**Attending:** Bob Shumeyko (HUD), Lynn Morrow (HUD), Dan Brennan (MaineHousing), Jerry Botta (HOME Inc.), Joe Locke (MSHA), Vickey Merrill (CHOM), Awa Conteh (CoB), Mike Shaughnessy (MSHA), Karessa Grenier (Hope and Justice Project), Jessica Lincoln (TNLH), Cullen Ryan (CHOM), Erin Kelly (Preble Street), Lauren Charon (DHHS OBH), Norm Maze (Augusta Housing), Scott Tibbitts (MSHA), Abigail Smallwood (Hub 1), Nicole Frydrych (Hub 6), Donna Alger (BFAH), Rich Romero (OHI), Tracy Allen (KBH), Jace Faris (Hub 8), Kari Bradstreet (H.S.A.), Tony Giarratano (Shalom House), Janice Daku (RCAM), Dave McCluskey ( Community Care), Kelly Watson (MSHA), Melody Fitch (FVP), Marcie Dean (Next Step), Noelle Coyne (WMCA), Jen Weatherbee (HUB 7), Shawna (YAB), Johanna Buzzell (MSHA), Jessica Sanfasin (VOA), Rebekah Paredes (NHM), Sharon Jordan (WBHW), Emily Richards (Hub 5), Sara Wade (DHHS)*,* Chris Bicknell (New Beginnings), Alice Preble (DHHS), Hanna Gregory (MCEDV), Mike Tuller (BFAH), Kehli Buck (RCAM), Lauri Legrere (VOA), Betty St. Hilaire (United Community Living Center), Jeff Cosgrove Cook (Hub 3), Lauren Bustard (MSHA), Mat Wyman (YAB), Nakesha Warren Colby (Hub 2), Boyd Kronholm (BAHS), Elaine Grade (KCHC), Alison Small (Community Care), Johnnie Walker (Partners for Peace), Julian Sherman (PCHC), Joe McNally (Milestone Recovery), Wes Phinney (YCSPI), David Sovetsky (MMHS), Russ Johnson (Shalom House), Shelby Wilson (Hub 9), Rebecca Hobbs (Through These Doors), Bonnie Gagnon (Caring Unlimited), Leah McDonald (Preble Street), Megan Simmons (DHHS), Ken Capron (Hope Harbor), Tara Hembree (MaineHousing), Jason Goodrich (Advocate), Zac Moore (Advocate), Steven McDermott (Genesis Community Loan Fund), Donald Smith ( ), Nickie Cohen (CHCS) , Ryan Kapp ( ), April Reed (MaineHousing), Cheryl Harkins (HVJ), Donna Kelley (Waldo CAP), Rosa Moore (HOME, INC.), Leanne Pameroy (Preble Street), Laura Briggs (BOL)

|  |
| --- |
|  |
|  |
|  |
|  |

 and

Stephonie Gregg (YCSPI) and Kari Bradstreet (FVP).

[Reminder – If you call in, please email blabua@mainehousing.org to let us know you were there!]

 [Reminder – If you call in, please email blabua@mainehousing.org to let us know you were there!]

**Meeting Minutes: Maine MCoC**

**Date: April 18, 2024, 1:00 – 3:00 PM**

**Location: Zoom**

**Maine**

**Continuum of Care**

# **Approval of Minutes and Moment of Silence:** The meeting began with a moment of silence to recognize those who have passed away while homeless. Erin then welcomed everyone and pointed out that today’s meeting was being recorded for the purpose of facilitating the writing of the minutes later.

# **MCOC Minutes from the March 2024** meeting were posted on the Maine Homeless Planning website for review. ***Laura B. motioned to approve minutes as written. Joe M. seconded. All were in favor. No abstentions. Minutes were unanimously approved as written.***

1. **The Meeting between HUD, MCOC Leadership, and MaineHousing**

Erin began this discussion by asking Bob Shumeyko and Lynn Morrow from HUD to introduce themselves. Bob is Director of Community Planning and Development at the HUD Office in Boston. Lynn is CPD Representative for the MCOC (among others in New England).

Erin then asked Cullen Ryan and Dan Brennan to give everyone a brief summary of that meeting and where things are at now.

Dan provided a bit of background – MaineHousing is the Collaborative Applicant (CA) for MCOC. There are currently several components of HUD Technical Assistance (TA) working in Maine, some of which are here as a result of requests from our Congressional Representatives. Over the last couple of months, Dan and others at MaineHousing, as CA, have met with our TA providers, as well as with Bob, Lynn, and Norm Suchar (HUD Director of the Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs) and heard concerns about two specific areas in particular. The first, being the Governance and Structure of our Continuum, and the second, the challenges regarding our Coordinated Entry System (CES). Maine is far behind in implementing our CES, and TA felt these two elements were connected. They are strongly recommending that MCOC look at and redesign our structure and how we operate. TA was also suggesting that MaineHousing, as CA, be more involved. Dan wants Maine, and the MCOC, to be seen by HUD, and others, as a leader in how things should be done. Dan values the relationship MaineHousing has with the MCOC and MCOC Leadership and felt it was important to share this information with them, so he arranged the meeting that was mentioned at the MCOC meeting in March. Bob and Lynn offered to come to Portland to meet in person with the Tri-Chairs, Cullen, as President of the Board, and with Dan, Lauren, and Kelly from MaineHousing, to address these concerns. This was followed by a virtual meeting on April 11th, with the TA Providers themselves, and additional MaineHousing staff. Dan stated that as the CA, MaineHousing is committed to helping the Continuum go through this process, and recommended the MCOC create a small working group to lead this effort. This is MCOC’s responsibility, it is work the Continuum needs to do – MaineHousing recognizes that, and is not here to tell the MCOC what to do, but is here to help guide, and support the work.

Cullen spoke next and thanked Dan for his responsiveness and involvement in this effort. He added that our Coordinated Entry was not just way behind – it was described as one of the worst in the country, so we really have a lot of work to do on that. Cullen felt the Governance concerns were centered around the Continuum itself, not so much about the Board, but acknowledged that it has sometimes been difficult for TA to discern which items need to go to the full MCOC and which need to go to the Board for a vote – Governance is not clear. Also, our website is a mess, so it is nearly impossible to find any useful information there. MaineHousing has acknowledge that and is already taking steps to improve the website.

In terms of structure, for those who may not know the history, at one time Maine had three Continuums of Care. The Greater Penobscot CoC merged with what was then the Balance of State CoC about 12 years ago, and the Portland CoC merged with us about 8 years ago to create one Maine CoC. There were concerns at the time about local communities losing control, and about all the resources being directed to just one or two larger cities, and so, our Governance and our Board were designed in that context – with three chairs and an eye toward ensuring representation from different geographic areas of the state in an effort to build trust and be inclusive. Now, HUD and TA are looking at that structure and saying some of that is unusual for one statewide CoC – so this gives us an opportunity to re-think it.

Also, our system is stuck and has been for a while. We have inflow but very little outflow. There are lots of reasons for that but one of the things HUD TA is telling us is that there are still things we can do to help move people out of shelters. For example, if we have someone in Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH), and we can determine that they no longer need or want that level of support, we can work with MaineHousing and other Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to help that person get a mainstream permanent subsidy and free up that Supportive Housing voucher for someone who does need the service component it can provide.

There are things we can do to simplify our Governance so it will make sense not only to us, but also to people ‘on the outside’ – and ensure it is streamlined to get resources to the people who need them. HUD is providing us with examples of Best Practices to see what other communities are doing – some of us recently met with folks from the Chittenden County Vermont CoC – which has some things in common with us and some good ideas. And, in terms of inclusiveness, we have worked to have our Board be broadly representative of various populations, but what we have not done is make sure our CoC is connecting with other entities in the state, and in communities, that also touch on homelessness. Homelessness is the result of many systems being broken, or ill informed, or simply not communicating effectively – we need to connect with Hospitals, with Law Enforcement, and with others who encounter the populations we are trying to serve and bring them to the table – we need to be more inclusive in that sense.

Erin added, in terms of the lack of transparency and communication, it is not just the website that is the problem – it is a problem, people cannot find meeting notes, or policies and procedures - and we will hear later in the meeting about efforts to address that - but there are also concerns about the lack of transparency around how decisions are made – that is part of a larger structural problem with both the Board and the MCOC. In terms of Coordinated Entry, Erin has brought the concerns raised by TA to the CE Committee, including around Case Conferencing. She believes that we have a good foundation for our CES, but we have a lot of work to do in terms of making sure it is reaching everyone that it needs to, and getting resources out to people in the community as quickly as possible. Some of the specific items TA has listed include centering equity, using data for decision making, and adding more resources to the system. We have already begun some of this work. Some of the issues around where we are at with our CES are symptoms of the larger problems of the Continuum – lack of clarity, the sense of being bogged down, and difficulty making decisions.

Dan would like to add, the Board structure does need to be looked at, it is part of the concerns raised. The CoC has done well in terms of diversity among individual members, but still needs other entities – however, the board is also already very large, and that should be looked at too, look at other examples and best practices.

Erin then opened the discussion up to hear from others.

-The Case Conferencing document that was share prior the meeting was excellent – very helpful. One of the things it talked about was the need for a uniform system statewide – we need that – but there was nothing in there about DV Providers, who use a different system, and do not attend the general Case Conferencing sessions due to confidentiality concerns. DV Providers were not part of developing that document, but would appreciate the opportunity to participate and provide feedback in future discussions.

-Is the problem with Coordinated Entry a software issue? There should be staff dedicated to this work full time – not people who have to do this while still trying to do another full time job. Are there training videos – or can we sit in on another CoC’s sessions? There may be confidentiality issues around sitting in, but HUD might have some trainings that could help.

-We could spend a whole meeting talking about Coordinated Entry, and maybe we should do that in the future, but it isn’t a software issue – we have HMIS; or a staffing issue – we have Hub Coordinators. It’s mostly a lack of resources available in the system – the biggest CoC resource has been off line for over a year, and other CoC funded PSH housing is very limited. We need to get more diversity of housing and other resources into the system to refer people to.

-If we are going to do a full system re-design, we need more information. For example – and maybe HUD can answer this - what percentage of Continuums have a State Housing Authority, a Collaborative Applicant, and an HMIS Lead all grouped together under the same agency? Some agencies feel disempowered by that structure. Isn’t it a conflict for one entity to have that much control? MaineHousing is a housing provider, and a funder to all the CoC partners – and it’s very difficult for smaller agencies to speak to a large statewide entity in way that has any authority – and even the leadership structure of the CoC has felt that. People hesitate to speak up. What do other CoCs look like in terms of those roles and responsibilities? We can talk about the governance structure or the board structure, but that’s just people in a room talking and making decisions – that’s not the actual CoC and how it’s working and implementing things – and if there are multiple conflicts of interest in the room and people don’t feel comfortable speaking, then we have bigger problems than whether or not Coordinated Entry is going to launch. There is some alarming data –from 2022 to 2023 Maine showed a 228% increase in homelessness, while nationally there was only a 12% increase. That is terrifying. We don’t just need a change in leadership, we need to restructure the entire CoC and start again from the ground up.

Bob said he did not know about national percentages, but gave examples of CoCs he has worked with where a state housing agency is also the CA, and in his experience, they augment the work and resources of the CoC. Obviously, it can be complicated and one size doesn’t fit all, but HUD doesn’t dictate that relationship, and their concern here was about the Governance Structure. Lynn added that the TA Providers might have a better sense of how other CoCs/CAs are set up nationally.

The member who spoke earlier said, in their perception, the issues with the Governance that HUD is pointing out now, are symptom of a broken structure, and if we do not fix the structure, we will come up against other issues later on. Beyond that, even if MaineHousing remains the CA, they should not be the HMIS – they are not incentivized to improve the system at all. If we contracted with a university, they would be internally incentivized to create a research tool for their students and their researchers so that they draw down greater funds for their university, plus, they would follow HUD guidance, they would invest in it in a way that would benefit us. We should walk away from MaineHousing as the HMIS Lead and offer that contract to someone else who would look at it as a bonus for them, not as a burden. Getting HMIS to move or change in any way – for twenty years – has been impossible and that needs to change immediately.

Dan said he respects that opinion, but suggests people talk to TA about some of these things. What he has heard in his conversations with TA suggests the exact opposite. He does not want to sound defensive, and wants MaineHousing to be as good as we can be, but really encourages people to engage with TA regarding whether MaineHousing being the CA, and HMIS Lead, and CE Lead, is really a conflict or not. Let’s take this opportunity to really have those conversations and think it through. That last thing we want is for MaineHousing to be a barrier to success for the state of Maine – we want to be part of the solution, part of the process – let’s continue the conversation.

The member added, part of their frustration is with themself, for not speaking up more over the years, for not pushing harder for change sooner. Erin said she has also faced that sort of frustration, particularly around implementing CES, but in other ways, too. It is hard to speak up when you know you are the only one in disagreement with everyone else. She referred to the presentation brought to the Continuum a few months ago about Dominant Cultural Norms, and how the culture of our CoC has not been one that encourages voices of dissent or disagreement. The leadership and the Board need to be better about making space for those differing opinions. Homelessness is a super complex issue, but people show up at these meetings because we deeply care about the people we are serving. There is no one solution, so of course people are going to disagree – and the CoC needs to allow everyone to express their views and encourage those dissenting voices. Also, she agrees change needs to happen – it is long overdue, and she is glad we are finally having these conversations. She encouraged everyone – if they have been around twenty years or if they are new to this work – to speak up and be a part of the change.

Another member said we should look at dividing roles – nothing against MaineHousing, but just diving up the work might be good. Also, we are very top heavy in the CoC, and we spend a lot of time talking about every piece of legislation – which is good information – but is all that, or even what HUD and TA are asking us to do about our structure – how does all that really help Maine people? The Case Conferencing documents that was shared – at times the recommendations are very specific but in other parts they are very vague.

Erin responded to the points about the Case Conferencing recommendations – it is easy to get defensive when you are invested in something like this, but there are some good ideas and suggestions in there, and not everything is going to apply to all areas. One item was ‘a decline in attendance’ but that was based on how many people were invited vs. how many show up – that might not be the best measure – and the fact that people do show up shows they are invested, that they feel it is worthwhile.

Another member stated that pushing for change and a commitment to equity go hand in hand – fixing the power structure of the Continuum will lead to increased equity.

MCOC will create a working group to address our governance, structure, and the other issues called out by HUD and our TA providers. We would like to have a broad array of representation on this group, so if anyone is interested in participating, please put your name and email in the chat, or contact Cullen and/or the Chairs directly.

Dan concluded this portion of the meeting by stating that MaineHousing is committed to fulfilling its role as the Collaborative Applicant for MCOC, and wants Maine to be in HUD’s good graces, and seen as a leader in addressing homelessness. There are decisions the MCOC needs to make, and work the MCOC needs to do, and MaineHousing is here to support that effort.

1. **System Inflow and Outflow:**

Mike S. provided a slide presentation of the data. Usually this information is shared at the Board level but there was a request to bring this to the full MCOC. The biggest “Inflow” right now is in the Housing Problem Solving Program. This program was launched last year with a combination of state and federal funds. The federal funds were restricted to “Diversion” – they could only help people who were at risk of becoming homeless, but if that person then became homeless, they no longer qualified. Adding the state funds and tweaking the program allowed for helping people even if they fall into homelessness, and added types of assistance that were not eligible under the original federal guidelines. In March alone the program completed 37 interventions and 31 of those households (84%) reported their issue was successfully resolved – they were able to either maintain or return to housing.

In terms of Emergency Shelters, in March, they were operating at 91% overall capacity, with some variations among different types of shelters/populations. Exits also very – between 40 and 100 people per month over the last 6 months, but pre-pandemic, 150 exits a month was average.

Erin thanked Mike, and added that we know the system is stuck, numbers are up, and there are more and bigger encampments, but we also have successes and things that are working, too.

1. **Youth Data Sharing:** This is a new item that we will want a vote on.

The Coordinated Entry Committee recognized that the way Youth programs have been entering their HMIS data for youth 18 to 24 was presenting an issue in terms of Coordinated Entry access. The Youth Provider Group and the YAB have both reviewed and approved a proposal from the Coordinated Entry Committee to address this, and they are bringing it here today seeking approval from the MCOC. Historically, Youth providers locked down all their records for all their clients. The proposal is for records for Youth 18 to 24 entering the program to be handled the same way they would be if entering any other program, sharing that data for Coordinated Entry, but, like any other program, the individual would still be able to opt out of data sharing. The group is also in the process of revising the CES Release of information – the language of the current version is complex and difficult to understand – they want to simplify it and will bring that back in a couple months. Several members spoke in favor of the proposal.

A **MOTION** was made by Mat W. to change Youth data sharing for Youth 18 to 24 years old from an ‘opt-in’ process to an ‘opt-out’ process. Awa Seconded. There were no abstentions, not votes against. The motion **PASSED**.

1. **The Maine Homeless Planning Website:** MaineHousing issued and RFP a while back and, with help from some MCOC members, SHC members, and PWLE, we have selected a new vendor – Owl’s Head Solutions, a Maine based company. We will begin the re-design process in a few weeks and will have representation from all stakeholders, and seek feedback from the larger group as well. We hope to launch the new site in the fall.
2. **Open Board Seats:** There are currently two seats open on the Board. One is currently occupied by Chris Bicknell, who has expressed his willingness to continue to serve if nominated and elected. He was just re-nominated by Awa, and he accepted. The other seat is specific to a DV provider, which has been vacant since Kate Easter stepped down. Hanna Gregory from MCEDV had expressed interest in joining the Board and was immediately nominated by several members. If there are any other nominations after the meeting, please email them to Cullen, the Tri-Chairs, and Scott by next Friday so they can go the Board in May.
3. **Adding new Resources to Coordinated Entry**: A sub-committee of CES has been working on this. This committee initially included Hub Coordinators, Housing and Service Providers, Housing Authorities, and other community stakeholders, but momentum has fallen off over time. The committee has lots of ideas for where more focus is needed but action items tend to land on the Hub Coordinators, or require funding or resources from other entities (MCOC, SHC, PHA) and therefore cannot be accomplished within the sub-committee itself, so they are asking that the MCOC engage in conversations with Housing Authorities and other Housing Providers to bring more resources into our CES in order to create a more robust and equitable system. Some of the specific needs identified by the sub-committee include Recovery Housing, Transitional Housing, Wrap-Around Services, ordinances on Rent Caps and Background Checks, Navigator Services, Landlord engagement and incentives, Master Leasing Programs, and housing for aging populations. There is often some willingness among partners and potential partners, but the committee does not feel it has the leverage needed to move things forward, and often times rules and regulations create barriers to what agencies feel they can do or contribute. Since we have HUD representatives here today – is there an opportunity for CPD to do, or suggest, or any flexibility they can offer that might free up some resources from HCV or PIH to help us get around barriers created by their waitlists and implement some move-on strategies. Bob said he would talk to his colleagues about this suggestion.

Any other ideas? Is there a way to collaborate with housing providers in general – to get a “Set-Aside” of a certain number of units for referrals from CES? Maybe a ‘first refusal’ sort of arrangement, where CES gets the option, but if they don’t have anyone that’s a good fit the provider then goes back to their list or advertises it or whatever they would otherwise do?

-PSH doesn’t have any special access to other types of housing to move people to – in fact, clients in PSH are no longer considered homeless, so they do not even qualify for same sort of homeless preference people coming from a shelter or Transitional Housing program might. We talk all the time about resources at the front end – but we also need resources at the back end if we want to move people out of the system and free up those PSH units. HUD TA has talked to us about Move-On strategies for people who have been in PSH a long time and still need the subsidy, but not the service component, but that requires PHA make those units available.

-One of the things Chittenden County Vermont CoC talked about was that back in 2019, their Housing Finance Agency – their version of MaineHousing – created a 15% set-aside so that all LIHTC (Low Income Housing Tax Credit) Projects have units specifically designated to serve homeless referrals from their Coordinated Entry. Initially it was a challenge, but it pushed their CES to get really good at filling those spots – so good that the authority has now raised that set aside to 25%, so a quarter of all new units are available to welcome people exiting homelessness! -It would be great if we could make that happen here in Maine. It really makes sense to do it that way and have all those details worked out from the start instead of trying to work around or overcome barriers as the last step to house someone.

-Our problem is not just lack of units – it’s also barriers to accessing them – we need to address policies around things like old criminal histories, eviction histories, back rent, lack of deposits.

-So, where should this work live? Maybe a collaboration between CE and Resource Committees? -The CE Committee will be very busy in the coming months based on recommendations from TA, so they will probably not have a lot of time for this sort of additional work. Having the Resource Committee involved makes sense – maybe working directly with the CE Housing Resource Sub-Committee? It really is ‘boots on the ground’ work to make those connections with the housing providers, and smaller sub-committees can be more effective at that.

-Talking with municipalities and affordable housing developers is also a huge missing piece here. There are people in this group that talk with people in those groups, but there is no overlap in terms of the CoC itself being engaged. It might take someone at a higher level – someone like Greg Payne or someone in a similar position to get those conversations started.

-Connecting directly with municipalities and developers is something we have not done. There are entities – like the Statewide Homeless Council, other Boards or organizations – that some of the people here are also part of –can we create more formal agreements between these groups to work together? Is there even any “official” representation of the MCOC within the Statewide or Regional Homeless Councils?

-This goes back to our Structure – does it make sense to have two big groups, with committees and sub-committees and ad-hoc committees – all doing basically the same thing? When everyone is already busy with their regular full time job, to then spend time on a committee, only to find some other group is already doing that – we need to understand what everyone is doing and communicate that and bring it all into one Structure – define those roles and tasks and relationships, eliminate the redundancies, and go from there.

-One of the recommendations from TA is about how the Board can better support CE by developing messaging about the importance and the benefits of participating to housing providers – especially non-coc-funded providers.

-To sum up this part of the discussion, there seems to be some enthusiasm from the Resource Committee to take on some of this, and we can bring the messaging recommendation to the Board at their next meeting, and we can try to find ways to engage with groups like the Statewide Homeless Council and others in more formal and mutually beneficial ways. Does that cover everything? There is sure to be more to come in future meetings about all of these things.

1. **Updates and Announcements**

The YAB will be conducting a couple of in person Trainings – in Augusta on May 7th and Bangor on May 8th, both sessions will be two, 2 hour, back to back trainings - one on Supporting LGBTQ+ Youth, and one on Supporting Neurodiverse Youth. These are Youth created and presented events – please attend, and please share this info and encourage others to attend.

More information can be found at [www.newbeginmaine.org/events/training/](http://www.newbeginmaine.org/events/training/)

Monday the 22nd, at 11:00 in Portland, Homeless Voices for Justice and other organizations will be gathering at Monument Square and marching to City Hall in support of the Supreme Court looking at the Martins vs. Boise case – hoping they will look favorably upon it and not support sweeps and pushing people down the road. All are welcome to join.

 If there is anything you would like to cover at our next meeting, please email the Tri-Chairs.

**The next MCOC meeting scheduled for May 16, 2024 from 1:00-3:00 pm on ZOOM!**