



April 23, 2021

Dear Joint Finance Committee Members,

I am writing on behalf of the Homeless Services Consortium (HSC) which is the Continuum of Care (CoC) for Madison/Dane County. We support the items relating to housing and homelessness that the Governor included in his budget. We would like to draw your attention to a few items that are particularly important.

Providing services to people experiencing homelessness, in the midst of a pandemic, has validated that housing is healthcare. Our community members were told to stay home in order to avoid getting sick or spreading illness. This is impossible when one does not have a home to stay at. Our community did an excellent job coming together to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on people experiencing homelessness. As we move into recovery from this crisis, we need to provide long-term solutions to homelessness.

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.

On March 31, 2021, there were 132 households with children and 479 single adults identified in Dane County as experiencing homelessness. These numbers do not include people who are doubled-up/couch surfing, people who haven't accessed services or people who are currently in institutions who may exit to homelessness. In order to meet the needs of our community members, we will need additional funding resources for all parts of the homeless crisis response system.

Ideally, the State Budget would include funding and policies to prevent and end homelessness for all people in Wisconsin. We recognize that type of investment may not come in this budget. There are items in the Governor's budget that will provide much needed resources in our efforts to prevent and end homelessness.

- \$5 million GPR in each fiscal year for the Housing Assistance Program
 - This funding source is unique in that it can be used for both case management services and rental assistance. It is a great resource to leverage other funding sources. For instance, a program could provide Tenant Based Rental Assistance (TBRA) and then also have case management services through the Housing Assistance Program. It also allows communities to focus on their unique needs.
- \$600,000 GPR in each fiscal year to create a grant for housing navigation
 - Currently, case managers are working to engage with landlords. However, this may not be their skill set. Their job is to work with people to find and maintain housing. Across the country and in Wisconsin, communities have found it beneficial to hire people who have knowledge and skills in property management or real estate to work on landlord engagement. They are able to speak the same language as property owners and spend time on developing and strengthening those relationships.

- \$25.5 Million in the DHS budget for providing a Medicaid community health benefit
 - This would provide additional funding for support services to people experiencing homelessness. Agencies could charge Medicaid for the work they do to help people obtain and maintain housing. There are specific eligibility requirements so this will not replace current funding for services, but will allow agencies to provide services to more people or move funds to rental assistance.
- The Governor has a recommendation to modify statutory language to allow local governments to enact ordinances regulating the landlord-tenant relationship and to modify statutory language related to landlord/tenant responsibilities that were enacted over the past decade.
 - When local governments were no longer able to enact ordinances related to the tenant-landlord relationship, it became much more difficult for people to obtain and maintain housing. It is important to return this power to local governments so they can create measures that will best serve their community members.

The Madison/Dane County CoC thanks you for your consideration of these specific budget items and all budget items relating to homelessness and housing. We believe that the items in the Governor's budget will strengthen the homeless crisis response system across the state. Thank you for your leadership.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brad Hinkfuss". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large loop at the end.

Brad Hinkfuss – President, Homeless Services Consortium of Dane County