

Milwaukee County Exec. Abele: Update on efforts to combat homelessness in Milwaukee County

Posted on Thursday, Nov 15, 2018

>> **WisPolitics is now on the State Affairs network. Get custom keyword notifications, bill tracking and all WisPolitics content. [Get the app or access via desktop.](#)**

MEDIA CONTACT: Karina Henderson

414.278.4216 (office) | karina.henderson@milwaukeecountywi.gov

TO: Milwaukee County homelessness partners, advocates and all county residents

FROM: County Executive Chris Abele

RE: Community Update: Homelessness in Milwaukee County

As a part of **Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Week**, I wanted to update you on the efforts, successes and ongoing commitment from Milwaukee County in fighting homelessness in our community.

In 2015, we all made a commitment toward ending chronic homelessness by this year, and we have not wavered from that commitment. **In fact, we are on track to formally meeting the requirements of a functional-zero number for the chronically homeless in our community.** As we said from the start, it's not our final goal, but it's an important step in reducing homelessness.

As we approach that goal on chronic homelessness, I want to highlight several accomplishments we've made through our extensive community partnerships and the ongoing efforts of the County Department of Health and Human Services Housing Division:

- **RECOGNITION FROM HARVARD:** The Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation at the Harvard Kennedy School recognized

Milwaukee County as a top-25 program through its 2018 Innovations in American Government Awards. The Milwaukee County Housing First initiative was honored for its work in approaching functional zero for chronic homelessness, defined as having more housing units immediately available than demand. The County commitment to Housing First has dramatically expanded permanent housing, and the coordinated entry system has helped all community partners match homeless individuals with housing, as well as identify them before they are defined as chronically homeless.

- **HOMELESSNESS DOWN MORE THAN 40 PERCENT:** The July point-in-time count performed by Milwaukee County and many partner agencies put the number of homeless individuals at 887. This is down from 1,521 in 2015, reflecting a 41.7 percent drop in the county's homeless population in three years.
- **OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS AND REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT:** Through its Opportunity Knocks program, the County has begun converting County-owned foreclosed properties into funding for efforts to prevent homelessness. House of Correction residents acquire construction-trades job training by renovating dilapidated single-family homes, and the houses are placed on the market. Net proceeds from the sale help support the Housing Opportunities and Minimizing Evictions for Stabilization (HOMES) program, designed to address the eviction crisis in Milwaukee County. This innovative program has resulted in the sale its first home in 2018. The Housing Division is also acting as a co-developer of multi-family real estate. Proceeds from developer fees will also be used for homeless related programming.
- **RAISING FUNDS AND AWARENESS:** In addition to the gold "parking meters" located along Wisconsin Avenue, the County has placed donation boxes at Mitchell Airport (MKE) to raise funds and awareness for its Housing First initiative. As passengers remove change from their pockets to go through security, they have the option to donate the change in support of rental assistance, case management and employment services. The airport boxes have been in place since July. All funds collected go to the Housing First Endowment through the Greater Milwaukee Foundation, which builds sustainable funding for the program.
- **CONSTANT OUTREACH EFFORTS:** The Housing Division outreach team

is checking in with homeless individuals in our community every day, working to connect people with services and housing. As tent encampments have grown in locations such as MacArthur Square and underneath 794 near the Intermodal Station, our outreach efforts have increased to try to give each person in a tent the dignity of real housing. Through a recent HUD competitive award as well as a homeless preference in our Housing Authority, 100 Section 8 vouchers were just made available to respond to the needs of these individuals. While we have successfully gotten dozens of individuals into temporary or permanent housing, our outreach efforts are ongoing – especially as cold weather becomes more of a health and safety threat.

- **A VISIBLE PROBLEM:** Many Milwaukee County residents have noticed more homeless individuals in tents throughout our downtown area. I have said it before, and I'll say it again: A tent is not good enough for anyone in our community. We strive, and work, for every individual to have the dignity of a real home. But if there's any positive aspect of the tents in our efforts to combat homelessness, it's this: The tents have made the homelessness issue in our community visible. Homeless people should never disappear from our line of sight or our continuum of services, and the tents show everyone how much work we have to do. Tent or no tent, our homeless residents will never vanish from my view.

One of the keys to our progress in fighting homelessness has been how many individuals and organizations have worked together. Milwaukee County could not have made this progress alone, and our coordinated efforts have produced results. Finding a home for everyone who needs one is an effort we need the entire community to be involved in. Anyone can contribute directly to providing services through the Housing First Endowment. Donations can be made at HousingFirstMilwaukee.org.

A 40 percent drop in homelessness is incredible, but it's not enough. We will continue to invest time, money, ideas and partnerships into battling and preventing homelessness in Milwaukee County.