

MARCH 9, 2011

The Senate Finance Committee heard testimony last Tuesday regarding the appropriation request of the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA). Among the programs under consideration was the Homeless Housing and Services Program (HHSP) which subsidizes our work here at The Bridge.



State funding for the HHSP is extremely important to the continued operation of the Bridge. For each of the last two years we've received \$1.2 million from HHSP (12% of our annual budget.)

The mood is somber in the Capitol right now. Every member of the two chambers is acutely aware of the budget shortfall, but none are more keenly aware than the Senate Finance

Committee (which is reviewing both the Medicaid and Education funding crisis in separate subcommittee hearings each morning). The testimony that they hear is sometimes agonizing and always challenging.

Three witnesses came to speak on behalf of MDHA and to Dallas' homeless picture in general. At Senator Royce West's request, Chairman **Steve Ogden** called our witnesses together as a panel at the beginning.

Judge **VonCeil Hill**, Legislative Committee Chair of the Dallas City Council, began with a well-rounded overview of our local challenge and the response that the Dallas community has mounted. She articulated an affirmative picture of the work that we do here and a glowing account of the Bridge operation.



Judge VonCeil Hill offered testimony before the Senate Finance Committee

She was followed by MDHA President and CEO **Michael Faenza**, who held the full attention of the committee, particularly that of the Chair, as he detailed the strategy and success of our integrated services and our comprehensive approach to ending chronic homelessness.

Mr. Faenza made it clear that we are able to open our arms to everyone because we have "scraped for dimes" by reaching for every possible funding source. The informative and non-confrontational approach seemed to pay immediate dividends.



Before our testimony was finished, Chairman Ogden offered the unsolicited suggestion that money should be appropriated for HHSP, and that the Governor’s Enterprise Fund might be an appropriate source of that revenue, since we do have demonstrable success in job placement.

Finally, we were privileged to be represented by Sara Huebner from Millet the Printer. She shared a little about the saga of her company’s opposition to the original proposal for construction of the Bridge, and the remarkable reversal which led Millet to become our most ardent supporter and friend. The effect of her candor and genuine delivery had a noticeable impression on the committee members.

So, is everything set?

No. There is still no mention of HHSP program funds anywhere **in any** of the appropriation documents which have been approved – either by committee or one of the chambers. There is still no clear indication that funds will be available, or transferred, to continue the program.

In a separate meeting earlier, Senator West assured the entire Dallas Council that he believed something would be appropriated to continue the program “even though there may be little cuts.” After our testimony was concluded, Senator West met the witnesses from Dallas outside the hearing room and assured them that he would do what he could to find funding.



Senator Royce West, who sits on the Senate Finance Committee, believes that there is still a way to restore HHSP funding, even if in part.

What are our next steps?

Whereas the process in the House (called “mark up”) turned out to be perfunctory, it is likely that the Senate will engage in a more deliberate and meaningful mark up. We will continue to advocate restoration of the HHSP during that process.

Another opportunity for us will arise during each of the considerations by the full chambers, and then possibly during Conference committee.

As this process continues we hope that some decision will be taken to draw on “Rainy Day” funds, or generate new revenue by restructuring taxes or increasing fees.

You can view the entire Dallas segment of HHSP testimony by going to the URL listed below, and select “March 1” from the list of archived testimony.

<http://www.senate.state.tx.us/75r/senate/commit/c540/c540.htm>