

September 11, 2025

To the Utah Homeless Services Board:

The Utah Homeless Network (UHN) is composed of an executive member from each of the three Utah Continuum of Care (CoC) boards. Each of the three CoCs has a unique geography and population it represents. Each CoC identifies the unique needs of its region and coordinates locally driven activities and services to address those needs. The UHN is responsible for supporting connections across the three CoCs, local homeless councils, and levels of government. Additionally, the UHN is responsible for coordinating statewide crisis response and educating the general public about the needs, challenges, and opportunities in both rural and urban communities, ensuring locally driven responses. Most importantly, the UHN makes recommendations to the UHSB regarding the provision of homeless services.

The UHN has reviewed the July 24 executive order “Ending Crime and Disorder on America’s Streets” and Utah Governor Spencer Cox’s letter to the Utah Homeless Services Board (UHSB). We want to emphasize that our CoC’s long-standing mission aligns with the Utah Homeless Services Board’s “Guiding Principles to Overcome Homelessness” and Utah’s Homelessness Strategic Plan, which states that homelessness should be rare, brief, and non-recurring.

**Our collective response to certain service delivery expectations and our recommendations for policy priorities are as follows:**

**1. Address Central Campus and State Funding Issues:**

**The Central Campus in Salt Lake County must be treated as an additional, ongoing funding opportunity - not a repurposing or reallocation.**

- According to 2025 PIT / HIC data, Salt Lake County’s homeless service system effectively and efficiently served 5,737 individuals (91.16%) through emergency shelter or permanent housing options on the night of the January count. This rate per 10,000 is still well below the national average and remained steady compared to 2024, despite an overall increase in the homelessness population in 2025.
- Even as providers worked tirelessly, 507 individuals (8.84%) went unsheltered on the night of the PIT Count because the system lacked the funding and resources necessary to serve the remaining population. The UHN supports the proposed Central Campus in North Salt Lake which would add 1,300 additional beds in Salt

Lake Valley. However, reallocating or repurposing current funds would be catastrophic. Redirecting or reallocating resources away from services that already support 5,737 people in Salt Lake Valley would result in a net increase in homelessness, particularly among unsheltered populations. It would also have a significant impact on the rest of the state's homeless population and the other CoCs that receive no benefit from a central campus outside of their continuum of care. A reallocation or redistribution would also devalue systems and programs already in place. The systems and programs represent significant investments made at both the state and federal levels and should not be devalued.

**The UHN requests that the UHSB review an annual report from OHS on current homelessness-related needs to identify actions that are underfunded or unfunded and prioritize them for future legislative sessions.**

- Counties across the state are currently burdened by unfunded legislative and contract requirements, including costs of shelter licensing, data entry, face-to-face client interactions and the like. These financial burdens have been exacerbated with each legislative session.

## **2. UHN and CoC Roles:**

**The UHN urges the UHSB to recognize and uphold the statutory role of the CoCs and UHN and utilize their expertise in policy decisions, legislative priorities, and strategies to address homeless concerns in order to ensure statewide needs are addressed effectively.**

- The UHN's three Continuums of Care (CoCs) are federally required to assess local homelessness and apply for federal funding. Composed of leaders from service providers and law enforcement, these CoCs are tailored to their specific communities, allowing them to effectively support individuals in need at the local level.
- Statewide, the three CoCs are responsible for responding to the unique homelessness issues within their respective population and geographical area. Each presents vastly different challenges, with Salt Lake Valley focusing on an urban and centralized area, while the other two face obstacles specific to rural communities. One-size-fits-all mandates risk undermining tailored solutions. Currently, 89% of Utahns experiencing homelessness are being served despite resource challenges, a testament to the effectiveness of this localized structure.

### **3. Treatment Policy Recommendations:**

**The UHN requests that, in alignment with statutory requirements, the UHSB collaborate with the Department of Health and Human Services, and specifically the Office of Substance Abuse and Mental Health, to engage as an advisor to the homeless services board. This is vital to develop best practices and innovative strategies for assisting individuals exiting incarceration or institutional settings to avoid homelessness.**

**Without a Health and Human Services Advisor, the UHB would like to emphasize the following policy recommendations:**

- Funding for early intervention treatment should be prioritized. It is the most cost-effective mental health solution for improving quality of life while relieving burdens on other social systems.
- Civil commitment is a tool to address individuals who are deemed a risk to harm themselves or others. Indiscriminate or haphazard civil commitments infringe on the civil liberties guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. Statutes direct civil commitment to be considered a temporary status and administered with the lowest level of restriction and care. Civil commitment is not the silver-bullet solution to homelessness, but rather one treatment option that should be carefully determined using already established processes.

### **4. Address Systemic Issues:**

**With more than 50,000 families in Utah at risk of homelessness, it is crucial to address the affordable housing crisis immediately. We urge the UHSB to prioritize the development of affordable housing, increase rental assistance programs, and implement long-term strategies to ensure housing stability for everyone.**

- **Affordable Housing Issue**

The lack of affordable housing is a pervasive systemic issue with far-reaching consequences for individuals, families, and communities. Its complexity stems from a confluence of factors, leading to significant challenges. Addressing systemic issues is crucial for fostering a healthier and more equitable society. These deeply rooted problems manifest as economic disparities, social inequalities, and inadequate access to essential resources.

- **Rising number of extremely low-income families:**

- According to the National Low Income Housing Alliance, 68,718

households in Utah (20% of the state population) are considered extremely low-income households, or households that fall below 30% of the area median income. This population struggles to find housing that is within their financial reach. This often forces individuals and families into precarious living situations, including homelessness, overcrowded conditions, or spending an unsustainable portion of their income on rent.

- **Rising number of cost-burdened households**

Households are considered "cost-burdened" when they spend more than 30% of their gross income on housing costs, including rent or mortgage payments, utilities, and insurance. When this figure exceeds 50%, they are deemed "severely cost-burdened." For Utah, 74% of the extremely low-income households fit into that category –that's over 50,000 households on the brink of homelessness.

Collaboration and partnership is the UHN's primary desire moving forward as we collectively respond to Utah's homelessness challenges. It takes localized effort on a statewide scale to make homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring.

In partnership,

**On behalf of the Salt Lake Coalition to End Homelessness:**

Jen Campbell, Executive Co-Chairperson

Shawn McMillen, Executive Co-Chairperson

Laurie Hopkins, Executive Vice-Chairperson

**On behalf of the Balance of State Continuum of Care**

Lauren Navidomskis, Executive Co-Chairperson

Andi Beadles, Executive Co-Chairperson

**On behalf of the Mountainland Continuum of Care**

Heather Hogue, Executive Chairperson