

Shelter Grievance Advisory Committee (SGAC)
Meeting Minutes
September 24, 2020, 2:00-4:00PM
Microsoft Team Video Conference

Members Present: Terezie Bohrer – Chair, Jose Landaverde, Nicholas Kimura, Stephen Irwin, Lessy Benedith, Jennifer Friedenbach, Kate Shuton

Members Absent: Dr. Joe Kenan, Jacquelynn Evans Gbogboade, Henry Brown

Shelter Client Advocates Present: Leah Simon-Weisberg, Meghan "RK" Johnson, Christopher Garcia

HSH Staff Present: Cordell Thompson, Mecca Cannariato, Louis Bracco, Cathy Perdue, Lisa Rachowicz, Elisabet Medina, Scott Walton, Janay Washington, Genevieve Herreria, Maria Bellinger

Others Present: Tori Larson, Emeka Nnebe, Alejandro Nuno, Jen Snyder, Chelsea Crumpler, Eunice Feathers, Valerie McEntee

Introductions and Welcome: Members and guests introduced themselves.

Meeting Agenda: The agenda was reviewed and approved.

Review and Approval of Meeting Minutes – 6/9/20: Meeting minutes were reviewed and approved.

SGAC Business

Discuss SGAC Membership

Chair Bohrer brought up the long-standing issue of membership. With the loss of Dr. Joe Kenan and Jacquelynn Evans Gbogboade, the committee was down to 8 members. She told the SGAC that she'd reach out to Del Seymour, the Chair of the Local Homeless Coordinating Board, regarding recruiting new members.

Review of Shelter Grievance Statistics

15 Month Denial of Services, Internal Hearings and Arbitrations Report 5/19-7/20

Summary of DOS's by Shelter for April – June 2020

Reports were not covered.

Client Advocate Reports

Hearing and Arbitration Monthly Comparison Report – April – June 2020

Reports were not covered.

Old Business

There was no Old Business.

New Business

Domestic Violence and the Shelter Grievance Policy

“The SGAC has started a workgroup to evaluate the Shelter Grievance Policy as it is applied to situations of domestic violence specially in situations where staff have not witnessed the incident. The workgroup is comparing how these situations are addressed in housing as well as across the temporary shelter system. The working group consists of members of the Shelter Grievance Advisory Committee, HSH, Family Shelters & Access Points, and the Department on the Status of Women. We are also seeking an Adult Shelter or Navigation Center provider to join the working group. The workgroup has met three times and is recommending to the overall Shelter Grievance Advisory committee that workgroup work on an addendum that explicitly states how programs are to apply the Shelter Grievance Policy in situations of domestic violence and to standardize approaches to these situations across family shelter, navigation center, adult shelter programs.” - Elisabet Medina

Nick told the SGAC that the subcommittee had come to the conclusions that the policies did not need to change. He believed the providers needed to effectively apply the rules.

COVID-19 Alternative Housing System Immediate Safety Exit, Interim Warnings and Non-Immediate Safety Exits Policy -- presented by Mecca Cannariato

Mecca Cannariato introduced herself to the SGAC and presented a Power Point presentation regarding the COVID-19 Alternative Housing System Immediate Safety Exit, Interim Warnings and Non-Immediate Safety Exits Policy.

The Chair asked if the exit policy would be translated into other languages.

Mecca responded that they would be translated into the 5 threshold languages.

The Chair asked that a member of the SGAC be added to the working group.

Jennifer Friedenbach felt that it was very problematic that the policy was created outside of the SGAC. She believed that single adult shelters were being reclassified as Shelter In Place (SIP) Hotels and the clients' rights to due process were being taken away. Also, Jennifer shared her concerns that the right to a shelter client advocate or arbitration was being removed. Instead, SIP Hotel staff had the power to decide if client could stay or go.

Lessy Benedith asked about the email process to be reinstated if a client happened to be exited? Also, she asked for the length of suspension for any given rule violation?

Leah Simon-Weisberg, Directing Attorney at the Shelter Client Advocate Program, believed the current process at the SIP Hotels has been demoralizing and problematic. Also, she believed that the appeal process has failed the shelter clients. Leah expressed her regret in believing the City would provide adequate protections and services to shelter clients. She said that this is the most non-transparent process that she's ever seen.

Jennifer added that the City needed to apply exciting processes to the new policy, so that the shelter clients would be familiar with it.

Leah asked what's the process was moving forward?

Mecca replied that a work group would be setup in the fall, so recommendations and improvements can be made to the policy.

Jennifer asked why there needed to be a new body to oversee the grievance process if the SGAC already exists?

Meghan "RK" Johnson, Shelter Client Advocate, believed that the system historically has not provided support to the most vulnerable in the city. Currently, the advocates have been completely removed from the grievance process. She thought the SIP Hotels have become more punitive by using the police and security to enforce the rules. RK expressed her concern that client advocates are being ignored. For example, she mentioned that emails regarding clients being denied services are not being answered.

Alejandro Nuno, Director at ST. Vincent DePaul, acknowledged the difficulty of the work. He believed that every guest in the system has a right to due process. However, Alejandro expressed his concerns regarding the level of challenges that the shelter staff face due to the lack of clarity in the process. He understood that clients have mental health issues and other challenges, but Alejandro wanted it to be known that shelter staff are being abused verbally, being threatened and physically attacked. Ultimately, he is open to work with the client advocates to ensure shelter clients get their say.

Christopher Garcia, Shelter Client Advocate, understood that it's important to have a process that insured the safety of shelter staff. However, he believed the process hasn't worked in a way that serves the homeless community. He wanted to know why clients need to wait 5 days to resolve their grievance?

Tori Larson, an attorney at the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights for the San Francisco Bay Area, said this policy lacked respect for the people the City is supposed to serve. She believed the policy doesn't protect the shelter clients. She wondered why the City came up with weaker protections, instead of choosing stronger ones. Tori had issues with shelter staff overseeing hearings, instead of unbiased arbitrators.

Valerie McEntee echoed her concerns expressed by previous speakers. By taking away power from the SGAC, she believed that it would only make matters worse. Valerie stated that the twenty-year Shelter Grievance Policy is understood and accepted.

Nick Kimura believed that the City's action was extreme and outrageous. He argued that the shelter staff are safer under the Shelter Grievance Policy compared

to the new policy. Nick wanted to know why the City believes the new policy is good, reasonable and legitimate?

After listening to the comments from committee members and guests, Mecca told the group that she'd pass their concerns on to her supervisor and the executive team of the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing (HSH). She reiterated that members of the SGAC will be invited to participate with the work group in October.

Nick asked why a work group was necessary when the SGAC already performs an existing role that oversees the shelter grievance process?

Lessy strongly believed that every shelter client should have access to representation when they are denied service. She encouraged the department to consider staying within the existing policy. Although not perfect, she said the Shelter Grievance Policy was working. Lessy thought that the shelter clients' voices were not being heard under the new policy.

Jennifer reminded the committee that a letter was sent to HSH. The letter laid out the case that the grievance policy applied to the SIP hotels. She stated that the SGAC was dismissed by HSH and the City moving in a different direction.

Kate Shuton supported the idea of stronger representation for shelter clients. Also, she believed the new policy is problematic and the new process is moving too fast.

Jennifer's motion was seconded and passed: The SGAC opposes the new policy, excluding the creation of the rules. There's a strong need for representation and a continuation of the existing shelter grievance policy, hearings and arbitrations.

The Chair thanked Mecca for her presentation and listening to the concerns of the committee. She felt that the SGAC was disregarded by the department.

Mecca acknowledged the frustration of the committee and appreciated the feedback she received. She told the SGAC that she believed in restorative justice and planned to incorporate those ideals into the new policy.

Nick asked when there would be an opportunity for individuals outside of the SGAC to voice their opinions regarding the new policy? He wanted to know what the next steps in the decision making process?

In response, Mecca said she would follow up with an answer.

Jennifer requested a listening session with Interim Director Abigail Stewart-Kahn and Executive Director of the Department of Emergency Management Mary Ellen Carroll. She suggested that clients who are impacted by the City's policy could participate in the meeting.

RK supported Jennifer's idea of holding a listening session for the shelter residence who are being impacted by the new policy.

Stephen Irwin wished that there was more of a democrat process that involved the people who have the lived experience of homelessness.

Jennifer's motion seconded and passed: The SGAC requests that Interim Director of the Department of Homelessness and Supportive Housing Abigail Stewart-Kahn and Executive Director of the Department of Emergency Management Mary Ellen Carroll participate in a listening session with stake holders regarding this proposed policy, before it is implemented.

She suggested that shelter / SIP Hotel clients should be give the opportunity to speak on this new policy.

Eviction Defense Collaborative Video Presentation

“The Shelter Client Advocates work with residents of homeless shelters funded by the City and County of San Francisco. We are charged with monitoring shelter conditions and the application of shelter rules, acting as informal conflict resolvers between the shelters and their clients, and assisting clients in appealing denials of service.” Eviction Defense Collaborative

Link to video: <https://evictiondefense.org/services/shelter-client-advocacy/>

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Next Meeting

Thursday, October 22, 2020

2:00-4:00PM
Video Conference

Meeting Adjourned