

Advocacy to Move from Homelessness to Housing

Georgia Supportive Housing Association Conference

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2022 is a Critical Election Year

Who we elect will determine Georgia's commitment to permanent supportive housing, mental health care, ending homelessness, and safely and stably housing vulnerable Georgians.

- Elections are the Ultimate "Teachable Moment" for Politicians. . .
- The Governor is up for re-election
 - Leads on the state budget and sets the revenue estimate;
 - Apportions \$4.8 Billion in federal American Rescue Plan Act funds;
 - Appoints the leaders in the Executive Branch, including agency heads and Boards for DBHDD, DCA and DCH, etc.
- All statewide Constitutional Officers are up for election/re-election:
 - Lieutenant Governor – Presides over the State Senate
 - Insurance Commissioner – Responsible for enforcing health insurance laws, including mental health parity
 - Attorney General – The State's Lawyer
- All Members of the Georgia House and Senate are up for election/re-election with new Districts

Rising Need and Opportunity for Change

Pandemic challenges have created heightened awareness of key issues:

- **Connection between housing and health** for the individual, their close contacts, and the community where they live
- **Increase in homelessness.** May continue to get worse as evictions move forward
 - Georgia was the state with the highest risk of eviction and foreclosure within the next two months (Census Bureau, Household Pulse Survey, Sept. 24, 2021)
 - Dangers of housing people in congregate settings, stark unemployment, and pressures of covid.
 - Black women with children are the face of eviction in Georgia with few legal protections or resources to prevent homelessness.
 - Georgia lagging the rest of the country in distribution of federal Emergency Rental Assistance funds.
- **Rising mental health crises, deaths, substance abuse overdoses, etc. during pandemic.**
 - Georgia is one of only 14 states that has still not expanded Medicaid to make MH and SUD services available for homeless.
 - Georgia ranked 48th among the states in US in access to mental health care for 2022.
- **Need for better diversion of persons with mental health and substance use disorders away from criminal justice system and into receiving supports.**

GSHA Building Advocacy Capacity

- **Created the HousingFirst Georgia coalition** of organizations and individuals to advocate for increased resources and stronger policies to address the unmet need for permanent supportive housing.
 - Engaging with 40 groups and more individuals.
 - Join the coalition by emailing Mariel at gshassociation@gmail.com or go to www.supportivehousingassociation.com and sign up to receive more information and join.
- **Co-Sponsored Housing Day at the Capitol 2021 and pre-Housing Day training webinar** with lead organization Georgia Advancing Communities Together (Georgia ACT).
- **Actively engaged in the state legislative session** by advocating and mobilizing grassroots and organizational support to achieve socially just public policy that ensures the most vulnerable people have access to housing and the supportive services they need to thrive.
- **Established a Zoning Barriers Task Force** to address discriminatory zoning regulations that prevent the construction or expansion of permanent supportive housing.

What will the 2022 Session Look Like?

Special Session November 3 – November 22-Redistricting for next 10 years. Covid protocols in place.

Re-election will be top of mind for the Governor, Constitutional officers and all members of the General Assembly seeking re-election.

Legislature Convenes Jan. 10, 2022, for 40 legislative days

- Over by the end of March 2022??
- Primary set for May 24, 2022 *(Some jurisdictions seeking to move to June 28 due to redistricting changing boundaries.)*
- Most candidates holding office cannot raise funds during the legislative session incentivizing them to end the session as soon as possible. *Note: Governor and members of the leadership team changed the law in 2021 so they can raise funds during the legislative session.*

Covid Restrictions?

- Practices in place in 2021 may be restored in some form. No pages, no rope line, no outside groups allowed to reserve rooms, no passage within the capitol around the House and Senate entrances, limited seating in meeting rooms.

Oppose HB 713:

Support Best Practices for Homeless Services

HB 713 proposes to redirect all federal and state funds for homelessness away from permanent supportive housing and services and into unproven strategies to hide rather than house homeless.

- Creates state sanctioned parking lots for homeless people with cars.
- Creates state sanctioned encampments for homeless without cars
- Creates short term cabins for up to 6 months conditioned on work or service.
- Conditions local receipt of homeless funds on enforcement of constitutionally suspect bans on sleeping and camping in public.

Best practices show funding permanent supportive housing with wrap around supportive services is key to ending homelessness. Permanent supportive housing costs no more than, and often half as much as sanctioned encampments, and is a path for leaving homelessness not sustaining it.

A New Emphasis on Mental Health

- Creation of a New Bipartisan Mental Health Caucus
- Commitment by Speaker David Ralston and other leadership to address mental health issues
- Omnibus legislation from Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission
 - Bill still being drafted and will continue to evolve, especially on diversion from criminal justice for seriously mentally ill persons.
 - Reflect recommendations in [2021 Report of the Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission](#).
 - Governor allocated \$335,000 to hire a consultant to help identify actionable budget and policy recommendations for next year from the BHRIC work. A report is due prior to the legislative session. That includes a subcontract with the Council of State Courts to support the Commission's two criminal justice committees on diversion, especially for persons with serious mental illness.

Omnibus Bill from Behavioral Health Reform and Innovation Commission

- **Assisted Outpatient Treatment** pilot funding five sites over three years, partnering CSBs, providers and Probate Courts to oversee and support outpatient involuntary care, treatment and case management, with a view toward statewide implementation.
- **Standard for Involuntary Commitment** – Inpatient and Outpatient
 - Eliminates requirement for “imminent” harm – just harm.
 - Eliminates requirement of unable to care for own “physical” health – just health and safety “so as to create a reasonable expectation that a life-endangering crisis or significant psychiatric deterioration will occur in the near future.”
- **Peace Officers** can take a person to a physician for emergency examination or to an emergency receiving facility without having committed a penal offense and if the person committed a penal offense the officer need not tender charges before taking to a physician or emergency facility. See also, HB 717 (Rep. Sharon Cooper)
- **Governor Appointed Diversion Committee** to research how to help local communities keep people with serious mental illness out of city and municipal jails and detention facilities.
- **Expand authority of BHRIC to partner with Department of Corrections to evaluate mental health wraparound services** and connection to local MH resources to meet client needs on reentry, including housing.

Record State Budget Surplus

- State finished the FY 22 Budget year on June 30, 2021, with a record surplus of \$3.7 Billion
 - 10% Across the Board Cuts from FY 21 Budget enacted in the early days of Covid-19 have not been fully restored, especially in mental health.
 - Even after funding the Rainy Day Reserve Fund with \$1.5 Billion, \$2.2 Billion remains unobligated.
 - Governor ordered all Executive Agencies to submit flat budget proposals for FY 23, with no increases.
 - Speaker Ralston promised \$75 Million for crisis mental health beds.

Budget Asks for Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities – DBHDD

- Restore Funding to Reentry Housing.
- Fully Fund the State Housing Voucher Program for people with severe and persistent mental illness.
- Adequately fund adult addictive disease services.
- Fully fund core services for adult mental health.

Department of Community Affairs-DCA

- Increase funding to the State Housing Trust Fund for Homeless.
- Protect the State Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC).

ARPA: Unprecedented Federal Resources

Federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds can be used to address housing instability, prevent evictions, end homelessness, and build statewide and regional programs that will create sound housing and homelessness program infrastructure in Georgia:

- \$4.8 Billion to be allocated by Governor Kemp with these housing purposes included as permissible uses:
 - Assistance to workers and families for housing, food & financial insecurity; Public benefits navigators; Individual housing needs
 - Relocation assistance; Affordable housing development; Housing vouchers; Residential counseling; homelessness prevention
- \$140 Million in HOME ARPA Funds for Production or preservation of affordable housing; Tenant based rental assistance (TBRA)
 - Supportive services, homeless prevention services, & housing counseling; Purchase and development of non-congregate shelter
- \$355 Million in Homeowner Assistance Program
- \$1.3 Billion in Emergency Rental Assistance Funds – DCA lagging in distribution with some successes in metro jurisdictions.
- FEMA: 100% reimbursement for non-congregate shelter and operating costs through end of 2021 and assistance.
- Fair Housing, Housing Counseling, and Emergency Food and Shelter Funding.
- Billions in funding directly to cities and counties

Anticipated Budget Reconciliation \$150 Billion Funding for Housing and Homelessness in House passed version.

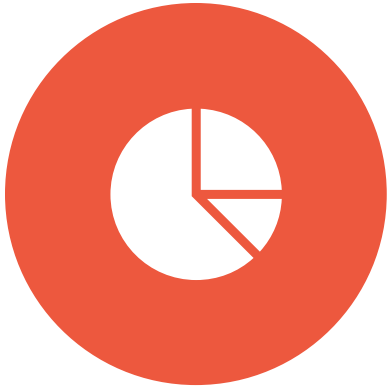
Next Steps

- Contact your State Senator and State Representative and urge them to prioritize the housing policy and funding issues you want to see in 2022.
 - Identify who represents you for the 2022 session (old/current districts) at www.openstates.org
- Watch for advocacy updates throughout the legislative session from GSHA and please take action when you are asked.
- Join the HousingFirst Georgia coalition to engage as a partner to support HousingFirst policies and resources.
- Participate in Housing Day at the Capitol and Pre-Housing Day webinar.

Participate in Housing Day Programs

- Housing Day at the Capitol - February 23, 2022
 - May be virtual or in-person depending on House and Senate Covid Protocols
 - Hear from legislators working to pass key housing legislation
 - Advocacy training
 - Issue briefings and update on legislation and budget highlights
 - Learn how best to engage with the people who represent you
- Pre-Housing Day Training Webinar - February 9, 2022 at Noon
 - Virtual Lunchtime Program
 - Learn Key Elements of Advocacy and Focus on Priority Bills and Issues
 - Hear from legislators advocating for housing solutions

Thank you!



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