

## Supporting Washington's Frontline Homeless Provider Workforce

*"I believe deeply in the work I do to help people get off the streets, but I can't pay my bills and the stress and trauma from fearing I could be next is almost too much. I'm not sure how much longer I can do this work."*

*"It is difficult to find and retain staff, due in part to the fact that our staff are paid less than a living wage. Constant staff turnover causes inefficiencies."*

We all share a goal to prevent and end homelessness. However, our ability to do so depends on our frontline homeless service and housing staff. As a state, we are failing these essential workers. Washington's ability to prevent and end homelessness rests on the shoulders of our workers and we must help them meet their basic needs and encourage them to stay in the field.

### The Crisis

Throughout the past two years, Washington's essential homelessness service providers have been at the frontlines of the pandemic. With deep compassion and commitment, they have supported our communities through crisis levels of homelessness and behavioral health crises. ***Despite this difficult and often traumatic work, staff have continued to show up twenty-four hours a day to support our state's most vulnerable.***

Unfortunately, due to the lack of state and private investments in this workforce, these essential workers rarely make a living wage and are often facing housing instability themselves in our increasingly expensive state. As a result, nonprofit organizations throughout the state - who already are faced with high operating costs - are struggling to recruit and retain staff to do this essential work.

### The Ask

Improving compensation and support for our workforce must be a long-term priority. However, failure to immediately support frontline workers puts our entire social safety net at risk.

**To rectify this, we are asking for a one-time investment of \$77.5 Million for Stipends for Frontline Homeless Provider Workers and \$500,000 for a homeless service provider workforce needs study.**

### Expected outcomes

- Frontline service workers will have new and unprecedented opportunity to utilize an accessible stipend to address immediate needs.

- Retention of frontline workers will improve.
- Economic security of frontline workers will improve.

## **Eligibility**

1. Essential, frontline homelessness service providers means current staff of organizations who work directly with people experiencing homelessness or residents of permanent supportive housing. This includes emergency shelter and transitional housing staff, outreach workers, caseworkers, peer advisors, reception and administrative support staff, maintenance and custodial staff, and other direct service providers who work directly on-site with people experiencing homelessness or living in permanent supportive housing, including youth and young adult providers.
2. Executive and senior administrative employees of homeless service organizations are not eligible.

## **Eligible uses**

A stipend of \$2,000, to address immediate economic needs including, but not limited to, rent or mortgage payments, household bills including utilities, basic necessities, student loan payments, car repairs, transportation related costs, child care, medical bills, behavioral health related costs including counseling and job training. The same person, if employed by the same employer, is eligible for a second stipend 6 months after the application date of the first stipend. Applicants can request a stipend of less than \$2,000, but are still only eligible for two stipends total.

As providers, we are deeply appreciative of the investments that the legislature has made in addressing our state's housing affordability and homelessness crises. Our state's success rests on the shoulders of our front line workers and we urgently need to ensure those workers can keep a roof over their heads and meet their basic needs.

## **\$500,000 for a homeless service provider workforce needs study**

Expected outcome: The Department of Commerce will contract with a third party entity to conduct a study on workforce related needs of nonprofit organizations employing homeless service workers and of nonprofit permanent supportive housing providers. The study will inform the legislature on state level strategies to improve morale, retention, training, safety, pay and benefits. The study shall examine pay and benefits; training and supervision; caseloads; safety and morale, and other factors affecting hiring and retention of workers in these essential positions, including service delivery models. The study shall explore the impact of inflationary increases to administrative allowances and other automatic escalators to state funded homelessness contracts, including contracts under the Office of Homeless

Youth serving minors and young adults experiencing homelessness. The study shall include a pay equity and comparable worth analysis, examining jobs that require similar levels of skills, education, complexity, and difficulty in other industries and private and public sectors deemed essential during the COVID19 pandemic. The study must include input from frontline, essential service workers, workers with lived experience of homelessness, and BIPOC led organizations statewide, including organizations primarily serving BIPOC or grantee populations.

### **Voices from the frontlines**

*“Morale is at an all time low, as our staff continue to push forward to serve individuals without housing, and individuals who are living with disabilities and extremely low incomes in permanent supportive housing. As the pandemic has required many changes to our day-to-day operations in shelter, housing, crisis response, and clinical programs, we've increased the amount of programs and staffing to support our community the best we can, however we are experiencing a staffing crisis.”*

*“In an agency of 100 people, I'm one of four staff that are still at the agency since I started seven years ago. And most of those 97 folks have turned over in the past year and a half.”*

*“Existing programs are short staffed meaning its hard to even be at baseline staffing capacity. Existing staff in these programs are often working more or longer to fill gaps causing burnout and retention issues.”*

*“Relationships are at the heart of ending homelessness, especially for youth and young adults. When the faces at the shelter or housing or education or employment training program are changing every day, and we are reliant on on-call/temporary staff, it is very, very hard for young people to connect and feel safe enough to trust.”*

### **Additional Information**

Commerce role:

The Department of Commerce must contract with a qualified nonprofit to administer the program statewide. Commerce must ensure that the grantee can meet the duties outlined in the proviso, including their ability to ensure funds are equitably distributed.

Commerce must ensure that funds are distributed equitably including by race and by geographic area.

Grantee organization:

A nonprofit organization with experience administering large state contracts that can demonstrate a current ability to efficiently administer a new statewide program. Organizations can demonstrate an ability to efficiently administer this program by showing successful

administration of similar direct-to-recipient programs, a demonstrated ability to adhere to federal tax requirements including sending stipend recipients W2 statements, and ability to track and report on demographic data of stipend recipients and fulfill other reporting requirements set forth by the department in the program contract.

**Duties:**

The nonprofit will develop the stipend program and must minimally do the following;

- a) Screen applicants for eligibility,
- b) Efficiently launch the program by October 1, 2022,
- c) Create a streamlined, accessible, low-barrier application process informed by front-line workers. The application must be available in Spanish,
- d) Ensure that funds are distributed equitably including by race and by geographic area,
- e) Promote this opportunity to eligible workers by reaching out to the homeless service and supportive housing agencies where they work, local governments, local homelessness networks and to other entities and in places likely to reach the targeted workers,
- f) Accept philanthropic or other donated funds to enhance or expand the program,
- g) Account for all expenditures and invoice the department for reimbursement,
- h) Submit a report to the Department of Commerce on stipend recipients, program outcomes, equity benchmarks and any other reporting requirements set forth by the department in the program contract.

**Administrative fee:**

The organization may use x% for costs related to administering this program. The department may receive x% for their costs related to administering the stipend.