

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING AND COMMUNITY AFFAIRS

TEXAS STRATEGIC PLAN TO PREVENT AND
END HOMELESSNESS

PUBLIC HEARING

7:00 p.m.
Tuesday,
November 29, 2011

Legacy Room
Chase Oaks Church
Legacy Drive
Plano, Texas

BEFORE:

COLIN McGRATH, VISTA, Planner
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ON THE RECORD REPORTING
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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. MENDELSON: Good. Well, thank you. That is why I put reminder. I was just waiting for someone to say, did you call us the first time? So this is actually an official hearing. And Colin McGrath who is going to be leading it, just mentioned that we're one of only ten locations in Texas that got it. So this is our first entry into a public hearing of this nature. And I am sure it has nothing to do with it being Collin County and Colin doing it.

(Simultaneous discussion.)

MR. McGRATH: It has everything to do with it.

MS. MENDELSON: And at one point, I even said, maybe we will have it at Collin College. And it just got too freaky. So anyway, thank you [indiscernible] for hosting, Shannon especially, for setting it up. So because it is an official hearing, if you would like to make a comment, after he is going to do a little presentation about it, you actually have to come up to the microphone, you have to sign in, and everything you say will be recorded. So --

He gave me a present of two copies of the Plan and two copies of the Executive Summary. And I am keeping one. So whoever is nicest to me can have the other copy.

Sorry. Auction it off? -- that's right, for donations. Okay. So thanks for coming out. I don't know if you have actually read it. It is so interesting. And it is comprehensive. And so hopefully, you all have some interesting things to say after the presentation. And now we will let Colin take it away. Colin McGrath.

MR. McGRATH: Okay. Thank you. So I will stand up here for a second. So I am Colin McGrath. I am with the Texas Interagency Council for the Homeless. For anyone who is not familiar, we are a state-mandated council, that was created by legislation in 1989. The purpose for the Council is to coordinate state agency resources. There are eleven state agencies that sit on the Council. Each Agency appoints a member to sit on the Council and represent their Agency. And the Council is working to coordinate resources of those state agencies, and to make sure that they are using resources efficiently and effectively insofar as they concern homelessness in the State of Texas. The agencies that are on the Council include the Department of Housing and Community Affairs. That is the Department that I am most closely associated with. That is where my office is. The Department of Family and Protective Services, Texas Workforce Commission, State Health Services, Assistive and

Rehabilitative Services, Aging and Disability Services. The list goes on. Not to slight any agency that I do not name.

And we are the state version of a federal council called the United States Interagency Council. I am not sure if anyone is familiar with them. They released a plan in June 2010. It is the first ever federal strategic comp plan to prevent and end homelessness. And they are very much doing the same thing that we are now proposing to do in the State of Texas, which is coordinating state agencies, and making the agencies more responsive to local needs around Texas. That is very much the reason why we are here today. And why we have been traveling around Texas gathering input for communities. We were in Corpus Christi, San Antonio last week. And then today, Fort Worth, Dallas, and now here.

We can break this up into four sections. I think that might be effective, so that we can comment that focuses on different components of the plan. I will just go over a very brief rundown, with just a little bit of background.

One of the key issues that we are addressing with this plan is, this shift in HUD policies. The

Department of Housing and Urban Development has since 2000, increasingly emphasized that Continuum of Care, you know, focused more of their funds that they are awarded to the housing component of their programs.

So in 2000, 60 percent of COC funds were used for supportive services like case management, job training, et cetera; 40 percent for the housing component, like brick and mortar stuff, or vouchers. As of now, it is flip-flopped. And so 60 percent of those funds you know, in a ten-year period, are now allocated to the housing component of say, re-housing programs, 40 percent for supportive services.

HUD is even going more in the housing only direction, in the way that they incentivize COC funds with now 80 percent of their dollars, they are pushing for about 80 percent to go to housing with that means, 20 percent for supportive services. Making it very difficult for communities to you know, provide supportive services for people who are seeking permanent housing, for instance.

We think agencies like state health services, assistive and rehabilitative services and others have resources. The term is, mainstream resources that we can bring into this project. So if HUD alone can't provide

the supportive services, can we bring in services from other agencies to meet that need. So I will just go -- the plan is in four sections.

The first section is affordable housing and supportive services. The second, homelessness prevention. Fourth, data research and analysis. And the third. The fourth is state infrastructure, which focuses on communications among agencies as well as communication between federal, state and local government.

So as for affordable housing and supportive services, the goal is increasing housing options for homeless individuals and families who face multiple barriers to secure housing. The first objective is to identify individuals and families experiencing homelessness, and prioritize their housing stability.

Second, explore options for increasing the supply and availability of affordable and permanent supportive housing units, in Texas. And third, promote the strategic pairing of state agency, non-profit and private sector resources to increase supportive services linked with affordable housing units.

Now each of the objectives has a set of strategies that we have outlined in the plan, that are steps we plan to take, or would encourage agencies to take

to achieve each of the objectives. But in the interest of time and wanting to hear from you, I won't go into too much detail with each of those. So with that, I would invite people to speak to affordable housing and supportive services, unless people would like to hear more about the Plan as a whole before jumping into comment. But if anyone wants to speak to this issue right now, please do. Yes. And we hope that you can come up here and state your name so the reporter can get it.

MS. MENDELSON: So you are going to speak here; you're going to sign in. And I just wanted to mention [indiscernible] coffee outside if you like. I'll just mention our restrooms. They're just to your right, I think. Okay. I am sorry that I had not said that. Okay.

MS. NIEMOTKA: My name is Irene Niemotka, N-I-E-M-O-T-K-A. I am a mom of a child with intellectual disabilities. And we have known for a long time that housing was going to be an issue. And I thought that we would buy housing with two other couples, and then get services. And found that is almost non-existent. There is like 300 beds for 20,000 people in North Texas. So why I came here today was to ask, and I don't know what HUD, if you are with HUD, or if you are with an entire different organization --

MR. McGRATH: I am strictly with the Texas Interagency Council on Homelessness.

MS. NIEMOTKA: Okay.

MR. McGRATH: Though I am housed with the Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

MS. NIEMOTKA: Okay. We are having a very difficult time trying to picture what happens to children like my daughter, who cannot live on their own. Services are being cut dramatically. There is just no answer.

Providers are leaving because they cannot get housing cheap enough, where our kids, they are allowed to spend like 30 percent of whatever they get from SSI or SSDI, which could be \$200 a month and they are only allowed to have three, maybe four people to a home. That is the law right now.

And who wants to purchase a home where they will only get 6- to \$800 in rent? And there is very little left for all other services. So I have come just to let everybody know that there are so many families like myself.

We are aging. We are not going to be able to take care of our children forever. We are going to die. And we would like to know what is going to happen to them, and what kind of housing is available to them, or will be.

Because that, whatever is coming in, is going out pretty quickly. There is just -- the money is running out. And we just have to do something, whether it is with corporations, through family trusts, through a lot of things. And we need help. And that is why I am here.

MR. McGRATH: Okay. Can I ask, so is most of your son's support now, up to now coming from you?

MS. NIEMOTKA: I have a daughter.

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

MS. NIEMOTKA: Yes. Basically, yes. Recently, we have gotten an HCS, which is a fund, a state fund that provides services. So we get some funding from them, as long as my child lives with me.

But the answer isn't for my child to live with me. I want her to be independent and living on her own, so that she is prepared for the time when I am gone. My husband is older than I am. And so we have no siblings.

And that is what happens to a lot of people. You will find, especially in the age of corporate moving, there is very few family members that have a lot of people around them, in any given suburb or you know, city.

So we have actually started a company called Community for Permanent Supported Housing. And we are going to be going to Austin and really working Austin, and

trying to get as much help. You know, it is very big.

There are baby steps to trying to get these kids going. And I think they are going to be homeless. I think we are going to find a lot of homeless kids soon, because we are a generation that did not put our children into an institution. Institutions are closing.

But there is no real answer. They haven't said okay, there aren't any more institutions, or will not be, so we are going to have this ready for your kids. That hasn't happened.

So we have gentle children. And they will be children forever, that will not have an easy way of it. Okay. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. Anybody else on housing? Okay.

MS. MENDELSON: Cara Mendelsohn. So the two things that I want to comment on, on behalf of Collin County is, one, while I support permanent supportive housing very much, and I think it is a great idea, in our county, our need is really transitional housing.

And so that change in focus has taken away the control of COC dollars to allocate it to the services actually needed. So we had a counted increase of over 100 percent of homelessness in our county. But the services

that we need to expand are transitional, documented, that we know.

But the bonus pool for the COC didn't include transitional housing. So that sort of excluded our area from participating in a way that could have been very helpful. So I would love to see a little bit of opening of letting the communities decide what the needs are in their local area.

The second part is the shift in focus from the actual housing dollars versus the support services. Because we know, we just had a huge article here in town about the loss of services for mental health. And they are looking at locally, a million dollars a month being cut of mental health services. And people will be back on the street.

So I love the idea of partnerships. We have the Chair of the Health Care Coalition of Collin County here. And we do try to partner.

But the partnering agencies and non-profits are having the same funding issues. So again, being able to use those dollars in the way that would best suit the needs of our community with our own judgment on that would be appreciated.

MR. McGRATH: Can I ask you.

MS. MENDELSON: Sure.

MR. McGRATH: About transitional housing, and something that we keep hearing about especially a balance of state, is -- or the advisors that sit on the Council. And they have one of the largest percentages of domestic violence or violence victims in the state. And they have made it very clear that our need is transitional housing.

MS. MENDELSON: Right.

MR. McGRATH: There are communities that may be clear to them that they need transitional housing. And I am wondering, is that for the same purpose. So you know, we will be here for them advisory, transitional housing is the key asset here. We don't need permanent supportive housing.

MS. MENDELSON: Yesterday, our local domestic violence shelter, Hope's Door was speaking to me directly about that. Even possibly setting up a task force to deal with lobbying for transitional funds. We are at capacity, they send people down to Genesis quite often, Family Place as well. So they are in need of the transitional dollars for DV. But it is not just domestic violence. And so locally, we have a program called the Samaritan Inn. And there is weeks they turn away over 100 people, with about a third of them is children. Some weeks, it is just 20 or

so. That would be this week. But that is every week. And that is a transitional program. And locally, I believe it is 45 percent of our people were newly homeless, and about 45 percent of them have a job. So they are not the chronic homeless that are going to need a lot of services. They need to get back on their feet. And it is taking 18 months to two years to do that. And that is what homelessness looks like here.

MR. McGRATH: So there is a very small chronically homeless population.

MS. MENDELSON: We documented seven people for the last two years.

MR. McGRATH: Okay. So very low. So most cases in Plano or Collin County are short-term.

MS. MENDELSON: It is short-term. It is single moms and kids. It is families. Somebody lost a job. They were the single breadwinner.

MR. McGRATH: Yes.

MS. MENDELSON: People already living on the edge.

VOICE: And we have a growing population of youth.

MS. MENDELSON: And we have a growing population of youth, and we have a growing population,

period. And we have a growing homeless population.

MR. McGRATH: I am wondering if you or anyone else would want to speak to the increase. You mentioned 100 percent increase.

MS. MENDELSON: 106 percent of counted increase.

MR. McGRATH: And from what years?

MS. MENDELSON: Just in this last one year.

MR. McGRATH: In the last year. Do you know why? Does anyone know why?

MS. MENDELSON: Yes. I know why.

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

MS. MENDELSON: Because we looked harder.

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

MS. MENDELSON: But here, I am being recorded, I am going to tell you. I am going to go on the record as saying, ladies and gentlemen we will have another 100 percent increase this year.

MR. McGRATH: Because you are going to look even harder.

MS. MENDELSON: Yes.

(Simultaneous discussion.)

MS. MENDELSON: And later at night. Yes. Terry is going 100 for 200. Who has got 300? Come on,

come on. No. Yes. We have got a lot of people.

It looks really different than Dallas. It looks really different than Tarrant County. But when you are homeless, it doesn't matter what it looks like.

And you know, pretty good showing. We beat Corpus. And that is a bigger population than us. So we are all pretty new to this. You know, there is some people that have been doing it a while.

But some people that see it every single day, that work it, that are here. But we need services, but not exactly the services that are in that Plan. So a little more local control. Sort of a famous political thing to say these days here. But it is legit. We need that.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. Anybody else on housing and supportive services? Yes.

MS. LANGTEAM: I am Marge Langteam with the Health Care Committee of Collin County. And we have also been working within the community to assess needs, homelessness. Just the lack of available housing is a situation that we have been dealing with.

One of the areas that we focused on has been the number of number of mentally ill in the jail system. Over 51 percent of the people that reside in the jails

have mental illness. And we have no system to be able to transfer them into permanent supportive housing. We can't do jail diversion because we don't have the supportive services in place to put this together.

I think it is a great idea that the state is trying to integrate, and trying to combine funding across, because a lot of the issues go across the departments that the state has compartmentalized. And they don't talk to one another. So and a lot of times, they will deny you in certain areas, and say you belong over here. And they will deny and say you belong over here. And so it becomes very ineffective.

We also see a very -- lack of money trickling down the system. So even though there may be a lot of money up here, by the time it gets down to the users, it has all been eaten up by the bureaucratic engine that it is. So if you could find a way to cut down a lot of that engine, so that the actual money is available for services.

Because the first place you cut is at the bottom. And we have providers that are going out of business, because the cuts keep coming down the chain. And so if we are now going back and saying we need more supportive services, but we can't provide them at the

price that you are willing to reimburse, it is a moot point.

So those are some of the things that we have been seeing. And I hope that with this integrative approach, you might be able to spend money wiser, and enable the access, and provide more services to the people on the bottom.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MS. LANGTEAM: You are welcome.

MR. McGRATH: Actually, have you used any -- or received funding from any agencies of the state? Or are they from other sources.

MS. LANGTEAM: No. I have watched other -- we are a fairly new non-profit. We haven't really -- we don't have the history to be able to go in and apply for the grants.

We have not been in it for two years. But we have seen some non-profits get audited, you know, six times in one year. And they don't share that information. And at the state level. And you know, you just see a lot of this bureaucratic machinery going on.

And people not talking to one another, and just having things happen. Where it just, it appears that a lot of money is being eaten up through this system,

instead of going to the actual people in need and creating the programs that could actually do a lot more good for the end user. That is it.

MR. McGRATH: All right. Thank you.

MS. LANGTEAM: You are welcome.

MS. WILLIAMS: Just so intense that everybody has got to listen very closely. Bernistine Williams with Texas Communities Foundation, building better communities, one city at a time. What I heard thus far, for the Texas strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness, and your group being the Texas Interagency Council on Homelessness, am I correct?

Okay. One of the ways in which me and a group of other women, of course, women. We have over the years, talked about the various ways in which we could be a part of making communities better. And so I was very surprised that Texas was so adamant about you know, ending homelessness, and preventing and ending.

So what our shift was for the last -- we would say 17 or 18 years, just talking among women and children organizations, was that we end it through permanency. You get a family who has access to government money in the form of a voucher. And that is the first time that I shared, and I trust you all.

But you have women and children in Texas which is a predominance of people on the Section 8 program. So what we thought about doing was to recycle money. And you recycle money by making those households permanent for those children.

It is not so much for the women. But the women have to take care of the children. And number one, is one way that we can build equity and to recycle money, would put us in a position to be able to reach out and help more families.

Because if the federal government is going to funnel it down, instead of it going out as rent money, this money can be utilized more efficiently. And I understood what you were saying, that when it finally got down here, it was just so little to work with.

Well, we don't even have a middle man in this particular situation. It would come straight from Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, which does the funding for the Section 8 program.

Now we do talk about homelessness, in this particular case. You said where there is no roof. Well, we talk about homelessness where you can be kicked out at any time. Because people who rent, if you have a private property. And I am one of those people who rent.

So if the owner says that he is selling the house next month, well, me and my children are looking for another place to live. And right now, it is a renter's market. And I would dare not want to go look.

So I saw that in the executive summary. It said, for families and children, residential and stability and loss of housing hinder, that is supposed to be hinder childhood development. Children at home, as families struggle to keep up in school, because they have to move so much.

You know, they just move around all of the time. And so you have got to get reacquainted with teachers and peers, and on and on. So that was one of the ways in which we have thrown it out there.

I call them householders. Like Chase, and Bank of America. All of these people who have got these foreclosure properties, that we paid for, they are just holding these houses. And they, I have talked to someone today at Chase.

And I was asking them. You know, what kind of plan do you all have, for all of these empty houses? Do you have got them on your books. And we have got people out here who gets a set amount of money. And they would be willing to come into some type of non-traditional

mortgage agreement.

Because we see traditional mortgages don't work. So what are we going to do now, that we have got all of these great vacant houses, and we have got all of this great federal Section 8 money. And why not take that money and make it a permanent situation for families, where you don't have to move children around.

It is a better thing for a taxpayer. I am paying taxes. So therefore, I would rather see a family stabilized, than them moving all over the place. And when they get back to square one again, they are still in the same spot.

But we have spent maybe 50, 60 \$70,000 providing some type of temporary housing situation for them. When at that point, they could really have owned the house. And I am not saying that we would want to just take care of people and pay all of their mortgage and whatever. No, you don't look at it like that.

It is about stabilizing children with people's taxpayer money. I don't want my money used any kind of way. I am the type of person, someone needs to be accountable to me about my money. And I work hard.

So you know, if we are going to spend money, I mean, that is just one way to help bring something to the

light that I think a lot of people overlook. That we have all of these super big dollar vouchers out here, every day all day. And people get them. And some lose them. Some can't find housing.

But then they have to move so much. So it puts such strain on the families. And it puts a strain on the children. And then it says down here in your summary, it says helping Texans access housing will contribute to communities' health and vitality.

And that is one of the reasons why that permanency is so important, because if you want neighborhoods and communities to be stable, you need to have people there that is going to stay there and take pride in the neighborhood, and stay there, and build it up, and make sure that it stays in a good place. I mean, to where children can have a nice place to stay in.

Then it says that Texas can be a leading state in a nationwide effort to ensure that all persons have safe, decent, affordable housing positioning them to contribute. That is major. And to benefit from our great future. So when you make housing money for a permanency plan, where they don't move around, you eventually create taxpayers.

So that is our problem now. Our tax base has

shrunk so, and we are just scrambling for dollars. So this is just one of the things in which we, I know that there are homeless people who don't have a roof. And you know, I didn't really recognize that there were so many definitions of homeless.

So but the homeless I am talking about is mothers and children. Because that is the predominance of women and children on the Section 8 program. They are homeless. They are homeless. And at any given time, they will have to move.

And so that leaves that child in a position where okay, here we go again. And then we are going to lead that child into a juvenile delinquency mode. We are going to lead them into another mode where they are not learning.

And you know, we have got the math and science issue in Texas, where our children need to be permanent. They need to stay somewhere, where they are going to perform. And then they can help take care of me. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MS. PATTEN: I'll be real quick, I promise. My name is Jennifer Patten. And I am actually the director of an emergency shelter in Plano called City House.

And I am actually just piggybacking off of what Cara said. Our biggest, obviously, our population is youth. And we need transitional housing for ages 16 and 17, predominantly. And a larger number of housing for 18 and up.

We see a lot of kids that are being kicked out of their home premature. Parents are losing their home. Parents are addicted to drugs. Parents are becoming homeless, and they are too -- they are very busy trying to find housing and stability in their own lives, that their children kind of get lost in the shuffle.

The children end up sleeping in park benches, at the schools, on friend's couches and things like that.

And we can provide them with an emergency-based shelter, but it is only for a couple of weeks.

And they need that transition so they can stay stable in school, so they can not have to worry about where their next meal is coming from. Where their jacket is going to come from when it turns 30 degrees. Where their roof is going to come from.

So they can focus on, like you were saying their education and schooling. So they are not running into the problem of homelessness five or ten years down the road. Almost our entire population of 18-to-21-year-

olds who are in our young adult transitional home, have been homeless or have experienced homelessness several times throughout their young adult life or throughout their adolescence, due to various situation.

A lot of almost, I would say, probably three-fourths of the population that come out of CPS care are not prepared to come into the world, and they end up to be homeless, based on the circumstances that they are given.

They need better preparation when they are exiting CPS, so that they don't run into the program of homelessness. So they know where to turn to.

And that sort of thing. So and I just have a personal question, because I have never done this before.

And this is kind of a crazy question. I love that we can come up here and speak. And I think that is fantastic. What are you planning on doing with the information that you are getting?

MR. McGRATH: This is all going back to the Council. So I am going to take everything that I've been hearing from -- in cities. I'm going to pull it all together, and report back to everyone. The Council is going to meet in January 16 or 18. We haven't picked the day.

But tell them what we have heard. What

criticism, what support we have gotten. What ideas emerged from this discussion. And incorporate it into a revision of this Plan, before we present it to agencies, the Governor's Office.

MS. PATTEN: I have got you.

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

MS. PATTEN: Well, kind of on top of what Cara said, we need more local and state funding. Our entire program is funded off of a federal grant. And there is one in Collin County and one in Dallas County and one in Tarrant County. And if you added the three largest counties in North Texas, we can serve at a total of ten to 15 homeless youth at one time. And that is it. And we are the three largest counties in North Texas. And that is just based on a federal grant. But if we had some more state and local money, it would be much better. We could offer a larger plan. We could create transitional programs. There is not a single transitional program in North Texas for 16- and 17-year-olds.

MR. McGRATH: What is the federal program, by the way?

MS. PATTEN: It is called the -- it is through the Health and Human Services Department.

MR. McGRATH: Okay.

MS. PATTEN: It is called the RHY Program for Runaway and Homeless Youth, basic grant.

MR. NICHOLS: My name is Doug Nichols. I am a Plano resident. And I just want to publicly say thank you so much for coming to Plano, Texas, or coming to Collin County.

As I saw in the literature, we are the only suburb that you are going to go to, in your trek across the State of Texas. And I think it is really a crime for you to focus on the cities and not the suburbs. I think the suburbs have a significant problem that is new to this generation.

I believe that if I look at what is in writing, if I am homeless in Plano, I have to go down, as a male, I have to go down to Dallas to find shelter. Away from my roots. Away from my friends. Away from all of the people that I associate with.

The program that I work with in providing beds and furniture to people coming out of homelessness, I am having to provide Plano residents furniture, because they cannot find affordable housing here in Collin County. They can find it in Dallas. They can find it in other surrounding areas. But we can't find affordable housing here in Collin County.

So I think, the bottom line is, I think one of the things that I would like to see your agency do is query more rural communities, and suburbs of large metropolitan areas, because they have specific needs and unique needs. We are the only city in Collin County that has public transportation for instance.

So to get somebody out of homelessness in northern Collin County, it is next to impossible. Because they can't keep a job. Because if they lose their transportation, if they lose their home, then they have no way to regain their foothold.

So that is a significant problem for a growing population of homeless people. That is all I have to say.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. And I would comment that suburban homelessness is definitely on the rise. HUD has been identifying that recently in their annual homelessness assessment report. The HIMS data, it is like the longitudinal data that all recipients of HUD funds are using.

And their HIMS systems are showing more homelessness in suburban areas. And recently, the Brookings Institution, I think this is about four months ago, had a report on geography of poverty in the United States. And they are seeing a huge rise just in poverty

itself in suburban areas of the United States.

It is becoming much more suburban and a little less urban. And I think it is pretty clear that homelessness is an issue that is very closely linked with poverty as a whole. So yes. Important to be in a suburban area. Anyone else on housing? You can jump in. Yes?

MS. PATTEN: At this time I don't have anything to do with you all.

MR. McGRATH: Can you just state your name, just to make sure that --

MS. PATTEN: Yes. Jennifer Patten. I am going to piggyback on his transportation. I don't know if this has anything to do with you all, or it has to do with somebody else. That is a huge issue.

Where you are standing at this exact moment, there is not a bus. There is not a DART. And if you are homeless right here, you have at least a two-hour walk to get to a bus station.

Plano is the only city. And it is not even all of Plano. It is only half of Plano that has DART transportation. And Collin County has I mean, correct me if I am wrong, like 20-plus little cities inside of it.

And for the fact that only half of one of the

larger cities has transportation, the biggest problem is, not just funding, but regulations. The City is not allowing for certain restrictions, and things like that, to allow the transportation to be laid down.

McKinney, which is where our adult homeless shelter is, there is not a single public transportation option anywhere in that entire city. And they are two cities north of us. So that is what I have to say. I don't know if that deals with you. If it is does, work on it, please.

(Simultaneous discussion.)

MR. McGRATH: That is enlightening to hear too, because among the agencies that sit on our Council, Department of Transportation is not a member. So that is good to hear. Yes?

MS. HOCKENBROUGH: My name is Terry Hockenbrough. And I am the Secretary of the Collin County Homeless Coalition. I also represent a higher education institution. And I want to say something about homeless youth.

A lot of homeless youth have been given a bad rap. In that, they are homeless because they are on drugs, or they are bad kids. The greater majority of homeless youth are running from abusive situations. And

that is just the bottom line.

And if I could piggyback on what you said, they want to go to school. They may be living on a couch at their best friend's house. But they don't have a way to get to school. They want to hold down a job and some of them may have a job. But they don't have a way to get to the job and back.

And there is absolutely nothing for them. No type of transitional shelter in Collin County at all. And to say that the only way that they could be safe is to send them down to Dallas. That is not going to work.

So we really want to step up and take care of our own. But we do need the funding help. But we are a different county than Dallas. Our demographics are different. The documentation from the homeless count last year, and the year before are proving that.

And so I think to look at this as a balanced approach, it cannot be all of one thing and nothing of anything else. But it has got to be a balanced approach.

According to that personality of the homeless in that county, because we are not Dallas County.

And Dallas County, I would be safe to say that the majority of homeless at The Bridge and a lot of the homeless shelters, do suffer from different types of

illnesses that they do need services for. But up in here, it is very low. Most of them are young families, one parent, single parent families with young children.

And I may correct you, Madam Chair, if I may. But it is not one third of the children. It is almost half of the homeless in Collin County are children. And those are the ones that we can document. So there is a balanced need. But it needs to be at what the county and all of those agencies coming together in that county can identify, and being able to distribute the funds that way.

But to say all goes into permanent housing, that might solve the problem for ten minutes. But then you still have the other problems of people losing their jobs, or students running away from abusive situations. That is not going to solve that problem. It is not going to solve the need for transitional housing.

So I think it is really important to respect the area, where the problem is. And let the people who are serving in that area decide best how to use the money. But yes, we need federal, state and local dollars.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MS. CUNNINGHAM: My name is Amanda Cunningham. And I don't know any of you here. But I actually was a homeless teen. And I just wanted to reiterate that

transitional housing was the way to go.

Maybe looking at other states, and seeing what works for them, what has worked for them. And then we can copycat that. I am from Portland, Oregon. They have great transitional housing programs.

I wanted to go to school. They had great transportation. I was able to go to school. If it wasn't for that transitional housing, I would probably still be homeless.

The supportive services are a must. You are dealing with teenagers that are rebellious. They are going through their teenage years. And so if you don't have supportive services, you are just going to have someone come up there and say, hey, I know you are homeless. Let me try to help you.

But I mean, someone is not just going to walk up to someone that is homeless, because they do have that bad stigma. They have, they are on drugs. They ran away.

Whatever it may be. But I came from an abusive household.

And in Collin County, I am amazed. I come from a small city, smaller than Fort Worth. And all of the transitional housing, and opportunities that are available there, that aren't available here.

And it is really sad. I mean, it is embarrassing. From being one of what, the third largest state in the United States. So I just wanted to put my two cents in there.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you so much. I have one or two, while we are on this subject. If anyone is familiar with the local school district and how they have handled or responded to homelessness among children.

MS. BROWN: Sure. James wants to get up here. And I will let you in just a second. But I will speak to that, too. I am Stacy Brown with the City of Frisco. And I am their housing and grants administrator. And I have been in the homeless business for a very long time, and ever since you started the first ten-year plans.

So first, I would like to talk about actually having teenagers come into City Hall and say, my parents are going to kick me out in a couple of months, what are you going to do for me. And us standing there with our jaws on the floor, saying I don't know.

That happened to me last spring. And right away, I called the school district. And they were very supportive. And I said, can you come to a meeting.

So Sylvia Henderson with Frisco ISD came to that meeting. And walking down the hall to my office was

one of the staff members of the Samaritan Inn, the homeless shelter. He was actually giving me a report for some money I was giving him. But anyway, I said, okay. You have to stay for this meeting, because we have a young adult who needs help.

So we started forming our own Council. And we really started getting a lot more members. And it has become the Frisco Youth Initiative. And it is helping homeless unaccompanied youth thrive.

That is our mission. Now, we have had a lot of discussions on how we are going to do that. And we have gone all over the place. But what we settled on for now is that we are going to bring cases of homeless students to the round table of providers, churches, organizations, the city and the school district.

Our own little COC, just for unaccompanied youth, trying to provide services for each case. And I think we are doing a great job. We have made a lot of connections. We have helped a lot of people.

But there is a lot of people we can't help. We had an 18-year-old and a 19-year-old living in a tent behind a Walmart. And the 18-year-old was working in the Walmart. And he would clean up every day in there.

And his girlfriend was pregnant. So we had

residents calling us, what are you going to do about those kids? I don't know. They were a part of Frisco that has no rental housing at all.

All single family homes. All gated communities. There is no place for this person to live. No place at all, and to be able to get to work. So that is why he just pitched a tent. It seemed like a good idea at the time.

But we are seeing so much more of unaccompanied youth that are on their own for whatever reason. They are on their own. And they do not have the maturity to make some decisions.

A young man that came into our office said, I think what I really just need is a washer and a dryer. He wasn't thinking of housing. He wasn't thinking of transportation. He wasn't thinking.

But in his head, he thought, if I only had clean clothes, people might not know I was homeless. So we had to talk to him. No, that is not what you need. You need some basics first.

So, I guess, I will just say that we need some support from you all whether it be from all of the interagency money to come to one place, in an area so that we can, sort of like the COCs. But I mean, you guys don't

all give your money to COCs.

If all of the agencies that you represent give their money to the COCs and said, okay. This is broad range. Do what you need to do with it. Just take care of these people, COCs just really get money from one source. And that is not enough.

Continuum of care is more than just a COC. It is the businesses. It is the health care. And we just don't have that right now. We cannot do it on our own. Can we? No.

We need the help of all of the agencies to be able to provide the services and to give you what you want to provide success for the homeless people in our area. So we just -- we really need your support. And your help in helping us to try to deal with our people.

Because I know it is a lot different when you don't have somebody walking into your office. Can you imagine being a 17-year-old and coming into an office of strangers, saying I need your help? That is hard for a lot of adults to do, let alone a 17-year-old. So that is all I have to say right now. But I have more to say.

MR. McGRATH: All right. Thank you. Do you have anything I could use to keep time? I don't have a --

MS. MENDELSON: You can point at me and I will

say it is up.

MR. RODENBAUGH: My name is Gary Rodenbaugh. I am with a group called Family Promise of Collin County, which is new to this area. We opened in July. There is -- it is also part of Interfaith Hospitality Network.

There is 170 networks working across the country today. There is actually 13 here in Texas. And it is a collaboration of faith communities and churches that house homeless families. And each network will house three to five families.

And although we are new here, we have been at capacity since we opened. And the biggest issues we are finding is transitional housing and so forth, to get people back in. They have got jobs. A lot of them have jobs when they come to us.

The Samaritan Inn does a wonderful job. It is just as they have said. The numbers have been 100 to 150 a week that they are turning away. This week, I was stunned by the numbers. It was below 50. But most of the time it has been 50 kids a week.

But we need help with transportation. Because we don't have transportation here to get them to and from jobs. We need help with the transitional housing. Most of them are eager. They want to get back into housing.

They want to be self-sufficient.

But to put them back into an apartment and so forth is just deadly to start with and so forth. Because they don't have the sustenance to stay within. We need to work with all of the agencies that are here to help that.

But the transitional housing will let them get build up those nest eggs. Build up those securities and so forth, so they can get back into permanent housing. We have got lots of housing around here. It is just not affordable. Especially for somebody starting out.

So it is a twofold component. We need the permanent housing. But we also need the transitional to get over that hump. Like I said, this is something that we are trying to work the collaborative efforts.

This is something that is done, not through state funding. It is done primarily through volunteers. And it is a wonderful way for the community to collaborate together. So we do need some help on the funding side. So thanks.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. I am just going to jump into the -- I spent a lot of time on the first part.

Next section of the plan is homelessness prevention. Where the goal established here is to develop a statewide

response mechanism. That identifies at risk individuals and families and prevents them from becoming homeless.

The first objective is refine and promote a definition of at risk of homelessness that fits Texas. Second, increase awareness of opportunities for preventing homelessness among state agencies. Third, increase the coordination of state agencies' services to enhance the State's preventive capacity.

And fourth, increase the capacity of State institutions to prevent instances of homelessness and shelter use upon discharge from facilities. And that last one, I know we have already touched on a bit with mentions of CPS and local jails. But any comments on this portion, homelessness prevention? Yes.

MS. MENDELSON: So in keeping, I am sorry. Cara Mendelsohn. In keeping with the philosophy of collaboration, what I felt was missing from the Plan was an identification of our food pantries as our first step in helping to prevent homelessness.

Because so many, at least in our community, that is the first place they are going to go. And so whether it is through the data. You are getting people in a system that could help you identify them. And make sure that they find out about all of the other services

available.

They may be going there because they are so close to being foreclosed. But oh my goodness, did you know that there was assistance. They may be so close to having all of their utilities turned off. But did you know there was assistance.

And a lot of times, they don't know until it is too late. So to me, that is a portal that I would love to see this plan address somehow. And you can figure it out.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. Yes.

MS. PATTEN: CPS is on your Board, right? They are on your Board?

MR. McGRATH: Yes, they are.

MS. PATTEN: Okay. I am going to talk. Jennifer Patten. The biggest thing that we see, because we also serve children in CPS care is the aging out of CPS care. It is terrible, in my personal opinion.

When a child turns 15, they can have a pre-circle of support. And then they only get one more. They have three years of bouncing around from foster home to foster home. Every child needs to have an advocate. Every single child, not just because they had a worse case than the other child.

Just because my parents only did marijuana, and

this child had a death in their family doesn't mean I don't deserve an advocate to stay with me from the moment that I come into care until I leave. The fact that these CPS workers only see their children once a month means that their foster homes are providing the most care for this child.

And then they are bouncing around from place to place. They don't have a consistent person looking into them. We see more attorneys, advocates, and CPS workers coming out to see new removals than we ever do for children who have been in CPS care for a number of years.

We have numerous individual teens that are at our emergency shelter, who have not seen their CPS worker for months. And they just see, an ACU worker. And I understand that that is probably the easiest thing to do if their worker is five hours away. But they need to have somebody there fighting for them, and somebody there talking them through things.

And having one circle of support with everybody within your family, or everybody within your support system. Only once during a three-year period is crazy. Because if you think about a child who is not in CPS care, how many times you sit and have a "Come to Jesus" meeting

with them, it is not once in three years. And I see tons of kids that don't even have circle of supports.

I see tons of kids that don't even understand what they are supposed to do when they turn 18. And that is why your children returning to care has increased as much as it has. And they can't come back, because there is nowhere to place them.

MR. McGRATH: Thanks.

(Simultaneous discussion.)

MR. McGRATH: And you know, what you said really resonates. Especially with, we had a young gentleman in Dallas come up and talk, who had been in CPS care. And had subsequently become homeless for essentially the same exact reasons that you are talking about.

MS. BROWN: Stacy Brown. I just want to talk a little bit about that. And how we can maybe get referrals from state agencies, from CPS, from the jails. Referrals, straight from those agencies to the COCs. An actual true, concrete partnership where we are actually helping somebody and not talking about it. And that is going to take a lot of collaboration.

But if we do that, then you all will know that they have plan when they leave the institution. And then

we will know that we have that person in our community that we need to help. And that is when our circles of support --

MS. MENDELSON: Mention --

MS. BROWN: NISD. Definitely.

MS. MENDELSON: And they strip away the regulations that say we can't do that, because of the Privacy Act. When he is the one who knows that there will get -- I am sorry.

MS. BROWN: That is okay. That is good. I just think there should be absolute and transparent collaboration between the state agencies and the COCs. We need to know who is homeless in our community, so that we can help them. And if you all know, but you let them go, and they are just out there, and they just happen to come to us at some point, we don't even know what we need to be doing.

We don't know how many kids come to our county in a year that don't have a place to live, do we? No. We don't know that. But I bet you CPS knows how many people they let go in Collin County. We don't know that.

So you know, I just really think that if we could work together with our COCs and our COCs need money as an entity to do the work. Everybody is a volunteer in

our COCs here. And we have our normal jobs, and this, and everything else.

But we need to actually have staff to be able to do this properly, and to help people. All right. Okay. COCs.

MR. McGRATH: That speaks very strongly to what we are pushing for with infrastructure, which I touched on very briefly. Increasing that communication between agencies and COCs, and local providers.

And I would just mention that in communication with Texas Youth Commission, something as simple as just talking with administrators and saying, hey, by the way, how do you guys define youth homelessness. And they realize, wait a second. We don't. And we are not identifying when youths are entering from homeless situations into juvenile correctional facilities, for instance. It is huge.

So now they are going to look into coming up with a definition, and looking into how they can respond to youth who have histories of homelessness upon entry. Which is a very strong indicator that they are going to end up homeless upon release from correctional facilities.

So using that kind of information to refer youth back to COCs or to inform COCs what their caseload is looking

like --

MS. BROWN: Definitely. That would be so great.

MR. McGRATH: Yes.

MS. BROWN: Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MS. MENDELSON: Hi. Cara Mendelson. So something you said was just a red flag. They are going to come up with a definition of homelessness. My goodness. We have too many of them. Can they pick an existing one?

MR. McGRATH: No. Right. And that is exactly what we would encourage.

MS. MENDELSON: Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Absolutely. I shouldn't have been so lax with my choice of words.

MR. THOMAS: James Thomas. I am with the local school district here in Plano. And my story is limited. Most of you see me when you attend these affairs, because I am interested in homelessness. I said the other night, and I did my CBS thing. And for those of you who had an opportunity to see the CBS thing regarding the children in Florida who are homeless brought tears to my eyes. But these are the stories I get every day. And I find myself often begging and asking for help. I had a meeting today

at the school district to talk about Doug and the wonderful thing Doug is doing with the Bed Start. I talked about City House and Family Promise and all of the organizations and God help me, my churches have been absolutely wonderful. But we need transitional housing. We most certainly do. And as far as identification, and that is my difficult point. I don't know to what degree anyone can help with that, but identifying my homeless families. PISD doesn't know my numbers right now. But today, I looked at 2009. I think I ended up with a total of 144 homeless students in 2009.

Beginning of November, I had a little over 164, at the beginning of November this year. And most of you are completely aware of the fact that it is generally four to five times the identified numbers. So are the costs. No one is in a big hurry to say that I am homeless. Parents are fearful of CPS intervening, or someone taking their kids, or INS. Or various factions imposing their will on the family. So they are reluctant about identifying themselves. And most of us just aren't proud of being homeless. So it is difficult, number one, to identify.

Number two and most importantly in my concern is finding a place for my kids. I have the stories. I

hear the stories redundantly. I close my doors in my office at work, because I have the individual stories with mom being evicted last week, and seeing things right before Thanksgiving, all of the furniture out on the lawn.

And this happens often. And I will say call Samaritan Inn. Samaritan Inn, it is a wonderful place. But they are at capacity.

And as a counselor told me today, well, we could do CPS. But we don't -- we certainly do City House.

But we don't -- you can't break up the family. Because there are two or three kids. So consequently, I have families sleeping in cars and all.

But I looked at my numbers today. And I had, I think, 27 kids staying in hotels. I had 37 kids who had been part of various shelters. I had 26, I don't have a clue as to where they are sleeping, because they are in transition. They are sleeping in cars, they are sleeping in parks. People are grabbing them. And the remaining kids are doubled up in various spots --

But identifying those kids and finding shelter for them, it has been tough on me. Because all I do is beg. And I know most of you are already completely aware.

But I do want to thank all of you, and all of the agencies for helping me. Because it is a tough one. I

bit off more than I could chew. But I know that all of you love our kids, and the families. I do appreciate you. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you so much.

VOICE: What was the topic again?

MR. McGRATH: We are talking about homelessness prevention. But since all things are so interconnected, you can really touch on most anything you want.

MR. NICHOLS: Doug Nichols again. And on homelessness prevention, I would put my other hat on. I am a landlord in the City of Plano and Allen. Part of your initiative needs to be to provide more transparency. I am very embarrassed to be a landlord, to be quite honest with you, in today's age. There is no disclosure to potential tenants as to the legitimacy of the landlord. There is no full disclosure of the legitimacy of the tenant.

Many of the tenants that I accept have bad credit to begin with. That is why a lot of them are seeking transitional housing for the next year. But we need to provide more transparency and more education to the relationship between homeowner and renter.

The documents, or the percentages that were provided in your documents, regarding the 30 percent

associated with your gross income, going towards housing.

That needs to be well-documented. And people need to understand that going into home ownership or home occupancy or apartment occupancy. I don't think, especially the kids, I don't think high school kids understand that 30 percent of their salary, gross salary needs to be apportioned to housing. That is something that we need to educate our Texas population on. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. Yes. Okay. And as long as we still have space, I think we can --

MS. MENDELSON: We were supposed to end now. But do you want to say 8:30?

MR. McGRATH: Sure. Yes.

MS. WILLIAMS: Bernistine Williams. I wanted to kind of bring it all back to where we have the mothers running households. To me, that is just so abnormal.

And we have too many women running households. The predominance of children that are in the CPS system, since we are talking CPS and those are such hard numbers. But a predominance of those children come from single, female head of households that are poor.

And I don't generally talk about color. But since they are from Austin, it is safe. They are black.

So we just have this overwhelming problem.

I sit on Dallas County DISPRO, if anybody knows about disproportionality, which is maybe new in Texas. I am not sure. But it is basically founded by Casey Foundation.

They are trying to figure out the numbers. Why the number is so huge. Why we have so many black children in foster care? Why so many black children in the juvenile justice system? Because our percentages are so tiny as far as population.

So we have that big issue also. Where we have women running households. That is the bottom line. Poor women running households. It doesn't work. It is abnormal. And so therefore, we have all of these great big numbers, where everything is so out of control.

But what I wanted to make sure that we understood with DISPRO, even with Dallas County and Collin County, I do that in Collin County also. Is that I would just -- we need to prevent it. Like he mentioned that we need to prevent it.

And one of the ways in which I had talked about it over the last six or seven, eight years, because my children were taken from -- my grandchildren were taken from me. No, my grandchildren was taken from us.

Because we are community, we are family. Me and my daughters. We are a community. They took our children. There was a big fight, a physical fight with CPS, blah blah.

But we want to make sure that we can identify -- did you mention identify? We need to identify children that are at risk in the school district. And that is one of the things that we talk about in DISPRO.

And my thing is that, I mean, how dumb can you act when you have a free lunch program. All of those children are at risk. They are poor. So I am like, are we adults? Or are we just kind of hiding behind mom's skirt? Or you know, we can't figure this out.

I consider myself highly intelligent. It don't take Jesus to come slap me. We know how to identify children at risk. And that is one of the main things that it is trying to prevent these people from getting in these various precarious situations, homelessness.

I mean we are adults. We can figure this thing out. We know what we are doing. So I am not saying that we need to make the State do anything, or we need to make anybody do something. But they need to do something.

But we know how to handle it. One of the main things that we are pushing with Texas Communities

Foundation, and this might sound far-fetched to many, is make abandonment in Texas a crime. Men shouldn't be able to walk off and leave their families. So, thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MS. ORTEGA: My name is Christine Ortega. I work at a local church in Frisco, Texas. Preston Trail Community Church. And a few years ago, well, I moved from Southern California, which you know, self-proclaimed Los Angeles County is the homeless capital, they claim, of the world, or whatever it is.

You know, when I first moved here, I thought well, that is not an issue up here in the suburbs. And I just have to tell you, in working in the church that I have been in, in the community that I am in, it is obviously a very different look, like we have shared here, with suburbs.

But I think that the prevention is just such a key, because we have our schools. That was a first step that we took. We went to McKinney ISD. And we said, how can we help you? And you know, the homeless liaison there was obviously overwhelmed. And she overwhelmed us. And we walked away and had no idea how we could help this situation.

We went, and we continued to further like

pursue. What can we do? What can we do? Who is helping me? What is out there? We have these wonderful organizations that are really trying to keep their heads above water, honestly.

I mean, when I hear the numbers like you said, the reports constantly coming out of how many children and how many families are being turned away. I mean, it is staggering. And the people in this county are wealthy. And they are like, this exists? Where? I didn't know this happens.

So we need to hear this more, I think in our communities. We need to advocate more. As well as support our -- is that our COCs? I guess our providers, I call them. Support them. They need the funding. They can't keep going at this pace, this rapid growth.

We have people moving into this county, thinking that this is where they are going to prosper. And they are finding out that the jobs may not be available. The ABCs of Collin County, I am really bad with numbers. But I think it is about 50 percent. Or no, not 50 percent excuse me.

I think they said that you have to earn an average of like \$50,000 a year to live in this county, and keep your head, you know, and sustain yourself with basic

necessities. Well, everybody in this county is not earning that income.

And the families that are moving in here to prosper, and they are getting the job at Walmart, or they are struggling. They don't have the education, and things like that. They are just -- what is happening is, they are getting evicted.

They are going into our food pantries. And then what happens is, they come in when it is too late. And I know, working with our local food pantries, they all are seeing the same thing. We need to know before you get in trouble. Because we can't help you once it is too late.

Well, these families are waiting until it is too late. And so then they are against the wall. And they can't be helped. So I feel that to me, in my limited vision of what I see, is our schools are our key answer. Like we said, the free and reduced lunches. Those are where our numbers are.

Our homeless liaisons, they are the ones who know. They are the ones that will identify these families so that we can have this prevention that we are talking about.

And I haven't been able to read through your 72

pages. But I plan to. And I appreciate that you have us to speak in this forum. I appreciate it very much. Thank you.

MR. McGRATH: Absolutely. And I would say you know, for anyone who finds a moment to read through it, or read through parts of it, and you are inspired to provide comment after that, you can write me.

I have a card, or cards you can take. So you can email me with comments after the fact. How are we doing on time?

MS. MENDELSON: Well, 8:20.

MR. McGRATH: Okay. Real quick, just to mention a few other components. The other two. Research, data research and analysis. This is critical for the more administrative side of things, in terms of communicating with decision makers in the State on what the need is. To put that, the things that we are hearing from you all right now, in quantifiable terms.

Improving the data collection that goes on in the state. And producing statewide statistics that will speak to your decision makers. As well as help find, you find ways to use statewide data to help agencies better address the needs of our communities.

And then finally, the state infrastructure

which I had mentioned briefly, which involves, our goal is increasing the communication and collaboration among all service providers and units of government in order to sustain TICH's, the TICH Council planning efforts, and aid in the implementation of this plan. When we talk about coordination and communication, we mean first, the coordination among state agencies.

Making sure that, one, we get agencies on the same page. And in terms of definitions, we have, you know, education -- using the Department of Education's definition. We have numerous housing programs, using HUD's definition. And then we have different agencies that have, not really a definition. But sort of.

Because it is a self-reported component of intake paperwork, for instance. But finding a more concrete and -- what is the word -- consistent way for communicating information about who we are serving when we talk about people experiencing homelessness or at risk. And increasing communication between the State and local units of government so that we continue to increase our ability to respond to local needs.

Like we are saying, we get from HUD or the United States Interagency Council for the Homeless. Permanent supportive housing, you know, housing first.

And yet, that message isn't entirely in synch with what we hear from, say, Collin County, or more rural areas of Texas.

So we think that is incredibly important to continue to communicate and to find, build relationships and find ways for state agencies to coordinate more effectively with Continuum of Care, for instance. So along those lines, if anyone wants to speak to either of those issues, please do so. Data or infrastructure and communication.

MR. GREEN: My name is Christopher Green. I am a pastor for a local church. And I am relatively new to the issue of homelessness. And I serve on the Collin County Homeless Coalition as the Chair of the Faith Communities Committee. And one of the things that I have observed is the lack of information and communication to faith communities in general.

I believe it might be a historical observation to say that over the last 100 years or so, faith communities have kind of dropped the ball, and maybe even advocated care given to homelessness to government, as opposed to, at least in my faith, tradition being the hands and feet of Jesus to people. And if we have done that, we have done it locally, congregationally, rather

than cooperating with other faith communities to do that.

I see a trend, a turn for more cooperation between faith communities to help offer care. But we are frankly, I believe we are so far behind the need that we will never catch up.

So at the advocacy, historically, is a sad commentary on our theology and our inability to work together. But I do think, especially with regards to infrastructure that if the State could help facilitate communication back to faith communities, the onus would then fall to us then to learn how to cooperate with one another, and with government agencies.

I understand the issues of separation of Church and State. I think we have used that, frankly, as a veil to hide behind. And I think that if the State could help us, as faith community leaders, learn how to hold hands together, because the issue is so great, it could be a great benefit, not only to us, but to the issue of homelessness.

And so I think if you could make that part of your strategy in the infrastructure. How do we at least communicate the need to faith communities, that could be incredibly beneficial. Because as one of the other

speakers said earlier, I think there is ignorance. There is general ignorance. I didn't know there was homelessness in Collin County.

And yet, a lot of us have our own little food pantries and things that we do out of our back doors. But, again, it is like blowing into a hurricane. It just doesn't make a difference in the long run. And so somehow, if we can bring agencies, faith communities and government together to serve, I think maybe we could really truly begin to address preventative care.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

VOICE: Can I just add one -- comment now?

MR. McGRATH: Yes, please. Can you -- I am sorry.

VOICE: [indiscernible]. Cut the red tape.

MR. McGRATH: For the record, cut the red tape.

VOICE: [indiscernible].

MR. McGRATH: Okay. Thank you.

MS. MENDELSON: No, I am not ending. I have a comment on each section. Don't you know me? Gosh. So Collin County is part of Dallas County COC. And because Washington has a rule about the COCs including the age of their housing, and since Collin County is one of the fastest growing, continues to be one of the fastest

growing counties, in my lifetime, if the rule doesn't change, we will never be our own COC.

So when you mix Collin and Dallas County with two very different kinds of sets of needs, what you have is a group that gets to make decisions for this whole broad area that maybe doesn't have the same priorities. So in our case, in Collin County, we have only two organizations that are funded by the COC.

One of them is a domestic violence shelter here in town, Hope's Door. And the other is a handful of permanent supportive housing locations from Life Path. And I am sorry. I said locations. I mean beds. And by a handful, I think it is six. And so that is all we have got.

So because of the rules of the COC, meaning you are in once, you don't get out unless we think you are so unethical as to bring criminal charges against you, and nobody else gets in. So therefore, we have many times mentioned various programs. We have none of those get funded from COC.

So when Stacy was talking about we need more funding and whether it is added to COC, do something different. I beg you, do something different. Because the COC does not represent our needs in Collin County. So

what we need is a different pot. I think you have heard a lot of people say, we need to be able to determine what that pot is.

And we will duke it out with Dallas County. I think we are good on that side. But it needs to be free of those same restrictions. Along with that, and this is how it gets to the data collection, in case you thought I forgot, those two organizations that get COC funds are members of our HIMS system.

No other organization in Collin County is part of it. So when you look at data for Collin County, you don't have that. And I know you don't have it, because all you could possibly have is what we submitted for HUD from our account. So that is why we made a big effort last year.

That is why we are making even a bigger effort this year. But it is not enough. It is not enough information in 100 different ways. So honestly, if you wanted to help us have good data and know what our needs are, and who we serve and why we serve them, why don't you provide that to everybody?

Because he has got a food pantry and she has got a food pantry, and they have a food pantry. And our de facto homeless shelter is the Plano Inn. And if we

went over there tonight, probably half of them are actually homeless.

Because their church and their church and that synagogue and that personal donor, they are putting people up because James begs them. Because all of these different people who are out here make that happen somehow.

So a number was said to you about the level of poverty. Plano is actually the richest large city in America. But 25 percent of our kids are on free and reduced lunch. So there is a disparity on what people think of.

If you went back and all of a sudden went, oh Collin County was telling me about how poor they are, and they have all of these homeless people, they are going to laugh and roll their eyes at you. Right. But the reality is, we are turning people away from our shelter, and they are going to sleep in the park, in the cars, and in the storage sheds and all of that.

So if you will go back with remembering that we need better data. But these organizations don't have the money to be part of HIMS system. But we need their data to get them the money.

So whether that is a state-funded thing, saying

okay, you qualify as a 501(c)(3) and you provide this kind of service. We will access you for free, so that you can then pull that consistent reliable data. That is cutting through the red tape. That is getting true data.

But someone is going to have cough up the money to make it happen. Because that church doesn't have it, and that church and that church. And it is a lot of money. I think we are spending \$25,000 a year for those two groups to have access to HIMS system. So Continuum of Care is COC.

MR. McGRATH: Thanks. All right.

MR. RODENBAUGH: Just one other quick thing. Gary Rodenbaugh again with Family Promise. We were talking about the faith-based communities and stuff. And one of the things that Family Promise models is, we will provide 6- to \$700,000 worth of services this year. And we operate on a budget of less than \$100,000. Because it is done all through volunteers.

That is a component that the faith-based group can bring to this table. And their dollars go much further. I mean, our overhead and so forth is done through volunteerism.

And so if the State and federal funds and so forth would help fund some of the faith-based initiatives

and so forth, we could make your dollars go exponentially further. Because we do have the volunteerism to help bring it into it. So I just wanted to add that component.

MR. McGRATH: All right. Thank you.

MS. PATTEN: Jennifer Patten. Exactly what Cara said. We have the numbers. I can guarantee you, my shelter has the numbers. And there are ten other shelters in the area that have numbers and data and stuff that you can analyze that will help support the reason for us requesting the funding, and requesting the support. Because I know that is what you need. But we don't have any way of giving it to you.

I understand the HIMS database and how there are only two. I am not extremely familiar with it. Our agency does not use it. Our agency can't afford it. And to be really honest, like I said, I am not super familiar with it. But the things I have heard about it aren't positive. And I am really sorry.

And I am a part of the Homeless Coalition. And when I go to meetings, I would say probably in the last five meetings, half of them have been our City of Plano representative saying, Okay, we are going to have another training on how we can help you guys understand HIMS. And for the fact that only a couple of people within that

meeting actually use it, and she is still having to help them, is a big red flag.

So I don't know about the system. But it obviously needs some help. And I have no problem with every month, every quarter, every year, having to do an obnoxious data report or anything like that, even though I will complain about it, just to give you numbers, so you can give us money. So because James does a report.

He is doing a report for ISD for something completely different than what I need a report for. And my shelter services certain children, but the other shelters down the road might service other different populations of children. And we all need to be on the same page with that. And we are not. And you don't know who we are serving.

MR. McGRATH: Right.

MS. PATTEN: You don't.

MR. McGRATH: Actually can I just -- so you said you have data that you could, that you are sitting on but we are not accessing it. It is not HIMS.

MS. PATTEN: No. We have to provide data and reports for the populations that we serve for obviously, all of our grants and then for our board. Those are the only people we give that information to. And I know that

other people need it. So -- and our PISD asked for numbers for us. But they only asked for certain things.

They don't ask for the entire population that we serve. They may ask for a specific portion of the homeless population that we serve. Maybe the special education population or something like that.

But I have never been asked, or don't know how to give that information to the State level, or even my local representatives haven't asked. And I would be more than happy to give it to them, if I knew that they knew what they were doing with it, and it went to an efficient place.

MR. McGRATH: Right. Okay.

MS. PATTEN: So, does that kind of make --

MR. McGRATH: Yes. Thank you.

MS. MENDELSON: It is 8:35.

MR. McGRATH: Okay. So we can wrap it up. If anyone has any last burning comment to make, please do now or forever hold your peace. Okay.

MS. BROWN: Hi. My name is Melissa Brown. I would just like to say like, at my school, I know about a little over 25 people that like get free lunch and stuff. And I am just like, that is amazing and stuff. Because there is like 900 people when I go to my school. Like 500

or something like that. I don't know. But, yes.

And it is like, it is just sad. Because some of my friends like just get free lunch because they didn't want it. And like they make up some reason, like they have to have it and stuff. And I am like, well, there is actually people out there that need it and stuff. So, yes.

MR. McGRATH: Thanks.

MS. CUNNINGHAM: Amanda Cunningham. I just wanted to go back to the ISD and say, it is a great start to look at the free lunches and the reduced programs. However, there are still a lot of people that are on the verge for preventive homelessness that don't qualify for free or reduced lunches.

I make \$30,000 a year. I am a single mother of two children. I don't qualify for food stamps. I make too much money for Children's Health Care Insurance for my children. I don't get any assistance.

I moved to Collin County so my children could go to a good school district. That is why I moved there.

Paying \$900 a month in rent. And everything else, and still not qualifying for food stamps, free lunches, reduced lunches. I am just one paycheck away from losing everything.

One paycheck away. So, yes, that is great to start looking at the reduced lunches and the free lunch programs to see that children that could be -- that we could help prevent them from reaching homelessness. But there are so many people out there that don't qualify for free or reduced lunches that are just one paycheck away from losing everything, absolutely everything.

So I suggest that, yes, it is great to look at free and reduced lunches. However, if you did an anonymous questionnaire to families, and say did you know that there is these resources out. Because people mentioned here today --

No one -- if I didn't know that this was going on today, I wouldn't walk up to somebody and say, Hey, I used to be homeless, and I am on the verge. I am one paycheck away.

People aren't going to publicize that. For some people, it is embarrassing. It is shameful. People want to be strong. And they think that they can do it for themselves, and they can't.

So while that is good, there has got to be something more than just looking at that. Because there is a lot of people that are one step away, one paycheck away from losing everything. And it is repetitive.

If we become homeless, what does that show our children? Our children, they have no stability. And it is just going to be a vicious cycle.

So, there has got to be more resources out there, and a better way to do preventive, to prevent homelessness. Reduced lunches and free lunches is great, but it is not going to be enough. It is not enough.

MR. McGRATH: Thank you. All right. With that we can close. And I was only kidding about forever hold your peace. Like I said before, please email me if you are inclined to continue commenting, to continue this dialogue. And I hope to learn more from the folks in Plano in the future.

This has been incredibly enlightening, I think. We have seen many different sides of Texas. And so it is wonderful to hear from all of you. Thank you for taking the time to be here, and to share your thoughts and comments. Thank you so much.

MS. MENDELSON: This is the third one today.
(Applause.)

MR. McGRATH: Thank you.

MS. MENDELSON: I will send out an email with Colin's email as a reminder for the Coalition.

MR. McGRATH: Yes.

MS. MENDELSON: If you are not on the Coalition email list, let me know. I will be happy to put you on there. With that email, it will be we are supposed to have a meeting on Thursday at 9:00. And I am going to reschedule it for a week later, and --

So I just thought I would let you know that. That's a little heads up. And if you want to --

And again, thank you both so much. Have you come to all three of them with them? Are you tailing them all day? Yes. Thank you. Thank you so much. Appreciate you coming.

MR. McGRATH: Absolutely. Thank you all so much.

(Whereupon, at 8:40 p.m., the hearing was concluded.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

IN RE: Texas Strategic Plan to Prevent & End
Homelessness Public Hearing

LOCATION: Plano, Texas

DATE: November 29, 2011

I do hereby certify that the foregoing pages, numbers 1 through 73, inclusive, are the true, accurate, and complete transcript prepared from the verbal recording made by electronic recording by Penny Bynum before the Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs.

(Transcriber) 12/05/2011
(Date)

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