

Advocacy in Action



lutheran metropolitan ministry | November 2021

A Message to Cleveland's Elected Officials from LMM



Dear Mayor-Elect Bibb and Cleveland City Councilmember-elects,

Congratulations on your successful election! Your work whether a seasoned member of Council or a first-time candidate has demonstrated true commitment to the city and an alignment of values and priorities with those who you represent. This is no easy feat, and we commend you for doing the hard work of public service and campaigning. As you prepare for your first day in office, we wanted to reach out to share a few ideas that may help ensure your success.

Firstly, we strongly urge you to continue to get to know the people who are experiencing, or have experienced, the types of hardship that leads them into emergency shelter, prison, or guardianship services. In doing so, you'll be able to better understand the systems failures facing our community. Each year, LMM serves more than 4,000 individuals. Each of these individuals comes to us with diverse life experiences that collectively demonstrate what is, or more often, what is not working in our community. By talking to these individuals, and harnessing their knowledge and experience, through one-on-one conversations or citizen's advisory committees, you'll never lose sight of the change that needs to be made.

Secondly, we urge you to speak regularly to the staff who provide the direct service. They are working daily to right the wrongs caused by a broken system. Further, some of these employees are former program participants or have family members who have faced these hardships. At the LMM managed Men's Shelter at 2100 Lakeside Avenue, the largest emergency shelter in the state, nearly half of all staff have experienced homelessness or past-justice involvement. Within LMM's Workforce Development Department which includes the Metropolitan Training Institute and the Chopping for Change program, half our staff have been previously incarcerated. Hearing these stories will help you both understand systems failures, but also demonstrate how supportive social services can lead people out of difficult times, and into fulfilling careers that give back to the community.

Finally, we urge you to think big. Our city faces life or death issues that require bold solutions. We are working to end homelessness, reform the criminal justice system, promote health and wellness, and advance racial equity. Some of the solutions to these challenges - like using [3D printing to build super affordable housing](#), or helping families out of homelessness with affordable housing and a [family stability fund](#) - may require an investment. Don't shy away from the costs, or outside-the-box thinking. Over time, they will lead to the types of long-term change that leads to fewer people needing the safety net services.

On that note, it is our hope that we eventually work our way out of the business of providing these safety net services. That is, we hope to change the system to a point where no one needs emergency housing, guardianship services, or workforce training while incarcerated. We look forward to your partnership in reaching these goals.

Best,

LMM Board of Directors, Staff Partners, and program participants.

From the Desk of the Advocacy Director



Dear LMM Community,

In the August 2021 LMM Advocacy Newsletter, I wrote about how with the fall seasons also comes both personal and professional change. Goodness has that change arrived!

Cleveland is officially preparing for a major change in leadership. In addition to Justin Bibb's mayoral win, five new members of City Council will be sworn into office in early 2022. This includes Stephanie Howse who will represent much of LMM's footprint as the newest Ward 7 Councilperson. Internally, Gloria Craig started as LMM's Community Engagement Coordinator in September. LMM is currently inviting these newly elected (and re-elected) officials as well as members of Cuyahoga County Council to learn more about the programs offered by the organization and ways they can help ensure their constituency's basic needs are met. In this role, she is already helping to connect LMM staff and program participants to advocacy opportunities,

including voter registration events and get out the vote activities. She is also increasing community awareness to LMM program and job offerings. Gloria comes to LMM from Case Western Reserve University where she earned a Masters in Social Work.

Finally, we are actively adapting to a transition in leadership following CEO Drew Genszler's departure in October. Sue Cyncynatus, the interim CEO is helping ensure that LMM's advocacy does not miss a beat, and continues to move full-steam into the new year. Keep an eye out for updated advocacy priorities in the February advocacy newsletter as well as an overview of programming for both program participants, staff partners and the LMM community.

Until then, thank you for your continued support, and happy holidays from the LMM Advocacy Department.

Best,

Margie Glick

In the News: Ward 7 Elects New Councilperson



Ward 7 Councilwoman, Stephanie Howse

On November 2, 2021, Stephanie Howse was elected to serve as new Ward 7 Councilperson, replacing Councilman Basheer Jones who ran for Mayor and was thus unable to seek reelection to council. LMM looks forward to working closely with Rep. Howse as Ward 7 includes both the Richard Sering Center and The Men's Shelter at 2100 Lakeside. Rep. Howse comes to this role following 6-years in the Ohio House of Representative.

As a representative, Rep. Howse served as a member of the Aging and Long-Term Care Committee, the House Finance Committee, the Transportation and Public Safety Committee and the Government Oversight Committee. In this role, Rep. Howse participated in LMM's Guardianship Breakfast in 2019, where she expressed her commitment to supporting those who are aging.

Prior to her time in the General Assembly, the Councilwoman served on Cleveland City Council from 2008 to 2014. Representative Howse holds a B.S. in Civil Environmental Engineering from Florida A&M University and her M.S. in Environmental Studies from Cleveland State University.

Open Minds, Open Hiring

There is an effort gaining steam in the United States called Open Hiring which is aimed at promoting social justice by addressing the alarming reality that one in three American adults – more than 70 million individuals - has a criminal record.

In Ohio, returning citizens must currently navigate 850 state and local collateral sanctions upon completion of their sentence that further restrict them from gaining certain types of employment. It should be of little surprise that according to Prison Policy Initiative unemployment rates amongst those with criminal records average 27% compared to 5% of the general population. Employment is actually the most important leg of the three-legged-stool to prevent recidivism with housing and transportation being the other legs. This makes employment related collateral sanctions detrimental to the well-being of a returning citizens.

To lessen the number of collateral sanctions that exist, organizations are increasingly adopting Open Hiring policies. Open Hiring, in the most fundamental sense, is a process that employs anyone on a first-come first-serve basis without asking for a resume or about criminal and educational backgrounds. This can simply mean a prospective employee puts their name on a list, and an employer calls the candidates, in order, as jobs open. This approach reduces bias in the hiring process. It also saves on average \$2,000-\$5,000 per hire by lessening the amount of staff time spent on recruitment and hiring.

The concept now known as Open Hiring started at Greyston's Bakery, a New York based company, founded by Roshi Bernie Glassman. Glassman launched the bakery in 1982 as a way to end homelessness and provide employment opportunities in his community. Since Greyston's founding, other organizations have begun to reevaluate hiring policies for entry-level, low-skill positions. In 2020, The Body Shop shifted to an open hiring model. The impetus for this change was to be a "force for good and fight injustices in society that exist, like unequal access to employment."

LMM has also seen success across the organization in hiring past program participants. At the Men's Shelter at 2100, half of employees are formerly homeless and or having past justice involvement. According to Michael Sering, Vice President of Housing and Shelter, these employees are incredibly hard working and bring unique strengths to the job that are often overlooked. Within LMM's Workforce Development Department, nearly 50% are formerly incarcerated and the students served are 90% justice involved.

Open Hiring policies can help address systematic inequities, including the long-term impacts of a racist criminal justice system, while also creating an organizational culture comprised of highly dedicated and loyal employees. It can also help meet the needs of employers at a time when the job market is especially competitive. Keep an eye out for more on the value of hiring individuals with past justice involvement in 2022.

Right to Counsel Cleveland: A Resource in a Critical Time

As readers, you know far too well how important safe and stable housing is to the overall health and well-being of families who live within our communities.

The COVID-19 pandemic further threatened the stability of housing for families in Northeast Ohio, making eviction, displacement, and homelessness a brutal reality for so many.

United Way of Greater Cleveland and The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland partnered in October of 2019 to launch Right to Counsel, a legislated right that guarantees full and free legal representation for low-income renters in Cleveland with one minor child in the home.

Right to Counsel Cleveland launched in July 2020, a critical time which coincided with the economic downturn brought on by the ongoing pandemic. Overnight, both United Way and Legal Aid had to modify service delivery to ensure high-quality legal representation was available in a virtual and safe atmosphere. From there, the partnership built a caseload of successes as tenants were not only represented in court but connected to rental assistance to pay their landlord. The result is a striking example of how collaboration and communication remain key strengths in rebuilding the lives of Northeastern Ohioans who remain in need. In just the first 18 months since our launch, Right to Counsel has served over 700 families, where 94% of clients were able to remain in their home and avoid eviction, and for those who wanted to move, 88% were given more time to do so.

While these are exciting initial outcomes of Right to Counsel, there are still many eligible families who are not represented due to lack of access or awareness of the program.

We ask your organizations and networks to please spread the word about Right to Counsel in Cleveland. There are many easy ways to get connected. Please visit our website FreeEvictionHelp.org, call 2-1-1 for 24/7 assistance, or contact Legal Aid at 216-861-5835.

Julie Wisneski, MSW
Director, Housing Stability
United Way of Greater Cleveland



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Our Mission:

To promote shalom (peace, well-being) and justice (right relationships) through a Christian ministry of service and advocacy with those who are oppressed, forgotten and hurting.

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By the Numbers: 2021 Election Results (Cleveland)

On Nov. 2nd. Clevelanders voted for a new Mayor, new City Council members, and for Issue 24. Here is how the numbers broke down.

26%

The percent of eligible voters in Cleveland who voted

63%

The percent of Clevelanders who voted for Justin Bibb

37%

The percent of Clevelanders who voted for Kevin Kelley

14,786

The number of votes that differentiated Bibb from Kelley

59%

The percent of voters who supported Issue 24, which would create a new citizens advisory board to oversee CPD

In The News: Advancing Renter Protections



In October, LMM and several fellow advocacy organizations launched the Renter Rights Day 1 Campaign. This campaign continued ongoing efforts to address barriers to housing for those experiencing homelessness or housing instability. The petition amassed more than 400 signatures as of early November. The effort garnered substantial media attention in the The Land and in Cleveland.com.

Relatedly, we are excited to share that also in October, County Executive Armond Budish announced his intent to introduce county-wide legislation to end Source of Income discrimination. The game-changing legislation, if passed, would also incentivize landlords to accept tenants using Section 8 housing vouchers by “providing them subsidies for the security deposit or up to two months of rent.” The timeline for this legislation’s advance is unclear, and it would still need to advance with the support of County Council, but it is definitely a step in the right direction!

What We’re Reading

- George Hrbek: The Selma Minister Who Built a White Antiracist Spiritual Community in Chicago
- Planet Money (podcast) The Rent Help Is Too Damn Slow - NPR
- New York Times: When Dasani Left Home
- The Land: Past due: Housing groups ask mayoral candidates to stand up for renters’ rights
- Cleveland.com: New Cleveland leadership should take renter protections seriously. This landlord does: Scott Kroehle