

December 15, 2017

Mayor Mike Rawlings
City of Dallas
1500 Marilla Street, Room 5EN
Dallas, Texas 75201-6390

Mr. T.C. Broadnax
City Manager
Dallas City Hall
1500 Marilla Street, Room 4EN
Dallas, Texas 75201

Dear Sirs:

We write this open letter to you, in light of the recent City of Dallas Audit of the Homeless Response System.

The mission of Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance ("MDHA") is to lead the development of the homeless response system that will make the experience of homelessness, in Dallas and Collin Counties, rare, brief and nonrecurring.

In March 2015, MDHA's Board of Directors hired Cindy J. Crain, a nationally recognized leader in homelessness solutions, who had successfully built MDHA's Tarrant County equivalent from the ground up. The board tasked Ms. Crain with transforming MDHA and its Continuum of Care into a high performing homeless response system. Under Ms. Crain's leadership, one of MDHA's main focuses has been on increasing participation in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS), which under federal law, tracks performance and drives improvement of homeless services providers. That system is compromised when emergency shelter data is not entered into it, and HUD penalizes non-complaint communities accordingly, as it did to Dallas. Ms. Crain succeeded in increasing emergency shelter participation from the low single digits to 57%, and expects to soon hit the important federal benchmark of 86%.

Today, Ms. Crain published a lengthy rebuttal to certain findings in the City of Dallas Audit of Homeless Response System Audit (the "audit"). We have enclosed a copy of that document for your reference and we hope that you will give it your careful consideration.

MDHA has been openly, transparently, publicly and repeatedly telling this story, since before Ms. Crain was even hired. Regretfully, this was not reflected in the City of Dallas Audit of Homeless Response System Audit (the "audit"). More than that, the audit claims that the loss of CoC Program funds during the years 2015 and 2016 was due to the policies of the current CoC leadership. This is incorrect. Those funds were lost, in significant part, because of a lack of HMIS participation, which occurred in the years *prior* to the beginning of Ms. Crain's tenure.

One of the major challenges in increasing participation in HMIS is that MDHA cannot force the emergency shelters to participate. At the same time, our community is penalized if they do not participate. It is up to every community to persuade the shelters to *willingly* participate.

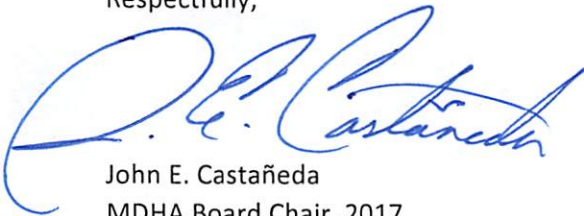
In an effort to accomplish that, MDHA radically restructured the way it funds HMIS, drastically lowering its fees. It introduced a menu of incentives, to induce participation, and it made it as easy as possible to do so. It also partnered with one of the most innovative programs in the country to make HMIS part of a larger data system that is already helping our community understand how social determinants affect health and vice versa. We now stand at the cusp of revolutionizing the way the homeless response system interacts with the healthcare system, which will lead to better care for the homeless and lower costs for county taxpayers.

With regard to the history of The Bridge and its participation in the HMIS, we direct you to Ms. Crain's detailed account, the gist of which was shared with the City Auditor during the course of this year's audit. Unfortunately, the audit wholly ignores these facts. Furthermore, we believe we must point out that the city audit mischaracterizes the process of designating the new Pieces Tech IRIS HMIS, as somehow running afoul of federal procurement processes. This is incorrect and it misreads the applicable regulations and MDHA policy.

We believe that the only way to solve homelessness is to rapidly house those experiencing homelessness. This cannot be done without an effective homeless response system, administered by a strong and independent backbone organization, as envisioned by the HEARTH Act and Opening Doors, the national strategic plan to end homelessness.

We urge you to please exercise leadership on this important issue, and to work with MDHA to bring about a future where we continue to partner with the City of Dallas, and other local governments, to make the experience of homelessness rare, brief and nonrecurring.

Respectfully,




John E. Castañeda
MDHA Board Chair, 2017



Tom Mills
MDHA Board Secretary, 2017



Karen Hughes
MDHA Board Treasurer, 2017



Edd Eason
MDHA Board Executive Committee/VP
Continuum of Care Board