

City of Cincinnati



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David S. Mann
Councilmember

September 16, 2020

MOTION

WE MOVE that the City administration immediately work with the Homeless Coalition, Strategies to End Homelessness and other appropriate stakeholders to address the challenges of homeless citizens and folks on the verge of becoming homeless as Winter approaches in the midst of the pandemic.



Councilmember David Mann

Statement:

The COVID pandemic with its health issues, coupled with unemployment and eviction problems, has created an extraordinary challenge for people experiencing or about to experience homelessness. The Homeless Coalition, Strategies to Prevent Homelessness and other stakeholders are working diligently but need the active involvement of the City Administration with its expertise and financial support.

The starting points for his collaboration should be the Plan presented by the Homeless Coalition to the Budget and Finance Committee on September 14, 2020, and the ideas contained in Kevin Finn's attached Memorandum of September 3, 2020, to Mayor Cranley.

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The City has received a substantial grant of \$7.5 million in ESG-CV funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Some \$4 million of this grant has not yet been allocated by the City. Suggestions from Strategies to End Homelessness and the Homeless Coalition lay out significant needs this winter.

The leadership and resources of the Administration are needed to make needed decisions long before winter demands set in.



**STRATEGIES TO
END HOMELESSNESS**
prevent. assist. solve.

Leading a coordinated community
effort to **end homelessness** in
Greater Cincinnati

MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor John Cranley, City of Cincinnati

From: Kevin Finn, President/CEO Strategies to End Homelessness
kfinn@end-homelessness.org, 513-708-8054

RE: Emergency Solutions Grant – CARES Act Funding

Date: September 3, 2020

Overview

Strategies to End Homelessness, the Unified Funding Agency of the Cincinnati/Hamilton County homeless services system, respectfully requests \$2 million in *Emergency Solutions Grant – CARES (ESG-CV)* funding, awarded to the City of Cincinnati by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, to allow expansion of local **Homelessness Prevention Programs** to serve our neighbors in need.

The City of Cincinnati has been awarded approximately \$7.5 million in ESG-CV funding. To date, plans have only been made known pertaining to approximately \$3.5 million of that funding, so our request constitutes about half of the City's remaining ESG-CV funding.

The need for homelessness prevention resources is urgent and great, while three households can be provided with homelessness prevention services for the same cost as serving only one household after that household is already on the street or in a shelter. Additionally, homelessness prevention services are 85% effective in preventing future episodes of homelessness, while a third of families that become homeless, and are assisted after they were already homeless will become homeless again. In short, homelessness prevention services are more cost effective and have better outcomes for at-risk households.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its direct economic impact, the number of families seeking assistance has greatly increased. Our Central Access Point Helpline, the centralized shelter placement helpline for Greater Cincinnati, has experienced a 25% increase in calls for assistance from April to June 2020.



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The CARES Act funding made available to assist families at-risk of homelessness expires on 12/31/2020, but many households will find themselves on the brink of homelessness beyond 2020. On September 2nd, the Department of Health and Human Services and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention issued an order to temporarily halt evictions through the end of the year.

A temporary halt we agree with, as evictions threaten to increase the spread of coronavirus because they force people to move or go into shared living situations or group settings like our local homeless shelters. However, the halt is not automatic. The order puts the responsibility on the renter to ensure they meet the criteria and to provide a signed written statement to their landlord in order to invoke the protection.

Rent is not canceled, nor forgiven. On January 1st, 2021 renters will be required to pay back rent and landlords may opt to collect rent in one lump sum. As the City of Cincinnati's allocation of ESG-CV funding can be spent over a two year period, it's this funding that can provide assistance to households we know will be struggling for help in 2021 and 2022, long after CARES Act funding has been exhausted.

We appreciate your consideration of this request, and appreciate your support and partnership to help end homelessness in the City of Cincinnati.

Homelessness Prevention Efforts ESG-CV funds would support:

Under the umbrella of Homelessness Prevention, two separate projects seek to prevent homelessness in Cincinnati/Hamilton County- Shelter Diversion and Eviction Prevention.

1) Shelter Diversion

As part of our comprehensive system of care, our Shelter Diversion program plays a critical piece of solving homelessness by targeting individuals and families who, statistically, are most likely to find themselves in an emergency shelter or on the streets in the near future – those who have already lost their housing, are now living in doubled-up situations and running out of such places to stay.

Shelter Diversion programming provides rental and utility assistance to households that are doubled-up and at-risk of having to enter an emergency shelter. Instead of experiencing the trauma of homelessness, Shelter Diversion assists households back into their own stable permanent housing.

Shelter Diversion programming is directed primarily toward families.

- Households are identified as appropriate for the Shelter Diversion Program by our Central Access Point Helpline Intake Specialists
- The program offers short-term (3-6 months) rental assistance, provides rental deposit, utility assistance, and oftentimes furniture
- Case management services (provided by Bethany House Services, the Freestore Foodbank, and the Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cincinnati) help households identify and eliminate any barriers to remaining stably housed into the future

Even before COVID-19, 56% of households in need of services were being turned away without any assistance. Clearly, there are many more families in need in our community if capacity were available. ESG-CV funds will be used to increase the capacity of these critical services, to meet the need in our community and assist more families.

- Homelessness Prevention is highly cost-effective and has the best outcomes for clients
- It costs on average \$1,300 per person to keep someone from becoming homeless, compared with \$3,900 per person to assist after they become homeless

2) Eviction Prevention

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and economic crash felt across the country, Strategies to End Homelessness has secured funding for Eviction Prevention services, provided in partnership with the Legal Aid Society of Southwestern Ohio. Eviction Prevention provides rental assistance and in some cases legal assistance to stop households from being evicted, thereby preventing households from losing their housing and beginning a likely decent toward homelessness. Strategies to End Homelessness is committed to the continued expansion of Eviction Prevention service, to be provided to the citizens of the City of Cincinnati, in partnership with Legal Aid, the Freestore Foodbank, Talbert House, Society of St. Vincent de Paul, and the Community Action Agency.

By way of example of critical evidence of need, on July 22nd the Hamilton County Commissioners announced a \$3.5M CARES Act Eviction Prevention fund. More than 2,000 families applied for assistance on the first day. As a result, on August 27th, the Hamilton County Commissioners voted to approve an additional \$3.5M CARES Act Eviction Prevention funding, as the response was overwhelming. It is important to note that CARES Act funding will expire on December 31st, 2020. Therefore, our goal is to secure the funding necessary to support local families who find themselves facing eviction in 2021 and beyond. Again, ESG-CV funds can be spent over a two year period.

We need to help keep these families stably housed, in their current properties, not only to prevent the trauma families endure experiencing homelessness, but because of the lack of affordable housing Greater Cincinnati households will have an even harder time finding decent, affordable housing in the future if they have an eviction history.

Amount and Duration of Financial Assistance for Clients

Shelter Diversion: In our experience of coordinating Shelter Diversion programming, families often need 3-6 months of financial assistance to stabilize once coming out of a doubled-up situation. Often there are many other barriers to stability besides just housing including income and other family concerns; which is why intensive Case Management is so important.

Eviction Prevention: An Eviction Prevention partner will complete an assessment with families to determine how many months of assistance are needed to stabilize the household. If they are behind multiple months, those arrears will be prioritized in order to bring them current with the landlord to cancel eviction. If additional months are needed based on the family's income prospects, future months may be requested and approved.

About Strategies to End Homelessness

Strategies to End Homelessness leads the coordinated community effort to end homelessness in Greater Cincinnati. We envision a community in which everyone has a stable home and the resources needed to maintain it. We work to prevent as many people from becoming homeless as possible, provide a high level of assistance those who are homeless, and offer solutions to homelessness through housing.

Strategies to End Homelessness was founded in 2007 as *The Cincinnati-Hamilton County Continuum of Care for the Homeless, Inc.*, for the purpose of coordinating and planning local homeless services through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Continuum of Care program. In 2012, we changed our name to Strategies to End Homelessness, a name that more accurately reflects our expanded leadership role in the community.

Under our leadership, the local Continuum of Care system has grown to include street outreach, a centralized intake helpline, emergency shelters, transitional and permanent housing programs, as well as comprehensive homelessness prevention services.

In 2016, Strategies to End Homelessness was designated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development as a **Unified Funding Agency**. One of only eight Unified Funding Agencies out of 412 Continuums of Care in the nation, to date. To receive and retain this status, an agency must demonstrate robust sub-recipient management and strong financial controls.

The Unified Funding Agency designation gives us a level of authority and autonomy normally reserved for HUD, enabling us to make flexible funding decisions to address the needs of our partner agencies in real time, and to target resources toward ending homelessness.

Strategies to End Homelessness oversees funding on behalf of the City of Cincinnati, Hamilton County, Ohio, Ohio Development Services Agency, Ohio Housing Finance Agency, and the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio.

Specific to Federal funding, we administrate the following: Emergency Solutions Grant, Emergency Solutions Grant CARES (partial funding previously awarded for qualifying Agencies supported by the City Human Services Fund), Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS, Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS CARES, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Continuum of Care Program Funding, and the CARES Act funding from the Department of Treasury on behalf of Hamilton County, Ohio.

Today our agency coordinates the work of 30 local nonprofit agencies to end homelessness in Greater Cincinnati by providing services, housing, shelter, and homelessness prevention programs affecting the lives of more than 12,000 people annually.

In part due to our work, and in part due to the strengths of our local partner agencies, Cincinnati is a nationally recognized leader in implementing innovative and effective programs to end homelessness.