## STAFF REPORT

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| **Agenda Item:** | 8 | **Name:** | Mary Bourguignon |
| **Proposed No**.: | 2016-0156 | **Date:** | March 15, 2016 |

**SUBJECT**

Proposed Ordinance 2016-0156 would approve an implementation plan for the Best Starts for Kids Youth and Family Homeless Prevention initiative and require an annual report on outcomes from the initiative.

**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 (YFHP) Initiative that is intended to "prevent and divert children and youth and their families from becoming homeless." The legislation that placed the BSK levy on the ballot required that the Executive transmit an implementation plan for this initiative by March 1, 2016.[[1]](#footnote-1) Proposed Ordinance 2016-0156 would approve the proposed implementation plan for the YFHP Initiative and require an annual report on outcomes from the initiative.

According to the implementation plan, the YFHP Initiative would be modelled on the Washington State Domestic Violence Housing First Program, a homeless prevention program that was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and coordinated by the Washington Coalition Against Domestic Violence. It would employ a combination of case management and flexible, client-centered funding to meet the needs of youth and families who are at imminent risk of homelessness.

Implementation of the YFHP Initiative is proposed to begin with a competitive Request for Proposals process to disburse $2.89 million in 2016.[[2]](#footnote-2) The implementation plan summarizes the steps proposed to be taken so that funds are disbursed to both urban and rural areas, as well as to disproportionately affected groups, particularly people of color and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) youth.

The committee’s review is occurring concurrent with and will be informed by review by the Regional Policy Committee, which has agreed to complete its review by April 13, 2016. This is the committee’s first briefing on this proposed legislation.

**BACKGROUND**

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 (YFHP) Initiative that is intended to "prevent and divert children and youth and their families from becoming homeless."[[3]](#footnote-3) Proposed Ordinance 2016-0156 would approve the required implementation plan for the YFHP Initiative and also establish a requirement for an annual report on initiative outcomes.

The implementation plan was developed, as required, in collaboration with the Children and Youth Advisory Board,[[4]](#footnote-4) as well as with a Planning Committee of community members, stakeholders, and provider agencies.

This staff report provides a summary of the proposed implementation plan, focusing on the policy recommendations incorporated in the implementation plan. Staff and legal analysis of the implementation plan is ongoing. No action is anticipated at today’s meeting.

* **Prevention focus.** The YFHP Initiative proposes to focus on preventing youth and families who are imminently at risk of homelessness from becoming literally homeless. This focus on prevention was proposed because of the fact that approximately half of all people who become homeless in King County (including 46 percent of homeless families and 64 percent of homeless youth who sought services in King County during 2015) have become homeless for the first time.[[5]](#footnote-5)

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.[[6]](#footnote-6)

The goal for the YFHP Initiative is that, with this focus on prevention, the number of people who are newly homeless in King County will decline over time. This goal is aligned with the All Home Strategic Plan goals of making homelessness rare, brief, and one-time.[[7]](#footnote-7)

To implement this focus on prevention, YFHP Initiative services and funds would be available to youth and families who are imminently at risk of homelessness but who are not already literally homeless. The implementation plan notes that this would not include people who are generally but not immediately at risk, but could include people who have been staying on friends’ or families’ couches, a young person who will be thrown out if he or she comes out as LGBTQ, or a youth exiting the criminal justice system with nowhere to go.

* **YFHP Initiative modeled on Domestic Violence Housing First Program.** The YFHP Initiative is proposed to be modeled on the Washington State Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) Program, a homeless prevention program that was funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and coordinated by the Washington Coalition Against Domestic Violence.[[8]](#footnote-8)

DVHF allocated $1.9 million[[9]](#footnote-9) 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.[[10]](#footnote-10),[[11]](#footnote-11) 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.[[12]](#footnote-12),[[13]](#footnote-13)

The YFHP Initiative proposes to model DVHF by incorporating:

* **Client-centered intervention,** through which a family or young person is offered whatever is needed to help them avoid becoming homeless, rather than the more traditional approach of offering only a pre-specified set of interventions or services.
* **Progressive engagement,** which is an approach to case management that provides as much help as is needed, but not more, for clients to achieve housing stability. The experience of DVHF agencies was that approximately one-third of participants needed light, medium, or more intensive support respectively. Building on this progressive engagement approach, the implementation plan proposes that YFHP case managers would be mobile rather than office-based, allowing them to meet clients at the locations of their choice.
* **Flexible funding,** to allow YFHP case managers to provide funds for anything that would prevent someone from becoming homeless. Funds might be used for child care, rental assistance, car payments, a business license or certification, or any other expense that would mean the difference between stability and homelessness. Flexible funding is proposed to be combined with the progressive engagement approach to case management to ensure that clients’ needs are met in the context of a plan to gain stability and independence.
* **Targeting approaches to the root causes of homelessness,** which would focus around the factors that cause youth and families to become homeless, such as domestic violence, youth who identify as LGBTQ, juvenile justice system involvement, school suspension, or involvement with the foster care system.

The implementation plan proposes that agencies that receive funding from the YFHP Initiative would partner with schools and the juvenile justice system. It also proposes strategies to address the disproportionality experienced by people of color and LGBTQ youth. These strategies to address disproportionality are discussed in more detail below.

* **Outcomes measurement.** The YFHP Initiative aims to prevent youth and families from becoming homeless. To determine whether that has occurred, the implementation plan proposes to employ three measures of success:

1. **Absence from HMIS.** The implementation plan proposes that data on clients who are served by the YFHP Initiative would be entered into the region’s Homeless Management Information System (HMIS).[[14]](#footnote-14) Success for those clients would then be measured by their future absence from the HMIS, meaning that they do not reappear in the future as literally homeless and in need of services, but have been able to stabilize and remain housed.
2. **Reduction in newly homeless youth and families.** Absence from the HMIS alone will not determine success for the initiative, as that could be a result of poor targeting of services (for instance if the initiative serves people who are not imminently at risk of homelessness). To address this potential challenge, the implementation plan proposes a second measure, that the region witness a reduction in the number of youth and families who are newly homeless.
3. **Success and stability.** In addition to these two measures, the Children and Youth Advisory Board has recommended that the YFHP Initiative also add a third measure that would focus on the longer-term success and stability of youth and families served by the initiative. This third measure is still to be determined, but could be increased educational attainment, no further engagement with the criminal justice system, or safety and self-determination for families that have experienced domestic violence.

* **Disproportionality.** Records on people seeking homeless services show that people of color and LGBTQ youth are disproportionately likely to be at risk of homelessness.[[15]](#footnote-15) In addition, the implementation plan notes that people at risk of homelessness in rural areas face a very different situation than those in urban areas. The implementation plan proposes several strategies to ensure that funds are distributed in a way that reaches geographic, racial, ethnic, and cultural communities and to address the issues of racial and LGBTQ disproportionality:
* **Program model.** As noted above, the implementation plan proposes to use a progressive engagement, client-centered model with targeting aimed at the factors that lead youth and families to become homeless. The stated goal of the model is to meet people within their communities and to provide them with flexible services and funding that are tailored to their needs.
* **Outreach.** The Children and Youth Advisory Board provided a number of recommendations on outreach to disproportionately affected communities to ensure that funds will truly address racial and LGBTQ disproportionality in homelessness. These recommendations, which have been incorporated into the proposed implementation plan, include making personal contacts with community and faith-based leaders, advertising funding availability in community newsletters, and asking members of the Children and Youth Advisory Board to share information in their communities.
* **Training.** Because the proposed model for the YFHP Initiative is based on the Domestic Violence Housing First (DVHF) program, it is anticipated that local providers that participated in DVHF would be able to begin implementing the YFHP Initiative more quickly than providers who are new to the model. To take advantage of this local expertise, the implementation plan recommends creating learning circles, through which the domestic violence agencies can help their peers build organizational capacity and create the organizational culture change needed to succeed in a progressive engagement, client-centered model.
* **Partnerships.** To engage small cultural and ethnic organizations that serve disproportionately affected communities, the implementation plan recommends a number of partnership approaches, including application support, reduced insurance barriers, and partnerships between small and large organizations.
* **Proposed disbursement of funds.** The implementation plan proposes that approximately $3.1 million be appropriated for the initiative during 2016 ($2.89 million to be competitively awarded to community-based provider agencies and just over $200,000 for program administration). The plan further recommends that the funding amount be increased during years two and three and that provider agencies receive contracts for three years, allowing them the certainty to invest in staff and training. The implementation plan notes that this funding approach could mean that initiative funds are expended prior to the end of the levy, but recommends this approach to demonstrate the effectiveness of a prevention-oriented approach.

The implementation plan proposes to disburse the funds through a competitive Request for Proposals process, which, as noted above, would seek to engage a wide variety of organizations and to ensure both that all geographic areas of the county are served and that the issue of racial and LGBTQ disproportionality is addressed.

As noted above the Executive has separately transmitted Proposed Ordinance 2016-0157, which would authorize appropriation authority for $3,166,667 for 2016, with the expectation that funding for years two and three would be sought through the 2017/2018 biennial budget.

**ANALYSIS**

The Regional Policy Committee was briefed on the proposal at its March 9, 2016, meeting. Members expressed interest in learning more about:

* How provider agencies would use the HMIS to collect client data in such a way as to avoid discouraging clients from participating;
* How the Domestic Violence Housing First Program functioned, and, in particular, how funds were allocated between agency overhead and administration, case management staff, and flexible funding for clients. In addition, members expressed interest in learning more about how the proposed RFP process will be implemented;
* How the proposed RFP would be operated to ensure outreach throughout the county and to disproportionately affected communities;
* How members of the public can be assured that funds are being put to good use; and
* How funds for this initiative are proposed to be allocated between county overhead and administration; agency overhead, administration, and training; case management staff; and flexible funding for clients.

Additional information on each of these items will be provided to members of the Regional Policy Committee prior to its next meeting on April 13, 2016, and will be copied to members of this committee.

**NEXT STEPS**

Per its adopted work plan, the Regional Policy Committee will complete its review of the proposed YFHP Initiative implementation plan on April 13, 2016. The HHHS Committee will take up its deliberations in May, following the Regional Policy Committee’s review. In addition, the BFM Committee will review Proposed Ordinance 2016-0157, which would provide $3.1 million in appropriation authority for 2016.

**ATTACHMENTS**

1. Proposed Ordinance 2016-0156 (and its attachments)

**INVITED**

1. Adrienne Quinn, Director, Department of Community and Human Services

1. Ordinance 18088 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Proposed Ordinance 2016-0157 would provide appropriation authority for a total of $3,166,667. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ordinance 18088 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ordinance 18217, enacted in December 2015, created the King County Children and Youth Advisory Board for the purposes of 1) serving as the advisory body recommended by the youth action plan; and 2) serving as the oversight and advisory board for the Best Starts for Kids levy. Members of the Children and Youth Advisory Board were appointed in January 2016. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), detailed data for 2015, page 3 of YFHP Implementation Plan [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. All Home (formerly Committee to End Homelessness in King County) Strategic Plan, 2015-2019, p. 28, http://allhomekc.org/the-plan/ [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. All Home Strategic Plan, 2015-2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. http://wscadv.org/projects/domestic-violence-housing-first/ [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. 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-9)
10. 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-10)
11. 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-11)
12. Cohort 1 evaluation, page 20 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Cohort 2 evaluation, page 29 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. A Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) is a locally administered database on people who use homeless services. An HMIS is required to be eligible to receive state and federal homeless services funds. The Seattle-King County region’s HMIS is in the process of transitioning from the Seattle Human Services Department to the King County Department of Community and Human Services. It is governed by All Home, which is the federally designated “continuum of care” for the region. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Page 4 of Youth and Family Homeless Prevention Initiative Implementation Plan [↑](#footnote-ref-15)