



HOMELESS AND HOUSING ALLIANCE: UNSHELTERED LEGISLATION TASK FORCE REPORT

JUNE 2024

The Homeless and Housing Alliance (HHA) is Palm Beach County's Continuum of Care delivering comprehensive and coordinated services for homeless individuals and families.

To learn more visit: [Community Services - Human Services Homeless and Housing Alliance of Palm Beach County \(pbcgov.org\)](https://www.pbcgov.org/Community-Services-Human-Services-Homeless-and-Housing-Alliance-of-Palm-Beach-County).



June 27, 2024

As we stand at a critical juncture in our community's history, we face an escalating crisis. The number of individuals and families experiencing homelessness in Palm Beach County continues to grow, exacerbated by rising housing costs that place stable housing further out of reach for many. Compounding this crisis is Florida's *HB 1365/S 1530: Unauthorized Public Camping and Public Sleeping*, which will take effect on October 1, 2024, and a pivotal ruling by the U.S. Supreme Court in the case of *Grants Pass v. Johnson*, which threatens to dismantle existing protections for those who have no place to call home. This confluence of factors demands our urgent and unified action to safeguard the dignity and rights of our most vulnerable neighbors.

In light of these challenges, the Homeless and Housing Alliance's (HHA) Unsheltered Legislation Task Force prepared this report to inform decision-makers in developing responses to these challenges. The HHA is committed to continuing to work with our community leaders, service providers, stakeholders, and elected officials to develop humane and effective solutions to ending unsheltered homelessness in Palm Beach County.

The following report outlines the work of the HHA Unsheltered Task Force, which actively sought input and suggestions from the broader Palm Beach County community. Together with guidance from community members, other Continuums of Care throughout Florida, the Florida Coalition to End Homelessness, local leaders, service providers, and individuals currently experiencing homelessness, we believe this report encapsulates the collective voice of our community. These collaborative efforts underscore the importance of community-driven solutions that uphold the dignity and rights of all individuals, regardless of their housing status.

Our hope is the strategies and recommendations presented in this report will foster a more compassionate and effective approach to addressing homelessness in our community. We look forward to continued collaboration with all stakeholders to implement solutions and to advocate for policies that support our unsheltered neighbors.

Together, we can create a community where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Yours in Service,

The Homeless and Housing Alliance, Unsheltered Legislation Task Force

Elizabeth Jo Miller, HHA President

Jennifer Sellars, HHA Advocacy & Engagement Pillar Chair

Ezra Krieg, HHA Permanent Housing Pillar Chair



Unsheltered Legislation Task Force Report

In Palm Beach County, the Continuum of Care is known as the **Homeless and Housing Alliance (HHA)**. The HHA is intended to deliver a comprehensive and coordinated continuum of services for homeless individuals and families. The system's fundamental components include homeless prevention, outreach and assessment, emergency shelter, transitional housing, supportive services, permanent housing, and permanent supportive housing. The HHA includes community-based membership with representatives from government, business, formerly homeless individuals, law enforcement, banking, housing service providers, faith groups, education, veterans, health care, and concerned individuals. Palm Beach County Division of Human Services and Community Action (HSCA), continues its role as the lead entity for the HHA, which began in January 2006.

OVERVIEW

During this last legislative session, Florida's Governor signed into law the "Unauthorized Public Camping and Sleeping" bill (HB 1365/S 1530). This law will go into effect on October 1, 2024. Recognizing the significant impact this law could have on our communities, the Homeless and Housing Alliance (HHA), Palm Beach County's Continuum of Care (CoC) initiated a series of actions to engage the CoC and the greater community in preparation for the legislation's implementation. Included were discussions with the Florida Coalition to End Homelessness (FCEH), other counties, lawmakers, and our community partners. On April 29th, the first community-wide task force meeting gathered and the voices of more than 200 people were heard, generating over 1,000 comments and suggestions.

ANALYSIS AND CONSOLIDATION OF FEEDBACK

The task force team meticulously reviewed the comments over several days, identifying common themes and consolidating them into actionable recommendations. These recommendations were categorized into two primary areas:

- HHA Responsibilities: Tasks and initiatives that the HHA would undertake utilizing the professional talents of the individual members and the sharing the resources of the organizational members.
- Community Leadership Responsibilities: Actions that would require broader community and leadership engagement.

The HHA recommendations were presented to the HHA general membership, who ranked them on June 13th. Subsequently, a second community task force meeting was held on June 14th to rank the community-oriented recommendations. This dual-layered approach ensured that both HHA members and the wider community had input into prioritizing the actions.



Unsheltered Legislation Task Force Report

RECOMMENDATIONS

The ranked recommendations from both the HHA general membership and the greater community have been reviewed by the HHA Task Force Team. Our goal has been to formulate a comprehensive community response to address the challenges and opportunities posed by HB 1365. The following are the HHA Unsheltered Task Force recommendations as prioritized by both the HHA General Membership and Community Stakeholders:

Recommendations to Homeless and Housing Alliance:

HHA Governance Board
Evaluate and publicize what has worked in other municipalities
Meet with other funded organizations to explore needs and to expand services
Collaborate with partner agency leadership and assign roles in response to legislation
HHA Engagement & Advocacy Pillar
Explore what other communities are doing in response to criminalizing homelessness (state & national)
Determine where unsheltered people can go legally
Provide education about the bill for those who are unsheltered
HHA Permanent Housing Pillar
Identify facilities that can serve as shelter
Re-define "affordable housing"
Work with property owners and businesses to provide housing
HHA Support Services Pillar
Look into the impact of increasing emergency shelter length of stay
Create a 24/hour drop-in center
Expand prevention services
Explore barriers that prevent people from enrolling in transitional housing programs
HHA HMIS Oversight Committee
Explore present barriers for homeless individuals
Focus on root causes of homelessness
Establish total public housing inventory and ensure numbers daily

Recommendations to Community Leadership:

Policy Change
Living wage / Raise wages
Changes in legislation
Rent control / Rental increase regulations/ Rent cap
Create/designate affordable housing based on individual income
Requests in Funding
Increase funds for homeless and housing programs
Prioritize mental health assistance funding
Identify available funds that can be used for affordable housing, and allocate to non-profits
Prioritize and fund affordable housing

Short Term Solutions
Open a Day/Night shelter (drop-in shelter, not program-based)
Create and open transitional housing (County & municipalities)
Identify funds available for affordable housing and put out RFPs for nonprofits
Donate land to service providers to build affordable housing
Long Term Solutions
Develop tiny homes
Address housing affordability issues for all
Prioritize housing for those earning less than 50% Area Median Income

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Community discussions elicited several ethical considerations that the Task Force believes are crucial for any response to HB 1365. These considerations include the following:

Treating People with Dignity and Respect: Ensuring that all actions and policies treat unsheltered individuals with the utmost respect and humanity.

Criminalizing Homelessness: Addressing concerns about the potential criminalization of homelessness and seeking alternatives that provide support rather than punishment.

Collaborations: Emphasizing the importance of working together with various stakeholders, including non-profits, government agencies, and community groups, to create holistic solutions.

Data Transparency: Ensuring that data collection and reporting are transparent and used to inform and improve services and policies.

Working with Undocumented Unsheltered Populations: Recognizing and addressing the unique challenges faced by undocumented unsheltered populations, including language barriers and legal issues.

Confidentiality and Privacy: Protecting the confidentiality and privacy of unsheltered individuals, especially when handling sensitive information.

Cultural Considerations: Understanding and respecting the diverse cultural backgrounds of unsheltered individuals, while recognizing and addressing barriers and biases that may affect access to services and fair treatment.

Policy Considerations: Being mindful about the risk of violating civil rights and ensuring policies are compliant with legal standards and adhering to ethical standards in policy-making to ensure fairness and justice. We strongly recommend that the development of policies is informed by an understanding of trauma and its effects, ensuring they do not dehumanize or further harm unsheltered individuals.



Unsheltered Legislation Task Force Report

POSSIBLE ACTIONS BASED ON PRIORITIES IDENTIFIED

- Open shared encampment by Palm Beach County and municipalities.
- Establish a “homeless court” as diversion to criminalization.
- Coordinate public education activities.
- Advocate for proposed changes to legislation for the next legislative session.
- Facilitate coordination between county, nonprofits and municipalities in homeless prevention programs.
- Establish and promulgate law enforcement best practices in light of new legislation.
- Expand immediate shelter opportunities, with focus on safe parking lots and day shelter.
- Dedicate unused municipal ARPA funds for unhoused people.
- Expand creation of housing for those earning 50% or less of Area Median Income.

CONCLUSION

The collaborative efforts of the HHA Unsheltered Legislation Task Force have culminated in a set of prioritized recommendations aimed at effectively preparing our communities for the implementation of HB 1365. The engagement and input from various stakeholders underscore the commitment of the HHA and the community to address homelessness and housing issues proactively and inclusively. We hope that these final recommendations will serve as a guiding framework for our response to the legislation, ensuring that we continue to support and advocate for the needs of our unsheltered population.

We extend our sincere gratitude to the Palm Beach County community, service providers, stakeholders, and policymakers for their invaluable participation and dedication throughout this process. A special thank you to the HHA Unsheltered Legislation Task Force team for their tireless efforts and commitment.

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