

Appendix II - PROBLEMS RESULTING FROM THE PROPOSED SILO

- **Harm to families seeking housing today.** The Navigator press release claims that “finding affordable housing is an overwhelming, confusing, and antiquated process.” But in the very same breath, this press release underscores in multiple sentences that there is no other online help available at present. ***If the need is so great, what then is the justification in hiding existing resources from desperate applicants? And why is the state participating in a campaign that hurts people who need help right now?***
- **It is true than the process of housing search is overwhelming, but that is not because the state provides too many silos and assigns them misleading names.** One small example is that there are two ‘Centralized section 8 waitlists’ plus the large number of other mobile voucher lists that must be applied to individually. Applicants wrongly assume that by applying to a list named “the centralized list”, they have covered all their bases. As it stands, applicants who are lucky enough to get extensive training think they have to go to the following places:
 1. the CHAMP system for state-funded public housing;
 2. the new Navigator for other types of housing;
 3. To two different Centralized section 8 waitlists; and
 4. Other lists for mobile vouchers that are not a part of any of the resources listed above.

This is precisely what Governor Baker has repeatedly advised against - having multiple silos is inefficient, costly, and counter to Fair Housing law and the Americans with Disability Act. and what HousingWorks’ free housing search is successful in solving: applicants that use our system are able to search and apply to ALL the options listed above, from one page. If a landlord allows an electronic app, or demands a paper app, or provides any other avenue, that avenue is available from the housingworks results page.

Currently there are 800 housing advocates in Massachusetts who find that it is far more efficient to use HousingWorks to locate and apply to ALL the options listed above. This alone should give pause to the support of a new additional silo that states it hopes to work with only 200 housing advocates.

- **Diverting resources to a redundant silo while failing to address unmet needs:** Other urgent needs have gone unaddressed while this new silo moves forward: since there are more than 40 kinds of low-income housing for which applicants might be eligible, the only way a household can locate all their options in an achievable time frame is with an internet-based site. But many households don’t have access to a computer and printer, or are disabled, or lack fluency in English, or lack fluency in internet searches, so these families have no way to locate and apply to housing unless they receive outside help. HousingWorks receives calls daily from citizens who cannot get a housing advocate, as our state supports far too few housing advocates. In addition to the 200 or so advocates funded by the state, HousingWorks works regularly works with more than 600 *other* housing advocates/social workers, most of whom found, even before the pandemic, that housing search would be the main focus of their job. All these advocates have

large caseloads. Many households cannot qualify for any of these advocates; **HousingWorks receives daily calls from desperate people who cannot get an advocate.** Further, the state often does not provide housing advocacy services until a household is already homeless, which is too late since prevention saves the state money. ***What is the justification in funding a redundant service when there is a desperate, but unaddressed need for more advocates who can easily use existing resources?***

- The proposed Navigator will be canvassing ***a smaller housing database than is offered by HousingWorks.net*** (because the Navigator will only search privately managed housing, in order to 'not compete' with the CHAMP public housing waitlist); this silo approach will help some agencies maintain a feeling of ownership of turf, but at the same time, **applicants who use the Navigator will miss out on opportunities to apply to housing and landlords will miss out on opportunities to fill units faster.**
- Between the CHAMP centralized waitlist (state public housing), the proposed new Housing Navigator, and the many other silos maintained by the state (federal public housing, MRVP vouchers, etc.), **the state has no way to get unduplicated data comparing the number of low-income households with the number of low-income housing units.** This supply-vs-demand data has been an urgent need for years, but will become even more urgent, as one certain pandemic outcome is that more households will need low-income / affordable housing or emergency housing stabilization services. HousingWorks unique design allows it to 1. report numbers of housing units across all the 40-plus types of housing, and 2. compare unduplicated counts and detailed profiles of who needs that housing - on a city-wide, county-wide, or even zip-code-by-zip-code basis. Absent this capability, the state cannot possibly create an efficient response to what is going to happen shortly. ***What is the justification in diverting money and energy into creating a redundant service, when the offer to partner with HousingWorks is continually rebuffed but remains the sole avenue to accessing this data?***
- *The proposed new system touts itself for having the state's backing*, i.e. it promises that landlords will be forced to update their information in the proposed state system. So, the Navigator, a smaller copy of HousingWorks, attempts to differentiate itself with this promise of government backing. But this government backing is what HousingWorks requested in our many meetings years ago with the state. If the need for state backing is so urgent, **how is it that the state can justify withholding this support from an existing comprehensive system, while attempting to de-legitimize HousingWorks for not having that support?** Here is a clear example of a few state agencies competing with private corporations in non-transparent ways. Housingworks has found ways to keep landlord information current without government backing - The state should be exploring those methods, rather than wasting time and money on another silo.
- One disingenuous critique that has been leveled against HousingWorks is that, as a private corporation, it cannot be trusted to maintain its free services. This overlooks the fact that HousingWorks began as a non-profit, but, being 20 years ahead of its time, there were zero grants available to fund a comprehensive affordable housing system. Three years after its

launch, HousingWorks was forced to reorganize as a for-profit to gain “angel investor” funding to continue providing a free housing search for all. That it thrives while providing free housing search services deserves praise and study.

- Since all the social needs listed above have been true prior to the pandemic but will be greatly exacerbated in coming months, why would the state waste effort in creating a redundant silo while turning its back to long-recognized gaps?
- The public deserves, at minimum, airing of these issues in a public forum. If you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to contact us. We appreciate your attention to this important matter and await a chance to answer questions.