



CITY OF BOSTON

IN THE YEAR TWO THOUSAND NINE

ORDER FOR A HEARING REGARDING REFERRALS TO HOUSING FIRST FROM HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOMS

- WHEREAS*, A lack of stable housing has a severe and lasting impact on the health and well-being of an individual homeless person and affects the community as a whole; and,
- WHEREAS*, The chronically homeless make up 10% of the overall homeless population, yet cost 50% of all resources dedicated to helping the homeless; and,
- WHEREAS*, Housing First provides permanent housing to the homeless, saving Massachusetts taxpayers money both in the short- and long-term, improving health and quality of life, and helping people achieve more stable, productive lives; and,
- WHEREAS* In a recent study, the Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program followed 119 homeless people in Boston, finding that they accounted for over 18,000 ER visits and 871 hospitalizations over that 5 year period; and,
- WHEREAS* One hospital emergency room doctor reported that 25 patients visited their ER between 20 and 50 times each over a one-year period. Even though this doctor knows the names of each patient, there has never been a direct housing referral made from the ER; and,
- WHEREAS* The Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance (MHSA) reports that the average annual Medicaid costs for homeless individuals in the *Home & Healthy for Good* program is \$26,124 before housing, as compared to \$8,500 annual costs for those who are taken off the street and provided housing. The annual overall cost savings per *Home & Healthy for Good* participant are \$8,900 per person; and,
- WHEREAS* According to a study of homeless individuals in New York City, homeless individuals placed into permanent housing show a 35% decrease in the need for medical and mental health services and a 38% reduction in incarceration costs. Data from the State of Massachusetts *Home & Healthy for Good* Housing First program shows an 84% residential stability rate; and,
- WHEREAS*, Currently emergency rooms do not make referrals to Housing First programs. Promoting and accepting referrals from emergency room professionals will enhance the ability of the MHSA and other likeminded organizations to better care for the homeless, reduce the burden on our medical facilities and neutralize those who are the most vulnerable and would benefit the most from permanent housing; *NOW THEREFORE BE IT*
- ORDERED*, That the appropriate committee of the Boston City Council hold a hearing to discuss and examine how Housing First referrals can be made directly from hospital emergency rooms in order to best serve the homeless population in Boston.