



# Allegheny County Council

County of Allegheny  
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## Legislation Text

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**File #:** 12925-24, **Version:** 1

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Motion of the Council of Allegheny County urging the Chief Executive and Department of Human Services, in cooperation with the City of Pittsburgh and the nonprofit, unhoused persons, medical, business, and other communities, to explore how aspects of the model for delivery of services to unhoused persons in Houston, TX might be successfully carried over to Allegheny County.

**Whereas**, on June 15, 2023, Allegheny County Council held a public hearing in which the closure of Smithfield Shelter and the delivery of shelter and other services to unhoused persons in Allegheny County was discussed in depth; and

**Whereas**, in listening to the testimony provided by a multitude of individuals and business entities, a recurring theme of the desirability of a multifaceted, cooperative approach to the delivery of adequate shelter, housing, and other services to this population; and

**Whereas**, on June 9, 2023, CNN published a brief overview of the progress that Houston, TX has made in a similar endeavor; and

**Whereas**, after Houston came to have one of the largest unhoused populations in the country in 2011, the city's collaborative approach with other units of government and various stakeholder communities has housed more than 28,000 individuals, which has decreased their unhoused population approximately 60% from 2012-23; and

**Whereas**, in order to accomplish this result, the City of Houston created a collaborative system aligned around a standardized set of practices, goals, and strategies; at present, over 100 entities combine their efforts and resources; and

**Whereas**, the Houston group created a centralized database to track unhoused individuals and their specific needs, and developed a standardized assessment to determine what housing and/or service interventions best suit the needs of each person. They also adopted a strategy focused on getting individuals and families out of the cycle of being unhoused by addressing mental health or substance abuse counseling, health care, job training, and similar services *after* individuals were permanently housed. Lastly, they opted to house the most vulnerable individuals first, and have found that these individuals usually stabilize when they're in permanent housing with appropriate services; and

**Whereas**, all of these efforts, working in concert, has reduced not only the rate of individual homelessness, but has also dramatically reduced the number of encampments in the city; and

**Whereas**, the report also indicated that this is also a more economical approach; they estimate that the cost of housing and providing necessary services in their program costs only about \$18,000 per person per year, while national estimates of the multiple costs of people living on the street range from \$30,000 to \$50,000 per individual per year.; and

**Whereas**, the CNN article, which was authored by Marc Eichenbaum (former special assistant for

homeless initiatives to Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner) and Michael Nichols (President and CEO of the Coalition for the Homeless of Houston/Harris County) also discusses a profoundly significant result of Houston's experience: most people become unhoused due to rapid and unexpected financial losses, and that being homeless then exacerbates any existing mental health or substance abuse issues that a person may be having. Put a little differently, in Houston's experience, mental illness is a symptom of homelessness, not its cause.; and

**Whereas**, during Council's June 15 public hearing, representatives of the Department of Human Services indicated that taking lessons learned by other communities in addressing these issues is of significant value to them in crafting Allegheny County's strategies; and

**Whereas**, based upon testimony received by Council during and contemporaneous with the above-referenced public hearing, it is the judgment of Council that the Houston model may be particularly valuable to the County as it endeavors to craft a more comprehensive approach to providing housing, shelter, and necessary services to the unhoused individuals living within the County and City of Pittsburgh;

***The Council of the County of Allegheny therefore hereby moves as follows:***

Council hereby urges the Chief Executive and Department of Human Services, in cooperation with the City of Pittsburgh and the nonprofit, unhoused persons, medical, business, and other communities, to explore how aspects of the model for delivery of services to unhoused persons in Houston, TX might be successfully carried over to Allegheny County.