

COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS, 2006

AUTHOR: HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RULES

HB5206

RESOLVE 2

RESOLVE PROVIDING FOR AN INVESTIGATION AND PLAN BY A SPECIAL COMMISSION RELATIVE TO ENDING HOMELESSNESS IN THE COMMONWEALTH.

Resolved, SECTION 1. There shall be a special commission for the purpose of devising a statewide strategy to end homelessness in the commonwealth. The commission shall consist of 5 members of the senate, 1 of whom shall be member of the minority party, 5 members of the house of representatives, 1 of whom shall be a member of the minority party, the director of housing and community development or her designee, the commissioner of mental health or her designee, the commissioner of transitional assistance or his designee, the secretary of veterans' services or his designee, 3 mayors or their designee nominated by the Massachusetts Municipal Association, the president of the Massachusetts Sheriffs' Association or his designee, the chief justice of the housing court or his designee, 6 persons to be appointed by the governor, and each member of the interagency council on homelessness and housing, established by Executive Order number 454 dated November 20, 2003. The governor shall designate a member of the commission as co-chairperson and the members of the commission shall elect a member of the commission to serve as co-chairperson. The commission's strategy shall outline the necessary steps to replace the decade-old system of ad hoc and disparate emergency responses to homelessness with a coordinated and consolidated plan for permanent solutions to homelessness involving housing, economic development, and job creation.

SECTION 2. The commission shall use and incorporate the work of the interagency council on homelessness and housing and shall, by June 30, 2007, develop a comprehensive housing plan to end homelessness in the commonwealth, including a consensus budget proposal capable of being implemented over a 5 year period, with a focus as follows:-

(a) To ensure the collaboration of the department of housing and community development, the executive office of health and human services and other state agencies, departments, and quasi-public authorities in the planning and distribution of resources that will create coordinated efforts to house homeless people, develop jobs and economic opportunities, and provide appropriate services.

(b) To consolidate within the state budget those funds allocated for services, housing, and economic development for homeless people, and to supplement these funds as necessary, for the purpose of developing coherent, comprehensive public policy. The objectives with actual quantifiable outcome and results, guided by research, as part of the creation of a consolidated budget and comprehensive public policy to reduce homelessness.

(c) To carry out an analysis of the financial and organizational feasibility of utilizing state resources for housing, economic development and supportive services under a conversion strategy. The preparation of this conversion analysis shall include, but not be limited to, compilation an analysis of the following information: (1) a determination of the number of units required by jurisdictions to house homeless individuals an families; (2) the coordination of discharge planning from correctional, mental health and other institutions' and the types of housing support systems require to prevent or end homelessness; (3) recommendations relative to the establishment of a results-oriented initiative of coordinated community support services designed to ensure that homeless individuals and families move towards independence and self-sufficiency; provided, however, that community support services shall include, but not be limited to, the case management of individual and family integration or reintegration into independent community living; and to identify the number of housing units affordable to very low-income and extremely low-income households according to the definition by the United States Department of Housing. and Urban Development or a successor agency; (4) the total amount in state resources currently spent on emergency shelter and services specifically targeted to homeless individuals and families; (5) a compilation of the costs of homelessness in mainstream primary and behavioral health systems and law enforcement systems, including jails, prisons, and courts; (6) an administrative review of all beds and services dedicated to homeless people and a review of models for housing, economic development and supportive services to which the present shelter system could be converted with recommendations regarding the transfer from the current to the proposed system; (7) the establishment of baseline quantification of the number of homeless people in the commonwealth and in various jurisdictions; (8) the establishment of incremental benchmarks to address what the baseline reveals; (9) the identification of the most innovative ideas from around the country for prevention.

The coordinated services that the commission shall analyze as a part of an individual or family living plan designed to prevent or eliminate homelessness shall include, but not be limited to, adult education, employment training and placement, family stabilization and reunification services, the head start program, child care and after-school services, substance abuse and mental health counseling and treatment, primary and preventive health care services, post-criminal justice rehabilitation and reintegration services, housing an rental assistance, energy and conservation assistance, group adult foster car and other elder home care services and nutrition.

(d) To prioritize and target state resources available for housing, economic development and supportive services to meet the needs of homeless individuals and families, and to ensure that those experiencing chronic homelessness are prioritized in the plan, especially veterans. Sue prioritization and targeting may include the creation of special initiative and set asides of a percentage of resources state agencies and quasi-public authorities may devote to the housing and employment of homeless people.

(e) To ensure that the state maximizes its ability to leverage outside resources from the federal, municipal, and private sources in the creation of coordinated, comprehensive initiatives to house homeless people.

(f) To identify what additional state resources are necessary to implement the strategy.

(g) To oversee the coordination and consolidation of state resources, both allocated and additional.

(h) To monitor a multi-year strategy initially to reduce the number of people who are homeless and to subsequently end homelessness in the commonwealth.

SECTION 3. For the purposes of this commission, "homelessness" shall mean the condition of a person sleeping in a place not meant for human habitation or in an emergency shelter, or a person in transitional housing for homeless persons who originally came from the street or an emergency shelter. For purposes of this commission "not meant for human habitation" shall include, but not be limited to, cars, parks, sidewalks, abandoned buildings, welfare hotels, shared temporary occupancy of housing not intended for multiple families or other individuals, or any other public or private place not designed for, or ordinarily used as, regular living accommodations.

SECTION 4. The commission shall present to the general court its comprehensive housing plan to end homelessness in the commonwealth, including a timeline for implementation, cost estimates and finance mechanisms and its recommendations, if any, together with drafts of legislation necessary to carry its recommendations into effect by filing them with the clerk of the house of representatives, who shall forward the same to the joint committee on children and families, the joint committee on housing, and the house and senate committees on ways and means on or before June 30, 2007. The commission's role shall be advisory in nature, and its recommendations, decisions, and actions shall not be binding on the executive branch or the legislative branch. One year after the effective date of this act, the commission shall be dissolved and any of its remaining responsibilities shall be assumed by the council on homelessness and housing.

10/26/06 APPROVED