



2024 Legislative Priorities

The Florida Coalition to End Homelessness (FCEH) is a dynamic organization whose membership includes the state's Local Lead Agency Continuums of Care (CoCs), homeless advocates, local service providers, members of the faith-based community, formerly homeless persons, educators, attorneys, mental health professionals and policy makers statewide. This diverse group is committed to implementing programs that prevent homelessness and rapidly re-house homeless individuals and families to return them to self-sufficiency and productive lives. The membership of the Florida Coalition to End Homelessness has collaborated to establish the following 2024 Legislative Priorities to work toward ending homelessness in Florida and to increase the capacity of local CoCs to manage and deliver these critical programs.

Background Screening Exemption for Persons with Lived Experience – minor offenses

Sen. Rouson/Rep. Campbell – Sponsors. Bill #'s TBD.

Ask: Support legislation which would allow persons with lived homeless experience with minor background findings to be exempt from background check disqualification.

Current Florida law prohibits individuals with minor non-violent offenses from being employed by state contracted Florida Homeless Continuum of Care Lead Agencies and their homeless services provider network. The legislative proposal would provide an exemption for persons with lived homeless experience who have a non-violent criminal record (any length of time) and has not, during the previous 3 years, been arrested for and is awaiting final disposition of, been found guilty of, regardless of adjudication, or entered a plea of nolo contendere or guilty to or been adjudicated delinquent and the record has not been sealed or expunged for, any felony. Violent crimes, including sexual, of any kind, would not be exempt. The legislative proposal mirrors legislation passed during the 2023 legislative session to exempt peer specialists contracted by the Managing Entities.

Utilizing Persons with Lived Experience is seen as a best practice by many providers, including the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) - the entity the Homeless Continuum of Care Lead Agencies draw down over \$100 million annually from to the State of Florida. HUD recently added scoring language to their Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) to encourage the best practice be adopted the state/local level.

Persons with Lived Experience provide information that is invaluable; provides a link to the community that often opens doors to serve individuals that would otherwise not be served, while also helping to address the vacancies within the homeless continuum of care / service provider system of care network.

Continue Homeless CoC Recurring Staffing Grant

Ask: Maintain current Fiscal Year Funding for the recurring base budget Homeless Staffing Grants (\$5.2 million) - Legislative initiative supported by Governor DeSantis, Department of Children and Families and the Council on Homelessness.

FCEH supports the continuation of recurring funding for the Homeless Housing Assistance grants (A.K.A. "Homeless Staffing Grants") for Fiscal Year 2024-25. CoCs continue to incur additional costs to complete the required tasks as outlined in s. 420.644, FS. Without the Staffing Grant, Florida's CoC system, which draws down and administers over \$110 million annually to the State, would not be able to operate.

The Staffing Grant provides \$185,900 for operational expenses to each of the State's 28 CoC Lead Agencies. A few examples of the operational expenses include salaries, office rent, equipment, electricity, internet, telephone, and supplies. On average, each CoC supports three full-time staff positions with this funding.

CoCs are responsible for a wide array of services to address homelessness in their communities and have done exemplary work to increase collaborative partnerships to keep homelessness rare, brief, and non-recurring. Without appropriate staffing levels, this momentum is not sustainable.

Continue Homeless CoC Recurring Challenge Grant Funding

Ask: Maintain current Fiscal Year Funding for the recurring base budget Homeless Challenge Grants (\$16.84 million) - Legislative initiative supported by Governor DeSantis, Department of Children and Families and the Council on Homelessness.

FCEH supports the continuation of recurring funding for the homeless Challenge Grants for Fiscal Year 2024-25. The legislature has funded this grant program each year consecutively since 2014. s. 420.644(4), FS, establishes the Challenge Grant Program and creates criteria for local grant awards, competitively procured through the State Office on Homelessness. This funding is used by the CoCs to meet emergency housing needs of the homeless and at-risk individuals and families, especially those needs which cannot be met by any other program.