

The Honorable Ben Carson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W.,
Washington, DC 20410-0001

Dear Secretary Carson:

I am writing to you as the CEO of HOW (Housing Opportunities for Women) out of concern for the future of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH) and its emerging departure from the Housing First model. The Housing First approach prioritizes providing permanent housing to people experiencing homelessness, pairing it with support services to help people achieve long-term stability.¹

HOW was among the first agencies in the nation to implement Housing First and has decades of data to support the efficacy of this model. Consistently over 95% of HOW clients maintain in stable housing while with us, and over 90% remain stably housed after they leave. We know first-hand that with the foundation of stable housing individuals and families overcome obstacles, rebuild their lives, and become economically independent, self-sufficient, proud members of our communities.

Since its founding over 30 years ago, the USICH has also successfully used the Housing First model to reduce homelessness and help our most vulnerable neighbors find stability. This has been the USICH's preferred approach to homelessness because of its proven effectiveness and cost-efficiency. According the USICH housing first reduces homelessness, significantly decreases the use of crisis services (hospitals, jails, shelters...etc.) resulting in cost savings, mitigates the harmful health effects of homelessness, and reduces criminal justice costs.²

As shown by years of research, and by the USICH itself, Housing First is the most "thoroughly established example of an evidence-based approach to ending homelessness."³

With the appointment of Mr. Robert Marbut, who has previously rejected the Housing First model⁴, I am gravely concerned about the agency's ability to continue in its mission of reducing homelessness. I fear Mr. Marbut will move funding and federal priorities away from Housing First policies and adopt failed previous approaches that also remove dignity and choice from individuals experiencing homelessness. Shifting away from proven methods and best practices will certainly have a detrimental impact on nonprofits such as HOW and will severely impede our ability to provide housing and services to hundreds of individuals and families across Chicagoland.

¹ National Alliance to End Homelessness, "Rapid Re-Housing Fact Sheet: Housing First," (April 2016) <http://endhomelessness.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/housing-first-fact-sheet.pdf>

² United State Interagency Council on Homelessness, "The Evidence Behind Approaches that Drive an End to Homelessness" (December 2017) https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Evidence-Behind-Approaches-That-End-Homelessness-Brief-2019.pdf

³ Berg, Steve, "The CoC Program NOFA is Here." *National Alliance to End Homelessness* (blog). July 9, 2019. Accessed January 10, 2019. <https://endhomelessness.org/the-coc-nofa-is-here/>

⁴ Delaney, Arthur. "How A Traveling Consultant Helps America Hide The Homeless." *HuffPost*, December 6, 2017. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/robert-marbut_n_6738948

I urge you to intervene and ensure the USICH continues to incentivize and promote the Housing First model as the most effective approach against homelessness. I also invite you to come visit HOW and meet some of our current and former clients who can speak to the effectiveness of Housing First and demonstrate how vital the funding and subsidies that support this approach are.

Thank you in advance for taking this request to best aid those experiencing homelessness and help thousands of individuals and families experience the stability and safety of a home.

Sincerely,

Britt Shawver
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