

<b>FROM</b>	<b>NAME &amp; TITLE</b>	Tisha Edwards, Acting Director	CITY of <b>BALTIMORE</b> <b>MEMO</b>	
	<b>AGENCY NAME &amp; ADDRESS</b>	Mayor's Office of Homeless Services 7 E Redwood St. Baltimore, MD 21201		
	<b>SUBJECT</b>	City Council Resolution 21-0028R – Baltimore's Plan for Our Neighbors Experiencing Homelessness and Residing in Hotels During the Pandemic		

DATE:

**TO**

The Honorable President and  
Members of the City Council  
City Hall, Room 400

May 25, 2021

The Mayor's Office of Homeless Services (MOHS) has been asked to respond to City Council Resolution 21-0028R introduced by Councilmembers Ramos, Middleton, Bullock, Schliefer, Torrence, Stokes, Cohen and Porter.

**Background**

This Resolution calls for an informational hearing to discuss the overall outcomes for individuals experiencing homelessness – residing in hotels and unsheltered – during the pandemic, next steps for permanent housing and access to housing programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic required the Mayor's Office of Homeless Services (MOHS) to implement an action plan that prioritized public health and safety. As part of the COVID-19 response and in lockstep with CDC guidance, MOHS moved over 500 clients residing in congregate care into non-congregate hotel decompression sites beginning in March 2020. This move was done to ensure that residents could safely quarantine in individual rooms to prevent outbreaks and the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Additionally, MOHS supported the opening of the COVID-19 Lord Baltimore TRI Center isolation site to provide shelter and supportive services to COVID-positive individuals experiencing homelessness and others who were unable to safely self-isolate at home.

In partnership with the Baltimore City Health Department (BCHD), MOHS assessed all emergency shelters operating in Baltimore and implemented infection control and safety protocols for clients and staff. MOHS also allocated funding from the Emergency Solutions Grant-CV CARES Act funding to provide personal protective equipment and other COVID response measures to shelter programs across the City.

As MOHS has seen a notable increase in demand for shelter and other support services during the pandemic, the agency added new staff members to the Outreach and Emergency Services team to meet the need. This additional staffing allowed the agency to launch the Coordinated Entry Call Center to improve coordination between shelter providers and create a single point of access for service seekers in need of shelter across the City.

Outreach services (initially suspended at the beginning of the pandemic as the team was redeployed to temporarily staff the new hotel sites) were reinstated by June 2020. MOHS added an additional partner for street outreach, the Downtown Partnership of Baltimore, to ensure that all City Council districts receive adequate street outreach support. In alignment with CDC guidelines, MOHS has continued to provide service to encampments and has not closed any encampments during the pandemic; this allowed encampment residents to shelter-in-place and prevented spread of the COVID-19 virus throughout the community due to displacement. MOHS

has also partnered with the Franciscan Center to offer meal service to encampment residents and has partnered with Generosity Global to provide mobile shower and hygiene services to individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness. This expansion of services was both timely and much needed, with almost 22,000 services provided by outreach workers to residents from March 1, 2020 to March 1, 2021.

Once COVID-19 vaccines were developed, MOHS partnered with BCHD to ensure that individuals experiencing homelessness and living in permanent supportive housing programs had equal access to vaccines. To date, over 550 clients and staff members have been vaccinated at the City's shelter and hotel decompression sites. MOHS has also partnered to support the vaccine clinics being operated by Health Care for the Homeless, where over 1500 people have been fully vaccinated. In April, MOHS partnered with Health Care for the Homeless and Downtown Partnership of Baltimore to offer a mobile vaccination clinic for individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness with plans to offer additional mobile clinics in the near future.

Although the agency has been able to redesign programming to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, the financial aspect of responding to COVID has been challenging and the hotel shelter decompression sites represent a major financial commitment for the City. MOHS has been working with the Department of Finance to document and submit reimbursement requests to FEMA to support shelter operations. At this time, the City is expecting approximately \$35 million in FEMA reimbursements in the coming months, although these expenses are currently an unfunded fiscal liability.

### **Next Steps**

At this time, contracts for the hotel shelter decompression sites have been extended through September 30, 2021, In April 2021, the city issued a RFI to solicit information from hotel owners to explore adding more permanent non-congregate shelter and supportive housing to the portfolio of options.

The City of Baltimore will be receiving additional federal funding to support the ongoing COVID-19 response. Baltimore was awarded one-time grant of \$15.4 million in HOME funding which will be overseen by the U.S. Department of Housing and Community Development in partnership with MOHS and the Continuum of Care (Journey Home).

MOHS remains focused on providing stable permanent housing options to residents in need. From March 2020 to April 2021, MOHS has moved over 570 individuals into permanent housing options. MOHS is partnering with the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) to provide additional permanent housing to as many neighbors in need as possible. To this end, MOHS has received 160 Housing Choice Vouchers from HABC. The agency will receive an additional 278 housing vouchers through the American Rescue Plan to be issued by the end of October 2021.

MOHS will continue to offer Rapid Rehousing Program placements to clients who need temporary rental assistance to get back on their feet. To date, 137 rapid rehousing program matches have been made. MOHS recently reallocated an additional \$3 million in ESG-CV funding to expand rapid rehousing options, with additional units coming online in July 2021. The increased investment will allow the program to serve approximately 250 clients in total.

## **Conclusion**

The Mayor's Office of Homeless Services strongly supports the City's efforts to address the homelessness in Baltimore City, both preceding and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**The Mayor's Office of Homeless Services thanks the Economic and Community Development Committee for the opportunity to respond to Council Resolution 21-0028R and stands ready to answer any questions the committee may have.**

cc: Natasha Mehu  
Nina Themelis