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Department Reports Management Officer
QDAM
Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street SW
Room 4178
Washington, D.C.20410-5000

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Elim Transitional Housing, Inc. serves over 6,000 people per year, who are at risk or are experiencing homeless in the seven counties metropolitan area of Minneapolis/St. Paul Minnesota. As a faith based organization, we believe we should treat others the way we would want to be treated if we were at risk or experiencing homelessness.

Elim Transitional Housing believes good, time sensitive data is essential to planning and developing policy. We also believe that poor, unreliable, invalid, and unusable data is very dangerous to planning and developing policy.

The following are public comments on: Docket No. FR-5282-N-01 and Docket No. FR-5282-N-02

Public Comments on: Docket No. FR-5282-N-01

Notice of Submission of proposed information Collection for Public Comment: Annual Performance Report and Annual Homeless Assessment Report.

Annual Performance Report: This report should be utilized to report the outcomes of the specific program and how it is assisting in stabilizing their targeted participants in housing, increasing their income, and assisting them to address barrier(s) to maintain their stability in the community. (HUD programs are not community based treatment settings, and should not be treated as such.)

The aggregate of data from these projects funded by HUD must be viewed with extreme caution. The varying populations being served in conjunction with the available affordable housing stock, access and funding for mainstream programs, employment opportunities, public assistance availability and eligibility, geographic location, nonprofit capacity, private, corporate and local/state funding , changing economic conditions, (as well as other variables), varies greatly from community to community.

Due to the number of independent variables to control for, generalization of the data to identify “successful or model” programs is inappropriate. It is appropriate to share the information with communities as potential options to explore as guidance in the developing strategies to prevent homelessness and assist people to stabilize in housing in the community.

1. Program outcomes reported should be limited to:
 - a. Did participant obtain stable housing?
 - b. Did participants maintain stable housing for one year?
 - c. Did participant increase their income?
 - d. Did participants, who were able to work, become employed?
 - e. Did participants demonstrate progress on addressing an identified issue to assist them in maintaining stability in the community?
 - f. Participant evaluation of program: Was it helpful? What would have prevented you from becoming homeless? In addition to the services you received what would help you stabilize in housing in the community.
2. The APR needs to be improved to provide a more accurate reflection of performance by very small programs and to account for how participants, enter, utilize, and exit the program.

Annual Homeless Assessment Report:

Congress requested an unduplicated count of people experiencing homelessness and to provide information on the effectiveness of the homeless programs.

The current and previous AHARs have NOT fulfilled that goal from Congress.

Reasons current AHAR does not provide accurate data to Congress:

1. HUD’s definition of homelessness is different than the other federal agencies. There is no one definition of homelessness that is agreed upon on the Federal, State or Local level. Any information provided to Congress through the AHAR will be confusing because the numbers will not match with reports from the U.S. Department of Education, the Veterans Administration, or the U.S. Conference of Mayors annual report, because their definitions are different.
2. One night count is an inaccurate way to identify people living outside of shelters and transitional facilities. It is completely dependent upon the community’s availability of resources to do the count and the willingness for people living outside to be identified. (Many are living in places where it is illegal for them to be).

3. HMIS data is unreliable and not usable information. HUD, in the most current AHAR, could **NOT USE 64%** of the data from 222 communities (these were HUD selected communities and others that volunteered). AHAR-Appendix B.
4. HMIS is currently, in our opinion, violating Federal and State Data privacy laws as well as violating the Community's certification to HUD to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing. (This is described in more detail in our attached public comments on HMIS)

Changing AHAR so that it fulfills the Congressional request would:

1. Include input from people experiencing homelessness and providers
2. Utilize one definition of homelessness similar to an expanded version of the U.S. Department of Education's definition of homelessness.
3. Utilize statistical sampling to obtain a more accurate calculation of the estimated number of and a more representative view of people experiencing homelessness across the country.
4. Provide a summary of information collected through the Annual Performance Reviews.
5. Provide information to Congress about the disparity between income and affordable housing in communities across the country.

We will Bring America Home when Public Policy Makers and the American people stops seeing homelessness as a personal failure. We must take responsibility, as a civilized society, to address the systemic causes of homelessness which include the lack of affordable decent, safe accessible housing, livable incomes, universal health care, accessible and affordable education and training, mainstream supports, and the honoring and protecting of people's civil rights.

Public Comments: Notice of Proposed Information: Collection of Public Comment: Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-Housing (HPRP) Quarterly and Annual Performance Reporting

Docket No. FR-5282-N-02

Elim Transitional Housing, Inc. strongly opposes the implementation of the proposed information collection and reporting requirements for the following reasons:

1. We believe HMIS currently violates Data Privacy and HIPPA laws and it does maintain authority through client annual releases of information to maintain data in the HMIS system. On May 21, 2008, Wilder Research and Service Point emailed providers they had over 6,000 documented breaches of security of HMIS data, 5,000 cases that had been open prior to May 2005. Elim Transitional Housing has sent a letter to Wilder Research indicating that we believe they are in breach of their contract with us for not maintaining the security of private data.

2. We believe that HMIS violates the community's certification to HUD to Affirmatively Further Fair Housing by placing undue data collection expectation on people of color and people with disabilities that are experiencing homelessness.
3. HUD is requesting a significant level of data collection on personal issues. Why does HUD need to know this information from people who are at risk of homelessness and who need rental assistance? The primary reason people experience homelessness is the lack of affordable housing and a livable income. All Americans have personal issues, many will utilize community supports if they are available and affordable (at least 50% of the American general population has a mental health and/or chemical health issue). HPRP is a Homeless prevention and assistance program, not a treatment program.
4. Communities and providers need to utilize their time and the HPRP resources to implement HPRP in the time frame provided to prevent people from becoming homeless and assist people to obtain housing, not to collect additional data elements. This bureaucratic data increase will decrease the number of people served and valuable staff time will be wasted collecting data instead of connecting people with the resources they need.
5. HMIS wastes valuable resources that are needed for housing and services for people that are at risk or are experiencing homelessness.
 - a. Elim Transitional Housing spends \$50,000 of primarily private donations to collect HMIS Federal and State Data. We consider most of the data unreliable, invalid, and worthless.

We maintain our own usable back up data system at a cost of less than \$10,000/year.
 - b. The State of Minnesota will spend almost TWICE as much money paying for HMIS data collection, as it will in providing direct State appropriated funding for emergency shelters for people. Each year, for the last several years we have remembered over 100 people who have died while experiencing homelessness in Minnesota. Data matters, but having emergency shelters to save lives, matters more!
6. Currently the HMIS data being reported to HUD is unreliable and invalid information. HUD, in the most current AHAR, could NOT USE 64% of the data from 222 communities (these were HUD selected communities and others that volunteered to participate). AHAR-Appendix B.
7. We request that no further data elements are added to HMIS for HRPR or for any of the other homeless programs. We request that Congress immediately place a **Moratorium** on HMIS and that it holds oversight hearings across the country with people experiencing homelessness and with direct service providers who are currently trying to deal with the HMIS bureaucracy.

Sincerely,
Sue Watlov Phillips, M.A., C.S.P.
Executive Director