



Recommendations to the Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness

Delivered by the Illinois Community Advisory
Council on Homelessness

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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Meet the Illinois Community Advisory Council on Homelessness

LIVED EXPERIENCE COUNCIL MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



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Tamela Milan-Alexander

Tamela Milan-Alexander, MPPA, is the Director of Community Engagement at EverThrive Illinois. She has over 20 years of experience in maternal child health working as a peer educator, parent advocate, developmental screener and community health worker, as well as a Healthy Start case manager. Mrs. Milan-Alexander is an active advocate and collaborator to improve the lives of moms and babies, including current membership on the Illinois Task Force on Infant and Maternal Mortality Among African Americans and the Illinois Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics' Collaborative on Child Homelessness. In her career, she has seen that the perspectives of people with lived experiences are critical to enacting positive change and to ultimately supporting the health of Illinois' children.

Mrs. Milan-Alexander's drive for health equity and improving systems that care for families comes from her personal experience. In 1997, Mrs. Milan-Alexander's five children were in state welfare custody. She struggled with long-standing opioid use disorder and began another high-risk pregnancy. Mrs. Milan-Alexander was able to begin a new path with the needed encouragement of her infant daughter's pediatrician and the coordinated services of a Healthy Start program. Mrs. Milan-Alexander reunited her family, moved from public housing into a townhome and completed college and a master's degree. Her personal experiences have given her deep insight into the role neighborhood factors — such as access to housing, public transportation, food, childcare and education — play in shaping each of our lives. She urges the Interagency Task Force to partner with Public Housing Authorities and private housing providers to maximize families' access to housing, and also the choice and respect afforded to families in housing programs.

LIVED EXPERIENCE COUNCIL MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



CONTACT OTHA AT:
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Otha Gaston

Otha Gaston has been an active advocate and collaborator to end homelessness in Illinois for the last eight years. He holds a seat on the Chicago Continuum of Care's Lived Experience Commission and its Racial Equity Impact Team. He also serves on the Chicago and Cook County Flexible Housing Pool Advisory Committee and is a longtime member of the Supportive Housing Providers Association's Peer Leadership Committee. His passions for ending homelessness and restoring hope to people stem from his own past experience with homelessness.

Otha wants to help policymakers understand that housing is the solution to homelessness and that the work of ending homelessness is urgent. Otha says that people do not set out to become homeless and that people experiencing homelessness live lives as complex as anyone else's. He knows the value of programs to prevent homelessness, such as emergency rental assistance and increased access to legal representation in eviction courts and encourages the State to prioritize investing in these programs.



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Richard Rowe

Richard Rowe is a Senior Program Manager with the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH), where he co-leads CSH's national justice work. He is also a current member of the Office to Prevent and End Homelessness's Racial Equity Roundtable on Black Homelessness. Richard has over 20 years of lived and professional experience in the nonprofit sector, including positions at Heartland Health Outreach and A Safe Haven Foundation prior to joining CSH six years ago. He was previously the Lead Collaboration Manager for the Housing Supports for the Families in Transition Program (FIT) program, a supportive housing program for 100 Chicago Public Schools' families.

Richard joined the Lived Experience Commission of Chicago's Chicago Continuum of Care in 2012, where he has served as chair on three occasions. He also served on the board of the Chicago Low-Income Housing Trust Fund and Vice President of Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation's board. He is a member of the Illinois Reentry Council, where he co-chairs the Housing Committee.

Richard reflects: Housing is a human right. It often appears that we must constantly remind some of this fact. Throughout the years, I have seen much progress in the fight to end homelessness but until we address the systemic root causes of homelessness, including lack of meaningful access to quality housing, health care, financial resources, employment and education, we will continue to miss the mark. I will continue to illuminate the barriers that prevent people and whole communities from thriving. To make progress, we must acknowledge structural racism and its deep roots. Addressing these perpetual, manmade barriers requires us to be bold, creative and unafraid to call out and call in when needed. Ask yourself: If not you, then who? If not now, then when?



Sandy Deters

BACKGROUND:

Housing Counseling Coordinator,
Embarras River Basin Agency

PARTNER WITH ME ON:

Rural homelessness

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John Herring

BACKGROUND:

Executive Director, Illinois Network of
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PARTNER WITH ME ON:

The intersection of homelessness
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Jennifer Hill

BACKGROUND:

Jennifer Hill is Executive Director of the Alliance to End Homelessness in Suburban Cook County, a membership organization that coordinates a continuum of services and housing options for people experiencing homelessness. Before joining the Alliance in 2004, Ms. Hill was the founding director of a statewide supportive housing coalition in Florida, where she contributed to the creation of Miami-Dade County's 10-year plan to end homelessness. She has worked for nonprofit community development groups in Uptown Chicago, San Francisco and Oakland, CA. Ms. Hill holds a masters degree in city planning from the University of California – Berkeley.

PARTNER WITH ME ON:

Continuums of Care, Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program, strategic planning and homelessness data

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Niya Kelly

BACKGROUND:

Niya is the Director of State Legislative Policy, Transformation and Equity at the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless. Her work focuses on advocacy and organizing around the Illinois' budget, public benefits, youth homelessness and housing insecurity policies. She understands that homelessness is a direct result of racism and inequities in our country and incorporates her deep understanding of systemic racism in her work.

PARTNER WITH ME ON:

Legislative advocacy, State budgeting, public benefits, racial equity and youth homelessness

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Brandie Knazze

BACKGROUND:

A native Chicagoan, Brandie serves as the Commissioner of the Chicago Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS), a role she has held since June 2021. As DFSS Commissioner, Ms. Knazze oversees the strategy, operations, budget and framework for citywide human and social-support initiatives in children services, community service centers, domestic violence, homeless services, senior services, workforce development and youth services.

PARTNER WITH ME ON:

Human and social services including workforce development, youth and homeless initiatives, corporate partnerships and advocacy

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Ron Lund

BACKGROUND:

Community Services Director, Project NOW and Board President, Northwestern Illinois Continuum of Care (a 15-county Continuum of Care serving Northwestern Illinois)

PARTNER WITH ME ON:

Rural homelessness, engaging Continuums of Care

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Brenda O'Connell

BACKGROUND:

Brenda O'Connell has more than two decades of experience working in nonprofits and government, where she has focused on homelessness, affordable housing, literacy and other anti-poverty work. During the pandemic, O'Connell was promoted to Lake County's Community Development Administrator where she has overseen over \$50 million of investment in food, homeless sheltering and rental assistance. In 2019, she was instrumental in effectively ending homelessness among veterans in Lake County by developing an innovative collaboration among numerous nonprofits, medical facilities and government agencies.

PARTNER WITH ME ON:

Strategies to end homelessness, system change, data-driven quality improvement and federal grant administration

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Susan Reyna-Guerrero

BACKGROUND:

Susan is the Chief Executive Officer at Covenant House Illinois.

Susan is a seasoned administrator and leader with more than 30 years of social service experience, all of which have been spent in the Chicago community. Susan has dedicated her career to working on the systemic issues that cause homelessness and lessening homelessness' impact on children and youths mental health, physical health and overall wellbeing.

PARTNER WITH ME ON:

Trauma-informed services and practical solutions for young people in Illinois experiencing homelessness and housing instability

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Debbie Reznick

BACKGROUND:

Debbie Reznick serves as a Senior Program Officer at the Polk Bros. Foundation where she leads grantmaking in the Foundation's homelessness, capacity building and legal aid and advocacy programs. She is a board member of Chicago's Continuum of Care and a founding member of Chicago Funders Together to End Homelessness, a collaborative of more than 30 philanthropic partners aligning resources around a shared strategy to prevent and end homelessness.

PARTNER WITH ME ON:

Cross-sector convenings, fundraising, public/private partnerships

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Carolyn Ross

BACKGROUND:

Carolyn is the President & CEO, All Chicago Making Homelessness History. All Chicago serves as the lead agency for the Chicago Continuum of Care, collaborating with more than 100 agency partners working to prevent and end homelessness in Chicago. She has years of experience working in the field of human services, homelessness prevention, behavioral health, child welfare and criminal justice. She has developed and implemented programs including prevention and intervention services for youth and families; prevention and Substance Use Disorder treatment for youth and adults; criminal justice diversion programs; and strategies to help build community capacity.

PARTNER WITH ME ON:

Preventing and ending homelessness, systems-level change, supportive services and community partnerships

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Linda Warner

BACKGROUND:

Linda Warner completed her Master of Education from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1994. In 1997, she began working in social services, spending nearly 20 years in community mental health. In 2017, Linda began working at Stopping Woman Abuse Now, Inc. (SWAN) where she has worked in legal advocacy, adult protective services, and as Executive Director since 2020. SWAN is based in Olney, IL but provides an array of services across 16 rural counties. With nine offices throughout their 7,000 square mile service region, SWAN has been providing invaluable services to its rural community for 43 years. SWAN's homeless shelter and domestic violence shelter are both located in Olney. At SWAN, we shelter, protect, advocate, and assist.

PARTNER WITH ME ON:

Rural homelessness and social services, domestic violence

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Nicole Wilson

BACKGROUND:

As Vice President of Community Investment, Heart of Illinois United Way, Nicole directs volunteer resource distribution and community impact activities across central Illinois. She manages grantmaking and programs including Supporting Student Success, the Home for All Continuum of Care and the 2-1-1 information and referral line.

PARTNER WITH ME ON:

Community partnerships, government relations, grants administration, program development, outcome measurement and volunteer recruitment

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Letter from the Illinois Community Advisory Council on Homelessness

Dear Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness,

These recommendations are respectfully submitted by the Illinois Community Advisory Council on Homelessness (the Council) in fulfillment of the new annual requirement for the Council to make recommendations to the Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness (Interagency Task Force) as required by state law. These recommendations are made independently of the Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness (OPEH).

The Council is a group of housing justice champions from across our state. Since our inaugural meeting in March 2022, the Council has focused on building our identity, structure and relationships and establishing workgroups that support the implementation of Home Illinois.

Initially, we have:

- deepened Council members' understanding of State homelessness programs and began to shape an advocacy agenda to support the goals of Home Illinois,
- gathered feedback from people who participate in the Statewide Referral Network (SRN) — including housing providers, service providers, Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) staff and people seeking housing — to help the State improve the SRN application process and meet its goals of providing housing for vulnerable people ([see page 13](#)) and
- worked closely with OPEH staff to plan the inaugural Home Illinois Summit, which was attended by 352 people with lived experience, advocates and policymakers from across the state. The Summit celebrated the accomplishments of Home Illinois and fostered momentum for its continued implementation.

Now that this groundwork has been laid, we are excited to deepen our collaboration with the Interagency Task Force and amplify our collective impact.

Reflecting on lessons learned during the first year of our work and on key opportunities for 2024, our recommendations focus on: (1) strengthening relationships between Interagency Task Force and Council members, (2) increasing interaction between people with lived experience of homelessness and the Interagency Task Force and (3) working with the OPEH to build on the strong foundation laid in the Home Illinois FY23-24 Plan.

Core values of Council members that have shaped these recommendations include a commitment to advancing racial equity, recognition of the human right to housing, centering the voices of people with lived experience and data-driven decision making.

We share OPEH's understanding that homelessness is fundamentally a solvable problem and its vision of an Illinois where everyone has a home. Through our collective work to end homelessness, we are sending a clear message: no Illinoisian deserves to live on a sidewalk, no Illinoisian deserves to live on a park bench, no child deserves to live in the back of a car. Each of us deserves a stable place to call home.

Achieving this joint vision of housing justice requires deep collaboration between government, advocates, people with lived experience, nonprofits and other partners. It also requires deeply examining root causes of homelessness. In Illinois and across our country, a major root cause of homelessness is systemic racism. The traumatic experience of homelessness is unjustly



ABOVE: Council members with State and community leaders at Phoenix Community Development Services in Peoria. In the foreground, starting from left: Illinois Representative Jehan Gordan-Booth, unknown, Carolyn Ross, Brenda O'Connell. Background, starting from left: Deputy Governor Sol Flores, Governor JB Pritzker, Lieutenant Governor Juliana Stratton, Chief Homelessness Officer Christine Haley, Peoria CoC Executive Director Kate Green and Peoria Mayor Rita Ali. Source: Office of Governor JB Pritzker.

and disproportionately experienced by people of color, particularly Black people. Statewide, Black Illinoisans make up 61% of residents experiencing homelessness, despite making up 30% of those living in poverty and 14% of the overall population.¹ We know this reality is driven by many manifestations of our country's long history of systemic racism and the way forward to a more just future is not always clear. But recognizing the role systemic racism plays in driving homelessness is a vital first step to solutions. We are encouraged that Home Illinois includes an explicit racial equity lens and encourage the Interagency Task Force to continue actively planning for racial equity.

In partnership,

Tamela Milan-Alexander
Community Engagement Director, EverThrive Illinois/
Representative of the Collaborative on Child Homelessness Illinois

Sandy Deters
Housing Coordinator, Embarras River Basin Agency

Otha Gaston
Chicago Lived Experience Commission

John Herring
Executive Director, Illinois Network of Centers for Independent Living

Jennifer Hill
Executive Director, Alliance to End Homelessness in
Suburban Cook County

Niya Kelly
Director of State Legislative Policy, Equity and Transformation,
Chicago Coalition for the Homeless

Brandie Knazze
Commissioner, Chicago Department of Family and Support Services

By recognizing the factors that drive homelessness and through solutions-oriented collaboration, we can realize the vision of an Illinois where all our neighbors are housed. It is in this ethos of collaboration and governing with, not for, those most directly impacted by policy that these recommendations are offered.

We thank Interagency Task Force members for your work to prevent and end homelessness across Illinois and Chief Haley for her remarkable and effective leadership. Together we can realize a future where each of our neighbors have a safe, healthy and stable place to call home — the future all Illinoisans deserve.

Ron Lund
Community Services Director, Project NOW

Brenda O'Connell
Community Development Administrator, Lake County

Susan Reyna-Guerrero
Chief Executive Officer, Covenant House Illinois

Debbie Reznick
Council Co-Chair, Senior Program Officer, Polk Bros. Foundation

Carolyn Ross
President and Chief Executive Officer, All Chicago

Richard Rowe
Senior Program Manager, Corporation for Supportive Housing

Linda Werner
Executive Director, Stopping Woman Abuse Now, Inc. (SWAN)

Nicole Wilson
Vice President of Community Investment,
Heart of Illinois United Way

¹ State of Illinois, Illinois Office to Prevent and End Homelessness. Home Illinois: Illinois' Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, 2022, p. 23. Citing Housing Action Illinois' 2019 report Black and white disparities in homelessness in Illinois.

Recommendations to the Interagency Task Force on Homelessness from the Council



ABOVE Council members Debbie Reznick, Brenda O'Connell, Sandy Deters, Chief Christine Haley, former Council member Richard Monocchio and Jennifer Hill at a Council meeting hosted at the Embarras River Basin Agency.

As established in Governor Pritzker's Executive Order 2021-21 and codified into law in HB 2831, the Community Advisory Council on Homelessness is tasked with advising the Illinois Interagency Task Force on Homelessness on its mission to achieve functional zero homelessness in the State of Illinois. In pursuit of this goal, the Council will discuss and make recommendations on improving health and human services for those experiencing homelessness, strengthening housing stability, and unnecessary institutionalization.

For more information, see <https://www.dhs.state.il.us/page.aspx?item=138563>

STRENGTHEN RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE AND COMMUNITY ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBERS

No single person or system can end homelessness. Our collective work requires deepening collaboration, breaking down silos and co-creating solutions. Working together requires a different way of approaching decision making and thinking about each of our roles. In the coming year, we seek to deepen our collaboration in order to advance community-driven implementation of Home Illinois.

RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS AREA INCLUDE:

01

Build in standing updates at Interagency Task Force and Council meetings about the current work of the other group and opportunities for engagement.

02

Utilize Council member expertise for relevant Interagency Task Force meeting agenda items (i.e. youth, reentry, rural homelessness).

03

Partner with the Council to host Interagency Task Force members and their senior staff at Council-member's organizations and other organizations to learn about their innovative work to solve homelessness.

04

Hold a special session for Interagency Task Force, Council members and OPEH staff to build community and celebrate progress at the 2024 Home Illinois Summit.

05

Collaborate with the Council to support State agency staff in deepening their understanding of the systemic causes of homelessness, the trauma of the experience and the intersections between homelessness and the work of Interagency Task Force departments. This could look like collaborating on short written communications for State staff, training, or opportunities for field visits.

06

Prioritize collaboration between the Council and the OPEH Fellows, five new senior-level policy experts who will work within the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS), the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH), the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) and the Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA).

- As a body of external stakeholders in Home Illinois and longtime housing justice advocates in our state, the Council can offer the Fellows unique perspectives and insights into opportunities for change and connections to the broader community. The Council is excited about the Fellows' potential to increase collaboration across departments and hopes to collaborate with them to support their department's community partnerships and implementation of Home Illinois.

RECOMMENDATIONS
CONTINUE



RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS AREA INCLUDE:

07

Collaborate with the Council to improve Statewide Referral Network policies and processes, with a focus on the program's ability to house clients in a timely and person-centered manner.

- In 2023, Council members worked with IDHS staff to conduct a high level review of the experience of seeking housing through the Statewide Referral Network (SRN). Ending homelessness in Illinois will require housing programs to operate in a dynamic, time sensitive and person-centered manner. Recognizing this, the working group recommends acting on opportunities to improve SRN processes and increasing the scale of the program in recognition of Illinois' significant need for increased affordable and supportive housing.
- Specifically, the Council recommends the Task Force work to increase:
 - potential applicants' awareness of the SRN program and how to apply;
 - the information that is provided about a unit when a referral is sent;
 - the time given to obtain documents once an individual is referred to a property; and
 - the amount of time documents are valid, particularly income documentation.
- The Council is excited about OPEH's funding of a new pilot to provide support services and a subsidy for SRN applicants experiencing homelessness. The Council recommends that the Interagency Task Force look for additional opportunities to fund services for SRN tenants and expand subsidies for tenants experiencing or at risk of homelessness who have no income.
- Additionally, there is a significant mismatch between the scale and location of housing made available through the SRN and the scale of Illinois's need for affordable housing for people experiencing homelessness. For example, in FY19-22, 189 people experiencing homelessness accessed permanent affordable housing through SRN over all four years. In contrast, in 2020, 10,431 people across our state experienced homelessness on the night of the Point-in-Time count alone. Therefore, SRN must be one tool in a much larger strategy in our state's work to increase housing access for people experiencing homelessness.
- The Council's working group looks forward to discussing its findings with IHDA, IDHS and other agencies involved in the SRN program and collaborating on implementation.

ONE MODEL THE COUNCIL HAS FOUND HELPFUL IS THE MOVEMENT STRATEGY CENTER'S SPECTRUM OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT TO OWNERSHIP.

This model provides a framework to understand community-government interactions as existing on a continuum, with complete marginalization at one extreme and community ownership on the other. As we build capacity for deeper collaboration in support of Home Illinois implementation, this framework offers a way to think about the Interagency Task Force's engagement with the Council and the wider community.

INCREASE INTERACTION BETWEEN PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS AND THE INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE

Too often, we misunderstand homelessness as being driven by individual choices. This isn't the case. When we misdiagnose the problem, we struggle to find solutions that work. People with lived experience of homelessness or housing instability — those closest to the systemic problems that drive homelessness — often have vital insight into the solutions.

And yet, the systems we work and live within too often are not designed to value lived experience or foster power sharing. Because of this, it is critical that people with lived experiences of homelessness and housing instability have seats at the table and central roles in decision-making. Their insights can play crucial roles in helping policymakers bridge the gap between theory and the lived experience of accessing a program or navigating a system. Therefore, intentional space must be created to foster this collaboration.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

01

Hold at least one yearly session dedicated to conversation between Interagency Task Force members and people with lived experience of homelessness.

02

Consult people with lived experience to advise and participate in the development of State homelessness-related policy and programmatic decisions. Budget to include compensating people with lived experience for consulting.

03

Maintain and build on the support OPEH is providing, through its partnership with the Supportive Housing Providers' Association, to lived experience members of the Council, Subcommittee on Youth Homelessness and of similar State-affiliated groups, including the opportunity to meet in an affinity group.

04

Explore weighing lived experience of homelessness or housing instability as a preference when hiring for State staff roles that provide services to or set policies related to people experiencing homelessness. Encourage the State's delegate agencies to do the same.

For more on ways to increase the role of people with lived experience in policy and decisionmaking and the benefits of doing so, see:

[Nothing about us without us: Seven principles for leadership and inclusion of people with lived experience of homelessness](#), Lived Experience Advisory Council (2016).

[Centering Lived Experience resource page](#) on the HUD Exchange.

[Methods and Emerging Strategies to Engage People with Lived Experience: Improving Federal Research, Policy, and Practice](#), US Department of Health and Human Services (2021).

[Why Am I Always Being Researched?: A guidebook for community organizations, researchers, and funders to help us get from insufficient understanding to more authentic truth](#), Chicago Beyond.

WORK WITH THE OFFICE TO PREVENT AND END HOMELESSNESS TO BUILD ON THE STRONG FOUNDATION LAID IN THE HOME ILLINOIS FY23-24 PLAN

The Home Illinois FY23-24 Plan laid a strong foundation for our collective work to end homelessness. It fostered a new level of interagency collaboration through actions focused on developing affordable and permanent supportive housing, bolstering the safety net, securing financial stability for unhoused people and closing the mortality gap. Critically, the Home Illinois FY23-24 Plan recognized that an explicit racial equity lens is central to the success of these efforts.

BUILDING ON THIS GROUNDWORK, WE RECOMMEND THE HOME ILLINOIS FY25-26 PLAN:

01

Incorporate recommendations from the Homelessness & Racial Equity Roundtable.

- The Council looks forward to forthcoming recommendations from OPEH's Homelessness & Racial Equity Roundtable and encourage their integration into the FY25-26 Plan. This is an exciting opportunity to continue operationalizing racial equity in our work to end homelessness.

02

Continue and build on the use of local CoCs as partners in local policy and funding allocation decisions.

- The Council applauds Home Illinois' leveraging of (CoCs) as partners in plan implementation and local funding distribution. Mandated by HUD, CoCs are local groups of cross-sector experts working together to coordinate the funding and delivery of housing and services for people experiencing homelessness and ultimately prevent and end homelessness in their communities.

03

Elevate the lessons learned and the outcomes achieved through Home Illinois-connected pilot projects, including guaranteed income pilots, Flexible Housing Pool pilot populations, Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice housing assistance pilot for youth post-release, IDPH intensive ER case management pilots and SNAP restaurant meals pilot program. Replicate successes across the state.

- To encourage replication of successful pilot projects, we encourage the Interagency Task Force to provide regular implementation updates on the progress of Home Illinois pilot projects at its own meetings, to the Council and for the wider community. This could include hosting webinars and publishing online reports.

- Additionally, the Council recommends that the Home Illinois FY25-26 Plan create space to learn from local innovations across the state. For example, there are opportunities to continue building on lessons learned through Cook County CoCs participation in the Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program and from recent significant federal investments in rural and unsheltered homelessness.





ABOVE: Council co-chairs Chief Christine Haley and Debbie Reznick at the 2023 Home Illinois Summit.

BUILDING ON THIS GROUNDWORK, WE RECOMMEND THE HOME ILLINOIS FY25-26 PLAN:

04

Include a status update on each of the State actions committed to in the Home Illinois FY23-24 Plan and explain barriers encountered, lessons learned and next steps.

05

Include housing and shelter needs of asylum seekers.

- The vision of Home Illinois is that all our neighbors, no matter how long they have resided in our state, have safe and stable housing. Since the plan was developed, more than 19,000 asylum seekers have arrived in Illinois. Meeting their needs for dignified shelter and housing has been an ongoing challenge at the local and state levels. To live out our values as a Welcoming State and in recognition that the wellbeing of all neighbors is interconnected, the Council urges the Interagency Task Force to include planning for the shelter and housing needs of new arrivals.

Recommendations to the Interagency Task Force on Homelessness from Community Members

Recognizing the importance of community members and engaged government staff co-creating policy solutions, the Council wants to uplift some of the community recommendations that have come to our attention through the course

of our work. The Council urges the Interagency Task Force and individual departments and agencies to partner with community advocates on the evaluation and implementation of these recommendations.

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

Youth Homelessness Prevention Subcommittee (Subcommittee) members developed the following initial recommendations, which the Council wishes to elevate. The Subcommittee brings together the four State youth systems of care — the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS), the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ), IDHS' Division of Mental Health (IDMH) and the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) — to ultimately improve discharge policies and procedures to ensure youth leaving state systems of care move on to stable housing. The Council hopes that the Interagency Task Force will work with the Subcommittee to move forward on the needs identified below and that the new OPEH Fellows can lead some of this important work.

YOUTH HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1** Through partnerships and direct funding, increase housing resources for youth exiting State systems of care.

 - Currently, DCFS is the only youth system of care in Illinois with direct housing resources. Through strong partnerships with local public housing authorities, DCFS has access to Family Unification Program (FUP) and Foster Youth to Independence (FYI) vouchers in some localities. These vouchers can be transformational resources for youth within and exiting foster care. The Council encourages DCFS to continue to grow partnerships with Partnerships with Public Housing Authorities in pursuit of these vouchers and to look at FUP and FYI processes to maximize voucher utilization and additionally encourages other systems of care to bring housing resources into their systems.
- 2** Grow the Subcommittee's work in order to drive the State's strategic vision for preventing homelessness among youth leaving State systems of care. Specifically:

 - Establish a working group of Subcommittee-member agencies to identify opportunities to standardize discharge planning and data collection across agencies and delegates.
 - Fund a landscape gaps analysis to understand the range of supports available to youth connected to State systems of care and where investments could have the highest impact to prevent homelessness for youth exiting these systems.
 - Evaluate infrastructure needs to facilitate increased data and information sharing among Subcommittee agencies around youth experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO PUBLIC BENEFITS

The Council received recommendations from advocates at Legal Council for Health Justice and Legal Aid Chicago who work with people experiencing homelessness seeking benefits they are qualified to receive including SSI, SSDI, TANF and SNAP. The Council is impressed by the insight of these community leaders into process and policy changes that would make a meaningful difference for people seeking life-sustaining public benefits.

As an immediate opportunity to act on the Council's above recommendation to expand the capacity of Interagency Task Force departments to solicit, receive and implement feedback from community experts, the Council recommends that a working group be established to collaborate with these advocates on evaluating the feasibility of their recommendations and moving them forward.

FROM LEGAL COUNCIL FOR HEALTH JUSTICE:

Attorneys from the Legal Council for Health Justice's Homeless Outreach Project provided a recommendation related to improving upon the "SSI Prerelease Application" process between IDOC, the Social Security Administration (SSA) and IDHS' Bureau of Disability Determination (DDS) to better serve people with disabilities who are reentering the community. The Homeless Outreach Project is staffed by a team of advocates who advise and represent homeless individuals with disabilities as they seek SSI/DI benefits. They recommend that the Interagency Taskforce convene a working group consisting of IDOC, IDHS (DDS), federal partners from the SSA Chicago Region office and community advocates to evaluate the current state of the prerelease program and work together to improve upon it. For more information, please reach out to the Council.

FROM LEGAL AID CHICAGO:

Staff of Legal Aid Chicago's Public Benefits Working Group, which help clients obtain and maintain benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA), the Veterans Administration, Medicare and IDHS, provided a set of recommendations for process and program improvements for IDHS-administered benefits. While these recommendations were submitted as a comment to the draft Home Illinois FY23-24 Plan, the Council is incorporating them here as we believe the Interagency Force has an opportunity to act on them moving forward. For more information, please reach out to the Council.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HOUSING FOR PEOPLE CONVICTED OF SEX OFFENSES

The Illinois Justice Project (ILJP) submitted recommendations to OPEH for housing people who have been convicted of sex offenses. As criminal justice reform is taking hold on many levels and prison populations continue to decline, those who serve their time for sex offenses are still tightly regulated, regardless of the offense. ILJP supports changes that can improve outcomes for both community safety and justice-involved treatment. The Council recognizes the particular extreme and unjust barriers that people convicted of sex offenses face in securing housing and urges the Interagency Task Force to move these recommendations forward.

EXECUTIVE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1** Create a pool of General Revenue Fund money earmarked to pay for rent for people with sex offense convictions—because of banishment laws and landlord bias, people with sex offenses often pay higher-than-market rents in order to secure safe housing.
- 2** Launch an IHDA/Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA)/IDHS concerted research effort to find and subsidize housing opportunities that do not conflict with banishment laws. (Seek to answer: Where is it possible to develop new or rehab housing that does not conflict with current residency restrictions)?
- 3** Establish a research project in ICJIA to document that people with records for sex crimes who live in state-supported or other housing do not commit crimes. (Note: Recidivism for people with sex offense convictions is less than 5%).
- 4** Work with Cook County Equity Task Force on implementation of housing for those leaving incarceration to earmark some of the housing for people with sex offense convictions. Also track lack of crime (see 3 above).
- 5** Work with IDOC to see what it will take to support their work under the court order (Barnes vs. Jeffreys) to get people with sex offense convictions out of incarceration (use IDHS, Department on Aging or services).
- 6** Identify those providing counseling services in and outside prison to see what resources the State can provide to support and expand their work. Get information to Prisoner Review Board (PRB) about the positive impact of mandated counseling in order to facilitate more PRB releases.

LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 State:**
 - Reduce time someone convicted of sex offense is on the sex registry
 - Reduce the geographic restrictions on where someone convicted of a sex offense can live
 - Mandate that a licensed counselor can certify that someone who is convicted of a sex offense is not a threat to the community and does not need to be on the sex registry
 - Abolish the sex registry
- 2 Federal:**
 - Work with national coalition(s) to alter the federal definitions of homelessness and chronic homelessness so that people who have been incarcerated qualify to live in housing supported by federal resources

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREVENTING AND ELIMINATING HOMELESSNESS IN RURAL ILLINOIS

The Housing Assistance Council created a report and recommendations for preventing and eliminating homelessness in rural Illinois. The Council is aware that these recommendations have already been submitted to the Interagency Task Force, however we are including them here to underscore and reiterate their importance.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1** Increase rural CoC capacity and coordination through dedicated staff
- 2** Consider modifying funding structures to include CoCs as eligible grantees
- 3** Support expansion of successful rural housing navigation, landlord outreach and risk mitigation strategies
- 4** Consider expanding the range of eligible populations and activities in rural areas for some of the State's targeted homelessness funding
- 5** Expand 211 coverage to the entire state
- 6** Provide resources to rural CoCs to support their ability to:
 - access accurate, real-time homelessness data more frequently than the annual Point-in-Time count and
 - identify the hidden homeless and people at risk of homelessness
- 7** Provide funding for transportation in rural CoCs to connect clients experiencing homelessness to needed supportive services
- 8** Target supportive services funding to close the housing stability focused case management gap in rural communities
- 9** Invest increased and targeted housing resources into rural communities
- 10** Consider expanding additional housing resources to farmworkers

Appendix

SUMMARY OF THE COUNCIL'S RECOMMENDATIONS

MAXIMIZE THE COUNCIL'S POTENTIAL TO SUPPORT THE INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE IN IMPLEMENTING HOME ILLINOIS

- Build in standing updates at Interagency Task Force and Council meetings about the current work of the other group and opportunities for engagement.
- Utilize Council member expertise for relevant Interagency Task Force meeting agenda items (i.e. youth, reentry, rural homelessness).
- Partner with the Council to host Interagency Task Force members and their senior staff at Council-member's organizations and other organizations to learn about their innovative work to solve homelessness.
- Hold a special session for Interagency Task Force, Council members and OPEH staff to build community and celebrate progress at the 2024 Home Illinois Summit.
- Collaborate with the Council to support State agency staff in deepening their understanding of the systemic causes of homelessness, the trauma of the experience and the intersections between homelessness and the work of Interagency Task Force departments.
- Prioritize collaboration between the Council and the OPEH Fellows, five new senior-level policy experts who will work within IDOC, IDHS, IDPH, the Illinois Department of Healthcare and HFS and IHDA.
- Collaborate with the Council to improve SRN policies and processes, with a focus on the program's ability to house clients in a timely and person-centered manner and on the scale of the program.

INCREASE INTERACTION BETWEEN PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE OF HOMELESSNESS AND THE INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE

- Hold at least one yearly session dedicated to conversation between Interagency Task Force members and people with lived experience of homelessness.
- Consult people with lived experience to advise and participate in the development of State homelessness-related policy and programmatic decisions.
- Ensure lived experience members of the Council, Subcommittee on Youth Homelessness and similar State-affiliated groups are offered support if desired to maximize their participation in these groups, including the opportunity to meet in an affinity group.
- Explore weighing lived experience of homelessness or housing instability as a preference when hiring for State staff roles that provide services to or set policies related to people experiencing homelessness. Encourage the State's delegate agencies to do the same.

WORK WITH OPEH TO BUILD ON THE STRONG FOUNDATION LAID IN THE HOME ILLINOIS FY23-24 PLAN

In the Home Illinois FY25-26 Plan:

- Incorporate recommendations from the Homelessness & Racial Equity Roundtable.
- Continue and build on the use of local Continuums of Care as partners in local policy and funding allocation decisions.
- Expand the capacity of Interagency Task Force departments to solicit, receive and implement feedback from community experts around program and policy development.
- Elevate the lessons learned and the outcomes achieved through Home Illinois-connected pilot projects.
- Include a status update on each of the State actions committed to in the Home Illinois FY23-24 Plan and explain barriers encountered, lessons learned and next steps.
- Include housing and shelter needs of asylum seekers.