

A Request for Response from the Governor from Homelessness Services Providers (HSPs) From Across the State

April 20, 2020

The Honorable Jared Polis
State Capitol Building
200 East Colfax Avenue, Room 136
Denver, CO 80203
Governorpolis@state.co.us

Dear Governor Polis:

We, the undersigned Homelessness Service Providers from across the state, are grateful for your leadership in addressing the COVID-19 pandemic during this unprecedented time. However, we are all very concerned about the lack of direct response to the critical needs of people experiencing homelessness and those who serve them. These issues are becoming more and more urgent as time goes by, as the virus continues to spread throughout the community including a significant increase in positive cases among our unhoused community members across the state.

We are appreciative of the guidance and information provided by the Homelessness Task Force, but we believe the state needs to engage in immediate and decisive action to respond to the needs of people experiencing homelessness throughout the state. **A recent [report](#) demonstrates that people experiencing homelessness who are infected with Coronavirus would be twice as likely to be hospitalized, two to four times as likely to require critical care, and two to three times as likely to die from the illness as the general population.** In order to reduce the dire impact this outbreak could have on our hospital systems as well as the potential for significant loss of life among our homeless community, this statewide network of Homelessness Service Providers urge the State to take immediate action including:

(1) Implementing an aggressive strategy for motel/hotel room acquisitions across the state including in rural communities where there are no shelter options.

- We appreciate the request that your office made to the hotel/motel community and believe it has resulted in some positive results – Unfortunately, we don't think it creates the urgency to get these resources online as soon possible especially in rural areas. We also believe that your office should immediately establish an office or empower the Homelessness Task Force to assist local communities with outreach to hotels/motels, contracting guidance, and the financial resources to secure these spaces. Local non-profits cannot afford to enter into these agreements without assurances and support from the state.
- Your office could provide a range of options to operators and managers to make these critical resources available sooner including providing incentives for motels/hotels to participate such as access to grants, loans, and state insurance to taking more formal measures like issuing an Executive Order to require motels/hotels to participate similar to what was done in the State of California.

(2) Deploying national guard personnel to communities across the state to assist with de-densification efforts in current shelter environments and to staff motel/hotel spaces as they become available.

- While we should be moving away from congregate settings whenever possible, we must take interim steps of providing safe spaces while we wait for critical motel/hotel resources to come online.
- In communities across the state, shelters are taking extreme measures including turning people away to setting up tents in parking lots in an attempt to provide public health physical distancing requirements, but it is extremely difficult without staff, resources, and additional space. National guard personnel are necessary to support the non-profits and small government agencies that are currently trying to do this work without the support of the State.

(3) Providing more testing resources across the state and prioritizing those that are providing and utilizing shelter services for testing to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among our population of people experiencing homelessness.

- As more data becomes available about asymptomatic transmission, it is critical that we test all individuals coming out of shelters or encampments before placing them in motels/hotels to ensure we are not risking the health of high-risk people who have been placed in these settings for their own protection. In Boston, a healthcare for the homeless provider found that 1 in 3 guests had COVID-19 despite not having any symptoms.
- As rapid testing equipment and supplies become available in the United States, we think your office should make requests to have homelessness service providers prioritized to receive those machines and equipment as well as to be tested for providing direct client care.

(4) Providing more personal protective equipment (PPE) for homelessness services providers who are in contact with thousands of individuals daily that are seeking assistance, healthcare, and shelter.

- Shelter providers and other homelessness service providers are on the front-line of serving people who are likely to be highly impacted by the spread of this virus with no access to critical PPE supplies.
- Local nonprofits and small local agencies do not have access to the state distribution of PPE and other sanitation supplies and cannot acquire these scarce resources on their own.

(5) Immediately deploy federal resources and funding as they become available to all areas of the state to assist with the emergency needs of people experiencing homelessness.

- Millions of dollars in federal resources will soon be making its way to state and it is critical that these resources get to local communities without delay.
- The state should immediately provide funding expectations and guidelines so these dollars can flow as soon as they are available without long, bureaucratic processes getting in the way.

(6) Immediately identify and deploy state resources and funding that can assist people experiencing homelessness across the state.

- We applaud the State Housing Board's approval of flexible use of Homelessness Solutions Program funding but urge that these funds begin flowing immediately to local communities who desperately need the funding.
- The state should identify and make available all other sources of funding in the easiest manner possible for local communities.

It is critical that you take immediate action to address the critical needs of the people experiencing homelessness across Colorado and those who serve them. Their lives are not only at risk – the lives of all Coloradans are at risk if an outbreak spreads any further among this underserved and under-resourced population. We cannot allow our community members who can't "stay at home" during this public health crisis to disproportionately bear the burden of the COVID-19 outbreak. We stand ready to partner with and assist the State in any way possible.

Sincerely,

57 Homelessness Service Providers and Agencies Across the State of Colorado

Advocates Against Domestic Assault, Charlene Tortorice, Executive Director

Advocates Safehouse Project, Julie Olson, Executive Director

Aspen Homeless Shelter, Dasa Bausouva

Attention Homes (Boulder), Chris Nelson, CEO

Balance of State Continuum of Care, John Parvensky, President/CEO

Boulder Shelter for the Homeless, Greg Harms, Executive Director

Bridge House, Isabel McDevitt, Chief Executive Officer

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Bright Futures, Sheri Mintz, Chief Executive Officer
Catholic Charities, Michael Sinnett, Vice President Shelters & Community Outreach
Centennial Mental Health, Liz Hickman, Executive Director
Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, John Parvensky, President/CEO
Colorado Village Collaborative, Cole Chandler, Executive Director
Community Compassion Outreach, Donna Mae Bauket, Executive Director
Community Health Partnerships, Amber Ptak, Chief Executive Officer
Community Partnership for Child Development, Noreen Landis Tyson, CEO
Crossroads Safehouse of Ft Collins, Lisa Poppaw, Executive Director
Delta Homeless Ministries, Inc. dba The Abraham Connection, Cheryl Oeltjenbruns, Board President
Denver Rescue Mission, Brad Meuli, President/CEO
Denver Homeless Out Loud, Terese Howard
Earthlinks, Kathleen Cronan, Executive Director
Family Housing Network, Annette Zacharias, Executive Director
Family Promise of Colorado Springs, Kate Lilly, Executive Director
Family Promise of Greater Denver, Allie Card, Executive Director
Family Tree, Scott Shields, Chief Executive Officer
Grand Valley Catholic Outreach, Beverly Lampley, Director of Development
Greeley Family House, Nancy Wiehagen, Executive Director
Haven House of Montrose, Larry Fredericksen, Co-Founder
Help For Abused Partners. Nicki Johnson, Executive Director
Homeward 2020, Holly LeMasurier, Executive Director
Homeward Alliance, David Rout, Executive Director
Ithaka, Anjuli Kapoor, Executive Director
La Puente, Lance Cheslock, Executive Director
Loaves and Fishes Ministries of Fremont County, DeeDee Clement, Executive Director
Metro Denver Homeless Initiative, Matt Meyer, Executive Director
Mile High Behavioral Health, Robert Bob Dorshimer, Chief Executive Officer
Montrose Lighthouse Ministries, Chris Hauck, CEO
Neighbors in Need Alliance, Caroline Kinser
Peaceworks, Inc – Mountain Shelter, Lori Cuno, Executive Director
Posada of Pueblo, Kim Bowman, Executive Director
Rocky Mountain Human Services for All Veterans, Shari Repinski, Executive Director
Second Chance Center, Hassan Latif, Executive Director
S.H.A.R.E., Inc., Jody Strouse, Executive Director
Springs Rescue Mission, Larry Yonker, President/CEO
St Francis Center, Tom Luehrs, Executive Director
The Delores Project, Stephanie Miller, Chief Executive Officer
The Gathering Place, Julia Stewart, President/CEO
The Interfaith Alliance, Brian Rossbert, Development Director
The Place (CO Springs), Shawna Kemppainen, Executive Director
The Salvation Army Denver Metro, Major Mike Dickinson, Divisional Commander
The Salvation Army Intermountain Division (CO, MT, UT, WY), Major Mike Dickinson, Divisional Commander
The Shepard's Hand, Garey Martinez, President
Total Concept, Steven R Cordova, Executive Director
Upper Arkansas Area Council of Governments – Central Colorado Housing, Autumn Dever, Regional Housing Director

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Urban Peak, Christina Carlson, CEO

Veterans Community Project, Bryan Meyer, CEO

Warren Village, Ethan Hemming, President/CEO

Westside CARES, Kristy Milligan, Chief Executive Officer

CC: Rick Garcia, Executive Director, Department of Local Affairs (DOLA)

Jill Hunsaker Ryan, Executive Director, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment (CDPHE)