

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

TEXAS STRATEGIC PLAN TO PREVENT AND  
END HOMELESSNESS

PUBLIC HEARING

9:30 a.m.  
Tuesday,  
November 29, 2011

Auditorium  
Salvation Army Mabee Center  
1855 E. Lancaster  
Fort Worth, Texas

BEFORE:

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Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless

CINDY J. CRAIN, Executive Director  
Tarrant County Homeless Coalition

MIKE DOYLE, Chairman  
DAVID LONG  
MINDY GREEN  
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*ON THE RECORD REPORTING*  
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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. CINDY J. CRAIN: I was getting a little nervous 30 minutes ago. I was the only one here, me and the court reporter. And I was trying to come up with all kinds of great comments I could make.

My name is Cindy Crain. I am the Executive Director of the Tarrant County Homeless Coalition. We are very pleased to host this public hearing. And I am going to just go ahead and hand it right off to the new Chairman of the Texas Interagency Council on Homelessness, someone very familiar to us, our very own Mike Doyle of Cornerstone Assistance Network. Michael.

And I also want to make one note, housekeeping, that as you come forward and prepare your comments, it is critical that you speak into these two mikes, as that is where the recorder is going to pick up and be able to type up all of your great comments. Thank you. Michael.

MR. DOYLE: Thank you, Cindy. Thank you for a good job. This is going to be very short. I just want to say thank you for coming. Thanks to Cindy and her staff for arranging all of this.

And we just really look forward, the Texas Interagency Council, to finally next year having a plan to end homelessness in the State of Texas. A lot of the

material that we used in our plans came from local plans.

The Directions Home Plan in particular here in Tarrant County, because you have done such a phenomenal job in giving input and leading that discussion.

And so thanks to Otis and Cindy and everybody on the Mayor's advisory commission who helped lead the Directions Home Plan, who is probably one of the premier plans in the State of Texas. It really helped us in our discussion around the statewide plan.

As you know, it is very difficult to get into great detail on the statewide plan. But we hope that you will find it interesting and thought provoking.

And we relish your comments. So let me introduce to you the author and kind of our leader at Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, Colin McGrath, who is going to lead us through this discussion. Colin.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. Hello, everyone. And I thank you all for being here. I am Colin McGrath with the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless. I will just give you a brief overview of the Council.

It is a state-mandated council, created in 1989 to coordinate state agencies. It has eleven agencies that are members of the Council. Each Agency has a

representative that sits on the Council. Agencies include Texas Workforce Commission, Department of Family and Protective Services, Aging and Disability Services, Assistive and Rehabilitative Services, Texas Department of Criminal Justice, TDHCA, others as well.

I will just give a brief introduction. We have David Long and Mindy Green here today who sit on the Council. And David is also the Council's liaison to the United States Interagency Council for the Homeless, helping us keep in touch with what is happening at the federal level.

My job today is to say as little as possible, and to give everyone who is here time to speak. Our goal is to hear from you, hear your comments on the plan. And to hear your thoughts more generally also about homelessness services in the State of Texas, and specifically in Fort Worth.

The value of having these sort of public hearings is to learn from local communities and to break us out of our state agency silos, and to learn more about what is happening on the ground in different urban areas, rural areas, to see how different areas of Texas are different, and find ways for state government to be more responsive to your local needs.

So I will not go into too much detail on the plan, just for lack of time. But I would just give a brief rundown of some of our priority areas, and some of the goals that we have set out in this document.

It is broken into four sections. The first is data, research and analysis. The second, affordable housing and supportive services. Homelessness prevention is the third. And the fourth, state infrastructure.

Our goals, first for data, research and analysis, to strengthen Texas's capacity to gather, analyze and report precise data on homelessness systematically. For homelessness and supportive services, the goal is to increase housing options for homeless individuals and families who face multiple barriers to secure housing.

For prevention, the goal is to develop a statewide crisis response mechanism that identifies at risk individuals and families, and prevents them from becoming homeless. And finally, state infrastructure, which is kind of about what we are here today about, is increasing communication and collaboration among all service providers in use of Government in order to sustain this Council's planning efforts and to aid in the implementation of this plan.

To explain that a little bit further, we want to increase the amount of communication that happens among state agencies. But also that occurs between Continuum of Care cities, counties and state government. So increasing the flow of communication between local regions and the councils, we can relay the information as much possible to other agencies.

I will give a brief rundown of some of the objectives. Under data, our first objective is to evaluate the quality of homelessness-related data. Second, facilitate coordinated data collection policies and procedures for all sources of data in the state.

Three, coordinate timely data collection reporting and analysis. For affordable housing and supportive services, 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. For prevention, 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 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.

Finally, for infrastructure, our first objective is to increase coordination and communication among state agencies through promoting a common language for communicating information on homelessness. Second, increase coordination and communication among local, state and federal government and non-government entities.

Third, raise awareness of homelessness among state agency boards of directors, executives and other decision makers. These are a bit abstract. And so I will just give a few examples of issues that we are working on towards these objectives.

In regards to data, we are working on creating a statewide data warehouse. All of the state's Continuum of Care operate their own homeless management information systems that report data directly to HUD. And we do not get a clear sense of statewide HMIS data as a result, because we never aggregate it.



So, we are developing a data warehouse that will aggregate HMIS data from the State's existing Continuum of Care, with the ultimate goal of using that data to report it to state agencies to the Governor's Office, to make decision makers aware of what the need is in the state, and what services exist. How they are doing, and to find ways that we can bring the State's resources to the assistance of our communities.

And in regards to state infrastructure, just this kind of communication right now, hearing from cities like Fort Worth about what their needs are is, I think a critical first step for helping the state government become more responsive. So with that, I would like to open this up for comment.

We can basically just have people come up one at a time. And we just ask that you state your name clearly so that the reporter can take down your name and accurately represent you.

And when you are done -- we have a sign-in sheet; we would just like to have you write your name down so that we can make sure that your name is spelled correctly in the transcript. That is all I have to say, and we would like to invite folks to come up and speak now.

MS. CINDY J. CRAIN: My name is Cindy Crain. Cindy Crain from the Tarrant County Homeless Coalition. And I would like to specifically ask the State to continue with strengthening resources available for the development of permanent affordable housing.

I think the State of Texas is in a very unique role with access to its Housing Trust Fund. I would like to see that applicants be given a premium of extra point mechanisms when within their plan and use of those dollars, that they propose allocating beds for homelessness, for permanent supportive housing to continue to build our supply of housing of affordable quality housing that has some level of supportive care.

In relationship to the data sets and the development of the data of HMIS, of which coalitions are very involved in, I think that more than just detailing the specifics, the demographics of homelessness and what it looks like, because data tends to follow various normal trends. And most of us in this room who are specialists in homelessness could detail why people are homeless, and what the demographic looks like.

I think that we should use that data in concert with the development of permanent supportive housing, and dig into unmet need, and truly analyzing housing need

within our urban centers and our rural areas. Utilizing resources such as the Real Estate Division of Texas A & M, which has an extraordinary database and system and graduate programs that examine housing markets.

And I think combining that data with permanent supportive housing need and the HUD calculations of unmet need, and let's look at that in the State of Texas to truly examine unmet need in our state, and in our urban areas. And maybe use that in the development of RFPs and grants related to the Housing Trust Fund, so that we truly match those resources together. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. Did anyone come with plans to speak today?

VOICE: I thought we were going to be educated a little more on --

MR. McGRATH: Oh, really. Okay. Well -- and we can do that. This is a totally adjustable situation. So if folks feel like they need more of an overview of the plan before we go into more discussion.

Yes?

MS. CINDY CRAIN: What is -- can you explain then, the relationship between the Council and HHSP. Is there a relationship? Is there an advisory capacity, or any way --

MR. McGRATH: No. There is no relationship between the Council and HHSP. They have actually worked in very separate capacities.

MS. CINDY CRAIN: That might be a good thing. HHSP is the --

MR. McGRATH: Sorry. Not to stifle the conversation, but if you want to speak, we ask that everyone come up and speak to the mike, so that the court reporter can capture the information. Actually it is this mike that needs to be spoken to. Sorry.

(Pause.)

MS. CINDY CRAIN: I just wanted to -- the HHSP money is the funds that pay for Catholic charities, SOS team, housing for the Shelter Plus Care Program for Directions Home. So we, in our jurisdiction, that would be the City of Arlington and the City of Fort Worth.

They have a new allocation in need, and it would be another encouraging thing that this Council, statewide Council have at least an advisory capacity, collaborating with TDHCA in how those funds are used and matching those local needs to that state funding that is made available, to assure there is a very significant directive that it fits this plan, so that we will be funded in subsequent years. And so, because it was very

precarious funding as it is, we don't want this next allocation to be its final allocation.

So if there were to be a connection between TDHCA, the Council, and the development of the HHSP funding, I think that would be good for our large communities in Texas. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Can I press you a little bit further? Could you comment on what you would like to see TICH recommend to TDHCA for instance, as an advisor. Would you prefer to comment --

MS. CINDY CRAIN: A seat at the table. Otis, you have more insight on HHSP funding, how it is allocated, its use in that whole conversation that developed the budget than anyone else in this room. Are you privileged to speak?

How could HHSP's uses, and its future success, and the future of being funded by the state, be enhanced through a relationship through the Texas state plan to prevent and end homelessness and the Council. Because currently, as we have learned, the two don't speak, and they are not at the same table.

But they obviously have very similar objectives and missions to prevent and end homelessness. And they are there at the State, and they are at Austin. It is not

a leap.

MS. MICHOL: I wanted to tell you when you were finished, I have a question for you. On the Council, do you guys have persons with disabilities on that Council?

VOICE: Yes.

MS. MICHOL: Okay. Could you tell me who that is?

VOICE: Lance Hamilos.

MR. McGRATH: I will state for the record that it is Lance Hamilos, who is a representative --

MS. MICHOL: Hamilos? I am sorry.

MR. McGRATH: Lance Hamilos, who is the representative from the Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services.

MS. MICHOL: What kind of disability does that person have?

MR. McGRATH: Hearing. He is deaf.

MS. MICHOL: Okay. Last year, I went on a tour here for the shelters. I went just right over there.

And for the Fort Worth class of 2010, we saw from the process from the beginning, we had access to the paperwork and we answered all these questions. And when we went in, and we stayed there. And then they had to leave --

VOICE: It is a public hearing. Absolutely.

MR. McGRATH: Yes.

VOICE: Introduce yourself.

MR. McGRATH: Can you -- yes, introduce her.

And can you speak into that microphone?

MS. MICHOL: This one here?

MR. McGRATH: Yes. Thank you.

MS. MICHOL: My name is Darline Michol. I am here with my daughter Tracy Michol. Tracy serves on the Human Relations Commission here in Fort Worth. And is just really being introduced to the issue of homelessness.

And that issue came to her recently because a person who is deaf, a case worker who works at a homeless shelter was seeking a safe shelter for this man. And so one thing led to another. And here she is.

What she is referring to is in going through Leadership Fort Worth last year, the group went to the Presbyterian Night Shelter. And it was a very impressive operation, having seen a homeless shelter for the first time. And visiting with the people who were residents of the shelter. And then sharing their stories.

The question then, more recently, became how many homeless people are disabled? And what are their disabilities? And how do you gather that information.

How are they supported? How are services provided?

And how are the shelters, how are they staffed to provide that service? How are they educated to provide that service?

And once this goal, how is the goal of reaching a homeless-free state, how is that being defined? And what is expected to be left over? You know, who is expected to still be homeless after this goal, however it is defined is reached.

So there are just more questions that are coming up as she is learning more about the homeless situation. And I know that probably many of you in this room have, you live it every day. And so basically, our question is centered around persons with disabilities.

And that she had also been exposed to the deaf, who over in Dallas, who are homeless. And a lot of the complaints centered around lack of communication at the shelter level.

MS. T. MICHOL: Yes. And also at the shelters here. They don't have video relay service which is a phone service. They don't have anything. I don't see a TTY, you know, people who are deaf blind, or the TTY, they can use a keyboard. And they have braille ones, so they can get phone calls that way.



And I don't see anything in the shelters around here to help them. So what do we have here. So they can have the same access to communication. The Goodrich Center for the Deaf, they are no longer providing services here in the Fort Worth area for the deaf people. So if they go into a shelter, we need to provide accessible communication there. Either video relay or TTY. Something for, well, the video relay for the deaf, and the TTY for the deaf and blind. And then also, you know, people who are hard of hearing, they use video voiceover communication. And so they will see a sign language interpreter, and then they will speak into the telephone. So that is my question.

MS. MICHOL: Okay. Communication is important. There is also culture issues. Those people who are deaf have a culture. And it is understanding what that culture is. So it is how to educate them to know even for them, when they go to a shelter, what it is that they need to provide to the people there, as far as information about themselves so that they can be assisted. It is also breaking down that barrier to trust that there are disabilities that are not visible. And some who have those invisible disabilities don't trust enough to step out and let people know that they have them. And then the

steps can be taken to provide the services that they need for them to become productive.

And housing, you talked about housing. It is what kind of housing is being put up for persons with disabilities, not just someone who has a mobile disability, or has a wheelchair that they need to use. But also looking at the type of housing that would support different disabilities. We did not come here with an agenda. And I didn't come here planning to talk. Thank you.

MS. CINDY CRAIN: Thank you. And as many of you know who work at our homeless shelters, I mean the proportion of the homeless that present in unsheltered and emergency sheltered is, it is -- the majority have very visible physical disabilities, mental health disabilities. That is the majority of the population. How we find, connect them to resources is usually through case managers.

For the first two years, I served in my position and working at the day resource center for the homeless. There were two gentlemen that were deaf. Bruce, I cannot remember their names. And even after they were housed, they came because they had developed a good friendship.

And in that situation, the case managers absolutely connected them with services for them. And so that is the connection. It is through case managers and managers understanding the resources available in making that call. That is how it is resolved.

Another -- do you have a comment? Oh, okay. In objective 4 that talks about discharge from institutions, we have not been very successful in our community in Tarrant County in preventing persons who are being released from jail or prison from not ending up in our emergency shelters.

I remember during the first couple of years of our Directions Home, City of Fort Worth ten-year plan, there was significant lobbying, and work being done. Otis, remind me, that asked the State that once upon discharge, that inmates would be released with a State ID has opposed to a prison ID. And at last recall, it still hasn't happened yet, at the state level.

And that is something very unique to the State.

And so understanding where that is in the process, after that work and lobbying has been done would be beneficial for local communities.

Do you have any update other than that, other than it is stuck? Everyone agreed that that was a good

idea. Because it is very difficult to get an apartment or a job, when your only ID is a prison ID.

And obviously, once again, the State is empowered on both ends of that. And if those two entities were to communicate and to expedite making that happen, it might certainly prevent homelessness, especially for those persons who have completed and served their terms in state prison, and now are released.

And the first thing they are all doing is looking for work, and looking for housing. Ms. Conlin?

MS. CONLIN: I am Wanda Conlin. I own a local newspaper. And I also live in a community adjacent to the shelter area. And I would, I also did not come planning to speak. Because I wasn't real sure what it is we were here for today.

And because of the newspaper, I got the meeting notice. And I wondered who else got this meeting notice.

It didn't look to me like there was anything on there except newspapers, small newspapers. I noticed the *Star Telegram* was on my list.

But I think the room would have been fuller had we had a better notification. Because a lot of people are interested in taking care of the homeless in the City of Fort Worth.

I live in the West Meadowbrook neighborhood, which is adjacent to this shelter area. And I would urge that any plans that we have be sensitive to the quality of life in that neighborhood, the neighborhoods that surround the areas that are affected by the homeless community.

We have so many that do not come into the shelters. They camp out close by. They also have affected, gravely affected the economic viability of our neighborhood. Because we are on a really good bus line. And they move back and forth along East Lancaster on a daily basis.

And they do affect the economic viability and stability of our neighborhood. And those are problems that need to be addressed as well.

Also, when you are looking at the housing for the homeless, try not to concentrate those in one area. Because that also affects the economic stability of that area, and creates a kind of dead zone. Because if they don't have, if we don't enough people to support retail like grocery stores and things in an area, then we have an area that does not contribute their share of taxes to the City of Fort Worth.

That has happened to West Meadowbrook, and we are fighting really hard to make that area secure again.

All of East Fort Worth, our East Fort Worth business association president is with me today. And we are extremely concerned with the economic viability of our area.

And the homeless shelter is all being concentrated. Is there any plan that will reduce that concentration? Because this has really made a difference in our neighborhood, and our whole side of town. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. Would you by the way, write your name down? Thank you.

MS. CINDY J. CRAIN: Anything else? Does anyone have a comment on state funding for mental health services?

MR. McGRATH: We have one hand.

MS. CINDY J. CRAIN: Larry.

MR. BEASLEY: My name is Larry Beasley. I am a case manager for the Salvation Army. Before I came to the Salvation Army, I was a case manager for the Department of Aging and Disability. I was there for a little over two years. I was a case manager managing in the community care for the aging and disabled program, as well as the community-based alternative program.

One of my most memorable clients at the

Salvation Army was a gentleman who was a diagnosed schizophrenic. And he wasn't able to self-sustain himself. He had incontinence issues. He wasn't able to self-medicate.

He had a lot of issues. I immediately referred him to the program that I used to manage, the community-based alternatives program. But was immediately hit with a roadblock.

Because in the policy and procedures manual, it specifically states that an individual can only be assessed for a community-based alternative if they met one of three requirements: they live in their own home, they lived in a place that they rented, or they reside in a nursing home. When I made a referral for my client who was residing in an emergency services shelter, he was automatically denied, because he didn't meet one of the first three requirements.

It took a congressional inquiry by Congresswoman Davis' office, as well as a petition to the Commissioner for the Department of Aging and Disability to get the definition of what a home was evaluated. I felt like because my client was residing at the Salvation Army, he was receiving his mail at the Salvation Army, and the State of Texas recognized the Salvation Army as his

residence. He was getting all of his official mail there.

That I felt like it could have been classified as his home. Although the congressional inquiry specifically asks for an interpretation and a reclassification of the definition of home, to include homelessness, they would not reevaluate that process. But they did allow him to be evaluated for the community-based alternative program.

The importance of that program was that it offered assisted living. And this gentleman needed assisted living that would help manage his medication. Offered daily meals, transportation to and from his medical appointment. Now through this process between when we eventually got them into assisted living and when I made the initial process, it took about six months for the wheels to turn.

My concern is that there is other state agencies that our homeless individuals may be able to benefit from, but aren't able to access the services because of the policy and procedures manuals, it specifically states that they have to be residing in their own home, have to be in an apartment or a house that they rent, or maybe in a nursing home. And because we work with individuals who are extremely transitional, briefly



stay in emergency services shelters, they don't meet that qualification.

And just like my client, I am concerned that other agencies in other parts of the region are being turned away. Because just like me, when I originally appealed the decision to my region of the Department of Aging and Disability, Region 3, they denied it. I had to take it a little bit further.

But I couldn't get clarification on that one state. So I felt like a lot of individuals that we are serving that would benefit from state agency services but are being limited because of the definition of what home and residence is.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you so much. And I would add too, that that is one of our key goals in this plan, is to reduce the barriers individuals would face in accessing mainstream services like you were referring to.

Since 2000, HUD has allowed or encouraged COCs to use more and more of their funds for the actual housing component of their COC grants for Shelter Plus Care. And you know, other COC programs.

Which means that we need to bring in resources from outside of just the COC grant in a communities effort to help rehouse individuals. So mainstream services from

an agency like DADS or from Health and Human Services Commission you know, TANF, job training programs through Texas Workforce Commission, et cetera.

So along those lines, I would ask, does anyone have comments about working with agencies, trying to help clients access resources and having difficulties helping individuals reach services that they might need? And if so, please come speak about it.

MS. COCKRELL: My name is Susan Cockrell. And I run homeless programs for the Fort Worth Housing Authority, and have been doing so for 14 years. So of course I have lots of comments.

Recently, I assisted someone in attempting to get food stamps. And as a taxpayer, and a citizen, I am embarrassed at the process. I will say, incompetency, the level of service. It was awful. I couldn't give details if somebody has input into that.

But many of our services are an embarrassment, frankly. We don't do a good education with people. When I actually got, initially got the food stamp card, they handed me a card.

And I said, is that it? Are there no instructions? I mean, no list of what this can be used for and not be used for. And he said no, that is it. I

guess they assume that everybody that is on food stamps knows how it operates. I was just stunned.

I mean, that is just one example. Of course, they called the next day to tell me, no, we didn't put any money on that card, because we figured out this person doesn't qualify. Twenty-four hours less, they have told them they have qualified. And I had already told the person who is all excited. And now I have got to go back and go, just kidding. You don't really qualify.

So I am sure that there are many examples like that. Because this is just one. And I kind of knew what I was doing to maneuver through the system, supposedly. So it is pathetic. I would go as far to say that. And I am embarrassed about it as a citizen. Food stamps is just one.

There are some really good services at the State, but the good ones, seems like we keep the good ones secret. You know, there is some things that the State has done, some really good things too. They have a program called Money Follows the Person. How many of you have heard of that. Yes. Not many, unless you all are in the business.

It is a collaborative effort between Health and Human Services and housing authorities to get people out

of nursing homes that really don't belong in nursing homes. And so it is kind of a fast track into the Section 8 system. And also, into home-based services, so that the person can be at home and not have to be in a more expensive nursing home.

People don't even know about it. People that do know about it, they just put a little bit of money into it. And so those slots are already used up. There are a number of things like that.

But in our State, a lot of programs, education is the problem. Some of the concerns that I have about what I see happening with homelessness, many times we tend to get -- we get focused on homeless, okay. We are working with the homeless, and we forget housing.

I remember many years back, here locally, we were coming up with our list of resources. And we came up with this great list, all of these resources for homeless. And get what wasn't on there? Housing. I mean, and it is kind of a joke. But it is not.

But I say that, to say that we do get focused sometimes on the homeless. And we have got to do homeless services, and we have got to do homeless services. And we don't look at curing the homeless.

We are too busy taking care of the shelters,

and getting them sheltered, and getting them fed. And we forget, hey wait. Oops. We have got to get them out of this situation, instead of just taking care of them on a daily basis.

So I am concerned that we do that, and there is a few things in the plan that kind of look like that. And I apologize that I am not more familiar with it, and have my statements prepared. But as most of us that work on a daily basis, we don't get time to sit down and read the 72 pages, or don't take time.

Anyway, another real concern that I have, and this has to do with funding. And I don't know I how much, if any influence the Council has federally, or statewide.

But of course, the funding for mental health services and substance abuse services, that can't be said enough.

I mean, if we don't do those services, those are some of our leading causes for keeping people in homeless situations. And if we can't get them into treatment, and can't help them, it is not going to change.

So enough said on that one.

What I am concerned about is that we seem to be getting more and more fragmented in our services. And I think this has to do, in my opinion, with the funding strings. My example, I will pick on HUD a little bit. I

think it was the last year in the NOFA, it came out for the continuants could get the extra money. The bonus money, if you housed veterans.

Well, you all probably know, veterans have been, I don't know, I guess the favorites to get housed. You know, everybody is up on veterans now. That is the thing. Let's house our veterans. Let's don't have homeless veterans.

So there have been tons of programs and money coming out for veterans. The VA is coming out with stuff; SAMHSA is coming out with stuff. It seems like every agency in Washington was coming out with housing programs for veterans. So HUD puts that into the NOFA.

Well, we have got, I don't know, I can't even count them, four or five housing programs for veterans here locally. And so then we get another one. And it is like, dang, couldn't we house somebody else? We have got these other programs.

So I know that the agencies in Washington, you know, don't necessarily talk and work together. The other thing, if the Council could have any influence is that the problem we have run into with our Shelter Plus Care is a big part of what I have managed all of these years. And we provide the housing component that is done through the

Continuum of Care.

And so our challenge has been to come up with the case management component, the supportive component. And the agencies that fund that, such as say, SAMHSA, some agencies that have gotten money from SAMHSA. The SHP funds from HUD. I am leaving some other agency out. Well, the VA.

At the state level, it has been the -- it was TACAA. I forget the new name now. But the drug and alcohol agencies. But they all run their monies on different cycles. You know, some of them fund for two years. Some of them fund for three years. And they all end at different times.

So if you are trying to use that funding to take care of somebody that is on housing funding that runs for five years, and this one runs for three years, you get somebody into services. And then in three years, you have got a problem.

What are we going to do with them? Well, we have still got them in housing for another two years. Well, we don't have any money any more to provide the case management.

So we strongly need to coordinate that at the federal, and that happens some at the state level, too.

Some of those were the state agencies. So not only do we need more funds, but we need to kind of coordinate when that funding, how long it runs for.

I wanted to talk, you said in the strategies, there was some mention about encouraging local providers to access mainstream state benefits. I talked about that a little bit. But what I haven't really seen in here is about education of other social service agencies.

And you talked a little bit about discharge planning. But I don't see mentioned in here organizations like hospitals or housing authorities. And I know, statewide there is not, there may not be a real good organization. But Texas Housing Association, Texas Hospital, I guess two THAs that could be brought into this. Because they have a lot to do with the housing of it.

A lot of our homeless people end up in the hospitals. So what do the hospitals do with them? I have been caught in that trap, of trying to find somebody a place recently.

Like three people that are coming out of a hospital, there is no place for them to go, unless they can get on the floor and get back up. But if they are coming out of a hospital, and they are sick, they are not



able to do that. So that is a big issue.

And what I am seeing in here, and I know it is kind of trying to shift from local provider to the state scene, but maybe involving those agencies, or even the Boards that license social workers, you know to get people educated. Because I have done a program, and I have always tell people when I am talking about housing, housing is a difficult business. And it is getting more and more difficult.

That is when I was talking about it being fragmented. Like for instance, when the HPRP money came out, that was great. That was to help a lot of people well, where do you go to get that help.

Well, there is like five different agencies. Okay, well I went to this one. And they said they didn't have any more money. Okay, well, then I am going to run over to this agency and apply. Well, no, they didn't have any either.

So I have to run over. And I think we are doing, it seems like we are doing more of that, instead of less of that. That we have more agencies doing housing, more -- not the.

You know, it has to be a monopoly, that only the housing authority does it. But I think we do need to

stop and say you know, wait. What are we doing? Is this really the best way to operate or not. And again, that comes from a lot of the housing. But I would like to see it at the state level.

Some of those other agencies don't just talk about DADS. And protective services. Talk about like, the housing authority organizations, the hospitals, places where folks frequent to get services. And let me see. Let me know if there is anything else here. Oh, I will pick on HUD one more time.

One of the problems, we have agencies that come to us to see about doing housing projects, and want to partner with us. And we, every year, I have somebody that is calling. And we are talking about doing something.

And the way that the money comes down now through the Continuum of Care, the only thing we could do is to do like projects to house like eight people. Because the ones that we would do would have to be like they are funded for like ten years. Well, if you have \$500,000 and you have to spread it out over a ten-year period, that doesn't give you much per year. So you can only do small units.

So there is nothing really available that I know of, like that comes from HUD for us to go in and say

we are going to build a 200-unit permanent supportive housing here in Fort Worth, and do this.

So I mean, we have, we want to do something like that. We have partners that would cooperate in doing it, but we can't find the money, or can't figure out how to do that, unless some private thing would come forward.

So that has kind of been an issue for us too, in looking at funding.

And that is the notes I have so far. Can I reserve the right to say something again, later?

MR. McGRATH: Sure. Yes. Thank you so much.

MS. COCKRELL: I will think of something.

Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Yes.

MS. BOARD: Hi. My name is Amy Board. I am the prepare manager for refugees management like Catholic charities. I felt like this would be a good time for me to come up to kind of piggyback off of what this lady, I am sorry. I didn't catch your name.

What Susan was saying about public housing resources being very limited. Well, first, I think I should probably step back and tell you a little bit about the demographic that I serve.

Because I think it is a group that is very

highly in danger of homelessness, but isn't always considered in homeless prevention plans, because they are very hidden, and a lot of the general public doesn't know about our population. So I am hoping to start by defining refugees.

For anyone who doesn't know, a refugee is someone who has fled persecution on the basis of their race, ethnicity, or religion or political opinion in their home country. Often fleeing with only the clothes on their back, trying to get to safety, because they are in danger of being killed for what they believe, or their background.

These individuals fleeing to other countries, in search of some form of ability to stay safe, and often are dumped into overcrowded temporary refugee camps, that are set up to house people while they are waiting for a permanent solution to be determined for them. Often, these individuals have to wait in refugee camps for many years before any other option is opened up for them to continue on with their lives.

And the role that we play in that is that we are very excited and proud to be able to resettle individuals who are coming from those refugee camp situations into their new lives here, legally and

permanently in the United States. So in my program, actually my department as a whole, we offer a number of services for refugees when they first arrive.

And these are anywhere from single individuals who are young adults to family units with children, even to the elderly that we resettle. And we provide them with their initial housing and some financial support and help them to get a job and obtain resources, that they can become self-sufficient.

And first of all, I would like to say that we have a remarkable rate of getting refugees self-sufficient. They are some of the most motivated individuals. You know, they have been waiting for this opportunity to get a job and provide for themselves and their families.

However, most of the jobs that are available to individuals who might have had less access to education in their home countries, or may not be fluent in English, as a lot of people are not when they go to a brand new country, those jobs tend to be more low-paying jobs. And while it is sufficient to meet the families' needs most of the time, what I learned by reading this really great plan that you guys have put together is that they almost all of our refugees even after they become self-sufficient would

qualify under the at-risk definition of becoming homeless.

And if their hours get cut, if they lose a job, if they have some medical expense that comes up, within a month, they could be on the verge of homelessness. And we see that in my program at alarming rates.

So although we have great success, and refugees are some of the most resilient people there are, for somebody who is in a brand new country, and faces language barriers and cultural barriers, in addition to just the sheer psychological trauma of everything they have endured. And it makes it a little bit more difficult for this particular group to get access to the resources they need. So we do the best we can.

But we have also found that there is a lot of steps that aren't taken into consideration for our clients. So I just wanted to share a few of those that we have experienced recently, in hopes that they can be considered in the continuation of this plan. So that all populations, including those like refugees who may be a little bit more hidden, to be included to benefit from this great plan.

So one of the things that, oh my goodness, I am blanking again. Susan, thank you. One of the things that Susan talked about which is a big barrier is the limited

access to public housing resources. And this plan does talk about that, which I appreciate.

But right now, our refugees who are in those situations I described, where they may just be one month away from homelessness, we try to get them onto the public housing wait list, and they are told that it will be at least a year before anything is available for them. And obviously by that time, they are already going to be affected.

We have also explored one time rental assistance options. Those vary in their availability in the processing time to get access to those. And also in their eligibility requirements, after they require things like having to have lost your job.

Well, sometimes even just getting a dramatic reduction in work hours, or having some other unexpected expense can be something that leads them to being on the verge of homelessness, but may not fit that very specific criteria. Even then, it is only a one-month solution. And they can only access it once in the whole year.

Additionally, Section 8 is a great option, but as we all know, and as the Dallas example in here illustrates the Section 8 wait list opened infrequently. It just opened this last summer, and before that, it had

been a year and a half before it was opened.

And then there is quite a bit of time before you can move through the list and be considered to get Section 8 housing vouchers, if you get considered at all.

And so Section 8 also is not really much of an option for clients who are about to become homeless.

Additionally, in Tarrant County, we have some really good services available for people who meet a certain definition of homeless. But it doesn't incorporate a lot of what our refugees would experience, which again, I also appreciate the facts addressed in this plan.

Because refugees, due to their language and cultural barriers are unlikely to be able to independently access emergency shelter resources on their own. They don't speak the language. They eat a different type of food than what might be served. They don't know how to communicate with anyone here, much like this other young lady talked about was a barrier as well.

And so because of that, they are likely to double up in a friend or neighbor's apartment within their community, rather than going to a shelter -- and we have seen this happen with a number of our cases in this past year.



But because of that, because they have not spent even one night in a shelter, they are ineligible for some of the other resources that would help get them back into housing quickly. And so those are some of the gaps.

So we are experiencing with our particular populations -- excuse me. I am getting a little bit of a cold. That I just wanted to highlight and make sure that they were brought to everyone's attention in this plan.

If it is all right, I would like to quickly share just an example that came to mind of one of the recent families who went through, a sort of case study, if you will. This was a refugee family of eleven. Yes, eleven people, and if you will believe it, all nine of their children were age 13 or younger.

So extremely vulnerable family. The youngest child is still a baby. And so mom didn't feel like she was able to work. She had to take care of the new baby, and then also two other children who were still at home and not in school.

That left the father of the household with the sole burden of obtaining an income that would meet their needs. And as you can imagine, for a family of eleven, that is a lot of expenses.

This gentleman had not been able to have access to proper education in his home country, because of his ethnic minority status. And he also had not had a chance to learn English before coming here. And so that presented a number of barriers for him to being able to get a job that would meet all of the needs of his family.

And for a while, they were doing fine. He was making enough to meet all of their expenses. Then his hours were cut. And then he no longer could pay for rent and all of the other needs of the family.

We were working with this family in the apartment complex over the course of several months, trying to see if there was any other option we could explore. In this case, public housing is not an option, because you have to have ten members of the household or less, in this area to be able to get public housing.

So they couldn't access public housing. We signed them up for Section 8. By that point, they were already two months behind on their rent, and were about to be evicted. And so that was not an option, either.

We also explored the emergency shelter options here in Fort Worth. And while those shelters are really good at meeting the needs of a lot of the homeless

population, for a family of eleven, they would have had to be split up to be in the shelter.

So if you could imagine, everything that a refugee has gone through to get here, the last thing they want to hear when they are experiencing financial crisis is that the only way for them to get a roof over their heads is that the family would have to be split up. So in addition, I also found out that there was a four- to six-long-waiting list for the family shelter, which wasn't going -- they weren't going to be able to process through to get into in time.

And so what ended up happening, is on the day of their eviction, they all eleven of them couch surfed. They moved into other apartments. And it is already hard enough to fit a regular family into an apartment unit, then add eleven more. It is pretty crowded.

And so ultimately, they did this for about two weeks. We had exhausted every other resources we could, tried the best, we could see if there is any other options. But there were none. And ultimately, they moved to another city to try their luck there.

And so I just wanted to share that story. By the way, this happened just two months ago. So this is very recent. This is happening now.

But I wanted to share that story, just to illuminate a little bit of what we see in our programs and how difficult it can be just for a regular person to experience financial crisis when they have grown up in the United States. They speak the language, and they understand the culture.

And when you haven't had the ability to do all of those things, you are at an even higher level of risk, because you don't know what resources are available, and you can't access them yourself. So I just wanted to go ahead and share that.

The last two points I wanted to make, because I was really glad they were [indiscernible] mentioned HPRP.

Can I just say, we didn't experience this when HPRP funding was available, and we were able to get our refugees into it. It worked for them.

It worked really well, when we had ample resources, and when they were able to be admitted. We saw success. And since it has ended, we have seen homelessness. And it has been really difficult. So I wanted to make sure that that was there in the record.

And then finally, I also saw in here, and I thought this was really neat. Something about a Medicaid 1915(I), I am not quite sure what that means. But it is a

modification which would allow individual adults who are 150 percent of the federal poverty level or below to become eligible for Medicaid in the State of Texas, if I read that and understood that correctly.

I think that is a great idea. And I will definitely say that medical expenses, even the expenses that it takes to maintain being healthy would be another issue that we are seeing that could lead to homelessness.

And so at least in our population that we serve, I would really urge that that continue to be considered in the State of Texas as a potential solution for preventing homelessness as well. So that is all I have to share. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you so much.

MR. THORNTON: Good morning. I am Otis Thornton with the City of Fort Worth. And first of all, I would like to congratulate the Interagency Council on doing a really good job of getting out a very solid draft in a very short period of time. This is a crazy sort of test of trying to get all of these different representatives from these different state agencies into the same room together, and talking around a common purpose.

So kudos to Colin for your leadership efforts, and the work of the Council. Because I think you have got a really solid draft. I would want to encourage the Interagency Council to take this very solid draft and do some very specific editing. And go back through with a few lenses on as you go back to the plan.

First of all, I think we -- it would be important to scrutinize -- I think the real meat of this plan are the charts on pages 47 through 55. I know that in Fort Worth, we have -- I have simply found that as we have administered and implemented and worked on the implementation of the Directions Home plan, that where the rubber really meets the road is, are those steps what you set out to do.

So first of all, I would encourage you to scrutinize those grids with the test in mind of is it necessary, and is it sufficient? There are a handful of critical paths to ending homelessness. Housing, jobs, health care. Emergency services that deliver dignity and prevent death without enfranchising unsheltered homelessness in ways that as Wanda pointed out earlier, are deleterious to neighborhoods, communities and the health of people who are living unsheltered.

For example, one of my pet peeves in the plan

is this matrix of housing. Do we really need that? Is that really necessary?

You have got, there is some instances in here, 3.2.4, incorporate all state agencies in TICH discussion of homelessness prevention. Well, I think the intent there is that you want to get some players at the table who are not part of the Council's initial mandate. But you don't necessarily need the Railroad Commission at the table to discuss homelessness prevention.

You need to go back through and scrutinize the language and the grammar of those action steps. Because that is what you are going to be held accountable for. It is going to be what you are holding yourselves accountable to in the future.

Also, in terms of necessity and sufficiency there is no mention of funding in here. And on the one hand, that makes good sense, because I think there is probably a very pragmatic group of people around the table, who are saying you know what? This is Texas. The likelihood of getting new revenue to the table is pretty slim. But come on. We have got to talk about revenues and funding.

Similarly, I think that the Council may be a little bit timid about its authority or its ability to get

things done. I believe that the publication of a plan, the adoption of it, by the Governor and the Legislature, I think that provides a great opportunity to go back and hold people accountable for things that have been suggested. Therefore, not only do I think we talk more specifically about funding for proactive responses that prevent and end homelessness as the documents title indicates, but also policies that are tied to existing funding streams that promote the goals of the plan.

So for example, there is a great example that come up earlier. One of us talking about the concentration of people with disabilities or people in assisted housing in particular geographies.

There are plans and policies at the State, most notably through the Qualified Allocation program at TDHCA that speak to these items. TDHCA's willingness to perform mixed use underwriting on tax credit properties within the guidelines of the law, utilizing State resources are ways that we can leverage existing State resources to accomplish the goals that promote healthy neighborhoods and end homelessness by increasing the availability of quality, affordable, accessible housing.

Secondly, I would encourage the Council to scrutinize the plan with the question in mind, who is on



the bus? And this comes from Jim Collins book, Good to Great, where he talks about making sure that the right people are involved.

This plan, as it reads right now, is a plan that was written by state bureaucrats, for state bureaucrats, about state bureaucrats. Now, I personally have helped write a city plan that reads similarly for the city in some instances. So I am sympathetic to this.

But I would say in particular, I think it is notable that the private sector is not on the bus. Where is the private sector? Specifically, if we are going to increase the supply of affordable housing in our state, we are not going to do that with public resources exclusively.

We have got to figure out ways to tap into private sector resources to provide the capital we need to develop those properties in ways that again, maintain the value of neighborhoods, and increase the likelihood of success for the participants and the tenants in those housing units. So are the right people on the bus?

I would also note that the Interagency Council seems to be the primary actor in here, and yet there is nothing that suggests that the Interagency Council should persist into the future, that it should have staffing.

That it should meet on any type of schedule. So I think that you need to attend to some of those kinds of implementation sorts of action items in the Plan.

Thirdly, I would encourage the Council to scrutinize the plan in terms of its grammar. And what I am trying to say here is that I would like to see the Plan be more assertive. On these grids in the back of the plan, I see a lot of instances where the Interagency Council is called on to promote, encourage, and increase coordination and communication.

And I submit to you that in some instances, we have confused the means with the end. Why is it important to increase coordination? Why is it important to increase communication? Why is it important to raise awareness?

Well, our sense is, is that in so doing, something is going to happen that prevents or ends homelessness. And I think that you are on the right track. I would just encourage you to take it a step further and be more specific about what you want.

As an example, under the homelessness prevention goal, Objective 2 is to increase awareness of opportunities for preventing homelessness among state agencies. Rather than increasing awareness of opportunities, why don't we increase the number of times

that state agencies prevent homelessness?

I think that is what we are after. And saying so, it is a much more specific mandate for state agency staff to follow, as well as for the Interagency Council to hold people accountable.

Why does it matter, and how will we know it is done? When we read the goals, do we know? How will we know when the goal has been accomplished? Some of these are not measurable.

If we are simply increasing communication, how do we know when communication has been increased? Are we going to monitor the number of emails going back and forth? I don't think that is what we are after. I think we are after specific outcomes and specific outputs that prevent and end homelessness.

And that leads back again to the test of, if we have assertive action steps that are specifically focused on ends and not means. And we know, when we know when the goal will be accomplished, then we can ask ourselves, does it matter, and is it necessary, and is it sufficient? It brings us back to the first part. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Can I just press you on one little issue?

MR. THORNTON: Sure.

MR. McGRATH: You mentioned this. I was wondering if you had any thoughts on what specific measurements you would like to see within the plan? What would we want to be holding ourselves accountable to?

MR. THORNTON: I think, for example, I think that a weakness of Fort Worth's Directions Home plan is that we did not establish benchmarks for the homeless population in our city. We did not say, Directions Home plan, after three years, the homeless population, our target is that it will be this large. After five years, it will be this large. After seven years, it will be that large.

A very specific numeric opportunity to hold ourselves accountable. To be transparent with the public that this is what we are shooting for. And we may have to recalibrate.

We may not make it. I mean, nobody anticipated what has happened in the global economy, when we first wrote the Directions Home plan. But certainly, I think opportunities to be specific about numeric outcomes related to the number of Texans who experience homelessness on a point in time basis, as well as the opportunities to prevent homelessness that have been articulated well previously.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. What is that?

MS. CRAIN: Tapped out? Are we tapped out?

All good.

MR. McGRATH: Sure. Can you come up and speak?

MS. MICHOL: Is this still working? I think Otis exhausted the battery in it. As I was listening to people talk about housing, I was wondering if there was anyone here from Habitat for Humanity?

(No response.)

MS. MICHOL: And on the model that they have is one that includes business, includes the private sector, as well as includes the non-profit sector, namely, churches. Well actually, also a city.

I think it was Mansfield or Arlington at one point had an eyesore. A place where people just dumped their garbage or anything that they didn't want. And so what that city did was donate the land to Habitat for Humanity, and Habitat then built homes with contributions from churches and from some businesses on that property.

What I learned, as our church, Arbor Lawn United Methodist Church also participates in that program.

What I learned was that the default on the loans, I mean there are loans where the occupants, once they are in the home pay, it is like less than 1 percent. And while this

may not help all people who are homeless, it might be a program or model to take a look at for those who may be on the verge of or nearing it.

Maybe it could be a preventive measure. We raised, the last house we built and raised \$60,000. And that is what was needed to build this home. The land in Fort Worth that it was built on was donated by a developer. The situation changed. He had these lots. He donated the lots to Habitat.

And the condition upon which the homes were build is that it had to match the design and the facade of and even the floor plan of the homes that this developer had set out to build. Because some of them he did build.

And they had brick facade in the front, and these were, I think, like three- or four-bedroom homes.

The one home that I participated on that we built was for a single parent who had a job, but who otherwise could not have owned her own home, had she not gone through the program. I think the other thing that I liked about the program is that she had to participate in the building of the home. She had to give 300 hours.

And those 300 hours could be given by her, as well as by friends and family participating with her. So choir members, teenagers were brought in to do some

things. I mean, it was a community effort working alongside with Habitat folks, and the lady's family.

So that might, and that was here in Fort Worth.

So that might be a model to look at. I don't know what it costs right now. But I would say \$60,000 for a business, or businesses here in Fort Worth, that is a drop in the bucket for them.

And the lady who was concerned about her neighborhood and the impact of public housing upon the value of the land, and the values of her neighborhood, that basically this would be another option to look at, that might also address some of her concerns. The last is that not only was the default on foreclosures less than 1 percent, crime was not an issue. The people had places where they could raise their family, send their kids to school.

And so overall, the effect, or the contribution to Fort Worth is that you don't have to send police officers out all of the time to this neighborhood. People are productive. And they are wanting to build a home for their families.

And then last, I would like to thank you. Tracy learned about this yesterday, nearing 5:00. And I don't know if it was you that she contacted, or someone

else in your organization. But I have never seen any organization provide interpreters with a request coming that late, and so quickly. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MS. CRAIN: Michael, do you want to close it out, or you all are --

MR. McGRATH: Do we have any more folks who want to speak?

(No response.)

MS. CRAIN: Thank you, Peggy. Thank you, Colin.

MR. McGRATH: Of course.

MR. DOYLE: Well, and I will just close by saying thank you again for your comments. We take those very seriously.

Colin and a group of the Board at the Interagency Council is traveling all over the State of Texas from El Paso, to leaving today to go to Dallas, and Houston on Thursday. So I just thank all of the Interagency Council board for making these things. So it is important as we go forward.

I can just tell you as a part of history about this plan, when there were nine state agencies that by legislation had to be on this Council, almost all of them



said, we serve the homeless. Yet the local representatives of those agencies told us on the local level they did not. And so there was a huge disconnect between what state agencies thought they were allowing their regional and local offices to do, and what was actually happening at the regional and local offices.

I will say that our representative, Lance Hamilos from DARS, what is now DARS, was successful for the first time ever in getting the question asked on their intake application, where are you living? Do you consider yourself homeless? And so that was very helpful. And so we are taking this in very small steps.

This Council started in '89, as Colin said, as an unfunded mandate. So TDHCA said, we want you, the legislation said, and it was housed under TDHCA. We want you to do nine specific things, but there is no money to do it with. And so, from that point forward, we are beginning to make some progress.

Otis' comments about funding, absolutely critical. But it is just such a blessing to get to the point where we actually have a plan ready to be signed by the Governor. And I know, as we go forward in the years to come, that very quickly, we are going to start looking at applications to how we do that. And how we fund that.

Because it is time. And if we, as Fort Worth has done, prove an economic benefit to the State by having this plan funded, we will get funding. But that is what it is going to take for us to do it. Is there a benefit to keeping people off of the streets and putting them into housing, on our system.

Because our systems are broken. And the comment Otis also made about the public sector, I make it in every Interagency Council meeting. Where are we? We are bigger than you are right now. We are bigger than you are.

We can bring resources to the table. Let us be a part. And so we are struggling with all of those things as well. But we thank you for your input. And the input we will get from around the State. They will be adhered to and listened to, and inform our decisions on how we go forward.

So thanks for being here. Thanks for all you do here locally. I am just so proud to be a resident of Tarrant County and see the good work that is going on here, as it is modeled throughout the United States on collaboration in thinking and process, and compassion. We appreciate all of you. More final words from you?

MR. McGRATH: Just as final words in closing, thank you all so much for being here and sharing your comments. If you have comments that you would like to submit in writing, you can first of all, find the Plan on TDHCA's website, which is TDHCA.state.tx.us. And the Council's website, you just add a slash after that TDHCA.state.tx.us/tich.

And you will find a link to the Plan. You will find my email address on there as well, where you can submit any comments in writing. And with that, we can close this hearing. Thank you all so much.

(Whereupon, at 10:30 a.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: Fort Worth, Texas

DATE: November 29, 2011

I do hereby certify that the foregoing pages, numbers 1 through 60, inclusive, are the true, accurate, and complete transcript prepared from the verbal recording made by electronic recording by Penny Bynum before the Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs.

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(Transcriber) 12/05/2011  
(Date)

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