Summary of Public Comments on Statewide Collaboration for Change:
Draft of the State of Utah's Plan to Address Homelessness

Summary of Comments

Methodology

At the Utah Homelessness Council Special Meeting held on December 16, a draft of the State of Utah's Plan to Address Homelessness was shared for review and public comment. Multiple methods were used to gather public input and approximately ninety submissions were gathered. Responses that came up repeatedly have been grouped together and are represented by one response that best reflected the general theme. Recommended changes to the plan are highlighted in yellow, while recommended changes/ideas that are a better fit for implementation efforts are highlighted in blue.

General

- Employment options for the homeless needs to be an aspect of the plan.
- Independent shelter models and approaches should be considered to get people experiencing unsheltered homelessness off the street, as well as other temporary models being tried in other states to offer a place for everyone.
- Homelessness is expanding into geographic areas historically unaffected.
- Efforts to end homelessness should not be concerned about the opinions of others, only on expanding housing and services to those in need.
- The public needs more ways to provide in person input into this document.
- This report doesn't really talk much about how these strategic initiatives will be funded. I'm not sure if that's a deliberate omission or an oversight, but I would have liked to see that addressed more.
- Change the term "Substance abuse services" to "substance use disorder services" throughout the document. On page 8, can we better define supportive services? On bullet point 3 calls out behavioral health which doesn't match language in point 1 on goal 2...Page 8 bulletpoint 5 has (2) "a's" in the heading...can we make sure to call baseline years in footnotes...page 10 last bullet point has a typo "count count"...
- I'm impressed with the timeline for strategic implementation & comprehensive studies done.
- The plan needs to recognize the relationship between homelessness and disorder, including rising crime and offer a plan to reduce crime in proximity of facilities serving those experiencing homelessness. Police reports show high rates of crime and police calls to the shelters and housing facilities provided to the homeless. In addition, drug use in permanent supportive housing facilities is a concern. Finally, court records show 80 percent of the habitual criminals in Salt Lake County have been homeless. About 50 percent of the habitual offenders are long term homeless who have spent years cycling in and out of shelters, encampments, and jail.
- At the end of the last state council meeting, Mayor Mendenhall suggested adding a 6th goal related to the effort to create a special intervention patterned after the Miami-Dade program she and other local

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leaders recently observed. We support adding a 6th goal supporting a court directed diversion program for not only the mentally ill, but also for all individuals who are suffering from substance abuse disorder. Add a Goal 6. Expand diversion options for individuals experiencing homelessness who are also involved in the criminal justice system.

- Include on the Joint Strategic Plan Implementation Committee, representatives of small business and residents who currently live near existing Homeless Resource Centers to strategize about ways to decrease the negative effects these resources have had on the surrounding community, including property crime and quality-of-life issues.

- It appears the planners have confused strategies and action steps with outcome measures. For example, the following is an action step: "by 2023, the Utah Homeless Network will establish a working group to coordinate supportive services efforts…" While this may be an important step towards helping people get the services they need, it isn't the goal. A better measure of performance might be to "reduce the number receiving substance abuse treatment who afterwards returned to homelessness."

- There are goals to achieve certain benchmarks by 2025, one is even in 2030. It is hard for people to focus their attention on and be held accountable for results that are not expected for many years in the future.

- Presumably, the plan is not calling for race-based decision making regarding who should receive housing. That would be unconstitutional and violate state and federal anti-discrimination laws.

- The plan does not address specific homeless subpopulations as recommended in past audit reports.

- The plan is not a unifying document and does not reflect the view of some key stakeholder groups.

- This plan continues to focus on providing housing without addressing the underlying causes of homelessness for those who suffer from substance abuse and who commit crime. These concerns are reflected in the lack of specific goals and outcome measures for objective 4 "to help people thrive," and (5) "to ensure stable and safe communities." I know that others in the community, mainly business leaders and community council leaders have also expressed these same concerns. It leads me to wonder if the Council is really committed to addressing these issues which are a also major concern for some business owners and residents in the community.

- We think the five goals outlined in the plan, and implementation steps for each goal, do a great job outlining some key steps that need to be taken to help address homelessness in Utah.

- While the plan identifies the need for more funding across the board—for both services and housing—we feel the plan should specifically state the need to identify and create an ongoing, dedicated funding source for homeless services and affordable housing. This is imperative to help service providers have more predictability in their budget planning, so needed affordable housing, including permanent supportive housing, can be built. A dedicated source of funding could be used to leverage other funding resources to provide housing and services needed to help address homelessness.

- This report doesn't really talk much about how these strategic initiatives will be funded. I'm not sure if that's a deliberate omission or an oversight, but I would have liked to see that addressed more. I'm not one of those "not with my tax dollars" types so my concerns are not centered around so-called "wasteful government spending." Rather, I'm concerned about whether there will be adequate long-term funding to implement any of the suggestions that are identified by the various working groups that will be formed to work on the problem. Will it require state legislature support or has the funding to implement these measures already been secured? I just want to ensure that the solutions identified can be conceivably implemented and that the funding is secure long enough to withstand the changing whims of the legislature or the executive branch. Are there ways that funding could be secured through donations or foundations in addition to the government?

- I want to applaud and celebrate this plan in general. But it does strike me that this is a highly technocratic approach to solving the homelessness problem, meaning it relies heavily on a panel of

government experts and work groups to do the work. A lot of committees are going to get together to gather data, analyze the information, talk a lot, and then implement solutions. I do not dislike this approach and I'm mildly in favor of technocratic solutions to the homeless problem. But I wish there was more room in your plan for partnering with grass-roots organizations or local citizens who care about solving the problem. Governments and technocratic experts are probably more efficient and effective at solving problem like this. But I think it's also important for the "soul" of our communities to be asked to play some role in finding solutions rather than just encouraging a "that's someone else's problem" or "surely there's a government program for that" mindset. I wish we could let our communities take some ownership in solving problems alongside the technocrats. If we can provide opportunities for everyday citizens to engage meaningfully in implementing the solutions to these problems, we could nurture more care and concern for our fellow citizens in our communities. Not everyone will want to, but I think it's good to keep those opportunities open to the public too.

- Plan includes the goals to develop a "generalized protocol for project performance evaluation" which is to be completed by 2030? That date is too far out. The Legislative Auditor General recommended that in 2018. Legislators have also asked for a more data driven, results oriented service system. Does it really take 12 years to evaluate what works?

Goal 1: Increase accessible and affordable permanent housing opportunities for people experiencing homelessness across the state

- A social marketing campaign will not be fully effective for reducing NIMBY-ism. It's important to educate the public and dispel misconceptions, but it feels like it's not going to be enough. I wonder if it might be more effective if you could identify and build a coalition of key alliances with trusted civic, church, and community leaders who can join with you in showing support for building affordable housing and winning hearts and minds
- Cities not participating in increasing affordable housing should be charged a fine or removed from other state programs.
- I think that the efforts to increase low income/no income housing is a positive step in the right direction. I work in the mental health field. It appears that the two big reasons for homelessness are persistent mental health issues and drug use/addiction issues so any increase in these two areas will inevitably help to decrease homelessness.
- This goal presumes that increasing the amount of affordable housing decreases the number of people experiencing homelessness. The problem of this notion is that it has yet to be demonstrated to scale. This is because of two things: 1) creating housing at scale of any kind is a huge and expensive challenge, and 2) the population experiencing homelessness is often negatively inclined to accept housing and services. The report should acknowledge that housing is the solution for only a portion of individuals experiencing homelessness.
- This plan frequently described the challenge of helping those who are not housing-ready due to mental illness and addiction. This problem is not adequately described in the report. Instead, the report relies on recommendations by "providers" and "survey respondents" to conclude that permanent supportive housing is the best option. The evidence suggests a more robust response than permanent supportive housing is needed for this population. The widespread use of drugs by residents in permanent supportive housing is not realistically acknowledged which makes it difficult for those trying to obtain or maintain recovery.
- The plan mentions working with local jurisdictions to increase investment in housing options. The plan should clearly state the roles of the State, Counties and Cities so every partner and stakeholders working to address the issues of homelessness has a clear understanding of who is responsible for what within the system. Cities traditionally do not play a role in providing services or housing,

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rather, they are able to set zoning conditions that allow housing to be constructed at more affordable levels.

- This plan needs to clarify if the State is still recommending allowing municipalities to stay committed to the scattered site model of homeless service delivery? Does it suggest moving back towards more centralized models of service?
- Goal of providing sanctioned spaces for those experiencing unsheltered homelessness shouldn't wait until 2025.

Goal 2: Increase access to and availability of supportive services and case management for people experiencing and at risk of homelessness

- Plan needs more focus on the LGBTQ population as well as other vulnerable groups.
- 211 lists available resources but not the scarcity of these resources, we need more real time information available.
- Ensuring youth voice is included in the process is important, and it is necessary to make sure the youth are not included as token members of the committees, but true members of the guiding bodies.
- Thank you for including specific information about youth/young adults (transition-age youth). This age range (approximately 14-26) has very specific needs and it is a key time frame for intervention around all life domains: housing, health, mental health, education, etc. When we engage with youth during this time, we can support them in leading healthy lives.
- This goal presumes that increasing the availability of mental health and substance abuse services will lead people to accept those services. This is not always the case. The plan does not address the problem of how to approach those unwilling or uninterested in receiving treatment. In fact, many individuals are unwilling to accept treatment even after they receive housing. This is a challenging problem which is not addressed in the plan. Recommendation: Drop those items under Measurable Outcomes for Goal 2 which are process oriented. Replace them with a goal to increase the number receiving treatment for their mental illness and substance abuse disorder. Also set a goal to identify and reduce the number who return to homelessness after receiving treatment.

Goal 3: Expand homeless prevention efforts by increasing coordination, resources, and affordable housing opportunities

- Single room occupancy units should be considered into all efforts to expand affordable housing.
- The State needs to attempt to regulate vacation and Airbnb rentals to have an impact on the rising rents.
- Prevention efforts should look at long-term supports and evaluate all needs. One need is support for costs for storage of belongings. Barrier removal is important. There needs to be a way to identify those who may be at risk of homelessness outside of official systems involvement. Community members, friends, neighbors, and individuals themselves may identify that they are at risk of homelessness before criminal justice, education, or other systems may recognize those signs.
- I am very impressed with the report and the plan. I have one suggestion. There is much in the report and plan about providing affordable housing. These recommendations should also include a recommendation about building walkable neighborhoods with mixed housing that bring people together are necessary for the social and emotional support that will help keep people housed and improve everyone's mental and social well-being.
- Use technology to better catch those about to fall into homelessness, seniors or other groups could be captured better for those at risk.

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- The research shows that prevention programs offer short term benefit in that they may help a family postpone an immediate housing crisis, but such programs do not help families achieve long-term housing stability, as seen in "The Impact of Homeless Prevention on Residential Instability: Evidence from the Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing Program," available at: https://bit.ly/2CtqT8J. The plan should monitor the outcomes of prevention programs by identifying the number who received services and who remained housed after two years.
- The Pioneer Park Coalition believes the state should develop a more robust approach to identifying the number and characteristics of people experiencing homelessness.   The data gathered during Point-in-Time Count offers only a rough estimate of the number of individuals who are unsheltered. Surveys of people experiencing homelessness are also not sufficiently reliable to identify their true needs.
- Explore programs to reunite homeless to other communities.
- Each LLC should be expected to have a minimum amount of services and housing available within its boundaries, so as not to force local residents to leave for assistance.

Goal 4: Target housing resources and supportive services to people experiencing unsheltered homelessness

- The State of Utah should mandate the construction of food banks and shelters across the state, it should be considered an essential city/county service, particularly winter shelters.
- Congregate shelters are not always an option for those with trauma issues, for those with past experiences of violence in shelters, or families.
- Medical and mental health treatment for the homeless are just as important as shelter and permanent housing. Support services keep those housed on the road to recovery.
- Utah has many programs and models that should be expanded before looking at untested or out of state organizations to solve this complex issue.
- Parks need to be reclaimed for residents, there should be specific action steps to make this a reality.
- We support the creation of sanctioned encampments if they are viewed as temporary facilities where clients can be stabilized, offered treatment and prepared for housing. However, the "strategies to achieve goal" presume that increased housing is the solution for the unsheltered, not recognizing that many unsheltered are not ready for housing. The plan needs to explain how we can best serve those who are resource and housing resistant. Replace Goal 4 with "Create a range of shelter and service options for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness." Include among the service options, sanctioned encampments, mental health, and drug addiction treatment.   And once temporary facilities are provided, the no camping laws must be enforced. Teams of police and outreach workers should actively encourage the unsheltered to enter facilities.
- I don't believe it is advisable to have a social media campaign directed to the public. It seems like advocacy and marketing is not a public function that should be paid for with tax dollars or donations to non-profit organizations.
- Utah's Plan to Address Homelessness must acknowledge this discrepancy between what businesses and residents were told about capacity when they accepted the HRCs in their neighborhoods and the reality of the situation if homeless service providers wish to regain trust with the community. The implementation plan must include steps to mitigate these situations.

Goal 5: Promote alignment and coordination across multiple systems of care to support people experiencing and at risk of homelessness.

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- There need to be more focus and effort of peer sharing capabilities by those currently or formerly homeless.
- Better alignment of McKinney-Vento students experiencing homelessness, particularly those transitioning into early adults.
- Expand Medicaid as well as leverage the libraries to provide services to at risk homeless.
- The State of Utah relies too heavily on police officers to be the ones interacting with the homeless population. Often, police officers are not trained to be health experts, and these encounters can escalate quickly. Maybe it's because we expect the police to handle too much in our society and some of their tasks could and should be delegated to other specialists rather than making the police do everything.
- The Hospital system needs to be better integrated into homeless services.
- This is an important feature of any homeless services system, but the COCs should be doing this already. The plan should clarify what more can be done than what is already being done. If the intent is to do more along the lines of Judge Leifman's program in Miami-Dade County, those goals should be clearly articulated. We view the proposal to increase data sharing among agencies as a positive step.
- The plan identifies opportunities to increase collaboration between stakeholders when it comes to mental health and criminal justice issues. We support any coordinated improvements in the way services for those facing mental health problems are provided. It will provide greater safety and support for those who are mentally ill, as well as enhances safety in our neighborhoods.
- Regarding the initiative to form partnerships with criminal justice, etc., I want to say that I hope that we can set up, train, and staff a new group of first responders who can respond more effectively to the unsheltered homeless population than the police force. I feel like we rely perhaps too heavily on police officers to be the ones interacting with the homeless population. Often, police officers are not trained to be health experts, and these encounters can escalate quickly. Maybe it's because we expect the police to handle too much in our society and some of their tasks could and should be delegated to other specialists rather than making the police do everything. I think it would be nice if we could create a new class of first responders who are better trained and well-equipped to help people dealing with mental illness, substance abuse, or other social problems that can contribute to homelessness.
- The plan needs to address Olmstead concerns across the state's mental health facilities.
- We need to inspect Utah's approach towards competency evaluations and develop more resources for those who have appropriately been declared mentally incompetent. This intersection of our criminal justice, mental health, and homeless services systems is profoundly broken, and it's having a significant negative impact on the most vulnerable and communities that host supportive services. These neighborhoods are already struggling and losing community members due to public safety issues, and it is often here where individuals that those in the justice system refer to as "incompetent cyclers" continue to re-offend.