

Policy Council on Homelessness

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Vision Statement: To identify local and state policy changes that will make homelessness rare, brief, and one time in Nevada and to advocate for the implementation of those policies.

The Policy Council on Homelessness seeks to support policies that will:

- Decrease the number of people experiencing homelessness
- Increase the development of affordable housing
- Increase funding for homeless and housing related services in Nevada

Policy Recommendations

1. Creation of a Statewide Affordable Housing Tax Credit Program.

To address the severe shortage of affordable housing we need to increase public investment in both building and preserving affordable housing at the state and local level. A tax credit would provide developers with additional financing necessary to encourage them to build affordable housing for low-income households. A Statewide Tax Credit would mirror and supplement the Federal Low-Income Housing Tax Credit which is a major financial driver of the construction, rehabilitation, and preservation of affordable housing in the country.

2. Establish the Nevada Interagency Council on Homelessness in NV Statute.

The Nevada Interagency Council on Homelessness was established in 2013 via an Executive Order and is set to expire in 2020. The Interagency Council develops a Statewide Plan to End Homelessness and ensures systems of care across the state work in collaboration to address the challenges of homelessness effectively. Nevada must have an Interagency Council on Homelessness in order to satisfy the requirements to receive federal CABHI grant dollars. Over the last three years, agencies in NV have received over \$670K a year for homeless services through federal CABHI grants. We will lose this funding for homeless services if the Interagency Council on Homelessness is not in place.

3. Expand Medicaid 1915(i) State Plan Amendment (SPA) to provide tenancy support services for homeless individuals. Support Governor Sisolak's proposed general fund budget request of \$621K in FY 2020 and \$1.3 million in FY 2021 for Medicaid 1915i waiver, which will generate additional federal and other funding totaling \$2.6 million in FY 2020 and \$5.2 million FY2021.

One of the greatest barriers to ending homelessness is the lack of resources available for individuals to access and maintain safe, stable and permanent housing. Without stable housing, individuals cycle in and out of shelters, jails, emergency rooms, and the street resulting in significant costs-both human and financial. Supportive Housing is a best practice for ending chronic homelessness, as research shows it improves the wellbeing of individuals and saves communities money in avoidable systems costs. However, we don't have the resources needed to take this intervention to scale. Expanding the Medicaid 1915i waiver will leverage millions in federal dollars for supportive housing for our most vulnerable Nevadans and could lead to substantial cost-savings for the State.

- 4. Amend state policies to allow local education agency homeless liaisons and licensed social workers to submit requests for birth certificates on a youth's behalf and allow for one-time waiver of fees for homeless youth to obtain original or duplicate ID's, including waiving the fee reimbursement.**

Valid identification is necessary to obtain employment, sign a lease, open a bank account, apply for public benefits and other essential life activities necessary to gain self-sufficiency and escape or avoid homelessness. Youth often rely on their parent or guardian to help obtain the vital records that are required to obtain ID. However, for unaccompanied homeless youth it can be nearly impossible to navigate the steps necessary to obtain their vital records and ID. Amending state laws and policies to allow social service professionals to request vital documents on behalf of unaccompanied youth clients, and to allow fee waivers for homeless youth, is a best-practice solution that is in place in at least 14 other states.

- 5. Amend state policies to ensure that pupils in foster care, who are homeless, or who are unaccompanied have equal opportunities to receive a high school diploma. Academic plans should be adjusted for such pupils so they may receive full credit for a specific course if the pupil completes the coursework without satisfying any attendance requirement for the course, or requirement for hours of classroom instruction.**

Systems-involved youth are at greater risk of not meeting the attendance requirements necessary to receive full credit for their courses due to absences related to housing instability; or frequent school transfers related to multiple foster care placements. These circumstances are out of the youth's control, and through no fault of their own can prevent a youth from graduating even when they have earned passing grades.

Education policy should be amended to identify foster, runaway, homeless, and unaccompanied youth and amend their education plans so they can earn the credits necessary to graduate when they meet all other course requirements.

- 6. Improve the current statewide low-income housing database maintained by the Housing Division of the Department of Business and Industry. Require local governments to cooperate with the Housing Division to provide annual reports/sources of information related to affordable housing for the statewide database.**

It is important that as municipalities collect data on affordable housing rental rates and vacancy rates, new permits, various population groups, and other important information relating to affordable housing in the state, that the data is reflected in the Nevada Housing Division's Low-Income Housing Database.

This data is important for analyzing utilization of subsidized and affordable housing, current and future needs, and key demographic groups relating to affordable housing needs in the State. Having a good understanding of the affordable housing needs in the State will help inform solutions.

- 7. Dedicated funding for Shelter Diversion.**

Shelter diversion programs help people seeking shelter quickly identify and access safe alternatives to emergency shelters. These programs intervene when an individual or family is initially seeking assistance in shelters or they are at risk of losing their permanent housing. Shelter diversion programs decrease the rate of newly homeless people, reduce shelter wait lists, lower the demand for limited shelter beds, and allow the state to be more competitive when applying for federal funding. Shelter Diversion funds can be used for landlord fees, move-in costs (including deposit and first month's rent; cost of moving truck; storage), utility deposits and arrears, short-term case management and other supportive services.