## STAFF REPORT

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| **Agenda Item:** | 7 | **Name:** | Mary Bourguignon |
| **Proposed No**.: | 2016-B0017 | **Date:** | February 2, 2016 |

**SUBJECT**

Today's briefing will provide an update on the development of the required implementation plan for the Youth and Family Homeless Prevention Initiative that will be funded by the Best Starts for Kids levy.

**SUMMARY**

The Best Starts for Kids (BSK) levy approved by King County voters in November 2015 includes $19 million for a Youth and Family Homeless Prevention Initiative that is intended to "prevent and divert children and youth and their families from becoming homeless." The Council has required that the Executive transmit an implementation plan for this initiative by March 1, 2016. [[1]](#footnote-1)

According to Executive staff, the BSK Homeless Prevention Initiative would be used as a flexible, client-centered fund to meet the needs of youth and families who are at risk of homelessness, with funds being used for a wide range of services and supports from rental assistance to child care. It is proposed to be modelled on the Washington State Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) Program,[[2]](#footnote-2) a homeless prevention program that was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and coordinated by the Washington Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

Today's briefing will provide an overview on the proposal for the BSK Homeless Prevention Initiative, as well as an update on the development of the implementation plan. It will summarize the Executive's work to date on funding eligibility, funding amounts per year, outcomes measurement, funding distribution, and monitoring.

Linda Olsen, Housing Program Coordinator from the Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, will be available to share information about her organization’s experience with the DVHF program and that program's potential applicability as a model for the BSK Homeless Prevention Initiative.

**BACKGROUND**

BSK Homeless Prevention Initiative. The Best Starts for Kids (BSK) levy that was approved by King County voters in November 2015 includes $19 million for a Youth and Family Homeless Prevention Initiative.

The focus on prevention was proposed as a component of the levy because of the fact that more than half of all households who were served at emergency shelters during 2014 were homeless for the first time (4,919 out of 9,402 served).[[3]](#footnote-3) Despite the number of people becoming homeless for the first time, the region has a relative lack of available resources to help people at risk avoid becoming homeless. In 2014, for example, out of more than $158 million in federal, state, local, and philanthropic funds devoted to homeless services and housing resources around the region, only $5.52 million (approximately 3.5 percent) was spent on prevention and diversion.[[4]](#footnote-4)

This focus on prevention for youth and families is also aligned with the goals of the Homeless Youth and Young Adult Initiative, which aims to prevent and end youth homelessness by 2020;[[5]](#footnote-5) as well as with the region's overarching goals through All Home of making homelessness rare, brief, and one-time by focusing on prevention activities.[[6]](#footnote-6)

According to Executive staff, the BSK Homeless Prevention Initiative would be used as a flexible fund to help families, youth and young adults avoid homelessness and would be modelled on the Washington State Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) Program,[[7]](#footnote-7) a homeless prevention program that was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and coordinated by the Washington Coalition Against Domestic Violence.

The ordinance that placed the BSK levy on the ballot established the $19 million total for the Homeless Prevention Initiative and defined the initiative as "an initiative intended to prevent and divert children and youth and their families from becoming homeless"[[8]](#footnote-8) but did not prescribe the amount of funding to be made available each year or the specific activities or agencies to receive funding.

Instead, the Council included in the BSK levy ordinance the requirement that the Executive transmit an implementation plan for the BSK Homeless Prevention Initiative by March 1, 2016, for review and approval by ordinance.

**Domestic Violence Housing First.** The *Washington State Domestic Violence Housing First* (DVHF) Program[[9]](#footnote-9) is a homeless prevention program that was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and coordinated by the Washington Coalition Against Domestic Violence. (See Attachments 1 and 2 for more information about this program.)

DVHF allocated $1.9 million[[10]](#footnote-10) between 2009 and 2014 to approximately 900 domestic violence survivors and their children through 13 domestic violence programs around the state, with the goal that lack of housing should not be a reason to stay in a violent relationship.[[11]](#footnote-11),[[12]](#footnote-12) Evaluation of the DVHF program found that nearly 90 percent of participants had been able to obtain or maintain permanent housing as of the program’s conclusion.[[13]](#footnote-13),[[14]](#footnote-14)

DVHF has four components:

* **Housing stability,** which is the key goal of program staff and participants’ advocates. Advocates work with participants as needed to help them find housing and negotiate with landlords, and also serve a liaison function with landlords.
* **Flexible financial assistance,** which provides program participants with financial help as needed to help them gain or retain their housing. The financial assistance can be used for rent, utility payments, child care, transportation, or other financial needs.
* **Survivor-driven advocacy,** also called “flexible engagement” (see Attachment 2) that aims to help domestic violence survivors and their advocates identify the level of services and funding they need to either access housing or retain their current housing. This approach allows program participants and their advocates to select different levels of support, unlike the more typical approach that provides all program participants with the same set of programs and support.
* **Community engagement,** which aims to engage landlords, law enforcement agencies, housing and homeless service providers, and employment programs to ensure that program participants have a full array of services available to them.

Based on the success of DVHF, the Executive has proposed to model the BSK Homeless Prevention Initiative on its flexible, service-based, prevention-oriented approach. In response to that proposal, the HHHS committee was briefed on DVHF in 2015 (2015-B00124) and the Budget & Fiscal Management Committee discussed Housing First, DVHF, prevention, and other housing and homelessness measures during its deliberations on the BSK levy ordinance.

**Implementation Plan Development.** The BSK levy ordinance requires that the Executive transmit an implementation plan for the Youth and Family Homeless Prevention Initiative by March 1, 2016. Funds cannot be allocated toward the initiative until the Council has reviewed and approved the implementation plan by ordinance.

The Executive has convened an informal working group of staff and providers to begin the work of developing and implementation plan for the BSK Homeless Prevention Initiative. The Children and Youth Advisory Board will also collaborate on the development of the implementation plan.

To date, the informal working group has focused on the following questions:

* **Who is eligible to be served by the initiative?** The proposal at this point is that the initiative would be for youth and families who are not literally homeless. That is because, as noted above, there are significantly more resources available for those who are already homeless than to help people avoid becoming homeless in the first place. The working group has noted that this general eligibility guideline may need fine-tuning, for instance to include youth who have been homeless in the past but are now in permanent housing and need ongoing case management to remain stable.
* **How should funds be allocated between youth and families?** The proposal at this point is that there be no separate allocations, in recognition of the overlap between youth and families. For instance, youth who are pregnant or parenting can be served by either the family or youth system, while youth who are still living with their parents would be served by the family system through unaccompanied youth would be served by the youth system.
* **What types of expenditures would be eligible for funding?** The proposal at this point is that any expenditure that will prevent someone from becoming homeless would be eligible. However, based on the experiences of the DVHF program, the working group has discussed the need for ongoing case management to ensure that the client has the opportunity to explore and address the issues that have led to the risk of homelessness. The working group has focused a great deal of attention on the need for provider agencies to align themselves toward the flexible, client-centered approach that proved successful for DVHF.
* **How much money should be allocated in 2016 and over how many years should funding be spread?** The working group continues to discuss this issue. The group has also discussed a preference for multi-year funding commitments to individual provider agencies to allow agencies the security to invest in the needed staffing and training.
* **How should success be measured?** The group has discussed a number of potential measures of success, noting that some combination of measures will be needed. These include:
  + The individual is entered into the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS)[[15]](#footnote-15) but then does not appear in the HMIS in the future, meaning they have not become homeless;
  + The region experiences a reduction in the number or percent of youth and families who have become newly homeless;
  + Youth who are at risk for homelessness have no further engagement with the criminal justice system or have positive educational results; and/or
  + People served by the program experience greater safety and self-determination.
* **How should provider agencies be trained?** Working group members have discussed the possibility of engaging organizations that successfully participated in the DVHF program as coaches. The idea of learning circles has also been discussed as a way to create partnerships among providers and share the client-centered approach to service.
* **How should funds be distributed?** This is an issue that will continue to require thought and discussion. Working group members have discussed a Request for Proposals process, but have expressed the hope that the process could be designed to:
  + Provide geographic coverage to all areas of King County (perhaps in proportion to the number of people identified as homeless or the number of 2-1-1 calls seeking housing assistance in each sub-region);
  + Provide services through domestic violence agencies, youth homeless agencies, and coordinated entry[[16]](#footnote-16) "HUB" agencies;
  + Engage schools and "natural helpers" such as libraries;
  + Include agencies that work with children and families before they become homeless;
  + Include non-traditional providers and providers that serve under-served communities; and
  + Provide culturally competent services to racial, ethnic, and LGBTQ communities.
* **How will funds be monitored?** As with all levy-funded programs, the Executive will be performing financial and programmatic audits. These will be outlined in the implementation plan.

**Next Steps.** Today's briefing is an opportunity for Councilmembers to provide feedback on work to date on the implementation plan. The implementation plan will be transmitted by March 1.

**LINKS**

Domestic Violence Housing First:

<http://wscadv.org/projects/domestic-violence-housing-first/>

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Domestic Violence Housing First: From Agency Pilot Projects to Regional Demonstration and Research Project
2. Domestic Violence Housing First and Flexible Engagement

**INVITED**

* Linda Olsen, Housing Program Coordinator, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
* Adrienne Quinn, Director, Department of Community and Human Services

1. Ordinance 18088 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <http://wscadv2.org/projects.cfm?aid=1bfef8e9-c29b-57e0-877e65883ece51fe> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. All Home (formerly Committee to End Homelessness in King County) Strategic Plan, 2015-2019, p. 28, Adopted by County Council through Ordinance 18097:   
   http://allhomekc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/All-Home-Strategic-Plan.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. All Home Strategic Plan, 2015-2019, p. 13 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. All Home, Comprehensive Plan to Prevent and End Youth and Young Adult (YYA) Homelessness in King County by 2020, 2015 Comprehensive Plan Refresh, May 2015: http://allhomekc.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Comp-Plan-Refresh-final-050515-with-appendices.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. All Home Strategic Plan [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://wscadv2.org/projects.cfm?aid=1bfef8e9-c29b-57e0-877e65883ece51fe> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ordinance 18088 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <http://wscadv2.org/projects.cfm?aid=1bfef8e9-c29b-57e0-877e65883ece51fe> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Program Expansion: Preventing Homelessness for Survivors of Domestic Violence, Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation doubles efforts by adding nine new service providers to Domestic Violence Housing First, September 13, 2012, Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Accessed May 15, 2015: http://wscadv2.org/docs/dvhf2011pressrelease.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Mbilinyi, Lyungai, Ph.D., and Alison Kreiter, MSW, Innovative Programs Research Group, School of Social Work, University of Washington, Seattle, The Washington State Domestic Violence Housing First Program Evaluation Summary, Cohort 1 Agencies, July 2011-December 2012, September 2013, (Cohort 1 Evaluation), Accessed May 15, 2015: http://wscadv2.org/docs/dvhfcohort1evaluationsummary.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Mbilinyi, Lyungai, Ph.D., Innovative Programs Research Group, School of Social Work, University of Washington, Seattle, The Washington State Domestic Violence Housing First Program Cohort 2 Agencies Final Evaluation Report, September 2011-September 2014, February 2015, (Cohort 2 Evaluation), Accessed May 15, 2015: http://wscadv2.org/docs/DVHF-FinalEvaluation.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Cohort 1 evaluation, page 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cohort 2 evaluation, page 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a locally-operated database that records information on people who use homeless services. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has required local communities to operate and report from an HMIS since 2007 to be eligible for federal homeless services funds. The regional HMIS is in the process of transitioning from being managed by the City of Seattle to being managed by King County. (Motion 14472) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The 2009 Federal Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act requires that local continuums of care develop “coordinated entry” systems to provide a single point of entry to affordable housing programs and to ensure that people experiencing a housing crisis have the opportunity to be quickly assessed and then connected to housing based on their needs. The HEARTH Act encourages but does not require local continuums of care to use their HMIS as part of their coordinated entry systems. In King County, All Home has developed coordinated entry systems for families and youth and is now leading the development of "coordinated entry for all populations," which will ultimately be integrated into the HMIS. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)