Hilary Scherer: Thank you, everyone for joining us and welcome. This is Hilary Scherer from DHS. I'm just going to go over a couple quick median logistics information, and then we'll kick it on over to Erin Dalton, Director of the Allegheny County Department of Human Services. So for some housekeeping items, this meeting is being recorded. We're asking everyone to please mute your lines when you're not speaking. There is a chat box that you can use to share questions or comments throughout the presentation, and we'll be monitoring that chat box. And at the end of the presentation, we'll raise the questions asked and we'll also give an opportunity to people joining via phone, to ask questions or make comments.

Those joining us via computer can turn on live closed captioning. To do so in Zoom, you can click on the live transcript button at the bottom of your screen and select the show subtitles option. You'll also be able to request a transcript of the hearing translated into any needed language by emailing dhs/, not slash, so dhs-ideas@alleghenycounty.us. You'll also note that you can use that email address after the meeting if you want to send any questions or comments once we're done today. And finally, if members of the media could please identify themselves in the chat, that would be appreciated. And with that, I can turn it over to you, Erin.

Erin Dalton: Okay, great. Thanks so much, Hilary. And thanks everybody for joining today. I know it's hard to take the time out of the workday to join something like this. So I greatly appreciate it. And we are very open to ideas. This is an atypical time in that there is more opportunity, I think, to think broader and to invest with so much of the federal stimulus and recovery funds in the mix. So this is the year for your idea, if you've got it. We'd love to hear it and try to work with folks to make stuff happen. So I'm going to try and be brief. Just give a little bit of an overview of a little bit about the funding for human services and some of our priorities, and then leave plenty of time for questions and answers and comments.

All right. So I think we've pretty much covered all of this. If you missed any of the specifics of what Hillary was saying, the dhs-ideas@alleghenycounty address is here. You will know that the meeting is being recorded and so on. And some very high-level information about DHS. And we don't really even know what this look like during COVID. In a non COVID year, we served about one in every five folks in the county. So 200,000 plus people. As you know, many of you are service providers, we mostly do this work through nonprofit and other community partners. We do a bunch of the child protective services, adult protective services, some other work with county staff. But a lot of the work is done with providers. And we really attempt, and this was certainly a legacy of Mark Turner, my predecessor, longtime predecessor, who really worked to integrate care across our kind of silos.

They were different silos 20 years ago. There's always silos to be trying to integrate across. But we have five program offices organizationally. So our Office of Community Services, Behavioral Health, Aging, Children Youth and Families,
and Office of Developmental Support. And then we're supported by the Office of Equity and Engagement, Analytics, Technology and Planning and Administration. So that's just a little bit about the way we're organized. We talk a lot about having lots and lots of different funding streams. We absolutely do. And we like having the diversity of funding where we apply for a lot of federal state competitive foundation grants. But primarily our funding comes from the Human Services Block Grant. And this is a specific hearing on those funds. Something that the state caused a needs-based budget and plan, and it helps to set the funding for Allegheny County for children youth services.

People sometimes think about that as just child protection, but it goes well beyond to afterschool family centers, anything that could prevent abuse and neglect. And then that really big... That 40% kind of gray part of the doughnut there is managed care. So behavioral health care in this case. So lots of the resources come through Allegheny County DHS to support managed care. And then a number of others that we note here, the Aging Block Grant, the early learning resource center and funding from federal Housing, Urban Development.

So that said, we have in the past had kind of separate hearings for separate things, and we may have to do that to some extent to meet requirements, but we'll take any ideas. If you've got an idea that you would think would support children today, you don't need to wait for the needs-based budget for that. We'd love to hear from you about any idea. It's our job to figure out how to pay for it.

And then just a little bit more detail about the block grant itself. So it's a flexible funding stream and it allows us to respond to needs and optimize other resources. And this is a little bit the way we've spent it in the past about 120 million. Three quarters of which have traditionally been spent on mental health expenses, which a good portion of that is housing supports because we can't use those managed care dollars to pay for the housing needs of people with mental illness, typically serious mental illness. But you see some of the other smaller parts of the pie in homeless assistance and substance use and aging and legal expenses for CYF families, which we can't use the needs-based budget for and so on. So this is our most flexible funding stream. And there's lots of room for ideas with it here.

So just a little bit about what DHS, the way we think about our work, kind of in what we tag as normal times, pre COVID times. We have a responsibility to protect children and youths, older adults and other vulnerable people. We attempt to prevent homelessness, substance misuse including overdose, mental health crisis, abuse and neglect, or incarceration. And we also work hard with many of you to support communities and families, health and wellness and treatment and recovery. But in times of COVID, which hopefully we are really pulling out of for the last time, we also realized we had to do some other things. So where DHS wasn't deeply involved in some of these things in the past, we worked to help hard hit families stabilize and recover from widespread job loss.
And I think we'll have... I know the employment picture is really strong right now, but I suspect that at a certain point, hopefully not, but that, that hits a wall and we'll have a lot of work to do to help get folks back to work, removing barriers and getting the right help to people in time to prevent real damage. And I think really important, we don't really know what the impact of isolation and COVID and learning loss and so on has been on needs for families and all of us. And so I think what we're also trying to anticipate is the significant mental health, child abuse, family violence, substance use issues, other learning loss that the pandemic has essentially been hiding from our view, at least to some extent. So we hope that doesn't come, but everything we know suggests that there's been more significant needs during this time.

And then lastly, really making sure that the nonprofit, our provider sector is equipped to handle an increase in demand by trying to at least identify and fix kind of problems that are at the heart of human services and its funding. All right. So more on that point. Some threats to human services and our providers. I don't have to tell folks probably here, but staffing and workforce issues and wages issues were a significant problem to all parts of the human services system prior to COVID. And current pressure on wages and staffing and people choosing new opportunities during this time has only made that worse under the pandemic. So the data point here is one in eight direct care worker is living in poverty, 75% earning less than a living wage. Huge, huge threat to the sector because we can put money in services, but, if providers or anyone can't find the staff to do the work and quality staff, then the quality services can't be delivered.

We think too, and these kinds of waves will hit at different points, but lack of investment in organizations serving disproportionally impacted communities. 87% of Pennsylvania health and human services nonprofits are facing increased expenses or lost revenue because of COVID. I do think that the state and county have attempted to fill those gaps, but at some point in the future when there isn't so much stimulus money, and maybe you feel it now, this lost revenue will become a significant issue. And then importantly too, 43% of Pittsburgh area nonprofits that focused their work on communities of color are in poor financial health. So there haven't been significant investments in those nonprofits, and they may in fact be hurting more during this time. And then I think to points I already made, while there is a lot of COVID relief funding available now, that will end at some point, and we want to be wary of a cliff and trying to anticipate that and work to reduce it.

So on the more opportunity side, hopefully we can use this, the recovery funds can be maximized to improve equity and fixed longstanding problems at the heart of human services, maybe. There would have to be significant state and federal reforms alongside of that. And then I can't speak, the county has not yet released their plan for the American Rescue funds. But what I can say in broad strokes is that we think the American Rescue Plan funds make sense to help support affordable housing and partnership with our partner at the Allegheny County Economic Development. And actually I think seek as much flexibility as
we can have to help people recover from the pandemic's economic and social impacts. The things that I was mentioning earlier that may have been hidden. Just to give a concrete example of that, reports to the child welfare hotline have been down all along the pandemic, all during the pandemic, but that's in part because a lot of the referrals come from schools and healthcare professionals and kids haven't been in those places.

And so we don't really have the same kinds of systems in place to understand abuse and neglect, just as an example. And as soon as we know how the county intends to use those resources, we'll certainly kind of feed them back into this planning process and update folks and kind of work to use those funds as best we can to work on the ideas that have been put forward. All right. So a couple of more slides and ideas that I think just kind of bring to heart the things that we've been thinking about. And a lot of this is my kind of take on what have been our priorities. So none of this is really very different from what human services and DHS has done in the past. But a real emphasis on trying to improve first level access to human services, making it much easier to both find and access help when you need it in both digital data, physical places, and to provide the opportunity for feedback on those services.

Quiet as it's kept too, human services often isn't available off kind of more nine to five Monday through Friday type hours. I don't think that works in the future. And so trying to make those shifts now. Increasing our partnerships and investments in economic security. We've seen how critical obviously economic security is and economic mobility. And DHS can do more, we think, with our partners to increase access to those assets, advocate and educate about how critical they are, and help to support people to get to economic security. And then we have a couple of more detailed slides on all of these, but really trying to expand prevention so that we can avoid crisis systems whenever possible. And then certainly a big effort. And we've been working on this since before the pandemic, but to help support people, their families, and first responders when there is a crisis so that law enforcement doesn't have to handle a mental health crisis, for example, alone and that there are other options for folks-

... and that there are other options for folks instead of 911 and so on. And so a lot of emphasis there. And then more of an internal focused approach, just, there's lots we can do, we have all these kinds of systems within government. How can we improve the flow and quality of those systems so that we can better serve people? So I want you to know that we're focusing on those internal improvements as well. So this is just, it's essentially the same thing I kind of just went through with a little bit more detail on each of the strategies, because we have a few more slides on each. I'll just continue on.

So access. Certainly look, we have lots of places across Allegheny county where people could theoretically get services, everything from 26 family support
centers across the community to senior centers, and so on. We want to just look across those and make sure that they are able to do what we intend them to do, and be the place where people can get access to many different things that they would need.

So really bolstering our place-based access services and making sure we have some specific places for populations that may not be able to be best served by some of the broader functions. So really looking at the centers and stuff that we already have, and investing more and making the ones that we support really, really robust.

I could speak for a very long time about this digital access problem. Every single day, twice today already, people have reminded me that the resource data that we have and the databases, and the internet doesn't really work very well for helping to find care, particularly the types of care folks would most want to access, with information about the quality of that care.

So we've got a whole plan there. Happy to talk about it a different time and we're not like other, we're very similar to other places around the country on this but we're going to break this problem. We're going to solve it. It's critical to people being able to find help.

And then lots of work, folks are familiar with some of our predictive risk modeling. It's not just that, but really using the data that we have to make sure that we triaged folks into the right levels of care. And alongside that kind of digital access is doing much more branding and marketing. I don't know how we expect people to find stuff if we don't tell them. They don't sort of just miraculously know. So I think in the past, it hasn't been a thing that we've focused on because it's weird to, perhaps for human services, to be thinking about marketing, but we want to make sure people know how to get to those services. So this is not about marketing or branding DHS, but marketing and branding ways to get access to various services, kind of those best paths to find help.

All right, so economic security, I think folks are, there's way more than this, and these are some of the things that we're working on. Certainly the rental assistance program, operating as well as we possibly can and maximizing getting dollars out to people. There's real limits of course, to what DHS on its own can do to reduce the digital divide. We've tried to be part of that solution in purchasing equipment for people and organizations, and providing access to wifi in the community and so on.

But we're anxious to work with other partners to pursue a broader strategy. Working with our partners across the county and the region, trying to increase childcare during nontraditional hours and short-term hours, and expand transportation for people who are in training and employment, so that they can get to that training and employment, and get their kids into care that's safe and
nurturing and so on. Supporting the many agencies throughout the community who work to get people enrolled in benefits, maybe nothing could be more credible than people being able to draw down those dollars.

And then, really actively seeking and educating folks about poverty alleviation and what's really needed to improve the safety net on the ground.

And then in terms of prevention, there's lots here. We're working on and other systems as well, but working to prevent homelessness through rental assistance and eviction prevention, and hopefully, well for sure, increasing the affordable housing supply. And then improving, this is again kind of more of an internal thing, but improving the flow of the system, kind of integrating across behavioral health and more of our HUD funded housing, and trying to see how we can have more people exiting housing into the community and living on their own, then there'll be more slots for others.

So lots of work there, lots of work with our partners, and this is something kind of a renewed effort as the pandemic has reduced burden. But to really focus again on reducing overdose through the availability of Narcan and medication assisted treatment and warm handoffs, and other reduction approaches to working with health department and other partners. Trauma, really critical to invest in all kinds of supports around violence reduction.

We had a provider meeting on that topic last week. If you get a chance to listen to it, I think it was a good kind of panel discussion. And then around kind of crisis services and other systems that we call... I'm sure I can find better words, but we call them kind of involuntary systems. Sometimes we call them more of the course of parts of government, which includes child welfare and child protection, and criminal justice and juvenile justice, working with partners across the community to have community alternatives instead of those kinds, of course of systems. And I think we're making good progress actually in all of the systems, including in child welfare. But we're happy to have ideas.

All right, this is last, except for the kind of more internal thing, which I'll go quickly on.

So on crisis response, we have systems across the county, we have a robust set of services for people experiencing homelessness, and never enough, but we have services for people struggling with mental illness or substance use. And yet we see just proportionate number of people who encounter police and end up incarcerated or otherwise harmed, having significant underlying human services needs. And not just that, it's the human services needs themselves that brought them before law enforcement.

So we think it's also undeniable that policing and incarceration along with a host of collateral consequences, harm black, in our community, black people at much higher rates. Black people represent about half of the jail population, only 13% of
the county population, we can repeat those statistics across all of these, more coercive systems of government.

And we want to try and make sure that we have supports for people during those times. So we're trying to reduce the overuse of the criminal justice system for folks with human services needs, including following onto a federal effort, which means preparing to have 988 become the number people call when someone is having a crisis, having more expanded mobile response, just replicating the co-responder model, and expanding the number of social work teams that can respond quickly when someone is in behavioral health or other kinds of crisis, housing crisis, for example, supporting communities and instituting ways of helping their neighbors in crisis. And hopefully, and this all takes a bunch of logistical and other work, making that part of the 911 system, in the kind of [inaudible 00:24:01] area, establishing welcoming peer operated spaces where people can find support when their mental health systems are escalating, or they need to recover from a crisis, and they could then be connected to other services and supports from there.

So lots happening in the area of crisis response. And so some of those are here on the slide. All right. And then last in terms of kind of high-level priorities. Working on, as I said, kind of system improvements, trying to strengthen the way we look at our internal systems and make them work better. There's a particular, there's all kinds of different kind of process improvement efforts and methodologies, like lean and I don't know, 6Sigma, and they all have their own various approaches. And we've picked one that helps us kind of look at the whole system. And just as an example, we've been using it to apply it to improving the kind of speed of elder abuse investigations. So the acronym here is OAPS, older adult protective services. They step in when an individual, 60 or older, experiences abuse or neglect, and they can also help when older adults can't meet their own basic needs. They investigate reports of abuse or neglect and connect folks to supports.

And so the problem here is the caseloads are growing and cases were remaining open longer, backlogs were increasing, all resulting in a system that less effectively serves the needs of older adults. And here's sort of the growing caseload and the time, average number of cases per investigator, so you can see the challenge, and we're already seeing some improvements. I don't see any data points on here, but I've heard that we've made some reductions in backlog, so we're identifying the core and essential activities to achieve those goals.

So the goal there is timely and accurate investigations, establishing standards and procedures around each core activity, utilizing both performance and process measures to track in real time. And then we're also, so I mean, these are kind of inside baseball things, but I think they're really critical to the way we do our part to improve care. And similarly, if we look at kind of contracting and procurement, but perhaps particularly contracting, trying to make that process
easier for providers so that it reduces your costs and all of our time in getting those kinds of things done.

So that's plenty and all I've got, so hopefully I'll stop sharing my screen if it's okay. And that way I can theoretically see people and the chat too, which I wasn't able to access while I was talking. But I'll take questions and comments. Thank you.

Hilary Scherer: So at this point no chats came in. So if anyone is interested in making a comment or raising a question, you can feel free to use the chat function or unmute yourself.

Brandy: Hi. Yes. I do have a question. My name is Brandy. I know that you did mention that there were some efforts being made to combat the digital divide. Would you be able to perhaps elaborate on sort of what's already been done for that?

Erin Dalton: Sure. And I'll see, I hit the wrong button. I'm going to see who else is on from DHS, who might want to weigh in. We can put it in the chat too. What we've done is pretty, I don't know, is retail, if you will, when what we need is some kind of, I don't know what the right words are, like corporate solution. We've purchased laptops and distributed them to clients and other families that we're serving, both directly and through our providers. We've purchased a bunch of hot spots and again, provided those to clients so that they could access treatment and education, and so on. We've put up community hotspots in a number, and if folks on the call can help me with the actual, we'll pull up the numbers and we'll put it in the chat. So hotspots throughout the county where people can go and access wifi.

But there are much more aggressive plans in other states that require much more significant coordination across public and private sector. And so I think what we've done has really helped clients in particular, what I just mentioned, and providers, in that we've purchased and are still purchasing equipment for them so that they can better work with clients in a tele type infrastructure. It doesn't solve the more systemic problems. So hope that gives you a little bit more detail. And as I said, we'll find the data and we'll put it in the chat on the numbers of devices distributed.

That was very helpful. Thank you.

Erin Dalton: [inaudible 00:29:42] I think I probably it.

Hilary Scherer: Kara, thank you, added the information about the hotspots in the chat.
Hilary Scherer: Okay. So a couple of questions have come...

Section 2 of 4 [00:15:00 - 00:30:04]
Section 3 of 4 [00:30:00 - 00:45:04]

Erin Dalton: Okay.

Hilary Scherer: Okay. A couple of questions have come in. We have one at the Hispanic corporation, we have a housing program and we have been providing rental assistance. We would like to work more closely with the county to continue providing assistance post pandemic. We also have an employment program. This was not a question, but information shared in the chat to collaborate.

Erin Dalton: Yeah, I saw that Abby was on, I don't know, Abby, if you would want to comment, make a comment there, if we're aware of the program and how it does and/or connect to the existing work. At least I think I saw Abby.

Abby: Now, can you hear me?

Erin Dalton: Yeah.

Abby: Okay. Sorry. I had to push a thousand buttons. Yeah. I believe that they're part of the ERAP program, working with Action Housing. That's going to be going on for a few more years. Fortunately, that funding both from federal and state has at least two more year horizon on it. We got two batches of that funding. I think that relationship will continue for a bit. Then, as other opportunities arise, we have RFPs on a somewhat regular timeframe as things come up. Make sure you get on the list to receive those. Maybe we can share an email or the website of how you sign up, if there's any organization that doesn't receive information about our competitive procurement process, but I'm thrilled you've enjoyed it and that you want to keep working on rental assistance.

Erin Dalton: Yeah. Abby, I feel like, I mean, we don't even because we did do rental assistance, we had a small rental assistance prior to the pandemic, but it's so greatly changed during the pandemic, I don't think we know what life post this level of rental assistance funding looks like. I can't really speculate on that, but I do think if there's continued need for rental assistance, we would try to find resources to support that in a more ongoing way after, as Abby said, this couple of years of bubble funding exists.

Abby: Yeah. Yeah. For sure. We'd much rather keep people in their apartments than serve them in the homeless system. If we can get the funding to align to do rental assistance and keep people housed and avoid evictions, that's the way forward for sure.

Erin Dalton: Thanks, Abby.
Hilary Scherer: Abby, while you're on, before you find the buttons to mute yourself, we did receive a question about efforts to increase affordable housing stuff. What will that look like and where DHS falls with that?

Abby: Yeah. Well, maybe Erin wants to talk, I mean, those are sort of open proposals that we have on the table that we are discussing with economic development, the other department within the county, as well as county wide discussions. Erin, I, yeah, I don't know if you want me to-

[00:33:30]
Hilary Scherer: Do you want to just mention, folks are probably aware, but do you want to just mention second avenue and that effort? Because I think, yeah, so that's one way, and we're doing some other efforts to at least keep online our existing single room occupancy, affordable housing and so on. Yeah, go ahead Abby.

Abby: Yeah. Yeah. I mean, we know really closely that the need for affordable housing. I mean, even when we just focus on the homeless system, it doesn't work if we don't have affordable housing for people to move into at the end. You can do as much as you want around homelessness, but if we don't have affordable housing in a good supply at the other end, it doesn't work. Yeah, I think we are currently building, in conjunction with a whole lot of partners, including PNC, a new shelter for singles. That's also going to include a very robust day program. From the very beginning, when the idea came along and we were talking about designs, we said it has to include affordable housing within the design. We need to keep on increasing the supply of affordable housing and have an exit strategy for individuals. That building, a new building being built will have the top two floors are actually SRO, single-

[00:35:00]
Erin Dalton: Room occupancy.

[00:35:00]
Abby: Yeah. Thank you. Single room occupancy, I forgot what the R was for. It's sort of a perfect continuum of care built into the entire project. We're really excited about that. We would like to do more of that, really looking for other opportunities where we can either shore up existing SRO buildings or other really low affordable units or opportunities where we can help support building new affordable housing. I think that's sort of, that's our strategic vision from street outreach all the way through to affordable housing, wherever we can increase that, we're looking for those options.

[00:35:30]
Erin Dalton: We'd love to hear people's thoughts on ideas there. We're thinking, and we're going to take advantage of whatever we can. Right? Whether it's ARP dollars or federal kind of infrastructure dollars, if those come to be, we'll continue looking for opportunities to support that full continuum, which includes affordable housing at the end of that, as Abby said.
Hilary Scherer: I didn't want to cut off anyone who might jump in. If there weren't other comments or questions related directly to that.

Erin Dalton: There's two more in the chat that we haven't addressed. Right?

[00:36:30]
Hilary Scherer: One regarding vision for supporting, quoting more traditional lines of service, such as outpatient mental health and mental health housing, which are underfunded and important.

Erin Dalton: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. I'm not the one, I'll see who else is on the line. I know, we know outpatient is struggling and I don't know the issues well enough to speak more about that. I'll see if anyone else on the line, but agree that it's not all just sort of like new stuff. Outpatient mental health services is, if I care about access to care at the front door, then I have to care about outpatient mental health services and making sure that we have what we need and that providers aren't losing money with every new patient and mental health housing is tricky. I mean, I think because yes, people need access to housing. There've been some federal initiatives that haven't quite made it to have Medicaid pay for that housing. That would be a total game changer across all of human services, changing everything in the way we can, I think, support that.

[00:37:30]
We are looking, we're looking at mental health housing a lot and trying to look across, as I mentioned, kind of HUD funded housing and mental health housing, blending those two models of support to perhaps increase the level of housing by shifting some of the way we pay for the services that are ancillary to housing. I don't know if any of that made any sense, except to say that we're both, we're looking at both of those things a lot and know that the mental health outpatient is key to broad access to care and that mental health housing and all of the housing initiatives deserve a real look to make sure we're both funding them and supporting providers in the best way possible.

[00:39:00]
If you have, and I'll see if there's anyone from DHS who wants to comment beyond that. Then, if you've got specific ideas attached to that, I'm happy to hear for them for sure. Anyone from DHS, or I think there might be some community care [inaudible 00:39:02] folks on too. If anyone wants to add, feel free. All right. Hearing nothing there. Do you want to go back, Hillary, to the question about wages or raising salaries for direct care staff? Not that I have an answer to that.

[00:39:30]
Hilary Scherer: Let me post to you, Erin, what's happening with efforts to raise salaries for direct care staff?

Erin Dalton: I'll take it, I guess, from the group on this. There's not enough money in the human services system to pay for the salaries that we think people should be paid. I think that's been fact for way before the pandemic, and we've tried to make sure that people didn't lose ground during the pandemic. We have begun
conversations with United Way and Greater Pittsburgh Nonprofit Partnership, just thinking through what the issues are. I mean, we know providers want to pay their staff a living wage. We know that in many cases you don't have the funding to do it. We also don't. It has to come from somewhere else. It has to come from the state or federal government in order for us to support that.

We know if there were increased, minimum wage increases, for example, that a lot of providers would struggle unless we had the resources to compensate for that. I think it's an extraordinarily complicated issue. From a moral perspective, I think everyone is on the same page, but from a how do you actually accomplish it and shift the systems so there the dollars to do it, I'm open. I'm not just open, I don't have the answers and I'm happy to hear if someone has ideas on how to do that. I think here is a place where everyone should come together around, I mean, again, I think we have to weigh risks and benefits to the system as it is right now. Because some providers couldn't make it if we, for example, required across the board higher salaries, but it time for education and advocacy with state and federal officials around this issue.

Hilary Scherer: We've had a couple more questions come in regarding housing and rental units and rights. One is regarding clients not seeming to know their rental and housing rights and questioning any news on funding a rental or landlord informational system or place where clients could better understand how to respond to landlord issues.

Erin Dalton: Yeah. Abby, is there someone on who could address what exists and what maybe, maybe it's a new idea posed like this, or maybe it's something we could develop. Do you have thoughts?

Abby: Yeah. I mean, you mentioned, I think one of the notes mentions Neighborhood Legal Services. We are in talks with Neighborhood Legal Services and they actually are contracted with us in sort of a few different ways. They already are available to explain folks rights in many ways, and we are talking to them about potentially increasing that role in particular tied to the lifting of the eviction moratorium soon. We're expecting that their services are likely to be in high demand. The other question is more about sort of ... What's the other question that I'm trying to ... I'm trying to now read ... The lack of tenants rights, so legal services. We also, we do have our housing navigation unit that does provide a lot of information to recruit landlords, so information to landlords, but it also, on the website and I'd have to search now to be able to give you the link, but I will do that once we switch topics, put in the link.

There's actually a surprising amount of really good information on our website for people who are looking for housing, it has a number of different sites that in fact, our staff in the housing navigation unit use to search for units and also has some really extremely helpful videos that anybody can watch that explain how to
go about applying for a section eight voucher. How does that work? How do you know what is the eviction process? What are your rights as a tenant if you are facing an eviction? How to search for a house. We have a lot of materials up there. As Erin has already acknowledged, sometimes our website is hard to maneuver and people, sometimes we don't have the right information, but sometimes we do have the right information and we're just not connecting people to it. Let me be a test of that and try and find the right link to put into the chat because we have the beginnings of, I think, some ...

Abby: ... into the chat because we have the beginnings of, I think some good information, both for landlords and for tenants. But we are in conversations, both with neighborhood legal and with Just Mediation Pittsburgh around mediation services and legal services connected to housing. I hope that answered the question.

Erin Dalton: Yeah. And Abby, I think we can look at, somebody put in a model in Boston, we can look at it. We are working pretty tightly with the courts and I think pretty effectively with the courts. We have staff in the court system to help prevent evictions and support landlords and tenants. But we're happy to look at any models. And maybe Abby, there's a world in which we should move some of those videos onto the rental assistance website or other places where people might find them and additional information. Yeah, we want people to have, especially when we actually create good information, we want to make sure we can promote it and put it out in the best places so that folks can find it.

Abby: I was able to put the link for housing and homelessness, which has the housing navigation unit link in it into the chat. But as follow up, there was also a commenting question regarding with changing neighborhood dynamics from housing displacement, is the county making or able to make efforts to track broad trends on who is being displaced and to where?

Erin Dalton: I mean, I feel like there's been another piece of work outside of what we've done, but we've done some work in that area. I'm not recalling where. Maybe there's something. I'm just looking in the chat to see if there's somebody else who could help me. What we'll do is get back to folks on that. We do want to understand displacement. I mean, one of the things that you've maybe heard us talk about a bunch on Allegheny County Analytics, we have a community needs index, which helps us to look at changing need at the census track level and where need might be moving throughout the county, but that doesn't get to the person level. I've been reading a lot actually about these issues recently. So I can't remember if some of the work that is going through my head is local or not. So unless there's somebody else on the chat, we'll get back to folks on that.
Hilary Scherer:
Switching gears then a little bit for the questions coming in. There is a question on is there a plan to increase funding for immigrant service programs like ISAAC? Service providers are already stretched thin, and with an expected increase and influx of refugees and immigrants to our region, it will become a priority.

Erin Dalton:
Yeah, thank you. We don't have any plan to announce, but we'll definitely look at the needs there, and are pleased to see that there's been a loosening of restrictions and more people are able to come back into the US and into the region and can imagine that there might be more needs there. So, we'll take a look at that for sure.

And I just want to just comment on what Claire is saying here. It's so true. It's why I think this branding and marketing is really important. She's saying, "You know about this material, but most tenants don't know how to get to the link that Abigail is talking about." I think it's just so true across our infrastructure. So we really need to create sources of truth in key areas where people most need help and then make sure that people know how to get help for those things. So anyway, it just makes my point, if you will, about the need for us to not just place things on a website, but to do the work, to get it seen by the people who might need to see it.

Did I just lose folks? It got super quiet. Hillary, are you there?

Hilary Scherer:
Yeah, I'm sorry. Just scrolling to review. I know there are the comments that have come through so far on the chat.

Erin Dalton:
Housing college students, that's the latest one I see. I don't know. Maybe the person who posted that could say a little bit more? Unless someone else from DHS knows, has something to offer.

Priscilla Rober...:
Hi, my name's Priscilla Robertson. Can you hear me okay?

Erin Dalton:
Yep. Yes.

Priscilla Rober...:
Okay. So I work for CCAC and we have students that often become homeless during the semester. So it comes down to sometimes them having to drop out of school because they can't find housing quick enough so that they can focus on their academics. So just wondering if there's any connection that community colleges can make with some emergency housing that can get them into housing fairly quickly.

Erin Dalton:
Yeah. Abby, do you want to take that too? I know we've been trying to at least understand and partner more with CCAC, and I'm sure it's not just CCAC so we can work beyond. But Abby, do you have anything?
Abby: I'm not sure. I mean, currently it would be the same options that really anybody facing an experience with homelessness would be facing. So we can obviously connect to the homeless system, which is not a satisfactory answer in terms of moving a college student into shelter. We oftentimes often can help with if they can find another unit that's more affordable, through a first month's rent and security deposit assistance. But in terms of an ongoing systemic solution working with colleges, currently there's no program like that. I mean, we could definitely talk it through. We'd probably have to be very creative about a funding source, but totally open to working with the universities on this problem.

Priscilla Rober...: Okay. I'm interested in working on that. I've been trying to solve the problem with the resource navigators at CCAC. Started in 2019. Our leadership had a conversation with DHS, so we do have some access to working with DHS in a different capacity, but definitely something that we'd like, or I'd definitely like to see, because we get situations where students are telling their professors they're sleeping in their car, they're trying to do their assignments on their phones. If they do get into a shelter, it's not college friendly. There aren't laptops. There isn't a study space. So trying to see ... We've had some students that have been able to get into a hotel. Usually there's wifi or something like that. But some type of relationship where we're able to reach out, or we have a DHS contact person and we can say, "Hi, this is so-and-so from CCAC. Can you help us get the student into a place for a few days?"

So, yeah, I'm interested in seeing how something like that could be fleshed out and made a reality, especially with community college students, because they're commuters. There isn't very many schools other than one that's out by the mall, out toward the airport that has campus housing. But some type of relationship that can be developed to help students, even if it's just for a week or a night or two. But we send them to Allegheny Link. We try to connect with DHS's YD, I think it's their youth homelessness program. We've been able to work with Our Belief for one too, but usually the student is spending the weekend in their car or they're just not able to connect, and then they have to make that decision to withdraw from classes. So, I would love to, if you guys put a task force or a team together, I'd love to help.

Erin Dalton: Sure. Yeah. And there are, I think, Abby, maybe not applied to this population, some unique efforts where families or people can take folks in too, and this may be a situation where that could work well.

Priscilla Rober...: You mean bridge to home?

Erin Dalton: Maybe.

Abby: Yeah. We just launched a program called host homes for youth. Actually, I mean, it sounds like you know every single resource. You just listed like all of our youth serving programs and ways of connecting these young college students to housing and to support. So I don't know if we'll be able to come up with anything
new immediately. It sounds like you actually know what's out there, but we could have a meeting and bring those same folks to the table and think through how we can just make sure people aren't falling through the cracks because that can happen despite having numerous programs. But host homes is our current version of what Erin is describing, where it could work really well for college students.

Priscilla Rober...: Okay. Well, I can put my email in the chat and if you guys decide to meet on it, I have some ideas that I'd like to throw around.

Abby: Great.

Erin Dalton: Yep.

Priscilla Rober...: Thank you. Thank you all for your time.

[00:57:00]

Abby: Do others on the call have questions or comments?

[00:57:30]

Erin Dalton: Hillary, do you want to just mention, I think we did upfront, but how people can get us ideas at any time?

 Hilary Scherer: Yes. So I'm putting where, we'll copy into the chat again, the email address, dhs-ideas@alleghenycounty.us. We welcome ideas that are specific to the human services plan, but as Erin mentioned at the onset, this is ongoing. Comments and questions and ideas are welcome for planning across funding and initiatives. So, please use that as much as you have ideas, and we'll stay connected. There is another of these hearings on Thursday, and then we anticipate others in the future for other specific planning efforts as well.

Erin Dalton: All right. Great. Thank you all very much for taking the time to join, and welcome more feedback or questions. And as we get these documents together, they're very boring government documents, hopefully the way we summarize stuff for presentations and so on is easier to absorb, but we'll make sure that those are published. And we'll take comments on, just as one of the comment or aside, are you still going to focus on outpatient mental health, for example? Making sure that we keep to the core things of human services that have helped so many people in the past. So any comments are good comments.

[00:59:30] All right. Last call. Anything else? No? Okay. All right. Thank you all very much and have a good rest of your afternoon.