



Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable

*Building Successful Strategies for
Offender Re-Entry in Austin/Travis County, Texas*

WRITTEN INPUT

July 11th, 2011

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Re: City of Austin's Draft FY 2011-2012 Action Plan

The Austin/Travis County Reentry Roundtable (A/TCRRT) formally submits this written input for consideration in finalizing the City's of Austin's FY 2011-2012 Action Plan.

- **The A/TCRRT recognizes the hard, multi-dimensional work of the COA Neighborhood Housing and Community Development this year:** They have demonstrated a desire to not only meet policy and community expectations but to ensure that the limited public dollars available are dispersed appropriately across the housing continuum. Additionally, they have also provided a large number of opportunities for the community and stakeholders to be involved in the dialogue from holding quarterly community affordable housing forums to facilitating meetings all across the city in ensure engagement with all residents. This effort has resulted in less public acrimony and more community consensus building processes that augmented the development of this action plan.
- **The A/TCRRT recommends that the Action Plan provide more clarity in how we are counting PSH units toward the City Council's Resolution for short term development goal of 350 units of PSH by 2014** (with a full need for 1,889 PSH units long term): The A/TCRRT continues to pledge to being a partner to help our community reach this goal. However, the A/TCRRT recommends that this Action Plan clearly identify how the PSH units funded through city sources will be counted toward meeting this goal. There are several examples of confusion regarding our PSH goals related to the city strategy. For instance:
 - Chapter 1, Page 23: Exhibit 8 (Unmet Needs for Persons Experiencing Homelessness) shows that the unmet need of PSH is 1,280. It could be inferred by some from this chart that the PSH gap of 1,889 (total gap of PSH units needed for chronically homeless population) has now been reduced by over 600 units.
 - Chapter 3, Page 11: The section identified as *Rental Housing Development Assistance (RHDA)/Permanent Supportive Housing* describes the goal the city has set for developing 350 units of PSH but then states how the city funded development of 312 units in FY2010-11. The section does identify that the city funded 86 units PSH for chronically homeless persons within that 312 but we have been unable to account for all of those 86 units (page 3-35 lays out the number of PSH units funded utilizing GO bonds this past year and that totals 70 units).
 - Chapter 3, Pages 33 and 34: The action plan describes the priority population to be served will be 225 households who are frequent users of systems and 75 households identified using a method of "vulnerability" assessment. However, the action plan does not describe what populations are being served or proposed to be served in any of the PSH units funded or in the pipeline using city services.

- Chapter 3, Page 35: Exhibit 23 (Austin PSH Pipeline): This chart lists PSH units currently being developed. It would be helpful to add the proposed/projected population to be served in these projects. In addition, it may be helpful to clarify in the text that the 183 PSH units identified in the pipeline chart reflects our progress toward meeting the 350 unit goal.

In addition, the A/TCRRT recommends that NHCD consider providing quarterly updates to the community regarding progress on meeting the 350 PSH units by 2014.

- **The A/TCRRT continues to encourage the City of Austin and other public entities to work together to ensure the development of PSH that will serve the hardest to serve/frequent users of public systems:** Evaluations from PSH projects serving chronically homeless frequent users of multiple systems have shown that serving this population dramatically reduces use and costs of these public systems. A huge barrier for many of these persons is criminal backgrounds usually associated with their disability or multiple disabilities. The A/TCRRT encourages the City of Austin to develop strategies to reduce barriers to any PSH for chronically homeless persons due to their criminal background.
- **The A/TCRRT encourages partnerships that will allow leveraging of resources across various governmental lines to help create/fund development of affordable housing including permanent supportive housing that will help persons with criminal backgrounds be served:** We believe that the newly formed PSH Finance Leadership Committee will help us meet these goals but specifically we request City of Austin officials assist us in:
 - Examining ways to help influence policy changes that will lead to more persons with criminal backgrounds accessing affordable housing options;
 - Developing a strong partnership with the local public housing authorities to help create a policy shift that will relax their selection criteria and develop project-based PSH voucher programs that will allow persons with criminal backgrounds to be served. In June 2011, the Secretary of the U.S. Housing and Urban Development issued a letter to public housing authority directors encouraging them set policies that encourages “second chances” for persons returning from incarceration as well reintegrating families who live in public housing (http://www.nlihc.org/detail/article.cfm?article_id=7992). The A/TCRRT will work closely with the City of Austin NHCD and ECHO in forming this partnership.
 - Examining strategies to maximize funding opportunities including, but not limited to, utilizing Medicaid reimbursement to help provide support services dollars for permanent supportive housing. A recent report published in July 2011 by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation entitled *Taking Health Care Home: A National Initiative to Reduce Chronic Homelessness Through the Creation of Permanent Supportive Housing* (<http://www.rwjf.org/files/research/66288.final.pdf>) included the recommendation of utilizing the integration of supportive housing with Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) which provide services that are typically reimbursed by Medicaid.

As in the past, the A/TCRRT looks forward to participating in continued exchange of ideas and true collaboration that will help us find ways to maximize our resources, talents and passions to meet the goals we share along the housing continuum for our most vulnerable populations.

Respectfully submitted,

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