The Way Home Campaign recommendations for the successful implementation of FY 22 PSH vouchers for the DC Housing Authority

February 23, 2022

Thanks to our collective advocacy, DC’s Fiscal Year 2022 budget included over 2,470 Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) vouchers: a historic investment that will help us reach our shared goal of ending chronic homelessness!

Now that the funding has been secured, we turn our focus towards ensuring those resources are implemented as intended and in a timely manner.

We have an ambitious goal before us. Implementing these vouchers - the most ever allocated in one fiscal year- will require significant shifts in operations and a renewed commitment to meeting the unique needs of our unhoused neighbors.

PSH voucher matches are behind schedule, but can still all be used by September 30

As of January 2022, DC had ended homelessness for just 100 individuals with Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH). While it was never realistic for all 2,400 vouchers to be used within the first 4 months of the Fiscal Year, this number is behind the pace we had hoped to have achieved by now.

This slower than anticipated rollout is a critical opportunity for the DC Council, the Department of Human Services, the DC Housing Authority, and housing providers to collectively address issues that may be delaying implementation and push for lasting solutions.

We must act with a sense of urgency

In December, the 2021 Annual Homeless Memorial Vigil, led by the People for Fairness Coalition, mourned 69 people who passed away in 2021 without housing, including 22 people who were matched to housing resources, but died before they moved into their homes. These deaths remind us that our collective work to end homelessness is urgent and that we must eliminate the red tape that stands between our unhoused neighbors and safe, stable housing.

The sooner this money is spent, the sooner our neighbors will exit homelessness.

Recommendations for the DC Housing Authority

These recommendations come from a broad group of DHS contracted PSH providers, outreach workers, advocates, and people with lived experience of homelessness.

- Speed up the housing process
  - Commit to accepting/denying voucher applications in two weeks or less. Current wait times and delays still pose a significant bottleneck and delay the housing process, sometimes by months.
  - Reduce or eliminate burdensome documentation requirements such as the need for birth certificates and income certification
    - We were pleased that DCHA recently voted to move towards allowing self-certification. The Council must make sure this is done on a permanent basis and
in accordance with Council wishes outlined in the Budget Support Act (Subtitle E, Section 20422)\(^1\).

- The Emergency Housing Vouchers funded by the Federal Governments COVID-19 relief package show that self-certification reduces the time it takes to utilize vouchers. DC must apply the same flexibility to all locally funded vouchers instead so that PSH clients can self-certify identity, income, disability, and birthdate wherever possible. Additionally, this will increase voucher access to people with criminal backgrounds and immigrants.

  - According to data released at the January 2022 Interagency Council on Homeless Executive Committee meeting, DCHA, due to the self-certification guidelines and the waiver of certain documents, took 19 days to complete EHV vouchers. In contrast, it took DCHA 126 days to complete a standard PSH application, a difference of 107 days. This shows not only that reducing barriers is possible, but that they result in a remarkable decrease in voucher processing times.

  - Ensure that housing inspections happen in a timely fashion

- Ensure DCHA is properly staffed to deliver client centered services to PSH clients and increase staffing transparency and accountability mechanisms
  - We applaud DCHA for creating a special division within their voucher staff to focus on LRSP. Additionally, we are pleased that DCHA appears to be in the process of creating a specialized team focused on PSH vouchers. These staff should undergo relevant training and have a thorough understanding of the PSH voucher process as well as experience working with people experiencing homelessness. We expect DCHA to act with urgency and ensure this team is fully staffed and trained as quickly as possible.
  - Several key positions vital to utilizing housing vouchers remain vacant at DCHA. This includes but is not limited to eligibility specialists, staff assistances, program analysis and recertification specialists. We implore DCHA to release an updated staffing plan, including the number of vacancies and their timeline for achieving full staffing.
  - Currently, Housing Case Managers remain unclear about who to contact at DCHA when their clients’ experience delays or other setbacks. As such, DCHA must reexamine and publish escalation and troubleshooting policies and ensure that clients and providers have consistent points of contact. This should be released with an updated organizational chart or relevant agencies and departments.

- Finish the creation of a portal to track vouchers throughout the leasing and relocation processes
  - To ensure that all parties involved in the housing process on the same page and have access to the relevant paperwork, DCHA must create and maintain a portal that is accessible by voucher recipients, landlords, and case managers that tracks the voucher process from when client is matched to a voucher to when they move into their unit. This must include paperwork, documentation, all landlord-related documents, and any other outstanding items. This portal should be updated weekly.
  - Create a clear plan for voucher relocations and recertifications with an expedited track for emergency relocations. This plan must include accountability mechanisms and staff escalation protocols.

\(^1\) [https://lims.dccouncil.us/downloads/LIMS/47312/Signed_Act/B24-0285-Signed_Act.pdf](https://lims.dccouncil.us/downloads/LIMS/47312/Signed_Act/B24-0285-Signed_Act.pdf) (Page 34)