

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

TEXAS STRATEGIC PLAN TO PREVENT AND  
END HOMELESSNESS

PUBLIC HEARING

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BEFORE:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. McGRATH: Okay. Let's get started.

Welcome, everyone, thank you all for taking the time to be here. I am Colin McGrath with the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless. We are an unfunded state-mandate, created in 1989 by state legislature to coordinate resources among state agencies as they relate to homelessness and to help state government be more responsive to needs of local communities in regards to homelessness issues.

We have released a state plan as of October, and until January of 2012 we are having public comment to hear the advice of our communities before we finalize the plan. It is largely a plan for state agencies, a set of recommendations that we are providing to help coordinate their resources and make agencies more responsive to communities' needs.

And it responds to the United States Interagency Council's plan which was released in June 2010. So today I'll just give a brief overview of what is in the plan and then turn this over to you all because really the goal is to hear your comments and to have me talk as little as possible.

As just sort of a starting point, I think one

of the fundamental claims in the plan is that homelessness in the state of Texas, and this is sort of accepting what is identified nationwide by the United States Interagency Council for the Homeless is homelessness is not always but predominantly a housing issue.

We have a remarkable shortage of affordable housing in the state. Since 1990 and 2011 we saw the number of households that have incomes below 50 percent median income increase by about 400,000 yet the number of available housing units that are affordable within that income range have increased by only about 185,000. So as a result, we see a lot of double-upped families, but then also homelessness on the rise, about 36,000 individuals on a give night in the state.

And chronic homelessness, which does largely stem from individuals who have -- from mental illness and chronic substance abuse comprises about 21 percent of the population. Thirty-six are families which research shows don't have the same sort of personal barriers that the chronically homeless population has.

So the plan is broken up into four sections, each addressing a different priority area. The first is affordable housing and supportive services; the second, homelessness prevention; the third, data research and

analysis; and the fourth, state infrastructure.

Each has a goal and each goal has a set of objectives that will help us reach the goal and every single objective has a list of strategies or action items that we think will help us reach that objective. For our purposes -- it'll take too long to go through all of the action items -- there are probably about 50 of them, but I'll go over the goals and the objectives that are in the plan.

For affordable housing and supportive services the goal is increase housing options for homeless individuals and families who face multiple barriers to secure housing. The first objective is identify individuals and families experiencing homelessness and prioritize their housing stability. Second, explore options for increasing the supply and availability of affordable and permanent supportive housing units in Texas.

Third, promote the strategic pairing of state agency, non-profit and private sector resources to increase supportive services linked with affordable housing units.

Under homelessness prevention, the goal is develop a statewide crisis response mechanism that

identifies at-risk individuals and families, and prevents them from becoming homeless.

The first objective is refine and promote a definition of at risk of homelessness that fits Texas. Second, increase awareness of opportunities for preventing homelessness among state agencies.

Third, increase the coordination of state agency services to enhance the state's preventive capacity. And fourth, increase the capacity of state institutions to prevent instances of homelessness and shelter use upon discharge from facilities.

Under data research and analysis, goal is strengthen Texas's capacity to gather, analyze and report precise data on homelessness systematically. First objective, evaluate the quality of homelessness-related data; second, facilitate coordinated data collection policies and procedures for all sources of data; third, coordinate timely data collection, reporting and analysis.

And finally, state infrastructure, the goal, increase communication and collaboration between all service providers and units of government in order to sustain the Interagency Council's planning efforts and aid in the implementation of the plan.

The first objective, increase coordination and

communication between state agencies through promoting a common language for communicating information on homelessness. We have the Texas Workforce Commission using one definition; we have the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs using HUD's definition which is far narrower.

We have two agencies that sort of have definitions that aren't entirely rigid. Other agencies use self-reported identification to identify individuals who are homeless who receive services. There are, I think, large opportunities for us to be more consistent in how we define our terms and which will, in turn, help us coordinate resources more efficiently.

Our second objective, increase coordination and communication between local, state and federal government and non-government entities and, third, raise awareness of homelessness among state agency boards of directors, executives and other decision makers. I think a lot of agencies that sit on the Council -- and on the Texas Interagency Council we have Texas Workforce Commission, Department of Housing and Community Affairs, Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Aging and Disability Services, Department of Family and Protective Services, numerous others -- Department of Criminal Justice and Texas Youth

Commission.

Not always do they recognize when they are serving individuals who are homeless, or recognize the opportunity to use our resources in statewide efforts addressing homelessness, so we want to increase awareness among these agencies that they have a role to play in this effort.

So, with that we would like to have you comment on the plan and in general of the state's response to homelessness. You don't have to have read the plan to have something to say here today. So I'll leave it at that and just ask when you come up, state your name and then say what you will, and then when you're done, write your name down just so that the reporter can record your name accurately.

VOICE: Who's going to be first?

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

(Pause.)

MR. ROSENTHAL: Okay. My name is Skip Rosenthal and I'm the executive director of International AIDS Empowerment. I did read the plan and I had just some overall comment about it. Obviously, I represent our clients here in El Paso with HIV and AIDS every day and many of them are either homeless, chronically homeless, or



on the verge of being homeless. And so the strategic plan mentions HIV and AIDS in passing only three time, all pages -- only three times does it happen to mention, just like, oh, and of course, people with HIV.

People with AIDS is one of HUD's special populations and that should be better integrated into the plan that you have. We also need to be able to integrate all programs, like ESGP, HHSP, all the acronyms and programs that exist that are part of the continuum. There is a continuum there and if we can integrate all those we'll create more fuller and better solutions.

And for the most part it seems that the state plan's been created kind of in a vacuum. It's very short -- not short-sighted but it just got created in a vacuum and all these things are happening around it but it doesn't take into consideration all those things like ESG, like the program HPRP and things like that.

And so I think it's important to open it up and look at the total picture if we want to have solutions. Now, the President's National AIDS Plan is a prime example of a document that integrates agencies, such as housing, HHS, SAMHSA, Labor, COC and other groups. So you have all different groups that are saying -- because people with AIDS need jobs; people that are homeless need jobs.

Why not start integrating some of the agencies -- we're talking about within the government -- to look at homelessness and become part of the solution. That isn't in there yet. I just think we need to be able to break out of our silos so that we can succeed better in helping our clients.

VOICE: [indiscernible].

MR. McGRATH: Can I ask you just maybe one or two questions while you're here?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Sure.

MR. McGRATH: So, absolutely, we neglect the issue of AIDS even though it is a HUD priority area and would like to address it better. How would you recommend we go about doing that. Are there certain strategies or approaches that we should illustrate or communicate to agencies about?

MR. ROSENTHAL: I think that one of your natural partners is HOPWA and the HOPWA agencies, and most of those agencies are either AIDS service organizations or people that have integrated into that community, and since they're a natural partners anyhow, I would reach out to them, to all the HOPWA grantees and project sponsors in the state. There may be a total of maybe 30.

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

MR. ROSENTHAL: But that would be great to ask them to be part.

MR. McGRATH: All right. Thank you.

MR. ROSENTHAL: That's it.

MR. McGRATH: Good point. And I'm trying now to remember what my second one was. You were talking about working in a vacuum and not being specific about how we would work with different programs and so I guess I'm looking for some clarification.

Do you mean that you would like to see more specifics on which programs would do what, or how we would want to work with different programs?

MR. ROSENTHAL: Right. You know, just as -- as I said, you look at the issue of homelessness. So you have -- it may AIDS; it may be mental health; it may be substance abuse; it may be employment; it may be affordable housing. You know, there -- within even the state government in Texas, there are a lot of agencies that take care -- that oversee all of those things. Yet, they're not part of this; they're not being asked to be part of the solution.

And there often is resistance. You know, they have silos too. That's not the issue. But, I think, that sometimes what the leadership is saying -- in this case,

what we had with the AIDS flap, it was the President that said, yeah, we need to incorporate all of this.

But I think that if we do we've got to actually come up with solutions. Obviously, if people that are homeless are gainfully employed, go to training, become doctors -- whatever they want -- people can be whatever they want to be. But if they're trained and get jobs, that's going to decrease homelessness.

And yet Texas Workforce Commission, they're not -- I don't think they're in the plan. I didn't look for them directly because -- so -- that's it.

MR. McGRATH: All right. Thank you.

MR. ROSENTHAL: Okay. Thank you.

VOICE: That's -- is that all for me to take?

MR. ROSENTHAL: That's for you to take.

VOICE: Oh, great. Thank you.

(Pause.)

MS. COX: Okay. I'm Kathy Cox. I'm the administrator for the YWCA Sara McKnight Transitional Living Center. Thank you for the opportunity to share testimony today regarding homelessness in our state. In particular, thank you for the opportunity to share the effectiveness and the need for transitional living centers when addressing homelessness.

Transitional living centers work with all community assets to maximize scarce resources and are a proven way to address homelessness and prevent recidivism.

Among a host of services, transitional living centers can provide the following: shelter, supportive services, life and job skills, language skills, food and clothing, case management, McKinney-Vento access to education for children, coordination for all other needs, medical, mental health, et cetera.

A recent *60 Minutes* program highlighted how fragile American families are at this time. Keeping families intact and providing the framework for self-sufficiency and successful permanent housing for the long term require that proven programs step up to meet the challenge.

The YWCA Transitional Living Center has been in existence since 1993. This last fiscal year 245 homeless women and children were served. El Paso's January 2011 Point-in-Time count made it evidence that the majority of homeless in this region are women and children. Those graduating from the YWCA TLC achieve self-sufficiency and permanent housing.

The majority of those at the TLC are survivors of domestic violence. A transitional living environment

allows a client to reside in the facility for up to two years, which meets the federal definition for transitional housing; however, we successfully graduate the majority of clients much sooner.

The demand for our type of work is high. Female heads of household are the fastest growing segment of the homeless in this region per the 2009 research conducted by the City of El Paso's Department of Community and Human Development. Transitional living centers are part of the solution for permanently addressing homelessness.

We remain dedicated to ending homelessness by providing a stable living situation for a sufficient time frame that supports individual growth and development, assuring each client becomes a contributing member of society. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you so much.

MR. GUTIERREZ: Hi. My name is Julio Gutierrez. I'm a social worker, or a caseworker, for a homeless shelter, emergency homeless shelter. I've been there for 13 years and I work with homeless veterans. But I work with everybody else and I'm an ex-homeless person myself.

And one of the things that I notice about most

of the shelters that I used to be in and that we have -- most of the places that I went to -- is the fact that these shelters do not have a map of what they have, meaning -- she mentioned transitional living and she mentioned a few things that are very, very important, but I want to focus on the chronically homeless.

The chronically homeless people that need the help, and what that means is the help that they require is long-term service, not just be able to stay in a shelter for two, three, four months and not get any services -- but high-quality supervision, quality caseworkers, quality employment development, or developers that can really come down and help with housing and help with all these other things that we need as a homeless individual, especially chronic homeless which, like you said, there's mental and drugs and alcohol problems.

This is a different monster, if you want to call it, where we need more care to get them out of homelessness. We truly need professionals that can be -- not just get them into a program and, okay, that's it.

We need to follow through for a few months, maybe years, because these guys have been on the streets for over four, five, six -- maybe eight years sometimes, especially if they're veterans, and they're not coming in

unless somebody goes out there and really puts out and cares and helps them, bring them into shelters not like a typical shelter.

I think we need to change what constitutes shelters that we have right now. We need to start a new kind of shelter where people can actually feel secure, feel they can stay, feel they can get some help and actually move on from there. Again, referrals to the VA, the site center, to all of the places that require -- but I truly think that we need to change the way emergency shelters work.

I personally think that if we can make emergency shelters like transitional living centers it would really be like the population because they could stay there. They could feel they are at home and they can move on from there.

Emergency shelters -- I don't know if you've ever been to one -- they're very difficult to live in. We have people going to school -- for them, it's hard for these people because it's hard to come in and have 150 people next to you, you know, if they're trying to do homework.

The other thing is, you know, professionals there that can actually really help you, and that's



basically what I have to say.

MR. McGRATH: Yeah. I was wondering. So you said -- and absolutely, we had like a focus group meeting in Austin, their large emergency shelter there, and people were saying exactly that, like I'm trying to go to job training but I can't do that while I'm here; it's like really hard to get a good night's rest to be ready for that, to go look for jobs. I don't have a good address to use; it's a stigmatizing address, and I get kicked out after 90 days so I'm not here long enough to -- yeah, absolutely.

So you said -- okay. It needs to look a bit more like transitional housing. I'm wondering if you can elaborate a little more on --

MR. GUTIERREZ: Yeah. You know, it's just that in a homeless shelter you have to get up, get out of there by six o'clock in the morning.

MR. McGRATH: Yeah.

MR. GUTIERREZ: Right? And then what do you do all day? You go to the public library and you're in the library and get kicked out of it? You can go to the park and continue to study and then the next thing I have to do is just hang out with these guys because I'm killing [indiscernible] when I withdraw from everybody else and

maybe write a sign and get some money and get drunk again?

That's why I think I -- if we centralize emergency shelters and make them big enough to where they can be comfortable, we'll get the people out of that downtown area, the outskirts of the city, into a place where they feel that they are safe. Then we could start working from there.

Because the emergency shelter today's a horrible thing; we need to change that. We need to change that so we ex-homeless people or the new homeless people will not be afraid to come in and ask for help. Their pride would not be involved. These things get [indiscernible] but once they get there, if they get help, it helps.

MR. McGRATH: Yeah. Great. Well, thank you so much.

MS. CASTILLO: My name is Camille Castillo. I'm with the El Paso Coalition for the Homeless, and I just kind of wanted to touch on one of your goals which was increase communication and collaboration between all service providers, units of government, et cetera.

So I think there needs to be stronger coordination with state agencies, you know, especially when it comes down to the local level. There's usually

initiatives out there at the federal level but by the time it comes down to us, it just totally fizzles out.

And so one example was -- that we saw and we experienced, was the TANF contingency emergency dollar amounts. And there was \$5 billion available nationally that they could utilize for rental assistance and everything that goes along with utilities, et cetera. And they were able to increase the cash grants being given to the families, and they also had the choice to subsidize employment.

So those were three great options. We saw that. We knew that was the initiative at the federal level but by the time it got here to locally, they opted not to go those routes. They had a different plan. We met with them and so we felt that this would have been a great opportunity to collaborate with the coalition and all its members in making a dent, and utilizing their program for our population. And so that didn't happen.

I think another example that I can think of off the top of my head is the VA. The VA is making a significant dent in their population because they're pumping in billions of dollars into homelessness -- into ending homelessness among vets. And I think it's really great all that's happening -- the VASH vouchers, all the

case management -- it's great. And we're seeing a little bit of a dent in that.

But one of the things I wanted to talk about is definitions and coordinating -- make sure that they're all across the board. When the VASH vouchers first came to -- you know, we'd get phone calls and we did some screening, and we felt that this particular family would have been great for the VASH program.

So I referred them to the VA. The VA -- I did follow up with them a few days later and it comes to find out that they didn't qualify so what they had told me -- I was like, well, why didn't they qualify? Well, they didn't have the four episodes of homeless -- or the three episodes of homelessness in four years.

And I was like, well, yeah, and that's okay. And they're like, no, because we have to stick to that definition. And so at that time, that became the discussion and still, to this day -- and so I called, you know, Pennsylvania; I called all the offices that I could look up in order to clarify that -- and then, like two months later HUD sent out a press release clarifying the definition, but still, to this day, they're still not accepting that overall definition of homelessness. They're stuck on that chronic definition, which is fine;

chronics should be able to apply for this as well, but that is what they're sticking. So if a family is homeless and there's a vet involved and they're just -- this is their first time homelessness, they're not going to get into the VASH program unfortunately.

And so, anyways, that's -- I think there needs to be stronger coordination with that as well, so --

MR. McGRATH: Yeah. I think some of the problem there is there's a bit of a tension between one, this philosophy that says we need to get the most high-risk, high-need individuals off the street ASAP --

MS. CASTILLO: Right.

MR. McGRATH: -- chronically homeless individuals. Set a deadline of five years --

MS. CASTILLO: Right.

MR. McGRATH: -- and yet, at the same time, you want to serve everyone. And so these two objectives kind of sit in conflict.

MS. CASTILLO: Right. And when I first talked to -- his name is Vincent, Vince Kane in Pennsylvania from the VA, he was telling me -- he goes, he apologized for the confusion because this is -- this happened in, he said, in '91 or something, I guess. This was -- they were -- a lot of people that had been with the VA for a

long period of time considered this a second phase because that first phase was addressing only that population and now -- so we have 125 vouchers and only 67-ish are taken, are only taken. And so there is --

MR. McGRATH: Because the veteran population that exists, say, in El Paso --

MS. CASTILLO: Yeah.

MR. McGRATH: -- doesn't meet the qualifications.

MS. CASTILLO: They don't have those three episodes of homelessness.

MR. McGRATH: Right.

MS. CASTILLO: And so I think that's fine and chronic population -- you're definitely in there but if you have a family that just became homeless first time, they should be able to qualify.

MR. McGRATH: Right.

MS. CASTILLO: So I think there's a lot of coordination and, like I said, there's usually initiatives out there at the federal level, but by the time they come down here, it's nothing. HHSP, I think, is a really good example where the original intent of HHSP was to supplement or create permanent supportive housing programs. And because the language was not strong enough

by the time it got to the city, the city said, well, this is what we want to do. And, granted, then, it went to good use and -- it went to good use. But that -- it needs to -- languages need to be stronger; messages need to be stronger and more coordination between agencies. I think we've tried to coordinate with the various agencies, Texas Workforce, and it's difficult; it's not easy. And so it needs to be -- there's so many barriers that we have to overcome in order to link up. It's just really challenging.

MR. McGRATH: You just opened up a can of worms for me in my head. Texas Workforce Commission -- and you said you've tried to coordinate with them and it was not easy.

MS. CASTILLO: It wasn't easy at all.

MR. McGRATH: Could you elaborate a little bit?

MS. CASTILLO: With -- and then specifically with ARRA dollars --

MR. McGRATH: Uh-huh.

MS. CASTILLO: -- where we knew that they had a pot of monies to help supplement the homeless population, and so we went to go meet with them and they were interested but when we tried to follow up and to get it started, you know, try and put the fire and set the little

bundle on fire, it didn't happen. It just never happened.

And we kept on following up and it was always a reason as to why they weren't able to, and maybe because it's -- I don't know -- it's such a large system that it was difficult for them to do -- work with us and collaborate with us. But that's what we experienced.

MR. McGRATH: Uh-huh.

MS. CASTILLO: And so --

MR. McGRATH: So did any of the money end up coming down or --

MS. CASTILLO: Not that we know of.

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

MS. CASTILLO: Not that we were in coordination with them.

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

MS. CASTILLO: I'm sure it did but, you know, to give you a solid answer, we don't --

MR. McGRATH: Not from what you saw, yeah.

MS. CASTILLO: Right. And that's -- with any of these monies we just -- when there's these monies available from Texas Workforce or TANF or HHS, we want to collaborate with these agencies so that we can actually see the fruits of their labor.

So anyways -- and, you know, their example is



too is the housing authority, and we asked them to prioritize our population and, as you know -- you probably know they do have a federal regulation that they do have to prioritize with the homeless population.

Ten percent of who they enter into their public housing in Section 8, they have a priority. And so what we wanted to -- what we offered them, and Salvation Army was a part of that, is that we offered to pay the salary of an individual from Salvation Army in order to -- we make the decision of who -- not we, but this person working with all the coalition members to get somebody into public housing or Section 8 and they asked us not to.

And so I don't -- we really don't know why they did that. We thought, wow, working -- for one of your folks to do the work and so we thought -- that they didn't. And so, another example.

MR. McGRATH: Yeah. All right. I just wanted to clarify one thing. When you were talking about the TANF emergency assistance funding, was that recent or is this what happened back -- I think it was like 1997.

MS. CASTILLO: No, it was in '09.

MR. McGRATH: In '09. Okay. So this is something different.

MS. CASTILLO: There's some [indiscernible]

dollars made available for this TANF contingency fund --

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

MS. CASTILLO: -- for those three eligible activities.

MR. McGRATH: Okay. Because what I was thinking of -- there is a TANF Emergency Assistance Fund that --

MS. CASTILLO: Yes.

MR. McGRATH: But this is different from ARRA. This was back --

MS. CASTILLO: Okay.

MR. McGRATH: -- back like right after welfare reform in '96. We decided to basically hand off -- there's like the emergency assistance which could be used for, say, rental assistance for, say, families at risk of homelessness, but we've sort of -- we handed it over to Department of Family Protective Services and that goes to --

MS. CASTILLO: Gotcha.

MR. McGRATH: -- CPS, I believe, so --

MS. CASTILLO: Okay. So, yeah, that's what it was -- it's to ARRA. And we're like, hey, this could be great.

MR. McGRATH: Yeah.

MS. CASTILLO: And so it didn't happen.

MR. McGRATH: All right. Well, thank you.

MS. CASTILLO: Thank you.

(Pause.)

MR. FLORES: Good afternoon. This is Michael Flores. I'm with the County of El Paso. I am the programs manager for the County General Assistance Office, which we provide emergency assistance to our clients on the county and inside the city, provide rental assistance and utility assistance.

We were lucky enough that the County of El Paso was able to get funding through the ARRA, HPRP, through the State TDHCA, and also with the City of El Paso through two different pots from the same funding source. What I'm up here to talk about was the difficulty about the HPRP pair of dollars that did come in because -- well, they call it Parasha [phonetic].

You talk about agency that -- a governmental agency that need to collaborate as the local unit of government that we have to work with the city because the City of El Paso is an entitlement city but yet they do not provide direct services. They contract out to the county.

And so one of the things that I propose to you all is if you are looking for units of government that

actually provide, say, there has to be a way to change the way that you -- TDHCA had made those determinations of making the entitlement cities responsible for providing the service.

And I understand that most organizations out there don't provide services and they contract out but we need to change the funding how TDHCA, or any of these funding sources, change the way they fund organizations that actually provide direct services.

So that's one of the key points here is that if you are serious about TDHCA, and I understand that [indiscernible] is looking for -- another program's the colonias that they do is they do directly to the county, but in this, the TDHCA, that came directly to the city and the cities are what that gives out that money and they becomes the responsible party.

But I propose that if you are -- if there's a way to change to the way that it filters back to our local community, that it goes to the local governmental agency that will actually provide the service.

The other portion that I need to speak to you about was when we talked to -- not on [indiscernible] Advisory, Texas Homeless Network, when I was on the active board there was always the collaboration process with

nonprofits, with local units of government. When you collaborate with nonprofits and no governmental agencies, the conversation that needs to get done is that they have to make that we're all on the same page, that we all have the same definitions, that we all have --

What is the end song? What is it that we're trying to accomplish of getting their clients off the streets, or in my case, my problem, homeless preventions.

Many homed people were being homeless for us to be able to pay their rent, stabilize them, teach them the self-sufficiency tools, give them the tools for them to succeed.

So the collaboration has to be very strong between government and nonprofit and we're talking about governmental offices -- we're not just talking about units of government but also the Workforce office, the Food Stamps, the Office of Department of Health and Human Services, CPS.

All these agencies, we all have to work together and it seems to me that in these past two-and-a-half years that we've been working on this empowerment [indiscernible] that there was always these lumps, that these -- and I say lumps that the -- and I say [indiscernible] to these agencies that we request

documents and then it takes them a while for them to be able to gather than documentation.

In these cases we need to make sure that the documentation for our files are complete so we can go ahead and proceed. And sometimes these agencies are more of a roadblock than they are out there helping. And so you need to make sure that when you go back that we talk about the true partnership between governments -- agencies and local units of government.

MR. McGRATH: Right.

MR. FLORES: That's it. Thank you, sir.

MR. McGRATH: And just -- when you were talking about, say, HPRP going down to El Paso, it was administered through the county government.

MR. FLORES: It was administered through the City of El Paso.

MR. McGRATH: Oh, through the city.

MR. FLORES: And so --

MR. McGRATH: And that was -- and what you're saying is that that was an added administrative road block.

MR. FLORES: Correct.

MR. McGRATH: It would have been better if went directly to the service provider.

MR. FLORES: And that is a roadblock because when you -- when HUD or TDHCA issues money to these entitlement cities because of their designation -- and no one can really tell me why the City of El Paso's the designation for our region. Why is it that there are some counties of the state are the designation for the funds going into the communities?

And as huge as El Paso County is -- you know, El Paso County has grown out to the borders already. Why hasn't that designation moved from the City of El Paso to the County of El Paso? And so that is something that I really want to look into and see what changes -- why the designated -- why is it that TDHCA and HUD and all these agencies makes the City of El Paso the person that receives the funding, direct funding sources?

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

MR. FLORES: Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you so much.

MR. BASS: Hi. My name is Ben Bass and I'm the executive director of the El Paso Alliance. We're an organization of people in recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction, along with family members and community allies. I am a man in long-term recovery and what that means to me is that I haven't had any alcohol or drugs

since 1987 and for that I'm grateful. It means that I can hold a job and pay my taxes and be the type of person that my kids would like me to be.

We are -- I'm encouraged by the idea that you all have here of wrapping supportive services around affordable housing. It's something that we've been supporting for a long time. And at the same time, the Department of State Health Services is providing less and less resident treatment for people seeking recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction.

I believe there's -- currently, the Department of State Health Services is reforming the way that they provide alcohol and drug services for indigent people and they're putting forth something called the Texas Recovery Initiative, which is guiding this restructuring.

They're having a meeting next Tuesday in Austin at the DSHS, and I think it would be a very good place for you to send someone to monitor, the reason being is that there's a -- the services that they provide, that we all provide under the Department of State Health auspices would be much better spent if there were supportive services wrapped around somebody who is recovering from alcoholism and drug addiction.

And the problem that they have had is that the



dose of treatment is smaller and smaller and smaller. They used to have an extremely structured residential system that stepped down to a halfway house that stepped down to a three-quarters house, and then finally the person had a really good chance of staying sober the rest of their lives.

But that's all -- they cut back to 14 days instead of nine months and this supportive services wrapped around affordable housing for people that qualify as homeless would be a really good way to make a difference there.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. So what I'm hearing you say is that the time that one is allowed to stay in a permanent housing location while receiving, say, drug or alcohol treatment services, is diminishing, down from 90 days -- or nine months down to 14 days at this point.

MR. BASS: Yeah. The structure -- well, what I foresee is that there's some structure attached to this support, that goes along with the housing. And that's the type of structure and support that used to be provided under the Department of State Health Services for long-term supportive halfway houses and stepped-down services for someone who was done with their treatment.

But all that 90 days and six months of

treatment that people used to get has been cut back to 14 days because of budgetary considerations, and so if we could take these outpatient services -- I'm sorry.

If we could somehow take these outpatient services and the peer services that we provide and wrap them around someone exiting treatment and going into affordable housing over a longer period of time, I think it would be real easily measurable way to save money over the long run.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. And, you know, I'll just interject one thing. The Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, one program that they have is the Vocational Rehabilitation program and we were looking at their data recently and folks who reported homelessness at entry and then they weren't necessarily receiving any housing assistance had about 18 percentage points lower rate of success view of the program than the people who were housed. And really the differences between the two groups are largely housed versus not being housed.

The -- say, individuals with mental illness or individuals with, you know, substance abuse issues have the same amount of success rate. They succeed like about 58 percent; the homeless group was 40 percent. So it's a pretty important first step.

MS. CASTILLO: Camille, again. I'd like to talk about HHSP. I just wanted to make a point because I was part of that informal group from the Corporation of Supportive Housing. In discussing HHSP dollars and getting data from each of our local areas to the legislators who were requesting some of this information on HHSP.

And one of the things that I had mentioned to the group is -- and I wanted to tell you -- like why wasn't there a larger and stronger voice? It was just a handful of directors from the various agencies out there.

And why was it -- why weren't you -- Colin? Why won't you advocate for us?

And the good thing about all of these efforts that this small group went through is that HHSP was put into the governor's enterprise fund and that was great. But unfortunately, the way it was written was that it gave the governor the option, Governor Perry -- so for those of you who are voting, it gave him the option whether to give us 20 million or not.

He got -- his enterprise fund is \$300 million and he opted not to give us a mere \$20 million. So what he did -- he scraped the bottom of the pots on all of whatever was left over -- leftovers, he put them all

together and that's what we got.

And so, how much did we get, Carol?

MS. BOHLE: [indiscernible].

MS. CASTILLO: Yeah, locally.

MS. BOHLE: 600,000.

MS. CASTILLO: 600,000. I mean, it's something and yeah, where I guess we can -- we're happy that we got something but why wasn't there more -- a stronger, coordinated effort with you advocating for us in receiving that monies. As you know, the state, the legislators, haven't really done a whole lot. When we first got that \$20 million, that was just like what? -- oh, my god. You know, when we first heard about that it was amazing that we were able to do that. So, other than that, going back ten years -- they really haven't done a whole lot to address this issue, and so, with that -- you know, going into the data warehousing. I think that's really important because we were having to come up with stuff almost kind of grope -- grabbing out of the air as far as outcomes. And so, if we had a data warehouse, like, okay, we'll -- let's get it out of the warehouse.

MR. McGRATH: Yeah.

MS. CASTILLO: And so -- but anyways, that was my had a comment is where were you -- where was the

Interagency Council in advocating for us for that HHSP dollars?

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. And, yeah, that's what we -- we also heard that from Houston yesterday, that -- they beat you. But your comment was slightly different. What they were really hitting on was we were asking for specific data that we could get to legislators with regards to HHSP, saying, look, this is where it's going to save money. They were trying to tap into, I think it was, Medicaid data --

VOICE: Yes.

MR. McGRATH: -- hospital data and they had the most difficult time getting it, so --

MS. CASTILLO: Exactly. And when we were asked for that information as well -- okay. Well, how many jobs did you create? It's like, okay, Salvation Army got a new refrigerated area with that money so how am I going to translate that into jobs created. That was so difficult; it was just really so I kind of like threw it and did my best. So anyways, I just --

MR. McGRATH: Yeah.

MS. CASTILLO: Thank you. That's all I have.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

(Pause.)

MR. FLORES: Michael Flores, again, from the County of El Paso, One of the things that, in passing, when we talk about the age [indiscernible] and I know that they refer back to this moving forward and this coming up with a new definition and so on and so forth.

One of the things that came to my mind is that the money that's coming in from HUD and from the state, from TDHCA, was -- there was a breakdown of communication that I think about what is an allowable expense and what is [indiscernible] funding sources because of the prevention component which is added to this funding source.

And I understand that the prevention dollars -- the prevention sentence was put in and the thing is that prevention -- we have to make sure that there is a fair and equitable distribution of funds. I understand that the competition is fierce among the shelters because shelters are the ones that always receive this type of funding.

And so the next logical step is for the agencies that are preventing homelessness, like myself, that the County is doing, and getting myself into that circle with the shelters, even though I have a member agency with the coalition that I do understand that the

need of shelter dollars, and so the dollar amounts now are dwindling for the shelter because of the new addition of the prevention.

So I believe that now there's an additional burden, not only to the local government but also to the state that needs to also address additional resources. And we all know that federal budgets and state budgets are being smaller and so there has to be a better way in which you would take that back to TDHCA, THN and to HUD that in writing all these definitions that we do need to add additional dollars for this eligible cost. That's all I have. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thanks.

VOICE: You want to say something else?

(Pause.)

MS. BOHLE: I'm Carl Bohle with the Homeless Coalition and in addressing the HPRP issue, that's a very critical need we have. We had \$3.3 million as part of that HPRP grant that went to the City. It has all been expended over a two-year time frame.

And what we have received in state and local funding, going forward to continue that program, is about \$500,000. So maybe if we get that again that'll be a million dollars, but it is still only 30 percent of what

the need was in 2009.

I did read your plan; I think it's terrific. Affordable housing is a key element for our community. I don't know how familiar you are -- you are familiar with the Juarez violence. We have the most dangerous city in the world right across the border. Actually, from here, it's three? -- three blocks maybe from here?

And one of the things that we have been seeing over the time frame is those people are leaving; they're coming here and they're buying up -- renting out all of our housing. We have -- I think the last numbers we were looking at from HPRP was about 99 percent occupancy.

So not only do we have no affordable housing, we have no housing. And so to see that as an initiative is heartwarming -- we hope that some of these incentives will prove effective. I hope there's more that can be done along those lines.

In addition, when reading your plan, you mentioned that the FMR -- about \$15.97 per hour and if you're looking at a \$7.25 minimum wage earner, then you have to have two-and-a-half people working in that home to be able to afford rent. So not only do we have virtually no opportunities for employment here, but we can't be having people just come out and working at a Circle-K or a



7-Eleven.

We need to have some sort of job development and education programs. And recently -- the Coalition just finished a strategic plan. It took us about a year to put together and we came up with three priority areas, two of those of which you guys hit on in your strategic plan, our first being affordable housing, our third being healthcare, and, of course, you incorporate that as part of your supportive services.

But I don't see a lot in the plan that addresses employment. I don't know if the State can do anything to incentivize employers to hire people, to have training programs, things of that nature because if we keep spinning these people out with the \$7.25 per hour, even with prevention money, they're going to be back on the street.

And so those are -- I guess the other thing that I wanted to comment on was the case management. You do have case management tied into the support services for the medical but I didn't see a lot of case management elsewhere and, as we all know, even the Housing First initiative, which I think is great, and the affordable housing for people that need assistance, they have to have case management; they have to have supportive services

outside of those that are typed in mental disabilities.

So, anyway, I think your data warehousing initiative is awesome. We're excited about that. We hope to see some funding and policy change come out of that.

MR. McGRATH: Wonderful. I'm glad that you're excited about it.

MS. BOHLE: Yeah. And our board is on board --

MR. McGRATH: Great.

MS. BOHLE: In fact, I have two members here that -- three members here that actually voted to support that, so Kathy, Michael, and Ben were all on that committee that supported it.

MS. CASTILLO: I have one more thing to say. Why is it that -- why can't you, Colin, create a legislative committee where we in CSG's homeless work out there put our priority list together because we do have a process here locally but it seems like when it comes to homeless issues, programs -- they're like number 50 out of 50, and so why can't we create something like that, putting together our priorities, our needs in preparation for the legislative session.

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

MS. CASTILLO: I think that would be great and I know that lobbyists cost. This stuff is not free but

maybe there's a method that we can create a way to tap into that.

MR. McGRATH: And so what you're saying is some sort of like set of priorities that are established through continuum or through the coalitions around the state --

MS. CASTILLO: Your Honor.

MR. McGRATH: -- as a joint entity, something like that?

MS. CASTILLO: Yes, definitely.

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

MS. CASTILLO: You know, maybe as a coalition to gather all the coalitions, to get coalitions metros together. Let's put a list of five copies that we could -- of the report that we need and then continuums get together and then put that list together.

MR. McGRATH: I think that's a terrific idea.

MS. CASTILLO: Because we don't have anything like that. And going through this informal group, the Corporation of Supportive Housing, it's like all our voices are good but if we get everybody else into this as one voice, we would be so much louder.

MR. McGRATH: Yeah.

MS. CASTILLO: And so we could become an

elephant instead of a little mouse running around.

MR. McGRATH: Yeah. And, you know, if you had to ask me what was my vision for TICH it really is for that organization to be a stronger facilitator for that sort of action. I think the data warehouse project, aside from accomplishing some sort of, you know, policy-wonky stuff, there's something bigger to it which is having all these COCs coming together for maybe the first time in ages working on one thing together but also building relationships and communicating together and kind of creating a platform for doing more of what you're talking about.

MS. CASTILLO: Yeah. Because I think that's important because when you have two legislative sessions not a whole lot -- we're not -- I know that it can go but it's just -- you just can't --

MR. McGRATH: Uh-huh.

MS. CASTILLO: And so if we can somehow create a way to make our voices heard, whether it's in Waco to Amarillo to El Paso, everybody's heard --

MR. McGRATH: Right.

MS. CASTILLO: -- that this is our voice and this is what we want. I was really disappointed when we didn't get that \$20 million -- out of \$300 million. Come

on. And we even promised with that to -- we even promised with that that we will definitely create jobs for this and we will show you everything that we've put into it with these \$20 million. But, I mean, it wasn't enough.

MR. McGRATH: Yeah.

MS. CASTILLO: Anyway -- thank you.

MR. McGRATH: All right. Thank you.

Everyone's spoken.

VOICE: I have just a quick question --

Were the other -- what was your attendance at the other meetings?

MR. McGRATH: Dallas, we had probably between 40 and 45; Fort Worth, we had around 30; Houston, probably around 30 to 35. San Antonio was one of our smaller big cities; that was about ten.

VOICE: So you don't take it as a sign of disinterest --

MR. McGRATH: Oh, no.

VOICE: -- but it's really hard to be here.

MR. McGRATH: Absolutely.

VOICE: I mean, we work -- probably everybody in the room, seven days a week, 365 days a year, with very small staffs and very small budgets.

MR. McGRATH: And I appreciate it so much that

you all are here.

VOICE: And the timing also --

VOICE: Do you want to go off the record for  
this?

MR. McGRATH: Sure. Why not? And let's say --

(Pause.)

VOICE: Close it up.

MR. McGRATH: -- we can close it up. Does  
anyone -- before -- we can talk more.

No further comments?

Okay. Thank you so much.

(Whereupon, at 3:00 p.m., the hearing was  
concluded.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

IN RE: Texas Strategic Plan to Prevent & End  
Homelessness Public Hearing

LOCATION: El Paso, Texas

DATE: December 2, 2011

I do hereby certify that the foregoing pages, numbers 1 through 47, inclusive, are the true, accurate, and complete transcript prepared from the verbal recording made by electronic recording by Barbara Wall before the Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs.

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(Transcriber) 12/09/2011  
(Date)

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