2015 Joint Legislative Agenda

Priority Items

Continue to Fund the Washington State Housing Trust Fund
Key partners: WLIHA, HDC
Support funding for the Housing Trust Fund (HTF), which is funded within the State Capital Budget, at the highest possible level. The availability of low income and homeless housing, as funded through the HTF, is fundamental to ending homelessness. [Historically, King County (including the City of Seattle) has received 40 percent of State HTF.] Provide flexibility for meeting a wide variety of local needs and for leveraging other resources.

Preserve and Strengthen the Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) Program
Key partners: SKCCH, WLIHA
Preserve, improve and sustain HEN assistance. Hold harmless HEN assistance (funded at $59 million in previous budgets), the Aged, Blind and Disabled (ABD) cash grant program, and SSI Facilitation Services. Improve the program by removing the current restriction on chemical dependency as primary disability; increasing ABD cash grant and/or; allowing ABD recipients to retain their HEN benefit for an extended period of time.

Improve Data Collection
Key partners: TBD
Preserve the $39 million Washington State currently receives in federal McKinney funding for homeless housing, by improving our statewide compliance with federal Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) standards. Changes to Washington’s HMIS informed consent privacy statute amending RCW 43.185C.180, to Opt Out from Opt In, could help improve statewide compliance. An amendment is also needed to address a recent Attorney General ruling to re-allow young people under 18 to consent to having their information included in HMIS, mirroring RCW provisions allowing minors to consent to mental health treatment. Finally, the emergence of Coordinated Entry systems, as required under the guidelines for Washington State’s Consolidated Housing Grant, relies on the availability of quality data to match people with homeless housing and services appropriate to their situation.

(CEH is working with the Washington Coalition Against Domestic Violence and State Department of Commerce to develop a legislative solution that protects confidentiality and improves consent rates.)
2015 Joint Legislative Agenda - Critical Support Items

Make Housing Bonds Effective Now
Lead: HDC and WLIHA
Generate a strong and dependable funding source for the creation and preservation of affordable workforce housing in coordination with transit investments, and close to transit stations, based on future bond revenue. Current funds are oversubscribed. The new revenue will provide much-needed funding for this high priority. To accomplish this, we will need to amend RCW 67.28.180 (3)(i) with a technical fix that specifically allows bonding for housing.

Fund the Washington Youth and Families Fund
Lead: Building Changes
Fund the Washington Youth and Family Fund at a level of $6 million. The Washington Families Fund is a public-private partnership created by the legislature in 2004 to fund services for families that aim to keep them securely housed. Youth and young adults have been added as a population served by the fund to address the unique needs of youth not being met by the family or adult homelessness systems. Over the past ten years $17 million dollars invested by Washington State has leveraged $35.5 million in private and philanthropic dollars for innovative strategies that address homelessness at a systems and youth/family level. King County relies on these funds to make our homeless housing investments work.

End Youth and Young Adult Homelessness
Extended Foster Care for Last Remaining Cohort (Foster Care to 21)  Lead: The Mockingbird Society
A 2013 DSHS report found that 35% of youth who age out of the foster care system experience homelessness within one year. In 2011, Washington State opted into the Fostering Connections Act, which provides a federal match to states that opt into the Extended Foster Care program. Since then, youth who are participating in high school/GED acquisition, post-secondary program, have a barrier to employment and/or working more than 80 hours per month have become eligible for the Extended Foster Care Program. The 2015 legislative request is to authorize the final, and most vulnerable, group: “those with documented medical conditions”. This would fully implement Extended Foster Care so no foster youth will have to face homelessness when aging out of care.

Pass the Homeless Youth Act and Establish the Office of Homeless Youth Programs  Lead: WACHYA
The Homeless Youth Act is needed to comprehensively address the issue of youth and young adult homelessness across Washington State. A critical element of the Homeless Youth Act is establishing the Office of Homeless Youth Programs to establish a coordinated approach to understanding and addressing system gaps, community needs and the resources necessary to develop a plan to prevent and end youth homelessness across Washington. The Homeless Youth Act would also call for Washington to adopt a policy that our state systems will not discharge youth directly into homelessness.

NOTE: The Homeless Youth Act may be part of a package request to the legislature to include the Extended Foster Care legislation and other key legislative proposals as part of the Homeless Youth Act.
Create a Medicaid Benefit for Tenant Support Services in Permanent Supportive Housing

Lead: UWKC, WLIHA

SB 6312 authorizes the state to create a permanent supportive housing service Medicaid benefit. We ask that the State appropriate funding to create this benefit.

NOTE: In 2014 the Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH) published Creating a Medicaid Supportive Housing Services Benefit: A Framework for Washington and Other States, available electronically. This document builds on the work done by CSH in 2013 to make the case for a PSH benefit. This 2014 document describes the policy and implementation avenues needed to make a PSH benefit a reality.

Fair Tenant Screening Act

Lead: Tenants Union

Address the high costs of unnecessarily repeated tenant screenings by ensuring that if tenants can provide landlords access to an exhaustive and timely report, they cannot be charged for another report. This is particularly important in keeping with the new requirement to increase rental assistance dollars paid in the private market. Additionally, evictions should be reportable on tenant screening reports only when a tenant is found guilty at the end of an eviction preceding.

Support Access to Critical Services – Fund 211 Services

Lead: Crisis Clinic and WIN 211

The 211 system is a critical entry point for those who are homeless to find housing, and in King County, 211 serves as an entry point for Coordinated Assessment for homeless housing. It also serves many other vulnerable people helping them to find important survival services. The requested $3M in state funding is essential to provide stability to the system. 211 is the 911 of the housing and human services systems.

Certificate of Restoration

Lead: Partners for Our Children

Reduce barriers to housing and employment for those exiting the criminal justice system through creation of a Certificate of Restoration. The certificate would help reduce barriers to employment for adults and juveniles who have a criminal history. The legislation identifies the requirements necessary to apply for a certificate.

Source of Income Restrictions

Lead: HDC and WLIHA

Prevent landlords from denying tenancy based solely on the grounds of the tenant relying on a subsidy or unearned income (such as Social Security Disability Insurance - SSDI) to pay all or a portion of their rent. Would still allow landlords to reject applications of tenants who do not have enough income/resources to meet the monthly rental payment, and to otherwise still deny tenancy on any other legal grounds.