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PA Senate Democratic Caucus Policy Committee Hearing on Homelessness

Presented by:

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She/Her/Hers

### **Creating a True Continuum of Care: Your Way Home Montgomery County**

Good morning Senator Kearney, Senator Saval, and members of the Senate Democratic Caucus Policy Committee. My name is Kayleigh Silver. I live in Conshohocken. I am the Senior Manager of Housing and Homeless Services for the Montgomery County Office of Housing and Community Development.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk about my experiences in designing and building an effective Continuum of Care for people experiencing and at-risk of homelessness in Montgomery County. My goal today is to demonstrate the importance of investing in housing continuums of care through capacity building, equity initiatives, and recognizing that these continuums need to be co-designed and led by the residents it is serving.

Historically, Montgomery County residents experiencing a housing crisis or homelessness were served by a relatively uncoordinated and fragmented system under a complex web of public agencies, nonprofit service providers, and faith-based groups. A family needing shelter, for example, would have no clear guidance on how to access emergency housing services. This uncoordinated and fragmented system demonstrated major inefficiencies and many worrisome practices.

Recognizing that this model was not cost-efficient, effective, trauma-informed, nor equitable, Montgomery County set forth on a planning and collaborative effort to build a better continuum of care. From 2009 through 2013, public, philanthropic, nonprofit and community partners gradually began a series of aligned planning initiatives, research studies, community conversations and pilot projects to explore and design a more coordinated, comprehensive community response to homelessness and housing stability based on data, and best and promising practices in policy, programs and funding. The end result of these collaborative efforts is Your Way Home, Montgomery County's Continuum of Care.

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Call 2-1-1 if you are experiencing homelessness



In January 2014, Your Way Home was officially established as the county's unified and coordinated housing crisis response system and public-private partnership to end and prevent homelessness.

Your Way Home's mission is to ensure that everyone who lives, works, learns, and invests in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania has equal opportunity to live in an affordable home and a thriving community.

Our partners include residents with the lived experience of homelessness, housing and homeless service providers, public and philanthropic funders, faith communities, landlords, housing developers, and community-based health and human service providers, including agencies that meet the specific needs of veterans, transition age youth, and victims of domestic violence or human trafficking.

The major components of the Your Way Home Continuum of Care include:

- Coordinated Entry through the Your Way Home Call Center, which is operated by 211, and the Your Way Home Street Outreach Team, both operating 24/7 for immediate homeless crisis response for anyone seeking assistance
- Housing-Focused and low-barrier Emergency Shelter services, including centralized shelter bed management
- Diversion and rapid resolution services to help people find alternative, safe & appropriate housing other than entering shelter or having to live outside
- Housing Resource Centers that rapidly re-house people who are homeless, thus exiting them from shelter or the streets quickly into permanent housing
- Permanent Supportive Housing for people who are experiencing chronic homelessness and have long-term disabilities
- Targeted and equitable Homelessness Prevention programs to serve those at risk of homelessness
- Streamlined connections to services, including child care, food security, physical, mental and behavioral health, employment and job training, public benefits access, and others
- A newly announced initiative entitled "Homes For All" that examines the current state of housing affordability in Montgomery County and aims to predict future housing needs and patterns based on economic, health, and social trends. The plan also identifies policy and funding barriers to the creation of affordable housing and ways to advance housing equity for underserved and marginalized populations.



Informed by the collective impact model of solving complex and deeply rooted social problems, the Your Way Home Public-Private Partnership is laser-focused on addressing “upstream” root causes of homelessness, including poverty, violence, trauma, and racism.

It is thanks to this successful, collaborative continuum of care and public-private partnership structure that Montgomery County has made incredible strides in reducing homelessness in our county. Because of having a strong continuum of care, we are able to constantly track our outcomes and data and see where to invest our resources for continued improvement and impact. Our continuum of care data shows that in Montgomery County:

- Fewer Montgomery County residents are entering into homelessness each year, with 757 unduplicated persons entering into homelessness in 2016, and 375 entering into homelessness in 2020.
- Of those who enter homelessness in Montgomery County, more are exiting to permanent housing destinations. While in 2014, only 25% of households experiencing homelessness exited to permanent housing, in 2020 over 61% of households successfully exited homelessness to a permanent housing destination.

Despite Your Way Home’s innovative and effective partnerships and continuum of services, the tragedy of homelessness persists in Montgomery County. Your Way Home has taken a hard look at why. In spring of 2018, Your Way Home officially adopted “advancing equity” as a core guiding principle in its work to end homelessness. The Continuum of Care once again utilized its strong public-private partnership structure and decided to evaluate the racial inequities in the homeless service system and use that information to design a more equitable continuum of care moving forward. It is because of a strong continuum of care that this is possible and will continue to be possible while we work to build a more racially just housing crisis response system.

On a personal note, I would like to take a moment to recognize that continuums of care are not just cost-effective system building, but have the ability to be a personal journey for many, including myself. As a system leader, helping to design and grow this continuum of care, I have been privileged to learn how to do a better job at owning the mistakes I have made in the past that contributed to housing disparities; learning how to step out of the way in order to listen and uplift the voices of those who have experienced homelessness; and do a better job at giving communities the support and regulatory flexibility they need to reframe our work and lead with racial equity.

Effective housing continuums of care that embrace collaboration, coordination, and leading with equity are the foundational support of truly making inroads to ending homelessness in Pennsylvania. By breaking down the silos and building capacity to work together, we have been able to grow a continuum of care that takes a hard look at the bigger systemic issues that drive homelessness: housing affordability, discriminatory practices like redlining, institutional racism, and an equitable path to home ownership.



The American Rescue Plan Act provides communities and continuums of care throughout Pennsylvania with a unique and powerful opportunity to invest in data sharing, capacity building, and housing infrastructure to ensure a safe and affordable home for all residents. Thank you for your time and leadership on this essential work.