

Gloria L. Brown
Director

Department of Human Resources
Prince George's County Department of Social Services

October 22, 2015

Paul Hastings
875 15th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20005

Dear Nomination Committee:

Please accept this nomination letter of the *Prince George's County Department of Social Services* for its *Homeless and Unaccompanied Youth System of Care* for the *Paul Hastings Award for Innovative Programs*. The nominated System of Care is a *publicly-led* public private partnership established to build and sustain a *systemic solution* to housing instability and homelessness among unaccompanied youth and young adults ages 13-24 in Prince George's County. This innovative program includes the establishment of the County's first publicly funded shelter for youth, Promise Place.

Program Longevity

The Prince George's County Department of Social Services (PGCDSS) convened the Homeless Youth Work Group (HYWG) composed of representatives of 38 private and public organizations in 2011 to begin development of a blueprint for creating a youth centric service system strategically focused on addressing the housing and supportive services needs of youth and young adults. Consideration was given to scientific advancements in adolescent brain development resulting in the identified target age of 13 to 24, as well as, evidence-informed services and interventions including trauma-informed care, harm reduction and positive youth development practices. To date, this group has brought more than \$1 million dollars in public and private funding to Prince George's County to serve this population and has established both emergency and transitional shelters; inclusive of safe beds for trafficked, gang engaged, and other youth at imminent risk of harm. In addition, the integration of child welfare services into the homeless youth system is building the platform for long term sustainability in both service delivery and practice beyond a traditional housing response.

Program Description

Unaccompanied homeless youth are a persistent yet oftentimes invisible subgroup of the homeless population in Prince George's County. These youth are disconnected from their families or system of care for numerous reasons including family violence, aging out of the foster care system, LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and questioning) issues, pregnancy, disability, and mental illness. Without intervention they are more likely than their peers to become entangled in the criminal justice system develop chronic and/or behavioral health issues, and experience continued homelessness throughout their lives- all at great cost to the public health and safety system. Most importantly, the issues they are dealing with and the solutions to their homelessness differ from those of older adults and/or children who are living with parents or guardians.

The HYWG developed a strategic plan that would create a single, integrated system of care and address homelessness among youth and young adults. As a result, the Housing Stability Study of Youth and Young Adults was conducted by the Center for Adolescent Health at the Johns Hopkins University to better understand the scope of the problem. County stakeholders were engaged in an inclusive process including survey design and outreach strategy resulting in an initial count of 185 youth surveyed and eight focus groups conducted to



determine youth perspectives of housing circumstances and service needs. The count was repeated in FY 2012 and FY 2013 and the County is currently identified as one of six Continuum of Cares to participate in a larger state initiative, Youth REACH MD, modeled in part after Prince George's County's earlier work.

At the time of the 2011 Unaccompanied Homeless Youth and Young Adults Survey, there was no coordinated service system available for county homeless and unstably housed youth and young adults. The existing shelter system had no capacity to house unaccompanied homeless youth under the age of 18. For young adults ages 18-24, shelter was only available as part of the larger system for homeless adults, with insufficient youth-focused programming. The data revealed clear gaps in services which resulted in the HYWG mobilizing to begin to quickly solve these problems. Within six months, reallocations were made within the existing system to create bed capacity and in the following three years, funding from untapped grant sources was successfully secured for dedicated shelter beds, including a first ever award made to the County by the Weinberg Foundation. Finally, a training academy was established in early 2012 to begin developing provider skill sets necessary for capacity expansion. Since its inception, this initiative has provided stable housing to more than 177 young people in need.

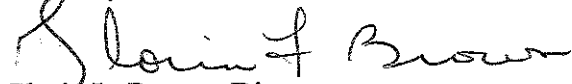
Program Impact

Prince George's County's investment in unaccompanied homeless youth represents an unprecedented level of commitment and involvement by a local jurisdiction in Maryland resulting in:

- A comprehensive and uniform information collection method for the circumstances of young people experiencing housing instability and homelessness on an annual basis;
- A strategic plan that focuses *solely* on unaccompanied youth and is intentionally developing a *systemic solution* to housing instability and homelessness among unaccompanied youth and young adults;
- A 24/7/365 hotline (1.866.4YOUTH1) dedicated to youth experiencing a housing crisis;
- Integrated child welfare and youth homeless systems of care and co-funded case management staff;
- Secured over \$1million dollars in federal, state, local and private funding specific to this population;
- Developed 24 new emergency and 26 new transitional housing beds for this population;
- Established a training academy that provides training aimed at strategic skill development within key youth provider networks to ensure services are youth centric and trauma informed; and
- Developed a street outreach brand (R U OK?) with youth input to expand access for youth in crisis.

Because of its extensive work in this area, Prince George's County was identified as one of two jurisdictions in Maryland to participate on the Governor's Task Force to Study Housing and Supportive Services for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth. The County was also an integral part of helping to advance two pieces of important state legislation, the Youth REACH MD pilot count and the addition of homeless youth to Maryland's tuition waiver. Given these accomplishments, the Homeless and Unaccompanied Youth System of Care meets the criteria for the County Best Practices Award as it is representative of the innovative programs that improve the quality of life for County residents.

Sincerely,



Gloria L. Brown, Director
Prince George's County
Department of Social Services