

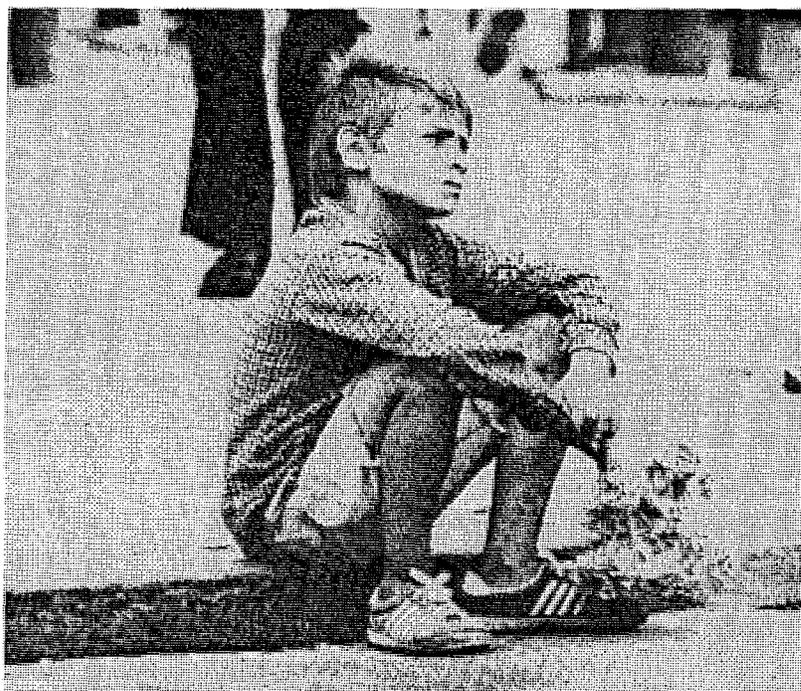
MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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Consolidating Services for People Who Are Homeless



Report to the Maine Legislature
by

Interagency Task Force on Homelessness and Housing Opportunities

Submitted October 31, 1995

INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE ON HOMELESSNESS

MEMBERSHIP

Frank Antonucci - Department of Education
Cynthia Butts - Maine Association of Realtors
Mary Anne Chalala - City of Bangor
William Ciciotte - Veterans Representative
Christine Cote - Kennebec Valley Community Action Program
William Floyd - Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation
Jessica Harnar - Maine Community Action Association
Roxy Henning - Department of Corrections
Russell King - York County Shelters
Bryan Lamoreau - Kennebec County Sheriff
Vaughn LeBlanc - Department of Labor
Rodney McCormick - Department of Agriculture
Joel Rekas - Maine Coalition for the Homeless
Edward Rosenthal - Non-profit Housing Developer
Sandy Ross - Family Violence Shelter
Aaron Shapiro - Department of Economic and Community Development
Dana Totman, Chair - Maine State Housing Authority



MAINE STATE HOUSING AUTHORITY

353 Water Street • P.O. Box 2669 • Augusta, ME 04338-2669

October 31, 1995

Ms. Sarah C. Tubbesing
Executive Director
Maine Legislative Council
State House Station #115
Augusta, ME 04333-0115

Dear Ms. Tubbesing:

On behalf of the Interagency Task Force on Homelessness and Housing Opportunities, I submit this report to you. This report, "Consolidating Services for People Who are Homeless" is being submitted pursuant to P.L. 1993, Chapter 738, Part D.

The Task Force would be pleased to assist you with this subject in the months ahead. We look forward to continuing our efforts to respond to the needs of Maine's Homeless Citizens.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dana Totman".

Dana Totman
Chairperson

DTjr

cc: Governor Angus S. King, Jr.
Senator Philip E. Harriman
Representative Steven G. Rowe
Senator Joan M. Pendexter
Representative Michael J. Fitzpatrick

CONSOLIDATING SERVICES FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE HOMELESS

Report to the Maine State Legislature

The Interagency Task Force on Homelessness & Housing Opportunities was established as part of the Maine Affordable Housing Alliance legislation in 1989. The purpose of the Task Force is to assist Maine State Housing Authority develop its affordable housing plan; review policies, programs and funding to determine their effectiveness; coordinate information and communication with respect to homelessness; identify the gaps that exist in the delivery of services; and make recommendations to the Governor and the Legislature. In 1991 a report "By Sundown", was submitted to the Governor and Legislature with the Task Force findings.

In 1993, additional legislation required the Task Force to *develop a plan to consolidate services for people who are homeless into a single agency or as few agencies as practicable*. The legislation required the Task Force to submit its finding to the legislature by November 1, 1995.

This report represents the Task Force's response to the assignment posed by the 1993 Maine State Legislature. This report also examines methods to improve services to homeless persons in ways other than consolidation.

BACKGROUND TO THE ASSIGNMENT

The Legislative assignment, *develop a plan to consolidate services for people who are homeless into a single agency or as few agencies as practicable* was a piece of legislation that, prior to passage, was a part of a much larger legislative initiative. The broader initiative was a major proposal to restructure state government. This legislation had grown out of one of the many special studies by special panels that have examined the structure of state government. Essentially, the 1993 legislation proposed reconfiguring the Department of Human Services and the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation. The restructuring that was considered included combining these two departments into one, splitting the two departments into three departments, or splitting the two departments into two reconfigured departments. Eventually, all these proposals failed to materialize. Some pieces related to the legislation were salvaged. Most of these remnants were studies and feasibility analyses. The charge to the Task Force on Homelessness is an example of these salvaged pieces. Arguably, examining in detail a piece of government without considering the broader structure may yield less than ideal results. The concept of consolidating homeless services into a single agency is perhaps a reasonable notion on the surface, but may not yield meaningful results.

FINDING ONE - *Consolidating Services into a Single Agency*

The Interagency Task Force on Homelessness does not endorse the consolidation of services for people who are homeless into a single agency. Persons that are homeless tend to need many different services and tend to have complex needs. The frequent services that are needed include: education, transportation, job training, physical and mental health care, housing, daycare and financial support. The consolidation of these services, at the state level, for people that are homeless is difficult within federal regulations and impractical to implement for only homeless persons. Creating an isolated system for homeless persons is not sound public policy since it tends to isolate and perhaps stigmatize those served. Similarly, creating an isolated system for persons with mental or physical health disabilities, or for older persons, or for offenders, or for women, or for Veterans is not reasonable public policy. Instead, education, transportation, job training, health and housing programs should be established to accommodate all groups regardless of characteristics.

The myriad of services which homeless persons need is also needed by many non homeless persons. For this reason the Task Force believes that consolidation at the state level of services for homeless persons is not practical.

FINDING TWO - *Consolidating Information*

The Task Force does endorse the consolidation of *information* on services available to homeless persons. In Maine, the delivery mechanisms for state and federally funded programs are very complex and inconsistent from program to program. The primary deliverers of programs include state agencies, private non profit agencies, and municipal entities. It is common for consumers to go one place for transportation help, another for job training and another for financial assistance. The Task Force, as indicated in *Finding One*, feels the delivery system should be divided based on types of service and not divided based on type of population. The Task Force, acknowledging the lack of clarity, recommends *information* on the many services always be consolidated to the extent possible. The Task Force feels all providers of service should assume personal responsibility of finding out as much about other providers as possible. If an agency provides one type of service to a consumer, the agency should be prepared to tell the consumer how and where to access other necessary services. In addition, agencies that specialize in providing information e.g. Preble Street Resource Center in Portland, Maine State Housing Authority Consumer Hot Line, United Way's First Call Service, should be supported. In general, service providers should continue to do as well as they can providing information directly to consumers and should refer the consumers to agencies that specialize in information and referral when the information is not known. The Task Force will continue to facilitate the sharing of information.

FINDING THREE - *Local Consolidation and Co-location*

The Task Force believes that, at the local level, consolidation or co-location of services is helpful to consumers and should be encouraged. Because homeless persons often lack

transportation and, like everyone, value their time, it is preferable to access as many services as possible in one stop. The Homeless Task Force recommends that state agencies and private non profit contractors of state agencies should be encouraged to co-locate services, programs and offices whenever possible and to provide mobile services when practical. This effort will help homeless persons to get all the help needed more quickly.

The Task Force also acknowledges that deliverers of services to homeless persons need a certain critical mass to be effective and efficient. Funding sources such as the state, counties, and United Ways should avoid creating new or supporting extremely small agencies that must establish costly infrastructures such as staffs, administrative systems and boards. Instead, funding sources should look to existing deliverers of services to homeless persons unless the existing system is unable or unwilling to deliver a service. As well, licensure standards for those to whom we invest our precious resources is appropriate and needs further development. These standards would reduce the risks often associated with new agencies or underfunded agencies.

FINDING FOUR - Program Design and Financial Allocations

The Task Force believes all monies in Maine that by law must be spent on homeless persons should be reviewed by the Interagency Task Force on Homelessness prior to a State Agency's decision on program implementation. Each State Commissioner or Department Head would bring their plans and budgets for funds which assist homeless persons to the Task Force for approval or review. The state departments and agencies would be required to bring only those funding plans that by statute must be dedicated to homeless persons. In other words, those funds or those programs that departments voluntarily decide to dedicate to persons that are homeless or programs that by chance may serve homeless persons, in addition to others, would not be required to come to the Task Force. It is, however, recommended that State officials be encouraged to bring to the Task Force spending plans that may include homeless persons among those served. For example, the Department of Labor budgets and plans would not come to the Task Force for review. However, a small special federal grant that comes to the State Department of Labor, specifically to provide job training to homeless citizens, would come to the Task Force for review. The Task Force would approve, advise and comment on spending plans.

Commissioners and Department Heads would not be bound by the Task Force decision. A Commissioner could ultimately decide to spend some homeless monies differently than the Task Force recommendation - but they would do so knowing publicly that their actions were contrary to the Task Force's counsel.

The rationale for the budget review process is to use the group closest to and most knowledgeable of homeless persons' needs as a sounding board for state homeless spending plans. It is often conceivable for Federal Officials to earmark monies for homeless persons and to allot those monies to a State Agency. State Agencies usually

attempt to spend monies in a responsive manner, however, officials at the State Agencies may not have a thorough understanding of the needs of homeless persons. By incorporating this review process, it can be assured the State Agencies will consult with those closest to the problems when making decisions. It is recommended that this recommendation be implemented by Executive Order to State Departments and Agencies.

FINDING FIVE - *Focus and Vision*

The Task Force acknowledges the enormous challenge facing State Agencies and Departments in coordinating services to the homeless. There are many difficult questions. Should the Department of Mental Health and Mental Retardation provide housing for those discharged by AMHI or should the Maine State Housing Authority assume this charge? Should the Maine State Housing Authority provide case management funds to Maine's Homeless Shelters or should the Department of Human Services? Where should a homeless person receive substance abuse services? Should literacy training occur at a shelter or at a school? Should homeless persons eat at a shelter or at a soup kitchen? These issues are very difficult. Collectively, the resources are insufficient to address all the needs of Maine's homeless citizens. The Task Force urges all providers of services and makers of policy to make decisions with broad vision while maintaining clear focus on the compelling needs of our State's Homeless population. The Interagency Task Force on Homelessness and Housing Opportunities looks forward to leading the efforts to respond to the needs of Maine's homeless citizens.

CONCLUSIONS

The notion to consolidate services for people who are homeless into a single state agency is not a good idea. It isolates classes of people based on their characteristics and splinters human service delivery systems into unmanageable fragments.

Improving services to homeless persons can occur in other ways. Consolidating information, co-locating local deliverers, avoiding small niche type program deliverers, and involving stakeholders in funding decisions will help. Perhaps most critical to successful homeless programs, is the need to maintain broad vision of our human service delivery system and clear focus of homeless citizens' needs at the same time.