



Office of Community Involvement



Department of County Human Services CBAC

TO: Chair Deborah Kafoury and Board of County Commissioners (5 pages)

FROM: Department of County Human Services Community Budget Advisory Committee

DATE: April 30, 2020

SUBJECT: DCHS Community Budget Advisory Committee Report & Recommendations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This letter represents the Department of County Human Services Community Budget Advisory Committee's (CBAC) recommendations regarding the pending FY 2020-2021 budget.

The DCHS CBAC is aware that the County Commission Chair has requested that all departments impose a two percent constraint within their submitted budget requests, which equals approximately \$975,701 in reductions within DCHS.

Our CBAC consists of members who take civic participation and equity work very seriously, which is why we strove to make recommendations to maximize benefit to citizens of the County while considering local budget realities and global health and economic uncertainties. We made sure to adhere to the following guiding principles while making our recommendations:

DCHS CBAC Guiding Principles:

1. Apply an equity lens
2. Emphasize stable housing
3. Identify program offers we cannot support cutting or reducing because of their vital impact on vulnerable populations
4. Protect match/leverage dollars
5. Protect programs/services not provided in another venue/mission

PROCESS

The DCHS CBAC met seven times during this budget cycle to hear from County staff and discuss budget priorities: five two hour in-person meetings between December 2019 and March 2020 and two virtual meetings in April 2020 once the COVID-19 pandemic was underway. We began the process by reviewing the Multnomah County Budget Process; the FY21 financial and 5-year General Fund forecasts, and the roles CBACs play in the county budget process. All meetings

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were attended by DCHS Director Peggy Brey or acting DCHS Director Mohammad Bader, who provided overviews, context, and support.

To inform our budget recommendations, various DCHS Division Directors attended meetings and presented overviews to their divisions, the services they provide and how their programs are funded in regards to CGF and other funds. This year the DCHS CBAC was intentional in allowing committee members more time to consider and debate budget recommendations than in previous years; this included gathering supporting information earlier and scheduling consecutive meetings during the decision making process.

Voting on program funding priorities took place during the April 7th virtual meeting, and the results were discussed during the April 22nd virtual meeting. During these meetings the on-going COVID-19 pandemic was on the forefront of everyone's minds, and we considered its impacts in our voting. While we were unable to physically sit in a room together and thoroughly discuss how each of us ranked the various program requests, we feel that the recommendations presented accurately reflect the priorities of the CBAC as a whole.

The DCHS CBAC feels that the DCHS is doing an admirable job of prioritizing critical human service programs during a time of decreasing budgets, increasing demand, and tremendous uncertainty. Department staff provided thorough program details and were very responsive to requests for further information, and clear rationale was given for all proposed budget changes.

EMERGING ISSUES & CHANGES

The committee formed its recommendations under the shadow of the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, and its effects on County citizens and programs needed to aid those disproportionately affected were heavy factors in our decision making. We also focused on supporting programs which provide aid to immigrants and refugees, those affected by the housing crisis, and communities of color who experience inequalities in economic opportunities, housing, health care, the justice system, and other areas.

COVID-19 RESPONSE & RECOVERY

We support the core values that Chair Kafoury outlined in her communication to CBAC members. DCHS work aligns with the social safety nets value in particular. We recommend that *transparency and communication* be added as a core value in our input for the Board of Commissioners.

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The DCHS CBAC expects the following communities to experience the most significant impacts of COVID-19:

- Historically vulnerable populations
- Seniors
- Domestic violence survivors
- Black, Latinx, and indigenous populations
- Unemployed people or people whose work hours/pay has been reduced due to COVID
- Immigrant and refugee communities
 - not eligible for federal assistance, particularly undocumented people
- People who live in food desert areas and lack transportation
- Houseless populations

COVID-19 is an emerging issue and the CBAC believes the fall out will continue. As time passes, more evidence will emerge regarding the impact of COVID-19 on our community, particularly on the exacerbation of pre-existing vulnerabilities. The DCHS CBAC believes that the impact of COVID-19, including but not limited to school closures, lost income, social isolation, and increased fear, will disproportionately impact the most vulnerable and under-represented members of our community. Multnomah County's DCHS has a history of providing essential services to people who risk further exclusion, and loss of life, livelihoods and safety from the multi-layered impact of COVID-19 on our society. Accordingly, the CBAC believes the DCHS requests that we have reviewed are all crucial, given the pre-existing vulnerabilities of the target population that Multnomah County DCHS serves.

The CBAC believes that DCHS provides a critical safety net through the provision of essential services in our community. We believe that a strengthened social safety net is the foundation of recovery for the populations that DCHS serves, particularly given the pre-existing vulnerabilities of these populations.

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

General Funding Proposed Cuts

The CBAC recommends that DCHS reject the proposed cut of YFS Housing Stabilization for Vulnerable Populations (25133). This is due to the houseless crisis in our community, and the impact that COVID-19 will have on housing insecure families and individuals.

We agreed with the other proposed cuts.

Requests for General Funding

Culturally Specific Navigation Services for Immigrant Families (25136)

This service becomes even more critical. Undocumented people are not included as potential recipients for assistance from the federal government. Further, undocumented people who

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present COVID symptoms may worry about their documentation status and not pursue COVID testing due to this fear. This program helps link undocumented people with the services that they are still eligible for, including both economic assistance, COVID testing, etc.

YFS - Gateway Center Scale (25050B)

It is a well established fact that domestic violence increases in crises worldwide; this is likely to be more pronounced during the COVID crisis because people are required to stay at home--which may not be a safe place. In Portland, domestic violence has increased following the shelter-in-place orders. It is crucial that we increase services to provide people (mostly women and children) the resources they need to get to safety, particularly if we anticipate future shelter-in-place orders.

Community Legal Clinics (25139B)

Access to quality legal representation and services is crucial for communities who experience hardship, unequal opportunity, and injustice. Providing culturally competent legal services to these communities directly benefits them and supports the goals of other DCHS programs by aiding their participants.

Family Unification Program (25130B)

The CBAC recognizes the importance of the multi-agency Family Unification Project partnership and its mission to restore and support families involved in the Child Welfare System, especially families of color who are overrepresented. Ongoing inequalities in the County cause families of color to experience higher degrees of economic hardship, housing instability, and limited opportunity. This fact and the acute health and economic impacts of COVID-19 which affect communities of color disproportionately demand that the County support efforts to strengthen and stabilize families of color.

ADVSD Multi Disciplinary Team (25028B)

The CBAC supports adding an additional 0.8 FTE Mental Health Specialist to the ADVSD Multi-Disciplinary Team providing case management, mental health, and nursing services to older adults, people with disabilities, and Veterans. These populations are likely to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 and programs supporting them will need extra capacity to meet client needs.

Legal Services Days (25131)

As noted above, the CBAC supports lowering barriers to quality legal representation for communities experiencing hardship and/or inequality who otherwise would have no or limited access to these services.

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Preschool for All (25153A)

The CBAC strongly believes in the importance of access to universal preschool, both for the children in our community, and to provide a critical service to parents. At the same time, the CBAC recognizes this is a new program introduced prior to COVID-19, and must be voted on by the public in November 2020. Further, it is unclear what federal programs exist (e.g. EFMLA) to alleviate this pressure. It is unclear whether the program design would be adapted to be focused on low-income or stressed populations, or if it would continue to be universally targeted.

Human Resources (25001B)

The CBAC recognizes the importance of supporting the DCHS HR department in order to facilitate efficient operations at the Department; however given current issues and priorities we ranked this request lower than those above.

ADVSD Transportation Services (25037B)

The CBAC was concerned about these essential services, particularly the importance of providing safe transportation and delivery services for people who are at risk of COVID-19. However, the CBAC wondered if volunteers could also provide delivery services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

On behalf of the committee, we would like to thank Interim DCHS Director Mohammad Bader for his commitment and passion to better the lives of the community. Mohammad's dedication and exemplary leadership have been incredibly valuable for the committee this year with so many new members. We would like to extend big thank yous to Rob Kodiriy, Peggy Brey, Lee Girard, Jill Jessee, Dan Haynes, Peggy Samolinski, and Kristie LoPrestie for all being great resources to our CBAC. Each and every one of them offers thorough and valuable information. Finally we would like to thank Tahira Rivera, Management Analyst, for her phenomenal work in supporting this committee.

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