



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Charles D. Baker, Governor ♦ Karyn E. Polito, Lt. Governor ♦ Chrystal Kornegay, Undersecretary

MEMORANDUM

TO: Continuum of Care and Regional Consortia Leadership

FROM: Linn Torto, Executive Director, Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness

DATE: April 19, 2017

RE: Engaging Partners in the 2017 Massachusetts Youth Count Initiative

As you are aware, the Massachusetts Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth has been working for several years to outline a strategy for better understanding the scope and needs of unaccompanied youth and young adults who are experiencing homelessness. For the fourth year, the state's budget includes resources to enhance the work of the Commission. The Commission, chaired by Secretary of Health and Human Services, Marylou Sudders, has been moving ahead with a strong agenda for continued partnership with local communities and youth services providers to not only understand the scope and profiles of youth who are experiencing homelessness but also to invest resources to address the needs of these young adults. The Legislature has committed funding for housing and services for homeless youth and EOHHS has awarded this funding to CoCs and youth providers across the state to support the work of addressing youth homelessness. We are looking forward to continued funding for the important housing and services which support Massachusetts youth and young adults.

For the fourth year in a row, the Commission, the Department of Housing and Community Development, and the Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness are partnering with the 15 Continuums of Care (CoC) in Massachusetts. Each CoC will conduct a count and survey of unaccompanied youth and youth adults who are experiencing homelessness. The survey will be administered from May 1 – 14, 2017. The Commission defines an unaccompanied homeless youth as a person 24 years of age or younger who is not in the physical custody or care of a parent or legal guardian, and who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence.

Massachusetts was the first state in the nation to conduct a statewide Youth Count in 2014, and participation by a diverse group of partners will be critical to realizing our goal of continuing this important work and improving our results. Strong, reliable data is necessary for informing policy and program design. With a clearer understanding of this vulnerable population, we all will be better positioned to allocate resources in a more effective and efficient manner, with the ultimate goal of ending homelessness among youth and young adults. We are pleased to announce that the Commission has recently engaged Dr. Laurie Ross of Clark University, who has an expertise in working with youth and young adults. She will be assisting the Commission going forward in reviewing and analyzing the results of the youth count surveys, which will provide the important data to support continued funding for youth housing and programming.

I encourage you to seek the partnership, leadership, and expertise of key stakeholders throughout your community, including youth and young adults themselves, single adult and family homeless shelters, drop-in centers, schools and educational programs, law enforcement, fire departments, child welfare agencies, juvenile courts, municipal agencies serving youth, faith-based organizations, health care facilities, youth employment programs, food banks, libraries, LGBTQ services, recreation centers, United Ways, children's mental health centers, universities, and others.

In addition, it will be important for you and your youth provider partners to engage the support of your business community to fully leverage the state resources being provided to you. The more successful you can be to engage your youth in sharing their experiences and their aspirations through incentives and local events to participate in the survey, the better able we will be to provide continued advocacy and funding for housing and services to meet their specific needs.

As you engage additional partners in this work, please share my expression of appreciation - and that of the Commission on Unaccompanied Homeless Youth - for their assistance. Thank you for your commitment to youth and young adults experiencing homelessness and the Massachusetts Youth Count effort.

Sincerely,

Linn Torto
Executive Director
Interagency Council on Housing and Homelessness