



Mental Health Planning Council
Housing Subcommittee
Thursday, March 26, 2020
10:00 Conference call / Zoom

Meeting Notes

The Subcommittee co-chair, Adrienne Cassidy of Advocates, Inc., welcomed everyone and thanked all for joining either on Zoom or conference call. Given the Covid-19 emergency and the need to follow the social distancing guidelines Advocates provided Zoom technology.

Adrienne thanked the more than 40 individuals, representing DMH service providers, DHCD staff, mental health advocates, DMH staff, and others who were participating in the meeting. She pointed out the sizable turnout was a clear indication of the importance of simply getting together to share information and hear from one another regarding concerns associated with Covid-19 and housing.

Andrew Roach from Vinfen, and Tim Lang from Riverside, were acknowledged for lending their assistance in helping to plan the agenda and facilitate the virtual meeting. Adrienne also noted the participation of Brendan Goodwin, Cecelia Woodworth and Stephanie Kan from DHCD.

Andrew highlighted the significant number of Vinfen clients (1,000+) living in the community who are dependent upon DMHRSP, MRVP, AHVP, Sec. 8, the 3% Set-Aside and other subsidized housing programs. He said staff were currently not going out to see clients due to Covid-19 concerns but, were staying in touch through phone and internet.

He also pointed out that Vinfen is not actively looking to lease-up new units because of concern for staff safety. He further noted that they can't get necessary leasing documents signed due to limited availability of both Vinfen and AA staff.

Tim underscored the need to protect staff and clients first and foremost but, did note Riverside has units that are in the process of lease up. He reported that one of the RAAs in central MA is completely closed down (staff not available remotely), making it impossible to process the required paperwork.

Adrienne noted Advocates has clients who are preparing to move for an April 1 lease-up however, they have yet to be able to secure Rent Share Letters from AAs.

Mike Walsh of Aspire Health asked if Sec. 8 inspections might be waived, as AAs won't go out to units. DHCD pointed out that HUD needs to clarify guidance for that federal program and they could not directly comment.

Tim inquired of DHCD if they were coming forward with written guidance specific to DMHRSP. Brendan pointed out that DHCD just completed guidance for MRVP, and AHVP and would make that available. He noted that given DMH's role in DMHRSP he would first want to consult with DMH on this question to determine what might be helpful and necessary.

Brendan did note that the LHAs are very focused on the residents that live in the buildings they own and operate and may be somewhat less available to needs of service providers. His understanding is that the RAAs are working from remote locations and should be in a position to process leasing paperwork.

He stressed that DHCD wants to ensure that landlord payments are not delayed because of the emergency and that AAs are asked to be flexible and follow revised guidance.

If issues related to DMHRSP are presenting themselves to service providers, then they are asked to contact their DMH Area Housing Coordinator who can help problem solve. Concerns that appear to be systemic will be brought to DMH Central Office.

Service providers raised concerns about processing Re-Certifications in a timely manner. DHCD will if necessary waive this requirement for MRVP and AHVP on a case-by-case basis. Providers should contact their DMH Housing Coordinator if this is an issue.

During the emergency provider staff are taking on different roles including bringing food to clients if necessary. Riverside noted that only one client and one staff is now allowed in a van at one time to keep the necessary social distancing. Adrienne reported that Advocates has contracted with a moving company in order to limit staff involvement with physical moves.

Danna Mauch, MAMH, underscored that these are challenging times and how appreciative she and her agency is for the many dedicated staff that are carrying on. The Administration may be moving to 1/12 budgets over this period to monitor lost revenue and spending, how this will impact DMHRSP is not yet clear. Housing is MAMH's number one issue.

Linda McMahon, MassHousing who oversees the MA 3% Set-Aside was asked to look into whether management companies are curtailing leasing due to Covid-19; Jeff from MB had heard that Beacon Communities had instituted a stoppage.

Adrienne thanked everyone for their participation, she made herself available for people to contact with concerns. Notes from the meeting are to be distributed along with contact information.

Please forward any additional comments, question to Joe Vallely at DMH.