

The Virgin Islands Consortium

HUD Noncompliance Blocks Federal Funds for Homeless Services, Leaving Territory Struggling as Unhoused Man Pleads Not to Be Forgotten

Officials warned the lack of a coordinated entry system prevents access to HUD support. At the meeting, Michael Hartledge, who remains unhoused, said he felt “ignored” after earlier outreach, highlighting the human toll of systemic gaps in care.

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Janeke Simon **September 22, 2025**



September's meeting of the Continuum of Care Council on Homelessness focused on executing the transition from ad hoc collection of volunteer individuals and agencies to fully functioning standalone legal entity at the helm of homelessness reduction in the

territory.

Attendees received training from Ann McCreedy, CEO of Oryx Solutions, who provided a broad overview of the duties and responsibilities of each component member of the Continuum of Care. She spoke of the importance of ensuring that COC boards include someone with current or recent lived experience with homelessness, and encouraged the inclusion of people who can bring multiple perspectives to the table.

Laying out just a few of the tasks at hand, Ms. McCreedy noted that a raft of policy documents need to be prepared, including a code of conduct and a policy on conflicts of interest, and a recusal process for board members whose organizations may be competing for funding from the CoC.

Upcoming training, she signaled, would focus on building out management systems to coordinate services and support for homeless Virgin Islanders. Referencing her work in the Florida Keys, Ms. McCreedy noted that “one of the things that is true about Monroe County is that each of the islands has its own personality and norms, and that has to be also considered in the development of the Coordinated Entry System.” Similar differences between islands may exist here in the territory, she suggested, advising that those building the system consider “not only how do we reach folks over a diverse geography, but also...what are the norms of different places and spaces.”

Getting a coordinated entry system is of critical importance, said Suzanne Magras. “We’re not in compliance with HUD because we don’t have that coordinated system in place, and as a result, we cannot tap into additional funding,” Dr. Magras noted. As a result, efficacy on the ground is limited.

At the beginning of the meeting, a currently unhoused man complained that communication had gone cold after initial outreach some months ago. After a June meeting, “I was hoping that some type of movement would go forward,” said Michael Hartledge. “I haven’t heard a peep out of anyone, and I know that the problem is complex, but to be ignored makes you feel like you’re not important and not wanted.”

CoC chair Danny Derima promised a follow-up call after the meeting to apprise Mr. Hartledge of some new developments, but according to Dr. Magras, assistance for people like him is often hamstrung because “we don’t have the system in place to help. We don’t have the funding resources to help.” Various individuals and entities are “working, still in silos, to address issues where we can, because we don’t have that cohesive triage approach, and we desperately need it,” she said. A draft needs urgent collaborative action to be finalized and implemented, Dr. Magras noted.

Before that can happen, however, the CoC must continue to formalize its structure. Board elections are upcoming, and having recently established a bank account, members plan to approach the legislature about accessing the funding that had been allocated for initial operations. This funding would enable the hiring of staff, which then would allow full-time operations to get up and running. Dr. Magras called for a strategic plan that would direct the CoC’s steps most effectively over the short term. “We do have around \$98,000 that needs to be expended ASAP,” she noted.

Nelly O'Reilly, a new member of the Continuum, queried how homeless people in the territory are currently being tracked. "I'm really worried who's collecting data as to where they are or if they have passed," she said, noting that there are a few individuals she has not seen in some time. CoC chair Danny Derima noted that the co-ordinated entry system would be needed for such tracking. As it currently stands, there is no centralized data store.

"We're providing the best service that we can as a continuum, but we all work and operate in individual silos, trying our best with whatever limited resources that we all have individually," he said.