

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

TEXAS STRATEGIC PLAN TO PREVENT AND
END HOMELESSNESS

PUBLIC HEARING

2:03 p.m.
Thursday,
December 1, 2011

Harris County Department of Education
5th Floor Conference Center, Room 502
6300 Irvington Blvd
Houston, Texas

BEFORE:

COLIN McGRATH, VISTA, Planner
MIKE DOYLE, Chairman
Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless

ON THE RECORD REPORTING
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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. DOYLE: Welcome to the public comment time for the Interagency Council Plan. I'm Mike Doyle. I am officially CEO and president of Cornerstone Assistance Network in Fort Worth, Texas, but I'm serving as chair of the Texas Interagency Council this year.

And it is a real blessing to be able to finally make some progress, with Colin's help, on this ten-year plan that we've been working on for four years, it seems like.

Let me just tell you a little of the history of the Interagency Council. It was legislatively mandated in 1989 as an unfunded mandate through Stuart B. McKinney and we had to do nine things as a council, with no money to do it wish. And so we contracted with the Texas Homeless Network to fulfill some of those goals, but when Philip Mangano reactivated the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness in about '06 or '07, he started the process of trying to get states and large cities to build and create state and city plans on how to end homelessness in ten years. And you're all familiar with that. You have one here. Most cities in Texas of any size do as well.

So the state kind of lagged behind and we had a hard time getting the governor to sign the plan but he did

sign a one-year plan back in '08 or '09, I guess it was, and we've been working off that plan ever since. But we need to permanently make the ten-year plan. And so we've made a lot of progress.

Hope you've had a chance to look at the draft. We'll be taking the public comments from all over the State of Texas. Colin's making a whirlwind tour, along with other members of the Interagency Council and we want to hear your feedback.

Let me just tell you that, as hard as it's going to be to let us know what your problems are here in Houston, and we're interested in those, put them in the context of how a state plan can help you with your local problems. We can't help you with a particular organization here who's not doing all that they should be doing or say that they're doing.

We can help you with things at the state level to give you the resources to do what you need here. So when you bring up an issue, which we all have in every city that we work in and talk about, have those issues, put it in the context of how this plan, from a state's perspective, written properly, will help you do the work that you are already doing so great here in Houston.

So, that being said, let me introduce you to

Colin McGrath who is with TDHCA, contracted with TDHCA, to help us write this plan -- done a phenomenal job, and he's going to give you a brief overview of the plan. We're not going to go through it section by section because we want to hear from you. This is about hearing from you, not from us.

So, Colin --

MR. McGRATH: All right. Thank you. So I'm Colin McGrath with the Texas Interagency Council for the Homelessness. And what we'll do today is break this hearing into four sections, each focusing on a different component of the plan. The plan gives an overview of -- so that the state of homelessness in Texas, and it attempts to use the best data that we have available to give a sense of the scope, scale and the composition of the homeless population in the state.

And then it is broken into four strategic areas, each focusing on a different strategy area. The first is affordable housing and supportive services; the second, homelessness prevention; the third, data research and analysis; and the fourth, state infrastructure. So we'd like to focus the hearing on each one of those items.

So I'll give an overview of the goals and the objectives for each of these and then invite comment.

After -- and just like a little bit of ground rules. We'd like to have you come up and speak here; speak to the microphone so that the reporter can hear what you say and record it, and then sign your name afterwards just so we make sure that your name is spelled correctly in the transcript.

So a little bit of overview on the plan. The context is USICH created the nation's first federal plan in June 2010 called Opening Doors, The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness, and this is the state's version of that plan, in a sense.

We are responding to what's happening on the federal level and want to bring state government in line with federal initiatives, but also making sure that state government remains in line with the needs of local communities.

It's like Mike Doyle said, we want to hear from you about how a state plan can address your needs; we want to make state agencies responsive to the unique needs of Texas's communities, rural, urban, suburban, and the like.

Since about 2000 HUD has increasingly emphasized that -- especially for permanent supportive housing programs guided through COCs that an increasing component of the funding that they allocate go toward that

housing component, the brick and mortar, the rental assistance, all of that, less towards the supportive services.

That leaves a bit of a gap and HUD has believed, and USICH believes, and TICH believes that it is now the job of mainstream services, those that are administered through state agencies especially to fill in that gap because if the COCs are allocating more funding at this point, you know, around 60 to 70 percent of their funds to the actual housing component, someone needs to step in and take care of the supportive services.

So, in a big way, the goal of increasing the coordination among agencies and making them aware of the issues of homelessness that are relevant to their agencies, bringing in resources from new areas that will step in and fill gaps as COCs especially dedicate more funds to actual housing.

So along those lines, affordable housing and supportive services, our goal is to increase housing options for homeless individuals and families who face multiple barriers to secure housing.

We have three objectives. The first is to 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 and, third, promote the strategic pairing of state agency, nonprofit and private sector resources to increase supportive services linked with affordable housing units.

So, with that said, we'd like to invite people to comment on this section of the plan at this moment. So I'll step back and sit down and invite people to speak.

MR. DOYLE: And we need to speak into that microphone, so we can record it --

MR. McGRATH: Right.

MR. DOYLE: -- and we need your signature on the sign-in sheet.

MR. McGRATH: And if no one is inclined at this moment to speak, we can continue giving an overview and then have you speak after we've gone through the entire set of goals and objectives. Is that better?

(Pause.)

MR. McGRATH: I'm seeing yes. Okay. I'll continue then.

Homeless prevention. Our goal is to 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.

We have guidance from HUD, especially with new ESG interim regulations that give some guidance on what is at risk of homelessness but we think that we can be a bit more precise in how we define the term.

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 four, increase the capacity of state institutions to prevent instances of homelessness and shelter use upon discharge from facilities. That is essentially discharge planning. All institutions are in consideration there.

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

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

The first objective is increase coordination and communication between state agencies through promoting a common language and communicating information on homelessness. Second, increase coordination and communication between local, state and federal government and non-government entities. And finally, objective three, raise awareness of homelessness among state agency boards of directors, executives and other decision makers.

I would add that each of the objectives, if you look towards the back of the executive summary, has a red associated with it that outlines specific action steps that will address each of the objectives.

So with that, why don't we invite comment? And it's not entirely necessary to have read the plan in depth to comment on it. Useful comments are those that might look at specifics in the document but also those that speak more generally to the needs of local communities.

You don't need to have read the plan to tell us, this is where we think Health and Human Services

Commission could step in. Or this is how we think state Medicaid funds could be used. Or, you know, we have worked with Texas Youth Commission in this capacity and X, Y or Z.

So we just ask -- we want to hear specifically how state government can be more responsive essentially. So, anyone wish to speak?

MR. BYNAM: My name's Keith Bynam. I'm with the City of Houston Housing and Community Development. I struggle with the plan in terms of trying to understand how we intend to end homelessness if we don't have any mechanisms in place to deal with the symptoms that create homelessness or understand what the real issues are that create homelessness.

So if we don't have those things in place, I don't know how we can end homelessness. We have a large number of individuals who have mental issues and it becomes very difficult if we haven't decided how we're going to allocate resources to deal with the real issues or the ills of society that are creating some issues of homelessness.

It's not always about someone who has loss of employment which is creating homelessness; there are many more issues. And if we haven't decided how we're going to

deal with those particular issues, I think it becomes very difficult to even begin to battle or to deal with managing homelessness. The five-year or a ten-year plan is somewhat -- I think it's somewhat misleading.

A couple of years ago I went to the National Alliance to End Homelessness convention in Washington, and the Secretary of Veterans Affairs made a statement that there was a five-year plan in place to end homelessness among veterans. Well, today he is still saying there is a five-year plan. I would think that by now that the statement should be we're two years into that five-year so in three years we're going to end homelessness among veterans. Well, that's not the case.

So what I tend to see around this country is that the five-year or a ten-year plan has no start date and it definitely has no end date -- so just a moving document that constantly moves around and we will never actually come to a date where this is the date homelessness is going to end. And I don't know how we're going to do that.

Homelessness has been around since the beginning of time. So what are we going to do that's going to be so different now that it hasn't been able to be accomplished when homelessness wasn't on the magnitude

that it is today.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MS. MACRIS: Good afternoon. My name is Martha Macris and I'm here today as the executive director of Memorial Assistance Ministries. We're an organization that serves about 4500 families each year and we collaborate with 13 partner organizations with a mission to help families -- assure the families the means to meet their basic needs.

It really wasn't until recently that MAM began to think of itself as preventing homelessness. For 25 years the organization lived to be charitable and to help people in need and I think that's a very common kind of provider, certainly within the city of Houston and throughout the state, if not the entire nation.

But like many of those organizations, we've grown and developed over the past few years and understand that we need to really look at the impact of our work. How does it affect families and how can we be more proactive to improve their own conditions as well as the conditions in the broader community?

So we have focused our efforts on that. We have also listened to our clients' requests and their hopes and dreams for finding jobs, improving their

education, and so forth.

We have a five-year goal of moving 20 percent of our assistance clients into programs that will help them meet their basic needs on their own, such as employment, self-sufficiency programs like English as a Second Language, GED, those kinds of things.

We learn that our clients do benefit from rent and utility assistance and about 81 percent of them remain in their homes for a minimum of six months and in our experience with HPRP, 99 percent of our clients who exited the Homelessness Prevention Program exited into self-funded private housing.

So we're attentive to our clients but we're also concerned about those whom we cannot help. And those are the families whose landlord may refuse a payment; they don't want to work with them anymore for a number of reasons. Keith was talking about mental health issues. It could be criminal; it could be chronic poverty. Those are the folks who are on the radar screen for falling into homelessness.

And I commend the plan for including prevention. I know that the national level has done that as well with some inclusion of funds eventually to help with that. On the timeline, I do think that if we are

going to address chronic homelessness in five years, we need to be doing prevent yesterday so I think the timeline -- I also think it's somewhat unrealistic.

But I'm also hopeful that we're paying adequate attention to the risk factors. And I would suggest that HPRP data not be the only resource for defining those, that it's limited; it's relatively new data; that rapid re-housing data under HPRP, working with homeless individuals, was underutilized and it was really not reflective of pre-housing-loss-prevention intervention and that the homelessness prevention program was really targeted -- the prevention side was targeted for families of 30 percent of median income or above.

And this threshold of 30 percent, which has appeared, and I agree that we need to focus our targets on those who are truly at risk, but that may not be the only defining criteria. I know that one study in New York demonstrated that only 20 percent of the rent assistance clients reported that they would have been homeless without that assistance. That may or may not hold true in Houston where we have a number of immigrant families that we're working with.

So I would like to comment that the process for gathering data, which now includes the Texas Homeless

Network, which is a very important resource and a good one, but that it would also be advisable to include providers who have worked with clients who've escaped homelessness, umbrella groups like the Alliance of Community Assistance Ministries in Houston or the United Way's Basic Needs Program or One Voice's Basic Needs Committee may also help shed some light on that area.

Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MR. DOYLE: Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: I would clarify that actually -- to clarify at this point, actually there isn't any articulation. We haven't said -- we actually haven't called it a ten-year plan, and that's one discussion that the council needs to have at the next meeting, is do we want to adopt the timetables that the United States Interagency Council, saying five years for chronic homelessness, five years for veterans -- so just to put that out there.

(Head table mike cuts out.)

MR. FOUNTAIN: I'm Morris Fountain and I'm speaking as an independent, a citizen, but one who has had experience working work for a nonprofit that was an emergency shelter serving the homeless and following

Martha Macris, one who as an AmeriCorps VISTA in 2005 served as a volunteer with Memorial Assistance Ministries. and was where my passion for what the Alliance of Community Assistance Ministries is doing and can do.

I also have a six-year history of being involved with restorative justice and that's kind of the focus of my remarks. In the Texas State Plan, as I looked at it, on page 33 where it referred to definitions of at risk of homelessness and so I guess my focus is homelessness prevention. One of those categories, Roman numeral VI, is a category of at risk when they are exiting an institution and that includes returning offenders from our jails and prisons. The flip side of those who are exiting the institutions, the flip side that's not addressed is -- and I would call it Roman numeral VIII -- it is the family of one entering an institution.

I've been involved recently with the Harris County Sheriff's Office at the jail where there's a program to raise the bar, I'll say, in terms of what's called re-entry, but re-entry is defined as starting with intake.

I believe there's the potential that following intake and an offender identifying next-of-kin that a volunteer telephone bank could be making telephone calls.

That opens the door for preventing the surviving -- the remaining family, especially children, from becoming homeless.

It's a very silent thing that happens. No one wants to talk about it; no one wants to go to their faith community and say, my family member has been locked up. They just deal with it and they drop out.

Statistically, I'll say there are a hundred thousand who go into the Harris County jail every year, not that it necessarily matches up, but they say 400 a day come out. I believe a bit more go in and stay a little longer with Texas Department of Criminal Justice.

As I estimate it, if we were an average zip code, wherever that zip code was, 15 a week go into the jail, and the question is, what happens to the family in terms of homelessness prevention, in terms of eligibility for some of the federal programs that are supported here in Houston/Harris County in terms of what happens with the children, if they have to relocate to live with another family member.

I've talked to the organization, Children At Risk, that is number one advocate for being concerned about children and Children At Risk has all kinds of statistics. At this point they don't have statistics on

how many children there are who have a parent in prison or jail. I've talked to them about it; I think they're interested. The question is, where's the source of the data?

In some of the suggestions that I've made to the Coalition for the Homeless in Houston/Harris County where we were concerned about some things, I pointed some of this out and I even pointed out the potential additional collaboration -- we already collaborate with the Alliance of Community Assistance Ministries that Martha Macris mentioned.

They have a strategic plan, a three-year strategic plan to 2013. And part of that plan is to increase the service area of membership by reaching out to the underserved parts of greater Houston. Well, I want to propose that the families of those going into the county jail are an underserved opportunity.

I thank you for the opportunity to make comments.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MR. DOYLE: Good points.

MS. CROUCH: Good afternoon. My name's Cathy Crouch. I'm executive vice president with SEARCH Homeless Services and we're a multi-service center here in town

serving over 10,000 different homeless individuals every year.

First of all, I want to say I thought this was an incredibly well written, very well developed, thoughtful, coherent report. I was quite surprised. So it was good.

My comments have to do with data and my first one is that one of the things that I thought was missing that I would like to see is this past -- well, a couple of years ago HUD commissioned APT Associates to do a study of five cities, looking at first-time homelessness for families.

And they ran into some roadblocks. One of the roadblocks was in getting Medicaid data from DSHS. And also in the process -- a separate issue was in the process of HHSP funding over the last cycle in the legislature, one of the things that kept coming up from the legislators was we want to see how this funding is going to save the state money.

Well, how do you show that? You know, what you have to show them is how it saves them money in the state mental hospitals, how it saves them money at TDC, or how it saves them Medicaid money. Any yet, none of us have access to that data. So locally, or as researchers or

evaluators, getting access to state data to help inform outcomes produced is difficult. So putting together some sort of procedures, some sort of process whereby educators, evaluators, researchers can really access data is going to be important.

And I appreciate that you put in there about data warehousing and really that you recognize the importance of data in this. But I think it has to be very clear and everybody has to agree how this data can be utilized, not just by the state but also by local researchers or federal researchers. So that's my first piece.

The second one is I'm glad you want to include universities; however, my experience with universities is they don't typically engage in research or evaluation unless they're some money. And so I hope that you at least have one full-time evaluator or researcher on staff to be able to do some work that may not be as big a scale as a formal evaluation or research but you've somebody there who really can move this forward and crunch some numbers and interface with researcher and evaluators around the country or in state, or locally. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MR. DOYLE: Just to comment on that, you know

this is a non-funded --

MS. CROUCH: I heard that.

MR. DOYLE: -- organization that is trying its best to try to make something but with input like this, we can hopefully inform the legislature and the state agencies that [inaudible] on their part and gather the data [inaudible] Tarrant County, they contracted --

(Pause.)

MS. CROUCH: Okay. Thank you.

MR. DOYLE: Oh, and just a reminder, after you speak if you'd write your name down on the sign-in sheets to make sure your name is recorded correctly.

MR. CHAPPELL: Very quickly, I'm Tom Chappell. I'm with the Association for Family and Community Integrity and the group of homeless that we work with are unaccompanied youth up through age 17. And to follow on what she was saying about gathering data, it's very difficult to gain data on those subjects because they're not allowed to give informed consent but yet they have no one to give them consent and they're not part of the Children's Protective Services.

So for research purposes, because I know we've missed out on a couple of grants simply because we couldn't prove there were homeless kids that were

unaccompanied because we had nowhere to get the data even though we're on the streets and we know they're there.

And understanding we can't get informed consent, I think it would be good if we could find a way, at least for research purposes, to allow universities, or whomever who are in this business to be able to talk to these kids and not worry about violating law just to gather information about the kids.

MS. GLAZE: My name is Laurie Glaze and I'm the executive director One Voice Texas. We are a health and human services advocacy organization here in Houston. We have 105 organizational members; many of these are organizations that are here today that have a focus on homelessness and housing needs although we cover five areas of health and human services priorities including behavioral health, healthcare, basic needs, education and child and youth services.

And we have -- one of the things that I have found through the years, and I hope that maybe with you leading the charge or coming within Houston to some of our organizations and helping us that work together, we need to be able, and we have taken this on at One Voice as a priority now -- we need to be able to bring together all of the organizations that are, in any way, working on

housing issues.

It's not just the bricks and mortar. It's also, as Martha talked about, people who need utility assistance; it's a lot of folks who have mental illness; it's law enforcement -- 25 percent of our inmates in Harris County jail are there with mental illness and many of those folks --

We have a very innovative program here through the Houston Police Department. It's called the Chronic Consumer Stabilization Initiative. It's received international awards now. One of the reasons that program is successful is because it puts very strong case management and has an emphasis on housing.

So we know that housing is the critical need but we also know that as we are working to achieve housing and achieve stability that bricks and mortars are not always the primary issue. We do have limited funding; we recognize that y'all don't have any more funding than the rest of us have.

But on the other hand, we do have organizations out there that are willing to build capacity. We've got the ability to blend and braid funding. We've the ability in Houston through all of our organizations to sit down together and really begin determining how do we look at

funding streams that may not be traditional housing funding streams. It may be Medicaid for case management services or behavioral health services. But if we're able to begin drawing down these additional services and funding streams, then that will impact the ability to achieve stable funding for our folks who need it in this community.

And so what I would urge you as y'all are moving forward is to reach out to some of our organizations. Reach out to One Voice. This is one of our priority areas right now, both in the child and youth services as well as in the behavioral health arena. If y'all will reach out to us, help us coordinate at a state level because one of the things that I'm hearing, and I'm probably the least educated in this room when it comes to housing, but one of the things I'm hearing is that we do not have a strong public policy voice in terms of housing at the state level.

And I know that we don't have that in terms of funding sources. But, once again, not all housing dollars need to be bricks and mortar. They can come from other places. But having the ability to bring in a consortium of organizations who traditionally are speaking about housing all of a sudden begin speaking about if we had

Medicaid dollars to help with case management services, this would improve our housing statistics. Then I think we could make some headway. And so I urge you to please stay in contact with us; reach out to us. Help us make a plan here.

We're doing this in other areas; we're doing some statewide work now around children and youth services but a lot of that work is done here in the regional level and then rolls up to the state level. And there's no reason why we can't do this with the plan that y'all have put together here. So, thank you.

MR. DOYLE: Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MS. SEMPLE: My name is Mandy Chapman Semple and I'm with the Corporation for Supportive Housing based here in Houston. And so I want to begin by just thanking the Texas Interagency Council for putting together, I think, what is a very thoughtful document.

And although I certainly have identified some areas where I think there can be improvement, nonetheless I think it's a wonderful first step for a statement that has, like you said, struggled to really develop a comprehensive document like this.

So let me first begin by saying that I think a

state plan in so many ways is an amazing opportunity to really influence how localities, or how communities can really work to support an end to homelessness. In much the same way as the federal strategic plan is really providing a lot of guidance to the states, I hope that this state plan can do the same for the localities here in Texas. And I think that, in some ways, is probably where I'd like to begin.

And, Colin, you addressed this a little bit earlier when you said that the council really does need to think about what the timeline is, or the time frame for this plan. But I really encourage you to think about using the analysis that you did, the data analysis to think about setting maybe some potentially ambitious, but real, goals to actually end homelessness in the state of Texas.

Even if we say we want to reduce within five years by 25 percent, I think in some ways it's not incredibly ambitious but even if we fail in that pursuit, I think it gives us a real sense of direction and purpose.

And right now I think one of the things that the plan lacks is that. It's, in some ways, a plan to plan and not necessarily a charge to really move forward to end homelessness in our community.

In the same way, I think one of the beauties of an Interagency Council is that it brings together state agencies that oftentimes doesn't communicate very effectively and certainly have a very difficult time collaborating when it comes to resources and there is no better issue than homelessness when it comes to needing all of those resources to collaborate in order to end this problem. And so I hope, too, that at the council continues to receive feedback, that you go back and think about to make each of these agencies more accountable in this process.

Everyone seems to be at the table but because the plan lacks specificity in turn of actionable items, I think that it really leaves things very open-ended. So as an example, it allows agencies to identify options but doesn't really compel them to actually follow through in coming -- you know, implementing any of those options.

And I understand the difficulty in that but I think that it would be worth kind of looking beyond the action steps and really think about how accountability plays into this over a ten-year time frame, as an example, because that's really what it's going to take is commitment from those departments to do more than just identify what to implement.

On that note, I think one of the most interesting, and I realize maybe controversial, ideas is that this plan should possibly begin by asking the governor to take a stronger approach when it comes to ending homelessness. And that may or may not be achievable in this state at this time but I think that nonetheless it should be included in the plan. We should recognize that the support of the Governor's Office is absolutely critical to moving forward.

So to kind of speak more specifically to some of the permanent supportive housing which is certainly our area of expertise, I really have to say I appreciate very much the plan's emphasis on trying to incentivize the development of permanent supportive housing.

I think in some ways that's getting to some of the specificity that I really hope and some of those action items that we can continue. I think we could go a step further in really articulating what that mechanism could be, or articulating where you actually incentivize development.

But I also think that this plan has a real opportunity to go a step further in helping communities understand how to target permanent supportive housing. So often permanent supportive housing as an intervention is

not necessarily used for the right subpopulation of the homeless. And as a result, our chronically homeless population continues to increase and that's certainly, in many ways, true here in Houston where we have a large street homeless population.

So there is a real opportunity to use some of the data work or to take some additional steps when you're talking about warehousing data and doing data analysis to identify frequent users, to really articulate what intervention is most appropriate for what particular population and set some real goals attached to that.

I think in the same token, we really have to think about not just incentivizing the development of permanent supportive housing but looking at the supportive services that are absolutely necessary if we want to do what I just described, which is targeting the chronically homeless.

So there's a real opportunity and, again, I understand a controversial one, but with the Affordable Care Act and healthcare reform there's a real opportunity to do just what was described by the previous speaker and increase the amount of Medicaid resources that are available for services within permanent supportive housing.

And I would really love to see the plan begin to try to address that, or at least anticipate, that that is going to be something that needs to be addressed. In many ways, I don't see how we can expand supportive services without really looking at Medicaid as a real option. And so I think we should address that head on in the plan and ask the appropriate state departments to come to the table and really put some effort into examination of that.

And you did include the 1950-I waiver and I think that's an excellent first step but any more specificity that we can have, I think will bring that accountability that's so important.

I think, finally, just to close, when it comes to the Section 4 of the plan where you're talking about the state infrastructure, I just want to reiterate accountability by these state agencies. And I think there could be some stronger language that goes beyond coordination and communication that brings us to more of a commitment.

And maybe that is by those state departments signing on to a directive or to a memorandum of understanding in some way that really says, we're not just going to be here at the table to talk about homelessness

but to really find ways to end it. And I don't think it would be too ambitious necessarily to include some of the stronger language in the plan.

But thank you, again, for your hard work. I know this has been quite a chore and it's been done in a pretty abbreviated time frame, considering how much work had to be done. So I appreciate it. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MR. DOYLE: Specificity is not first being heard here and we're aware of that. We just didn't feel like listing out all the specificity that will ultimately be in the plan at a public hearing would take anything short of a day and a half to get through. So -- but we will make this more specific, and we hope to hold, with the governor's help, hope to hold agencies accountable but that's the only way we're going to hold them accountable.

If we go to them and ask them for money right now they're going to say, are you crazy? So --

MS. SEMPLE: Thank you.

MR. COOPER: Good afternoon.

MR. DOYLE: Good afternoon.

MR. COOPER: My name is Ralph Cooper and I do a lot of work with an organization called Car Brake Houston, LLC. We currently have 286 units of housing for homeless

veterans here in Houston, 4640 Main Street. We're very fortunate in that we won a tax credit deal so that we've just now broken ground on 192 new units of permanent housing for this same population, homeless veterans, men and women who put their lives on the line for this nation.

They signed the contract, said I'm willing to die for me and you, and they find themselves homeless on the streets of Houston and all over Texas.

I'm originally from Boston, Massachusetts, so, you know, the homeless situation there is even more dire because of the cold winters and snow and all of that stuff. So Texas and California and Hawaii and states that are warm like Florida are a magnet sometimes for people who are homeless. At least they won't be out in the snow.

But as we witnessed a couple of days here, it gets kind of cold.

There's about 3500 homeless veterans in the Houston area. I'm not sure about the big number in Texas but if it's any indication of what it's like nationally, I'd say about a third of the male population that are homeless are veterans. The women are trying to catch up but it's too bad because it's real sad to see homeless women and children that have served the country and still end up homeless.

Affordable housing, of course, is a big, big issue, a big problem but supportive services like what you have in your plan is absolutely key, especially for the chronically homeless, the ones that have been out there in the street the longest. And unfortunately, veterans are able to adapt to extreme circumstances so they end up homeless a lot longer and they stay in the street a lot longer -- harder to outreach to, but we've proven that it can be done.

And so outreach is key; preventing homelessness for the veteran population is key. You already have your state veterans agencies trying to intervene at the point of discharge, which is critical. However, there are still many, many that slip through the cracks. There are so many that come back with post-traumatic stress, other mental issues, that they still end up swelling that population again.

I think that, unfortunately, as long as we have wars as a way that we're going to solve our international and national and world problems we're always going to have veterans, and more than likely there'll be homeless veterans.

I am pleased to see that this plan does address a lot of the issues. Now, unfortunately, I have not had

an opportunity to read the whole big piece because I found out about this hearing a couple of hours ago, but I felt that it was real important that if you don't have the veteran homeless population as a target population in your plan then you might be missing out on maybe a third of the homeless population that you can help.

And if you end homelessness among them, that's a big chunk of your effort. And I want to put us out of business. I don't want to be servicing homeless veterans.

I think that it's a national disgrace, quite frankly, to have men and women who have put their life on the line to be homeless.

So my comments are not going to be lengthy; I don't have pinpoints but I am going to -- I see that there's some time so that I can respond in writing after I really have digested the whole plan. And if it's acceptable to you I will be forwarding those other comments to you.

But I want to thank you, thank you, for your efforts to end something that I know is a scourge among the richest nation and where homelessness itself is a sad thing. So thank you for listening to me and keep up the solid work.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MR. DOYLE: Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: And, yes, please -- I can give you my contact information later and you can send me comments written.

MR. COOPER: Okay. Thank you.

MS. IBRAHIM: My name is Majida Ibrahim. I'm here on behalf of Santa Maria hostel. We are a nonprofit organization for females. Originally, we are a treatment facility for substance abuse but we have a new program for homeless female veterans.

And I would like, first of all, to thank you for this inclusive plan that is trying to cover all the areas of -- the reason and the risks factors and the resolutions that we can come up with.

One thing that I would like to say that we need practical interventions at this time. One of the practical interventions that I can talk about now for female veterans or for veterans in general is that one of the areas that we would like to see our dollars spent on is that when the veterans come back from the war zone they need some kind of restructuring, some kind of rehabilitation to be able to fit in the civil life again.

Then come back here; they come back here, but when they are struck with all of this -- like new world.

They come back here; they are away for a few years, out in a different world; war zone, it's different standards, different life, different -- everything is different.

They come back here. It's harsh and hard to fit in. They end up losing their jobs, losing their careers, losing their families, and they end up homeless.

If we can have a program, a very structured program, that the moment that our veterans are out of the war zone, and they are just entering their home here, they will go through this kind of program to rehabilitate them, to prepare them how to start a new beginning now, how to start a new life; then we will prevent them from becoming homeless. We will prevent this to happen and if they become homeless, they become careerless, their children are affected and we are talking about generations now.

The program that we are like serving now -- our female veterans they are degreed, highly degreed, but they are homeless. They've lost their jobs, they've lost their careers, and here they are. So what one of the areas that we would like to see that to spend like more money in prevention of homelessness. And thank you so much for this. Thank you.

MR. DOYLE: Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Anyone else?

(Pause.)

MS. FLEMING: Hi. I'm Whitney Fleming. I'm the systems project manager at the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County. We're the COC lead agency for Harris and Fort Bend Counties and our CEO and president, Connie Boyd, wasn't able to be here today so I'm speaking on her behalf.

And, first of all, I want to say how reassuring it is that this is being addressed at a state level and that different state agencies are coming together to plan and coordinate efforts. That's something that we really value. But I would like to make sure that the plan really stays at a broad state level and acknowledges the differences in different localities in Texas.

So, for example, mention of standardizing point-in-time methodology across the state is a little concerning to us because we've done a lot of work to really finesse that method for our community. We are one of the largest sprawling communities in the country and so it really takes some probably different methods than it would in a rural area of Texas.

We were also hoping that since the new HUD definitions of homelessness came out recently, and also the at-risk definitions came out, that the definitions at

the state level will be consistent with the HUD regulations. One of the problems that we have in our continuum is that we have five different grantees that are recipients of HUD funds. And so, as much as possible, being consistent and not placing additional layers of regulations makes it easier for service providers to be consistent in applying roles.

We were also a little concerned about some of the data that was used that was gleaned from THN's point-in-time count. They cover the balance of the state which is a much more rural area so some of their demographic data isn't representative of the larger homeless population in Texas.

For example, there is a much higher percentage of Hispanic people who are homeless than is probably representative in our part of the state. And I know some of that will be addressed with the plans for data warehousing, which we support, and just, again, to, you know, some of the issues that we see at a local level that could be addressed by state agencies to respond better to the needs of people of homeless.

We really hope that there is accountability for those state agencies to not only identify the issues but to really work collaboratively in partnership to be

flexible in their provision of services for people who are homeless. Thank you.

MR. DOYLE: I just want to ask you a question.

MS. FLEMING: Uh-huh.

MR. DOYLE: So there's two issues. The first is with the different [inaudible]. I agree that we want to not intervene or interfere with the program, how they go about [inaudible] but at the same time, and this is the second issue that's identified, is because I one has different methodologies [inaudible], it's hard for us to get statewide data --

So this is why we use only the [inaudible] data. So I'm wondering if you have any thoughts on how we could generate some sort of statewide [inaudible] survey.

I don't know. [inaudible] ways to -- without interfering with how [inaudible] how can we still gather all of that data that we are gathering --

MS. FLEMING: Well, I think -- I mean HUD is pretty specific as far as what subpopulations we have to count and those requirements that are used to aggregate the data at a national level so I guess I'm a little unsure of why at the national level that could be done but it wouldn't be possible at the state level.

MR. DOYLE: Well, what -- so what I'm referring

to are specifically the [inaudible]. So, let's say, just for instance, [inaudible] asks what's your age, and [inaudible] asks that in a way where you report the data [inaudible] so you have different elements predict the same data that you're asking in several different ways so that [inaudible] survey is that we can actually just easily create all that information.

MS. FLEMING: This isn't just related to that but I know when I've talked to other states about their interagency councils and most of them, there is a mechanism for local representation on the interagency council, and so that might be something just structurally that would help address some of those differences because Texas is such a large state and there isn't formal local representation on the interagency council. Having a voice at that level to advocate for our needs and the way that we're doing things might be one way to do that.

MR. DOYLE: There's an advisory function to the council but --

MS. FLEMING: And if that's not a formal possibility, I know, maybe like there was reference to having conference calls and things like that, maybe more consistently having the COC leads or the different government entities at a local level discussing what our

plans are and collaborating more formally that way.

MR. DOYLE: We're going to be talking about that in the next year and maybe that when we have the interagency council meetings we can make it open through conference calls --

MR. McGRATH: Absolutely. And I'd also say that there have been a few references to a data warehouse where we're trying to get COCs to come together as a group [inaudible] statewide statistics on people and services and who's out there but, sort of in addition to that, or an added bonus, is that where [inaudible] representatives from COCs around the state, 16 COCs, and hoping that we build relationships through just doing that and have that on something that's a lot better which is the data warehouse.

MS. FLEMING. Thank you.

MR. Chambless: Good afternoon. I'm Roland Chambless with the Salvation Army and I really have more of a political question from a personal point of view than representing the Army. I was on the coalition board at the time this subject first came up under the Bush administration and I work for an organization that's been around for over a hundred-and-something years, 75 years, and I think if you talk to us, we're not sure homelessness

is ever going to really end.

So my personal question is with the way the name is, and I'm not sure -- I don't know if we've addressed this, but so this is not a political football in five, ten, 15, 20 years because of the name being to end homelessness, what does the plan talk about if it's a great -- things are going great but it doesn't do exactly what the title does, so they're not kicking it back and forth on what's wrong or what's right with the plan?

MR. McGRATH: And you know, I believe there's actually -- it's kind of like a subtle thing, but in a way it's not necessarily to end homelessness forever, permanently, you know -- that's -- we're realistic about things. It holds as -- it's for instances in individual's cases of homelessness.

I don't think anyone thinks that we will forever end homelessness in Texas or the entire country, let alone -- but we want to increase the ability of our agencies and communities to end individual's cases of homelessness as much as possible.

MR. DOYLE: And you'll see the plans around the state, and around the country, have taken the ten-year component completely out because I've not talked to anybody knowledgeable of the subject that thinks that

that's possible, that there's not going to be one homeless person in the United States in ten years. That just makes no sense.

So we've taken out the ten-year part and we're just trying to look at the mandate of the U.S. Interagency Council which was under HUD, as you know, which provides our funding for all those programs. We just said to prevent and end homelessness but there are plans around that say to make homelessness rare --occasional, rare and non-reoccurring. And so rather than ending, so --

MR. CHAMBLESS: Which I would agree with because I could see where -- and I'm not sure I'm supposed to talk again but -- where that if we convince the Congress -- at the state level to bring more funding to the problem, and it doesn't end quote, quote, you could really, I think, have some hard-liners say, well, look we've brought all this extra funding and we still have the problem.

(Pause.)

MR. McGRATH: Anybody else?

(No response.)

MR. McGRATH: We can end it now unless anyone has plans to speak or if you have questions, we can --

MR. DOYLE: Going once, going twice -- okay.

Well, thank your attendance. I'll call an end to this public hearing in Houston, Texas, on December 1, 2011.

Thank you for coming.

(Whereupon, at 3:10 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: Houston, Texas

DATE: December 1, 2011

I do hereby certify that the foregoing pages, numbers 1 through 46, inclusive, are the true, accurate, and complete transcript prepared from the verbal recording made by electronic recording by Leslie Berridge before the Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs.

(Transcriber) 12/07/2011
(Date)

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