

January 3, 2023

Governor Chris Sununu  
107 N Main St # 208  
Concord, NH 03301

Commissioner Lori Weaver  
Associate Commissioner Christine Santaniello  
NH Department of Health and Human Services  
129 Pleasant Street  
Concord, NH 03301

Dear Governor Sununu, Commissioner Weaver and Associate Commissioner Santaniello,

The State of New Hampshire's systems of care for individuals experiencing or at-risk of homelessness are not meeting the needs of communities across the state and are contributing to a statewide homelessness crisis.

Inadequate state services for individuals experiencing substance use disorder, mental illness, chronic health conditions, histories of trauma, and incarceration are all substantial factors contributing to homelessness in New Hampshire. The ongoing opioid epidemic is also exacerbating homelessness in the state. Recent data from American Medical Response (AMR) shows that 35% of individuals involved in suspected opioid overdoses in Manchester and Nashua were unhoused.<sup>1</sup>

Homelessness has come to the forefront in recent weeks because of several tragic incidents that occurred in Manchester, but homelessness is a statewide issue.

Over 4,500 New Hampshire residents will experience homelessness at some point this year<sup>2</sup>. Since the beginning of the pandemic, the number of individuals statewide who have experienced unsheltered homelessness has almost tripled, and in 2022, 95 unsheltered individuals tragically passed away.<sup>3</sup>

In November 2020, all 13 of New Hampshire's mayors wrote a letter to Governor Sununu stating that "homelessness is a crisis experienced by each of our communities that needs to be a top priority addressed at the state level." Two years have passed since this letter was received, and there has been no

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<sup>1</sup> Feely, Paul. "Number of fatal overdoses in Manchester, Nashua up 30% over last year". *Union Leader*. December 19, 2022.

[https://www.unionleader.com/news/human\\_interest/number-of-fatal-overdoses-in-manchester-nashua-up-30-over-last-year/article\\_93b62435-2a27-5d11-a82e-34b873d0794d.html](https://www.unionleader.com/news/human_interest/number-of-fatal-overdoses-in-manchester-nashua-up-30-over-last-year/article_93b62435-2a27-5d11-a82e-34b873d0794d.html)

<sup>2</sup> NH Coalition to End Homelessness (NHCEH). "The State of Homelessness in New Hampshire: Annual Report 2021". June 2, 2022.

[https://www.nhceh.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-NHCEH-Full-Report-6.2.2022\\_compressed.pdf](https://www.nhceh.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-NHCEH-Full-Report-6.2.2022_compressed.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Schinella, Tony. "Homeless Memorial Day vigils held in New Hampshire Wednesday". *Patch*. December 21, 2022. <https://patch.com/new-hampshire/concord-nh/homeless-memorial-day-vigils-held-new-hampshire-wednesday>

improvement in collaboration with local communities in addressing homelessness in New Hampshire.<sup>4</sup> Just last month, Governor Sununu declined a meeting with New Hampshire's mayors to discuss the impacts of the end of the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), which ran the risk of sending hundreds of low-income Granite Staters into homelessness.

Evidence shows the best way to address homelessness is through the 'Housing First' model that prioritizes providing individuals experiencing homelessness with permanent, supportive housing, regardless of their sobriety, mental health or other factors that contribute to housing insecurity.<sup>5</sup> Everyone needs safe and stable housing, and New Hampshire communities are unable to provide adequate support without active assistance from the State.

The InvestNH program, which requires developers to make units affordable for those at 80% of AMI, and only requires affordability for five years<sup>6</sup> is a start. However, the State must also invest in permanent supportive housing that incorporates treatment for trauma, mental illness, and substance use disorder.

Building more affordable, and supportive housing is a long term solution, but with winter upon us, the State of New Hampshire's housing and homelessness crisis is reaching a tipping point. State government and local communities need to collectively work towards sustainable, evidence-based solutions that not only address our ongoing housing shortage, but also meet the immediate and dire needs of New Hampshire's unsheltered population. The only way to save the lives of some of the most vulnerable New Hampshire residents is through collaboration, transparency, and accountability.

We respectfully ask that the New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services work with the Governor's Office for Emergency Relief and Recovery to recommend the allocation of necessary federal funding to address these critical needs across the state and save lives this winter. With these life saving funds, the State would support the following critical needs:

- 1) A statewide increase in emergency shelter beds:** The current funding for emergency shelter is not enough to meet the needs of New Hampshire's unhoused residents. While the State of New Hampshire recently supplemented existing contracts with emergency shelter providers, this additional funding did not include a requirement to increase shelter capacity. Prior to this additional allocation, shelters were receiving less than \$8 per day, per person to provide services

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<sup>4</sup> Becksted, Rick, George Hansel, Jim Bouley, Dana Hilliard, Bob Carrier, Andrew Hosmer, Joyce Craig, Charlene Lovett, Jim Donchess, Tim McNamara, Paul Grenier, Caroline McCarley, and Tony Giunta. "Letter: NH mayors ask Gov. Sununu for statewide response to homelessness". *Seacoast Online*. November 5, 2020. <https://www.seacoastonline.com/story/opinion/letters/2020/11/05/letter-nh-mayors-ask-governor-statewide-response-homelessness/6178333002/>

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. "Housing First in Permanent Supportive Housing Brief". Accessed December 28, 2022. <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/Housing-First-Permanent-Supportive-Housing-Brief.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Caswell, Taylor. "Agenda packet for 11/02/2022 Governor and Executive Council meeting". *New Hampshire Department of Business and Economic Affairs*. Pages 1-3. October 24, 2022. <https://www.sos.nh.gov/sites/g/files/ehbemt561/files/inline-documents/sonh/39a-gc-agenda-110222.pdf>

when the actual cost is nearly \$45 per day<sup>7</sup>. The supplemental funding was needed to keep shelters open through the winter, but with the statewide increase in people experiencing unsheltered homelessness, more beds are needed immediately.

Currently, individuals experiencing homelessness are encouraged to call 211 to access available sheltering, but shelters across the state are consistently at or near capacity. This winter, unless the State increases the number of emergency shelter beds, individuals will be forced to live outside and risk death.

Governor Sununu noted at the Executive Council meeting on December 21, 2022 that “a lot of service providers are nonprofits, and even though they are funded, they struggle to find qualified paid staff and volunteers, which keeps them from increasing capacity.”<sup>8</sup> In states like Rhode Island<sup>9</sup>, Colorado<sup>10</sup>, and even here in New Hampshire,<sup>11</sup> the New Hampshire National Guard has been requested to assist in staffing additional shelters to prevent loss of life and keep individuals safe. Demand for shelter beds has reached a point that we can no longer only rely on nonprofit partners to meet the basic needs of New Hampshire residents. The power to call up the New Hampshire National Guard lies with the Governor, and I’m asking, in absence of another solution, that you consider this option to adequately staff winter surge shelters.

- 2) **Additional shelter for women:** The Families in Transition Emergency Shelter in Manchester has 38 beds for women, and has been at capacity since December 9th, 2022, and on several occasions has turned away women seeking shelter services. Increasing the emergency shelter capacity for women is a dire need that must be acted upon quickly in order to save lives this winter.

**To help meet this need, the City of Manchester is requesting the temporary use of the State-owned Tirrell House located at 15 Brook Street in Manchester.** Following the closure of the Families in Transition Men’s Transitional Living Program on November 4, 2022, this 14 bed facility remains heated and vacant. In an effort to collaborate on this shelter, the City of Manchester will work with nonprofit and faith-based partners and City staff to fund and provide wrap-around services and monitoring at this facility.

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<sup>7</sup> NH Coalition to End Homelessness (NHCEH). “The Personal and Financial Costs of Insufficient Housing: Case Studies of High Frequency Service Users in Manchester, NH”. *NHCEH*. September 2016.

<https://www.nhceh.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Frequent-Service-Utilizers-Issue-Brief.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> New Hampshire Governor & Executive Council. “Audio recording from NH Executive Council meeting held on 12/21/2022.” *New Hampshire Secretary of State, Governor & Executive Council Meetings*. Accessed December 28, 2022. <https://www.sos.nh.gov/administration/governor-executive-council/meetings>

<sup>9</sup> Providence Business News Staff. “Hearing over homeless encampment postponed; National Guard activated to set up warming station”. *Providence Business News*. December 14, 2022.

<https://pbn.com/hearing-over-homeless-encampment-postponed-mckee-retains-outside-counsel/>

<sup>10</sup> Colorado National Guard. “Colorado National Guard helps shelter homeless in Denver area”. Accessed December 28, 2022.

<https://www.nationalguard.mil/News/State-Partnership-Program/Article/2141765/colorado-national-guard-helps-shelter-homeless-in-denver-area/>

<sup>11</sup> Crompton, Jennifer. “Rochester warming center seen as model for providing range of services”. *WMUR*. January 10, 2018.

<https://www.wmur.com/article/rochester-warming-center-seen-as-model-for-providing-range-of-services/15054866>

- 3) **Provide medical respite care:** According to the National Healthcare for the Homeless Council, medical respite is “care for persons experiencing homelessness who are too ill or frail to recover from a physical illness or injury on the streets but are not ill enough to be in a hospital.” The State of New Hampshire is one of only twelve states in the country with zero medical respite beds.<sup>12</sup> While we have no way of knowing how many individuals were released from hospitals across the state into unsheltered homelessness, we do know that over the last six months, 67 individuals have been released from hospitals or psychiatric facilities into Manchester’s Families in Transition emergency shelter – 12% of their clients during this period.

When hospitals release patients into emergency shelters or onto the streets, they are not able to receive the care they need to recover, which results in significantly worse outcomes. Studies also show that medical respite actually saves money, and that “homeless patients who are discharged to a medical respite program experience 50 percent fewer hospital readmissions within 90 days of being discharged than patients who are discharged to their own care.”<sup>13</sup>

For over 40 years, the City of Manchester has worked with Catholic Medical Center to operate the only Health Care for the Homeless Program in the state and can offer expertise in facilitating the establishment of this life saving program across the state.

- 4) **Additional shelter and resources for homeless youth:** Stepping Stones in Nashua serves as a drop-in center for homeless youth, but is unable to offer the emergency shelter or transitional housing that is desperately needed for this underserved population. Funding to expand their services would provide homeless youth a safe place to sleep instead of in tents along the Nashua River.

Waypoint in Manchester currently operates the state’s only shelter for young adults, which was full just four nights after its opening in October of 2022.<sup>14</sup>

The immediate needs that we have outlined are by no means a comprehensive solution to ending homelessness in the State of New Hampshire, but they are critical pieces of what must be a statewide strategy to address homelessness.

The City of Manchester plans to partner with the National Alliance to End Homelessness to continue to identify opportunities to increase services and how to effectively use limited funds. The City of Nashua is working with the Nashua Soup Kitchen & Shelter to open the new Spring Street Shelter, expanding

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<sup>12</sup> National Institute for Medical Respite Care. “Medical Respite Care Directory”. *National Institute for Medical Respite Care*. Accessed December 30, 2022. <https://nimrc.org/medical-respite-directory/>

<sup>13</sup> Kertesz, Stephen G., Michael A. Posner, James J. O’Connell, Stacy Swain, Ashley N. Mullins, Michael Shwartz, and Arlene Sandra Ash. 2009. “Post-hospital medical respite care and hospital readmission of homeless persons.” *Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community*, 37(2): 129–142. DOI: 10.1080/10852350902735734

<sup>14</sup> Hayward, Mark. “Mark Hayward's City Matters: Six available beds, 28 homeless youth; who gets a good night's sleep?”. *Union Leader*. December 19, 2022. [https://www.unionleader.com/voices/city\\_matters/mark-haywards-city-matters-six-available-beds-28-homeless-youth-who-gets-a-good-nights/article\\_0a8ffc94-2c51-53ca-bbd5-5c0f4b850241.html](https://www.unionleader.com/voices/city_matters/mark-haywards-city-matters-six-available-beds-28-homeless-youth-who-gets-a-good-nights/article_0a8ffc94-2c51-53ca-bbd5-5c0f4b850241.html)

wrap-around services and adding 91 emergency beds. However, in order to properly understand how we can do better, we must first have transparent access to statewide information about funding and services.

Currently, very little information is compiled that provides communities or the public with up-to-date information about what nonprofits are receiving State funding and what services are being provided with that funding. This is something that the mayors of all 13 communities across the state requested in 2020 but have yet to receive.<sup>15</sup> As elected officials, we must be responsible stewards of tax dollars, which is impossible without transparency and accountability.

In addition to this information, we are also requesting the following be provided by the State:

- 1) **Statewide Emergency Operations Plan for winter surge:** There is no publicly available plan if all State-funded emergency shelters are full. It cannot be the sole responsibility of municipalities to manage this eventuality, and there must be a clear emergency operations plan.
- 2) **Shareable information about statewide warming stations:** For the first time this year, the State of New Hampshire provided funding for 10 county-based winter warming stations. However, there has not been a publicly released document outlining what entities were funded to provide winter emergency shelter, their hours of operation, and how individuals can access these services. This information must be made readily available so that individuals in need of assistance can access services in communities closest to their own.
- 3) **Provide information to municipalities on outcomes provided by Emergency Shelter Service Providers:** In the State of New Hampshire's contracts through the State Grant in Aid (SGIA) Home Assistance program, it is required that providers "are monitored for performance through reports available from the Homeless Management Information System, which include information regarding:
  - Length of time individuals remain homeless
  - The extent to which individuals who exit homelessness to permanent housing destinations return to homelessness
  - Successful exit to permanent housing destinations"<sup>16</sup>

The State of New Hampshire spends millions of taxpayer dollars on these services, and this information is critical for cities and towns to determine the success of State-funded programs. We request that this information at minimum be made available to municipalities, but believe that cities and towns should be included in discussions between the State and nonprofit entities

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<sup>15</sup> Becksted, Rick, George Hansel, Jim Bouley, Dana Hilliard, Bob Carrier, Andrew Hosmer, Joyce Craig, Charlene Lovett, Jim Donchess, Tim McNamara, Paul Grenier, Caroline McCarley, and Tony Giunta. "Letter: NH mayors ask Gov. Sununu for statewide response to homelessness". *Seacoast Online*. November 5, 2020. <https://www.seacoastonline.com/story/opinion/letters/2020/11/05/letter-nh-mayors-ask-governor-statewide-response-homelessness/6178333002/>

<sup>16</sup> Shibinette, Lori A. "Supplemental materials for 12/07/2022 Governor and Executive Council meeting". *State of New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Economic and Housing Stability*. Pages 1-6. November 15, 2022. <https://media.sos.nh.gov/govcouncil/2022/1207/20%20GC%20Agenda%20120722.pdf>

operating in a municipality to better coordinate services. In addition, municipalities should be receiving regular updates on outcomes for individuals that are placed at Certified Recovery Houses that are registered through the NH Coalition of Recovery Residences (NHCORR).

Municipal leaders are working to provide support to every Granite Stater experiencing homelessness in our cities, but the State and County governments need to share a common commitment to ending homelessness statewide. We must work together to strengthen collaboration, increase transparency, and improve accountability for the services provided.

Best,

Mayor Joyce Craig  
Manchester, NH

Mayor Jim Donchess  
Nashua, NH

Mayor Paul Grenier  
Berlin, NH

Mayor Dana Hilliard  
Somersworth, NH

Mayor Jo Brown  
Franklin, NH

Mayor Dale Girard  
Claremont, NH

Mayor Bob Carrier  
Dover, NH

Mayor Andrew Hosmer  
Laconia, NH