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U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH)
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Washington, DC, 20024

April 14, 2023

The Honorable J. Kevin Stitt
Office of Governor J. Kevin Stitt
2300 N. Lincoln Blvd., Suite 212
Oklahoma City, OK 73105

Dear Governor Stitt:

On behalf of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness, I am writing to applaud and support the work that has been happening across the State of Oklahoma with your Governor's Interagency Council on Homelessness (GICH). The GICH is a 25-member advisory body comprised of public, private, and nonprofit representatives working together to end homelessness across Oklahoma. Each year the GICH works to promote collaborations among stakeholders, increase access to affordable permanent housing, improve access to services, mainstream resources and federal and state benefits for individuals and families who are homeless or imminently at-risk of experiencing homelessness. The GICH has also created a five-year action plan aimed at improving outcomes for everyday Oklahomans.

Among the accomplishments of this action-driven body have been:

- Capacity building and statewide technical assistance on Fair Housing, eviction prevention, wrap around services and other models of service delivery, free of charge.
- In February 2020, GICH hosted a statewide discharge planning forum to begin addressing the strategic action plan as outlined in Oklahoma's Five-Year Plan to End Homelessness (January 2019-December 2023) that was submitted to the Governor's office. The effort brought together stakeholders, policymakers, local units of government, funders, tribes, and providers to discuss the importance of discharge planning to include housing and wrap-around services, system barriers and gaps, and what is working well. Hosting regional discharge planning forums to discuss resource mapping, training, leveraging resources, and building collaborations was the next step that was proposed for this forum. Areas of focus included discharge from hospitals, correctional facilities and youth and youth aging out of DHS or foster care, among others.
 - Regional discharge planning forums in conjunction with HUD Continua of Care were held from October 2020-April 2021. Over 400 individuals from across the state attended these to learn about resources across the state and how to build collaborations across sectors for warm hand-offs and braided non-duplications of services.

- Increasing access to safe, affordable housing through a partnership with the Oklahoma Housing Finance Agency (OHFA). OHFA offers rental assistance, home buying, and housing development programs and works with nonprofit organizations, developers, and municipalities to bring quality housing opportunities to communities across the state.
- Providing advisory committee and steering committee support members for the following:
 - OKC Basic Center Program (drop-in services, emergency shelter, gateway services for runaway and homeless youth seventeen and under)
 - ASPIRE, the Advancing State Policy Integration for Recovery and Employment initiative, which was awarded to Oklahoma in March 2021. This project is a statewide initiative that supports bringing key stakeholders together to advance state policy regarding using employment through competitive integrated employment as a recovery tool. GICH has a seat on this steering committee.
 - The GICH subcommittee on employment, education, and training is the state steering committee for the state Intentional Peer Support (IPS) Learning Community. GICH endorses IPS as the model to improve employment, education, and training for those experiencing homelessness.
 - RISE Above Program (housing vouchers for victims of human trafficking)
- From 2020 through 2022, the GICH expanded the number of attendees at Council meetings and now has over 50 attendees regularly.
- The Council has prioritized holding meetings throughout Oklahoma to foster inclusivity of rural and tribal partners. The goal is highlighting best practice programs and model facilities for serving homeless populations throughout Oklahoma, including affordable housing, emergency shelters, employment programs, health care facilities and more. Locations have included, Lawton, Enid, Ada, Stillwater, Henrietta (Muscogee Creek Nation), Tulsa and Oklahoma City, among others.

In August 2022, the GICH hosted me and our Senior Regional Advisor, Tamara Wright. The GICH convened meetings with us to hold Tribal Listening sessions, meet with local providers and city officials, and go on tours of service locations in Oklahoma including Sisu Youth Services and the Department of Health and Mental Health where we were honored to meet Secretary Kevin Corbett. It was clear to me during this visit that the Governor's Interagency Council plays a central role in effective responses to homelessness in the state. The existence of such statewide councils is also in alignment with our Congressional mandate to support states in establishing and maintaining these important bodies.

The work of coordinating multiple state and local agencies, Tribal governments, and providers to streamline access for Oklahomans is no small feat. The GICH has been serving Oklahoma since 2004, and we hope this body will continue its valiant efforts for years to come. We look forward to continuing our partnership and supporting you in the work to prevent and end homelessness in Oklahoma. Please let us know how we can support your work.

Sincerely,


Jeff Olivet, Executive Director

U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness