal year, the Commission intends to analyze the 2016 Youth Count (conducted in May 2016), as well as monitor the implementation of the youth funding and will make recommendations for further regulatory or legislative action.

2015 Youth Count

The Identification and Connection Working Group of the Commission is charged with assessing the Commonwealth's ability to identify and connect with unaccompanied homeless youth and capture an accurate count of unaccompanied young people who are experiencing homelessness in the Commonwealth.

Recent Activities

Between January and March 2015, the Massachusetts Special Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth conducted the second annual Massachusetts Youth Count (Count), a statewide survey of unaccompanied youth who are experiencing homelessness. The survey followed the groundbreaking 2014 Count, which was the first-in-the-nation statewide effort of its kind. Historically, the number of unaccompanied youth has been difficult to determine for a variety of reasons; limited resources to identify and count the population and fear among the youth related to being returned to a home they left and deem unsafe. Consequently, the federal government and communities across the country have been working over the past several years to develop methodologies for conducting a more comprehensive Count in order to understand the scope of homelessness among unaccompanied youth and connect them to appropriate housing and services.

Members of the Identification and Connection Working Group

- Amy Ackroyd, Children's Friend and Family Services
- Kadra Adderly, City of Boston Department of Neighborhood Development
- Tom Baker, LUK, Inc.
- Maurie Bergeron, LUK, Inc.
- Jamila Bradley, Y2Y and Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance Leadership Development Program
- Gordon Calkins, Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development

- Ana Camargo, City of Lawrence
- Lucy Costa, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless
- Rose Evans, Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, Working Group Co-Chair
- Ayala Livny, Consultant and Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance Leadership Development Program
- Caitlin Golden, Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance
- Jim Greene, City of Boston Emergency Shelter Commission
- Suzanne Heilman, Massachusetts Appleseed Center for Law and Justice
- Hannah Hussey, Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth
- Elisabeth Jackson, Bridge Over Troubled Waters
- Lauren Leonardis, Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance Leadership Development Program
- Kevin Lilly, Samaritans Steps
- Sam Margolius, Justice Resource Institute YouthHarbors Program
- Glenda Medina, Children's Friend and Family Services
- Sarah Slautterback, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
- Linn Torto, Massachusetts Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness
- Kelly Turley, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, Working Group Co-Chair
- Kitty Zen, Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance Leadership Development Program

Attachment A- Massachusetts Youth Count 2015 Report

