



December 11, 2017

Florida Housing Finance Corporation
c/o Brantley Henderson
227 North Bronough Street, Suite 5000
Tallahassee, FL 32301

RE: RFA 2018-101

Dear Mr. Henderson:

I would like to submit a comment regarding RFA 2018-101-SAIL Financing For Smaller Permanent Supportive Housing Developments For Persons With Special Needs.

My comment addresses the requirement that the proposed developments are in conformance with the written priorities of the Local Assistance Continuum of Care. We would like to recommend that the RFA provide more flexibility as to how the eligibility of residents is determined. In Miami-Dade County, the eligibility requirements and priorities of our local CoC result in barriers that keep many individuals who have serious mental illness and are on the verge of homelessness from being given access to supportive housing.

Our organization, The Key Clubhouse of South Florida, serves adults living with serious mental illness, the vast majority of whom live far below the poverty line and/or live solely on disability benefits. We work one-on-one with our clients, whom we call “members,” to help them obtain support services in the community.

One of the most critical of these services is affordable housing, as many of our members are homeless, on the verge of homelessness, or in substandard living situations, such as couch-surfing. Without a safe, affordable and stable housing, members cannot maintain mental health stability and employment. It takes months, even years, to locate suitable housing for these members as there is an acute shortage of supportive and affordable independent housing. The average rent in even the poorest neighborhoods is \$1,000 for a one-bedroom apartment and soars to an average of \$1,395 County-wide, unattainable for a person living on a monthly disability check of \$754 a month.

One obstacle that we encounter again and again in seeking affordable housing for our members, and which virtually every mental health provider in our County encounters, is the requirement that an individual enter the “Coordinated Entry” system established by our local CoC lead agency, the Miami-Dade Homeless Trust, in order to qualify for virtually ANY state or federally funded housing units. This entry system automatically blocks access to certain individuals who



have serious mental illnesses and who face a grave risk of homelessness and further mental health deterioration.

Here are a few examples of individuals with mental illness who do not meet the criteria of the Miami-Dade Homeless Trust for permanent housing but who face an immediate crisis if not given stable housing:

- a person coming out of the State Hospital, despite having nowhere to live
- a person with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse issues, who has nowhere to live after completing residential substance abuse treatment, if that person stays in treatment just one day beyond the 90-day limit
- a person with a mental illness coming out of jail, who has nowhere to live, if he/she is in jail longer than 90 days

Additionally, individuals are prioritized by need in the Central Entry system. Since there are so many individuals in the highest level of “chronically homeless” in our County, other individuals in desperate need of supportive housing never rise to the top of the list.

We applaud the efforts of the Miami-Dade Homeless Trust to provide permanent housing to the chronically homeless population in our community. It is operating a full capacity with limited funding. However, hundreds, perhaps thousands, of extremely vulnerable individuals living with serious mental illness or who have co-occurring disorders cannot gain access to any state or federally funded housing because they do not meet the strict criteria or who qualify but are not given priority over others. These criteria actually result in INCREASING the number of individuals with mental illness who end up joining the chronically homeless population.

I hope that you will consider these comments and provide more flexibility to address the housing needs of vulnerable individuals living with serious mental illness. Our organization’s goal is to increase the number of affordable, supportive housing units available to this population to alleviate this ongoing shortage.

Sincerely,

Debra Webb
Executive Director

