



MEMORANDUM

TO: Steve March, County Auditor

FROM: Marc Jolin, Joint Office of Homeless Services Director

DATE: January 3, 2018

RE: **Response to Audit of Joint Office of Homeless Services**

Thank you for conducting this very helpful audit in the early months after the formation of the Joint Office of Homeless Services (JOHS). As you indicated, the intent of auditing at this early stage was to identify issues that should be addressed in order to set the JOHS on a path to success. We share this goal and we agree with your recommendations, many of which we are already implementing.

Recommendation 1: Work with the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS) administrator at the City of Portland to gain full access to HMIS reports, including source data for evaluation.

As the audit notes, the JOHS and the Portland Housing Bureau (PHB) data team jointly convene two data quality groups that look at questions of data input, data alignment, and outcome reporting. As a result of the work of these groups data quality and reporting has improved significantly over the past two years. With respect to allowing JOHS full access to HMIS reports and source data, we agree with the importance of this access and attorneys for the City of Portland and Multnomah County are working to resolve the remaining legal issues to allow for full data sharing.

Recommendation 2: Build in capacity for analysis and evaluation, and conduct formal HMIS data analysis and program evaluation.

We fully recognize this need. In partnership with PHB and the evaluation team at the Department of County Management, the JOHS worked during its first year to develop a comprehensive evaluation framework for the A Home for Everyone Initiative. In order to implement this framework, the JOHS requested a full time data analyst position; the request was approved by Multnomah County and the City of Portland. We will review the framework and evaluation plan in light of the audit's specific recommendations to help identify specific evaluation priorities and make any necessary adjustments to the framework.

Recommendation 3: Regularly report to the public on system performance targets and results.

The JOHS has provided regular quarterly system performance reports on the A Home for Everyone (AHFE) website and at the regular AHFE Coordinating Board and Executive Committee meetings. These reports include key metrics, such as housing placements, retention rates, homelessness preventions, and shelter utilization. The metrics are disaggregated by race and ethnicity and are presented with reference to annual performance targets as well as previous

years' outcomes. As the audit points out, there are certain system performance measures that JOHS collects at the direction of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) that have not thus far been included in these quarterly reports or made readily available online. As JOHS' access to HMIS data improves, and our data analysis capacity expands, it will be easier to provide these metrics more reliably, more frequently, and in a more accessible form. The audit also recommends that the JOHS present more context, e.g. levels of unmet need, when presenting system outcomes. We agree and are determining how best to implement this recommendation.

Recommendation 4: Work with service providers to improve data collection efforts, particularly at the shelter level.

This work is happening through the data quality workgroup convened by JOHS and PHB, the HMIS data teams at PHB and the Department of County Human Services (DCHS), and through direct engagement with individually contracted non-profit providers. Each non-profit provider is subject to an annual data quality review as part of the conditions of receiving public funds. The audit's recommendation to focus specifically on shelter providers is understandable. As a community we have made a large investment in the expansion of shelter, in particular a no turn-away family shelter, a low-barrier year-round shelter and temporary overnight shelters. Data collection in these new shelter types present certain challenges that we are actively working with providers to address. The JOHS is working to address these challenges so that we are able to provide better data on shelter visitors and their outcomes.

Recommendation 5: Comply with Resolution 08-112 when considering future contracting relationships, or, in light of the partnership with the City of Portland, revisit the rule.

The JOHS received contract relationships from PHB and DCHS. As we go to re-procure those contracts, we will apply Resolution 08-112, unless in consultation with all the appropriate parties within Multnomah County and the City of Portland, it is determined that the rule should be modified or not applied due to the unique nature of the JOHS.

Again, we appreciate the audit's focus on helping ensure that the fledgling Joint Office of Homeless Services is in the best possible position to fulfill its mission. The audit recommendations align well with the priorities we have set for ourselves and we will continue to work diligently to implement those recommendations.

Sincerely,



Marc Jolin, Director