



June 7, 2021

Mayor Satya Rhodes-Conway  
Alders, Common Council of Madison  
County Executive Joe Parisi  
Supervisors, Dane County Board

Dear Mayor Rhodes-Conway, County Executive Parisi, Alders and County Board Supervisors,

We are writing to you today as the Governing Board of the Homeless Services Consortium (HSC) of Dane County. The HSC Board is responsible for operating Dane County's Continuum of Care (CoC). This includes designating and operating a Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), engaging in CoC planning and approving funding slates for EHH (Emergency Solutions Grant, Homeless Prevention Program, Housing Assistance Program) and CoC funding competitions. The HSC itself represents a diverse host of almost 90 organizations that are dedicated to serving the most vulnerable people in our community. Our membership and Board include representation from people who have experienced homelessness and/or housing insecurity. These experiences and voices are essential to informing our work.

With the passing of the \$1.9 trillion dollar American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP) signed by the President on March 11, 2021, we adamantly urge you to prioritize and direct our community's funds towards long term solutions for people who are homeless and housing insecure. The solution to homelessness is housing. Our CoC recognizes that placing people in housing alone will not solve homelessness. Rather, we must provide support services that correspond with the household's level of need. Dane County has engaged in improvements of our homeless crisis response system in an effort to be more efficient, effective and ensure households are getting the appropriate level of service. However, there are not enough resources to provide housing and services to everyone who needs them. Directing Rescue Plan Act funds to this area will provide our community with these much needed resources.

The data systems that we have in place indicate that there are nearly 1,000 combined homeless singles and households with children today. As daunting as this number may appear, it does not even come close to capturing the horrific state of homelessness and near homelessness in our community right now. Our collective outreach and direct experience show us that there are thousands more who are doubled-up, couch-surfing, self-paying at hotels, institutionalized, identified as homeless within the public school system, or facing almost certain eviction when the CDC moratorium ends. This is throughout the City of Madison and greater Dane County. We face a mounting homelessness epidemic within the pandemic.

Because Dane County is among the worst in the nation for racial disparities across multiple sectors, this crisis is disproportionately affecting communities of color. While African Americans make up 5% of the Dane County population, they make up almost half of our homeless population. Among the population of African Americans experiencing homelessness, 75% are women and children.

These horribly skewed numbers tell a story of persistent racism that intersects with sexism and is woven into our community's unjust housing policies and practices. Now is the time to address and correct these legacies of harm; we must direct funds towards housing programs that serve our most vulnerable community members.

We respectfully recommend the following list of funding priorities:

1. **Hotel Conversion** – The availability of deeply affordable housing is a foundational priority. Strategically, the best way to provide this housing would be to purchase and convert several hotels into permanent and affordable housing. We endorse the purchase & conversion of a minimum of 300 rooms/units into affordable housing at the 30-50% CMI level. This should be a joint City of Madison/Dane County effort.
2. **Shelter** – The immediate safety net of shelter is the first line of defense in homelessness. Our community needs expanded and sufficient emergency overnight shelter space for all populations with enough space to socially distance. Part of this effort must consider subpopulations with special shelter needs, such as youth who are parenting.
3. **Transportation** - Transportation is repeatedly identified as an unmet need for persons experiencing homelessness. Free bus rides, gas cards, and other flexible forms of transportation (cabs, Uber, etc.) should be provided to users of shelter and other very low-income housing projects.
4. **Flexible Eviction Prevention Funds** – Most of the funding currently available to assist in eviction prevention is tied to onerous and time-consuming application processes. Our community needs to build our capacity to use those funds more quickly and flexibly. We advocate for the City & County to invest in building capacity to distribute these funds.
5. **Category 2 & 3 Homeless** – Most existing services are directed to a strict definition of the HUD Category 1 homeless definition, leaving a huge swath of doubled-up, self-paying and effectively homeless people in need. We support the creation of additional services and support for families and individuals in these categories.
6. **Targeted Disparities** – We advocate for more direct support of organizations that strive to address persistent racial and economic disparities among the homeless population.

Our community has resources as never before to address problems as never before. We must use these resources wisely. Please hear our voice and honor the recommendations of the agencies and the people who are on the front lines of this challenge.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We welcome any questions and dialogue on the positions and ideas covered in this letter.

On behalf of the HSC Consortium,



Brad Hinkfuss  
President – HSC Board of Directors

Cc: HSC Board Members

***Delivered by email***