SoS Constructive Alternatives to Criminalization

**Solution I:**

The creation of comprehensive and seamless systems of care that combine housing with behavioral health and social service supports have been shown to prevent and end homelessness. Communities around the country have been working in partnership with the federal government to develop comprehensive systems of care that can effectively prevent and end homelessness. In an effort to address duplication of activities, gaps in service delivery, and costly use of emergency systems as safety nets, many local partners developed a host of combined housing and service programs.

These combined housing and service strategies, supported by communitywide involvement in planning and implementation, have proven to achieve long-term reductions in street homelessness and connect individuals with benefits and services that improve stability.

**Potential solutions include:**

1. Develop and implement communitywide plans to end homelessness that bring together a variety of stakeholders such as consumers, businesses, law enforcement, mayors and other city/town officials, schools, philanthropy, and community members to create collaborative and innovative solutions.

   **Broward CoC – on Homeless Initiative Partnership Advisory Board** recommended and August 27, 2013 Broward Board of County Commission adopted the recommendations in National Alliance to End Homelessness report “Recommendations for Implementation of the Federal HEARTH Act,” which included adopting the goals of the Federal “Opening Doors” Plan to End Homelessness; initiating the process of becoming a housing first system of care; restructuring the Continuum of Care Board to include designated seats for major homeless stakeholders including Elected Officials, Housing Authorities, Homeless or Formerly Homeless persons, Hospital Districts, Advocates, Homeless Providers, Local Workforce Board,
Behavioral Heath Funder, Law Enforcement, United Way, and School Board among others.

Board of County Commissioners supports Homeless CoC’s request for $11.8M in additional funding targeted for new Rapid Rehousing in the amount of $1.8M; and $10M for new Permanent Supportive Housing for Chronic and Non-chronic households. The Board of County Commissioners supports the Homeless CoC Board’s recommendation that half of the new $11.8M come from the County, and the other half come from the 31 Municipalities and Municipal Services District based on total population.

Broward County does not support and conveyed decision to community that use of the County Stockade as shelter (any form) for persons experiencing homelessness is not a viable solution.

2. Develop “Housing First” permanent supportive housing to provide persons experiencing chronic homelessness immediate options, directly reducing the number of people living in public space.

Broward CoC – implemented first stage of Coordinated Assessment in August 2013 through adoption of recommendations in NAEH Plan. Initial Coordinated Entry and Assessment services RFP’s in spring of 2014 and began on October 1, 2014 (Homeless Helpline and Mobile Outreach Services); Renegotiated Homeless Assistance Center Agreements and modified performance measures to support shift to Housing First; CoC joined the 100,000 Homes Campaign in November 2013 and conducted first 100,000 Homes Boot Camp and was trained on using the VI-SPDAT; conducted 100,000 Homes Registration in the January 2014 Point in Time Count; started housing Chronic and all Homeless and long term homeless in February 2014 subsequent to 2014 Point in Time Count. In 2015 CoC was accepted and joined the Zero:2016 Veterans and Chronic Homeless Initiative. In 2015 CoC engaged OrgCode to conduct VI-SPDAT and Harm Reduction Trainings. Since 2012 HUD NoFA, the Broward County CoC has reallocated approximately $1M to create new Permanent and Permanent Supportive Housing Projects targeting Families and Chronically Homeless.
In FY 2016 the Board of County Commissioner appropriated additional $1.2 to add 30 new low-demand emergency shelter beds in central-county; 25 new Rapid Rehousing Units for Families; and 30 new Permanent Supportive Housing units for chronic and non-chronic households. The County’s FY 2016 Homeless Services appropriation is $11.2M.

3. Ensure 24-hour access to shelters and/or services that offer alternatives to living in public spaces and access to services that meet the basic needs of individuals experiencing homelessness in order to reduce visible street homelessness and contribute to reductions in homelessness. Not much progress made in this area. However, Law Enforcement CIT trained officers can place persons experiencing homelessness in low/demand and/or program beds based on availability.

4. Create street outreach teams and provide safe havens to help chronically homeless individuals exit the streets. In FY 2014 Broward Board of County Commissioners increased and expanded Mobile Outreach funding from $47,500 limited to North County to $125,000 Countywide; In FY 2016 Broward Board of County Commissioners increased Targeted Mobile Outreach funding by $180,000 to expand service hours of Countywide Mobile Outreach services; in FY 2016 Board of County Commissioners increased funding for Safe Haven Services by $19,000 to $304,000 and expanded clients’ eligibility for Safe Haven shelter services. In FY 2015 increased shelter/program placement authority for Outreach teams.

5. Employ communitywide collaboration through education, volunteerism and donations to provide solutions to homelessness.
In FY 2015 Broward Regional Health Planning Council, through Homeless Point in Time Count Coordination agreement, increased Volunteer participation by 150%; In FY 2015 CoC held it first Community forum to provide an update on CoC achievements and opportunities for involvement in CoC Committees and planning activities.
6. Coordinate food sharing activities and set uniform standards for the preparation and distribution of food that promote access to food. In FY 2012/2013 participating CoC Homeless Provider initiated plan to coordinate faith, secular and community based feedings in the City of Fort Lauderdale. Endeavor was spearheaded by Hope South Florida. Currently, feedings are coordinated 6 days a week and The Salvation Army among other faith based organizations are participating. City of Fort Lauderdale staff advised in late 2015 that a RFP is in development to fund coordination of feeding in the City. It is understood that the coordinated feedings are also underway in Hollywood.

7. Improve access to mainstream benefit programs (SNAP, Medicaid, SSI/SSDI) by ensuring all those eligible receive benefits through streamlining application processes for multiple benefit programs and enhanced outreach by service providers. In FY 2014, the Broward Board of County Commissioners approved Homeless Services agreements which require the use SOAR Method by funded providers to apply for eligible participant’s SSI/SSDI Benefits. In addition, the State Managing Entity, Broward Behavioral Health Coalition (BBHC) requires all Behavioral Health funded providers use the SOAR method. BBHC is also a member of the Broward CoC Board.

Solution II:

Collaboration between law enforcement and behavioral health and social service providers results in tailored interventions that connect people with housing, services, and treatment and meet the community’s goal of reducing the number of people inhabiting public spaces.

Local and county governments frequently devote significant resources to deploying law enforcement to disperse people experiencing homelessness from public spaces; however, these interventions do little to stop the cycle of homelessness. Law enforcement engagement not only provides a temporary solution to the problem, it contributes to a culture of distrust, pitting individuals experiencing homelessness against the broader community. Further, police action to move or arrest people experiencing homelessness is rarely effective because
those who sleep unsheltered on the streets are often chronically homeless with no access to housing and have underlying mental health issues and other disabilities. It is not a solution to force someone to move when they have nowhere else to go; but in many cities police do not have the tools they need to offer solutions – they can only disperse or arrest.

In some instances, disperse or arrest activities subject police and sheriff departments to civil rights lawsuits brought by parties aggrieved by forcible removal actions. Potential solutions include the following:

1. Outreach and engagement involving police and service provider collaboration to link people with supportive housing and avoid their arrest. **Broward Sheriff’s Office (BSO) implemented nationally recognized Crisis Intervention Team training and coordination with County and PATH funded Outreach Teams. Team is led by Captain Scott Russell and Sargent Ed Rafilovitc. BSO Homeless Outreach Teams utilize HMIS and are authorized to place persons experiencing homelessness in low-demand and/or program Emergency Shelter Beds.**

2. Cross-training of police officers and service providers to facilitate information sharing and promote ongoing coordination. **BSO provides Homeless CIT trainings on a recurring basis to Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) throughout Broward County as well as to LEAs outside of Broward. Outreach and Behavioral Health subject matter experts are presenters in the CIT course. Multiple LEAs in Broward have designated specific Homeless CIT units and under the leadership of Sargent Ed Rafilovitc these units have formed the Multi=Agency Taskforce to coordinate activities and share best practices.**

3. Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT) with specially trained police officers working with behavioral health professionals to respond to crises involving people with mental illness. **Homeless CIT Units are working seamlessly with Homeless Outreach, Behavioral Health Mobile Crisis and Crisis Stabilization Unit professionals. Captain Russell, BSO is a member of the Broward Behavioral Health and**
CoC Boards, and brings significant advocacy, experience and subject matter expertise to the CIT training curriculum.

**Solution III:**

Implementation of alternative justice system strategies can reduce homeless involvement with the criminal justice system, decrease recidivism, and facilitate connection with other systems of care.

People experiencing homelessness often struggle with a variety of legal problems that interfere with their ability to find employment, access benefits, and obtain housing. Additionally, mental illness, substance abuse disorders, and logistical difficulties, such as lack of transportation and inability to store or retrieve personal records, as well as the daily search to meet basic needs, present substantial barriers to complying with court orders and paying applicable fines. For those incarcerated in prisons or jails, release into homelessness is strongly correlated with recidivism. The cost to public systems is substantial, as a small number of individuals absorb significant amounts of limited resources as they cycle through jails and prisons to shelters, emergency rooms, and mental health crisis centers without ever receiving the level of care and treatment needed to resolve their underlying problems.

Potential solutions include the following:

1. Problem-solving courts, including homeless courts, mental health courts, drug courts and Veterans courts, that focus on the underlying causes of illegal activities with the intention of reducing recidivism and encouraging reintegration into society.

   **Broward County has a nationally recognized Mental Health Court Program started by Judge Ginger Wren.** Broward County funds the Mental Health COURT Project which provides post arrest jail diversion for persons with severe and persistent mental illness. In addition, Broward County also has Drug Court which coordinates substance use treatment and Transitional Housing programs for homeless and non-homeless persons. Finally, Broward County has a Veteran’s Court wherein behavioral health
and veteran services providers are connected with veterans through jail diversion programs.

2. Citation dismissal programs that allow individuals who are homeless with low-level infractions to participate in service or diversion programs or link them with appropriate services in lieu of paying a fine. 
Need info from Court.

3. Create holistic public defender offices, enabling them to provide a range of social services in addition to standard legal services for populations with special needs. 
Need info from Public Defenders Office.

4. Volunteer legal projects and pro bono attorneys that provide essential legal services for homeless populations and for the agencies serving them. 
Broward Board of County Commissioners fund Legal Aid of Broward County to provide services via the Homeless Legal Rights Project. Services include assistance with obtaining mainstream benefits, child support, etc......

5. Reentry or transition planning to prepare people in prison or jails to return to the community by linking them to housing and needed services and treatment. 
Need information from Public Safety Council, Byrne Grant, Drug-Court and/or Re-entry Coalition Re: OIC, etc.

6. Reentry housing, specialized housing with support services tailored to the needs of ex-offenders, designed to help them make a successful transition from incarceration back to the community. 
Need information from Public Safety Council, Byrne Grant, Drug-Court and/or Re-entry Coalition Re: OIC, etc.

7. Reentry employment, transitional work and supportive employment services to individuals shortly after their release from jail/prison.
Need information from Public Safety Council, Byrne Grant, Drug-Court and/or Re-entry Coalition Re: OIC, etc.

USICH will continue to facilitate dialogue and investigate constructive alternatives to criminalization measures at all levels of government. At the Federal level, agencies can provide leadership and technical assistance to encourage communitywide collaboration, partnerships and needed coordination on the ground. Participants at the Summit noted that legislative action could also be taken, recommending that Congress ensure that funding streams that support law enforcement activities are not allowed to support activities that criminalize the basic life activities of people experiencing homelessness. We are enthusiastic about the promising approaches identified in this report and eager to support the efforts of local communities who are moving beyond marginalization to instead answer the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness.