

Patrick unveils plan to aid homeless people at Framingham event



Mike, a homeless man helped by SMOC, shakes hands with Gov. Deval Patrick after addressing a crowd present at SMOC headquarters in Framingham to hear Patrick announce a new initiative to help the homeless. Daily News Staff Photo / Allan Jung

By Danielle Ameden
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FRAMINGHAM – When Jim Cuddy joined the South Middlesex Opportunity Council as executive director back in 1985, homeless shelters were a new concept. He never imagined he'd be among the leaders still working to put roofs over people's heads 30 years later.

"Over time – that much time – it's easy to get discouraged, and to see a problem not go away, to see a social injustice not go away...that's why this day is important," Cuddy said Monday, celebrating Gov. Deval Patrick's announcement of a new state program that promises to end chronic individual homelessness. "This day marks an event that will help us make this problem go away, once and for all."

A large crowd of state and local community leaders and partners from the public and private sector gathered at SMOC's headquarters on Bishop Street to hail the new Pay for Success initiative.

Leveraging \$3.5 million in philanthropic funding and private capital investments, the new model will serve up to 800 of the state's estimated 1,500 chronically homeless individuals.

"This is about how we share – all of us – the responsibility for solving a problem that is about all of us," Patrick said.

"It's about ending this notion that the homeless are somebody else's problem, somebody else's family, somebody else's relative but in fact members of our community, and then we have to have a solution which isn't just about getting them out of the cold on a terrible day like this, but helping them get back up and stay on their feet and I'm proud to be a part of that," he said, earning a standing ovation from the crowd.

The state says the Pay for Success program will provide 500 permanent units of stable, supportive housing. One benefit will be lower costs for emergency resources, such as shelter and Medicaid payments.

Funding for the contract or social impact bond comes from Santander Bank N.A., the Corporation for Supportive Housing and United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley.

If successful, the initiative will generate up to \$6 million that the state would use to repay investors, who are taking a risk by providing the up-front financing.

The state only pays the money back if the program succeeds in providing stable housing for one year for chronically homeless individuals.

Patrick said it's a simple premise: "Have government pay for what works."

Secretary of Administration and Finance Glen Shor, after the event, said the permanent housing will help people get jobs and lead safer and stable lives. Ultimately, that will mean higher income tax revenue for the state and lower costs for public assistance and public safety, he said.

Cuddy said SMOC has signed a contract to provide housing for 135 homeless individuals and will take them directly out of shelters in MetroWest, Worcester and Lowell.

"It's a challenge we embrace," Cuddy said. "It's a challenge we're determined to be successful at."

The social service agency has already been doing this under its own pilot program.

One of its clients, Mike, got a chance to shake the outgoing governor's hand after he talked about how SMOC gave him a place of his own.

"I came to Framingham about three years ago," Mike, who only gave his first name, told the crowd. "I was living in my car just down the street here for about three months."

He went to SMOC to get into a shelter for the winter and ended up in housing under the pilot program that has helped get his life on track. Mike, who suffers from mental illness, alcoholism and drug addiction, said he is glad to have "a place to live and shower and shave and keep my clothes clean."

"The people here at SMOC have been wonderful, have been working with me and helping me out for the last couple of years and I'm grateful," he said.

Mike Durkin, president of the United Way of Massachusetts Bay and Merrimack Valley, said his organization is delighted to be a part of the creative Pay for Success program.

He praised the Patrick administration for going "into the brave new world" with this initiative and including the private and public sectors.

"It's said sometimes in a disparaging way that success has 100 partners, 100 fathers," Durkin said. "But that's really true here today with all of you that are here, committing to folks like Mike and the others throughout the commonwealth who need a little bit of help to make a difference in their life."

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At SMOC headquarters in Framingham, from left, SMOC Executive Director Jim Cuddy, Jerry Desilets, SMOC Director of Policy, Planning and Community Relations, Framingham Town Manager Bob Halpern and Paul Mina, President & CPO of United Way of Tri-County listen as Joe Finn, President and Executive Director of Massachusetts Housing and Shelter Alliance, speaks to a crowd present to hear Gov. Deval Patrick announce a new initiative to help the homeless. Daily News Staff Photo / Allan Jung