



# INTERAGENCY COMMISSION ON HOMELESSNESS

Housing for all = A Stronger Montgomery

[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/homelessness](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/homelessness)

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Virtual Zoom Webinar Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, July 14, 2021 | 3-5p

## Members

(Present or Represented)

Chesney, Amanda

Glass, Evan

**Goldman, Jeff** (Chair)

Habte, Asmara G.

Harris, Amanda

Hegel, Connor

Jochum, Kendra

(representing Angela Talley)

**Johnson, Ebony** (Vice Chair)

Kauffman, Louise

London, Sharan

Nigam, Aseem

Roynestad, Brian

Seidel, Stan

Sinclair-Smith, Susie

## Members

(Absent/Excused)

Crowel, Raymond

Reuben, Ruschelle

## Presenters:

Branda, Ilana

Riedel, Jonathan

## Welcome | Introductions | Remarks – Jeff Goldman, Co-chair

*Jeff Goldman* convened the meeting with welcome and introductions.

## Review and Approval of the May 2021, Meeting Notes – Ebony Johnson, Co-chair

*Ebony Johnson* called for a motion to approve the minutes. *Stanley Seidel* motioned to accept the minutes. *Sharan London* seconded the motion. Meeting minutes for May 5 meeting were approved unanimously as written. Meeting agendas, notes and presentations are posted on the [Homelessness website](#).

## Status of Evictions and Rent Relief Program – Jonathan Riedel, Esq. Supervising Attorney, CASA and Ilana Branda, Deputy Chief, MCDHHS Services to End and Prevent Homelessness

Jonathan Riedel reported that back in February or March the administrative judge expediated the docket schedule for hearing failure to pay rent cases from 2 days a week to 5 days resulting in the courts hearing 700 cases a week. Maryland Legal Aide, the Homeless Persons Representative Project and CASA provided tenants with legal representation during the months of April and May (termed the “Rocket Docket”). Currently, the caseload is back to normal. The court is hearing between 20-120 cases 2 days a week (Wednesdays and Fridays),

CASA also developed a Housing Court Observation Program rallying volunteers to go into the courts to analyze the situation. During the months of April and May, there were 17,000 docketed summonses for failure to pay rent.

The following are statistics from the analysis:

<b>70%</b>	Voluntarily dismissed because they were repetitive cases (landlords and lawyers file the same case month after month). In many of the repetitive cases, the rent or partial rent had been paid.
<b>21%</b>	Default cases because the tenant did not appear, and this means an automatic win for the landlord.
<b>7% (1,200)</b>	Tenants received judgements. There are two defenses for tenants failing to pay rent, (1) the CDC Moratorium which expires on July 31 and (2) Governor Hogan’s State Moratorium which expires on August 15.
<b>1-2%</b>	Postponed for various reasons. Landlord not licensed, complaint not filled properly, etc.
<b>1% (120)</b>	Tenants won their cases with the assistance of the representation. Lawyers applied the CDC Defense saving tenants from eviction.

Eviction judgements in Montgomery County (MC) are up to date which means anyone who is behind in their rent and the landlord chooses to evict will have the judgement entered. The Federal Rent Relief dollars will spare tenants from evictions. The MC Eviction Prevention Team is working on processing applications. Landlords receive rent relief dollars on the condition that they certify that they will not file for an eviction for a period of the assistance (up to three months) plus 30 days after that period.

Landlords have the prerogative to

- Wait for the rent relief payment,
- Evict the tenant regardless of the rent relief, or
- Not renew leases to evict the tenant and/or get out of the business of renting.

Ilana Branda reported that the Eviction Prevention Team: [See Slide 3 of the Presentation by clicking HERE](#)

- Received 7,752 applications
- Prioritizes and assigns applications that have received an eviction hearing or judgements
- Prioritizes applicants where there is a member of the household who has been unemployed for 90 days or more
- As of Monday, July 12 has paid \$6.64 million to eligible renters (for arrears and prospective rent).
- Continues to use the geographic homeless prevention index to target high need areas
- Currently, is reviewing 2,000 cases which are thoroughly reviewed to ensure that we support options of eligibility.
- Assigned two workers to be on site at the courthouse on Wednesdays and Fridays to assist renters apply for the rent relief program or to have their application prioritized because of the court hearing

The website for submitting applications is [www.MC311.com/rentrelief](http://www.MC311.com/rentrelief).

#### **Questions and answers:**

*Jeff Goldman*-Will the moratorium be extended beyond July 31?

Answer: Jeff responded that the State of Maryland will not extend their moratorium. The CDC's decision is unknown, but the CDC stated that this would be the last moratorium.

*Susie Sinclair-Smith*-Is there any assistance for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) tenants who misinterpreted the moratorium and just stop paying their rent?

Answer: Jeff responded that the COVID Rent Relief Program (CRRP) is for renters who were impacted by the COVID pandemic. Renters who choose not to pay rent and are now behind can seek help through the general homelessness prevention services or community resources through churches or other organizations.

*Louise Kauffman*-Are Landlords cooperating with the COVID Rent Relief program?

Answer: Ilana responded that most landlords are responsive and are participating in the program. Many have been proactive by calling the CRRP office to report tenants that are behind so that outreach or prioritization can be done. Landlords are registering with us or are already in the system because they previously registered. Only about 5% of checks are going directly to clients.

*Louise Kauffman*-Are private landlords cooperating?

Answer: Ilana responded many private landlords work with the program. Some landlords were hesitating at first but after realizing the benefits, they cooperate. The lack of participation is generally around subleasing. Perhaps, the space is illegal, or the renter is undocumented. The program does not look at immigration status, but private landlords may be reluctant to engage for those reasons.

Jonathan added that working with an attorney increases the comfort level for landlords that they will get their back rent and renters that they will be protected.

*Amanda Harris* raised the issue of renters moving without paying their arrears and seeking funds to pay arrears at the housing that they vacated. There are no resources to pay arrears if the renter is no longer living there.

Amanda suggested that the ICH and the County consider proposing legislation to protect renters in these situations. For example:

- Sealing eviction record for a period to protect people from being denied access to affordable housing
- Increasing the fee to file an eviction (Cost \$20). Making it more challenging for landlords.
- Eliminating the tenant holding over or “just cause eviction,” landlords can just choose to not renew a tenant’s lease.

*Evan Glass* shared that though the Council is supportive of eliminating “just cause evictions” that is a legislation that must be handled in Annapolis.

Evan updated the ICH regarding the Rent Stabilization Bill that was passed by the Council last year. It was the COVID 19 Rental Relief Act that put a cap on rent increases during the pandemic the voluntary rent guidelines of 2.6% (this year the guideline is 1.4%). The legislation states that the rent needs to be lower than 2.6% during the Governor’s State of Emergency and 90 days thereafter. The Governor’s State of Emergency ends August 12 and then the 90-day period begins.

Yesterday, Councilmember Will Jawando introduced legislation that proposed 0% rent increases for the next year. The public hearing on this legislation will be the first week of September.

**HUD Funding Priorities – Amanda Harris (VOTE)** [See Slides 5-18 of the Presentation by clicking HERE.](#)

The CoC Competition is funding for homeless services through HUD of approximately \$2 billion. The CoC anticipates an increase in 2021. MC Health and Human Services is the collaborative applicant and is responsible to submit MC’s application as a community requesting funding for renewal, existing and bonus projects. Today, we will discuss which projects should be prioritized.

There have been some positive impacts to our budget because of the COVID pandemic. Resources have been provided to prevent evictions, to rapidly house homeless individuals through diversion programs, to fund year-round shelters and hotels, creation of a homeless docket, and psychiatric discharge planner, etc. Most of the funding is one-time only and will not be on-going. (See Slide 7 for details)

• **Overview of programs:**

COVID Rent Relief Program Rapid Resolution to help households facing eviction and those already homeless to exit to permanent housing. To date, the program has served under 200 households with only 5% returning to homelessness.

Exit Bonus Program which provides \$5,000 in direct cash assistance targeting single adults to exit emergency shelters. To date, 52 participants only 10% have returned to homelessness.

Rapid Rehousing (RRH) – ESG CV Funding provides short-term housing subsidy and intensive case management. To date, 201 households have been served (92 families and 109 Single Adults). To date, no individual or household has returned to homelessness.

Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV). MC has been allocated 188 EHV’s which are one-time or one-use only housing vouchers. The EHV program is administered by HOC with referrals from the COC’s Coordinated Entry System.

Assistance in Community Integration Services (ACIS) slots (also known as-1115 Medicaid Waiver Slots) have been added which fund supportive services for those in PSHs (does not include housing subsidy). MC have 20 additional Assistance in Community Integration Services (ACIS) slots. Over the next year, MC will be eligible to apply for at least 100 additional slots from the State.

• **Update on Initiatives:**

Zero:2016 | Veteran Homelessness: There are currently 17 Veterans identified as homeless. This month we saw an increase of 5 Veterans. Currently, we have resource available to meet the needs of Veterans through the HUD VASH program, PSH, and RRH.

Inside (Not Outside) | Chronic Homelessness: There are currently 32 individuals meeting the Federal definition of chronic homelessness (15 have housing placements; 17 on waitlist). This is an increase from previous months up from around 7-10 individuals. One reason for the increase is that MC decided to expand our focus to not only include those who meet the federal definition of chronic but individuals who are vulnerable.

@Home Together | Family Homelessness: The CoC continued to do well in serving families because the number of housing placements exceeds the number of families that are seeking shelter.

Youth Homelessness: *Bezil Taylor* reported that:

- The University of Maryland Youth Reach count has been challenging due to the pandemic and limitations on going out and contacting youths.
- MC is exploring the option of conducting our own youth count
- The 2021 Homeless Point in Time Count identified 23 young adults experiencing homelessness (1 parenting youth).
- The CoC is working with the Collaboration Center and the National Center for Children and Families to open a new Homeless Youth Drop-In center in Wheaton that will open this fall.
- The CoC will soon start the Ending Youth Homelessness Campaign Initiative
- Programs to assist youths in the County are:
  - A transitional housing program for youth exclusively
  - Family Unification Program vouchers for youth exiting foster care
  - Rapid-Rehousing program targeted to parenting youth.

Non-Chronic Single Adults Subpopulation:

- The Non-Chronic Single Adults make up 65% of the people we serve (the Coordinated Entry By-name List identify 465 individuals who are in this subpopulation).
- The statistic shows that at the beginning of the pandemic our inflow of single adults experiencing homelessness was greater than our outflow. In the fall of last year, the CoC implemented the Exit Bonus Program and RRH. Over the last 6 months, there has been a shift and more single adults are exiting homelessness than entering the system. There is still a lot of work to be done but the programs that we have implemented are working.
- Another important observation is that there is a rise in people exhibiting behavioral health issues. No doubt due to the stress of the pandemic and the lack of access to mental health services.

**Recommendations for HUD Priorities:**

1. Support new projects that exclusively serve youth in RRH or joint transitional housing-rapid rehousing.
2. Support new RRH projects for single adults.
3. Support new PSH projects that address the behavioral health needs of people experiencing homelessness. New project should leverage Medicaid funding for supportive services.

**VOTE:** Susie Sinclair-Smith motioned to accept the recommendations for the HUD Priorities and Amanda Chesney seconded the motion.

**Lessons Learned from COVID-19** – Discussion on how to gather feedback and incorporate change – Jeff Goldman

*Jeff Goldman* opened a discussion around lessons learned from the experiences of serving those who are homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, the ICH had discussions around:

- Shelters or hotel placement
- How to segregate populations
- Evictions Prevention
- Deploying Emergency Funds
- Encouraging people to get tested
- Encouraging people to get vaccinated
- Safely Reopening Facilities

*Frank Demarais* recommended the ICH leverage their consideration of lessons learned with the Recovery Workgroup's efforts. The Recovery Workgroup have spent many hours gathering information and published recommendations on lessons learned across the County during the pandemic. Jeff suggested repackaging the workgroup recommendations and focusing on what were the best practices for serving people experiencing homelessness. Some other suggestions from Commissioners were:

- Inviting other groups to discuss lessons learned with the ICH such as behavioral health
- Holding a roundtable to share what agencies specifically did to adjust to the changing circumstances
- Conduct a community survey of what things worked for folks and what would have been helpful
- Creating a centralized document of a codified plan of best practices that could be used in future pandemics or crises

**Next meeting:** ICH Full Commission meeting Wednesday, September 29 at 3-5p Zoom webinar platform.

**Adjournment**