



Atlanta City Council HOPWA Work Session Handouts

Meeting Date: Thursday, August 11, 2022

Committee: CDHS/FEC

Chair: Chair Dozier & Chair Wan

MISCELLANEOUS HANDOUTS

- p. 1 - HOPWA Work Session Agenda 8.11.2022

PRESENTATION

- p.2 - Joint CDHS FEC Work Session Update on City's HOPWA 8.11.2022

WRITTEN STATEMENTS

- p. 19 - Statement – Bruce Garner - Atlanta HOPWA Advisory Committee
- p. 22 - Statement – by Georgia Equality and others
- p. 26 - Statement – Jeff Graham - Executive Director of Georgia Equality
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Supplemental Materials

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**Community Development/Human Services Committee
Finance/Executive Committee
WORK SESSION
Housing Opportunities for People with Aids (HOPWA) Program
Thursday, August 11, 2022
Committee Room 1
9:00a.m. – 12:00 p.m.**

- I. **Welcome** – *Councilmember Jason Dozier, Chair CDHS Committee
Councilmember Alex Wan, Chair Finance/Executive Committee*

- II. **Update of City’s HOPWA Programs/Funding/Reimbursement Policies** –
Deborah Lonon, Commissioner, Department of Grants and Community Development

- III. **HOPWA Sponsors** – *5 minutes*

- IV. **Discussion**

- V. **Public Comments** – *3 minutes*

- VI. **Next Steps**

- VI. **Adjourn**

Department of Grants and Community Development

UPDATE to CDHS and FEC
August 11, 2022

Deborah Lonon, Commissioner



Department Key Facts



1. Serves the City's most vulnerable residents and outcomes include:
 - Rehabilitate approximately 100 houses annually
 - Provide TBRA for approximately 450 households annually
 - Assist with approximately 50 home purchases
 - Prevent homelessness for approximately 1000 persons annually

2. Support administration of grants for key priorities of the Mayor and City:
 - Affordable Housing Supply and Support
 - Safe, Sanitary, and Low-Barrier Housing and Support Services for People Living with HIV/AIDS
 - Assistance for Currently Homeless Persons and Families
 - Aid to Public Facilities, Facility Improvements, and Public Infrastructure
 - Blight Reduction and Neighborhood Cleanups
 - Economic Development and Small Business Incentives
 - Fair Housing, Housing Counseling, and Legal Services
 - Public Services

3. Manage between 125 – 150 projects

4. Responsible for deploying more than \$30M annually



Key Programs

1. HUD Entitlement Grants

- Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
- Home Investment Partnership Program (HOME)
- Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG)
- Housing Opportunities for Persons With AIDS (HOPWA)

2. Section 8 (project-based rental assistance)

3. Federal Recovery Funds (Neighborhood Stabilization Program)

4. Competitive Grants (other federal grants, philanthropic grants)



DGCD Metrics

Program Outcomes: Achieve the desired outcomes established for programs and within each project in alignment with CoA's Consolidated Plan

- Sample measure – actual vs. planned outcomes

Timeliness of Expenditures: Expend the funding CoA has been entrusted to administer in a timely manner and ensure payments to partner agencies in a timely manner

- Sample measure – timeliness ratio, days to pay invoices

Compliance: Ensure compliance with grant program policies and procedures

- Sample measure - monitoring findings, timely monitoring of agencies



DGCD Metrics cont.

CDBG Priorities:

- 100% Low Income Benefit (Public Services)
- 51% Low Income Benefit (Capital Projects)
- Area Benefit (Capital Projects)
- Presumed Benefit (Public Services or Capital Projects)
- Job Creation/Retention for Low Income Individuals
- Slum/Blight Elimination

ESG Priorities:

- Housing Relocation & Stabilization plan
- Rapid Rehousing
- Rental Assistance



DGCD Metrics concl.

HOPWA Priorities:

- Promote affordable, accessible, available, and adequate housing
- Increase housing options by targeting HOPWA resources and connection to non-HOPWA housing resources
- Promote increased housing stability and maximum independence
- Ensure adequate supportive services that promote housing stability and ongoing access to care and support
- Leverage HOPWA resources to connect to existing systems of healthcare, supportive services, and affordable housing

HOME Priorities:

- Permanent or Transitional Housing
- Affordable Housing via gap financing for acquisition, new construction, or rehabilitation
- Multi-family development
- Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO)



Payment updates – Sec 8

Section 8 AP Paid Invoice Report (01-01-2022 thru 08-08-2022)	
Row Labels	Sum of Distribution Amount
949-953 Washington St LLC	\$ 18,170.00
G&S Santa Fe LLC	\$ 213,169.00
Georgia Natural Gas	\$ 444.00
Georgia Power Co.	\$ 5,155.00
Scana Energy	\$ 618.00
Scott Property Management LLC	\$ 18,450.00
Grand Total	\$ 256,006.00

Payment updates – ESG

ESG AP Paid Invoice Request (01-01-2022 thru 08-08-2022)	
Row Labels	Sum of Distribution Amount
24/7 Gateway, LLC	\$ 211,523.99
Atlanta Harm Reduction Coalition, Inc	\$ 188,021.61
City of Refuge, Incorporated	\$ 30,000.00
Covenant House Georgia	\$ 8,354.48
Grady Health System	\$ 157,046.36
Hosea Feed The Hungry And The Homeless, Inc	\$ 16,945.11
Our House, Inc	\$ 106,208.38
Partners For Home	\$ 295,804.49
Project Community Connection, Inc	\$ 2,148,549.53
Quest Communities Development Organization, Inc.	\$ 159,102.99
The Salvation Army, A Georgia Corporation	\$ 766,127.01
Travelers Aid Of Metro Atlanta	\$ 269,003.58
Youth Empowerment Success Services	\$ 126,640.30
Zaban Paradies Center	\$ 155,724.20
Grand Total	\$ 4,639,052.03

Payment updates cont. - CDBG



CDBG AP Paid Invoice Report (01-01-2022 thru 08-08-2022)	
Row Labels	Sum of Distribution Amount
Atlanta Housing Authority	\$ 918,047.00
Atlanta Legal Aid Society Inc	\$ 65,806.20
Atlanta Volunteer Lawyers Foundation	\$ 77,442.27
Caringworks, Inc	\$ 5,323.33
Center For Black Women's Wellness	\$ 38,996.03
Central Outreach & Advocacy Center, Inc	\$ 2,758.23
East Lake Foundation	\$ 69,202.00
Essence of Hope, Inc	\$ 3,600.00
Families First, Inc	\$ 37,901.68
FURNITURE BANK OF METRO ATLANTA INC	\$ 42,660.00
Gilgal, Inc	\$ 12,433.55
H.O.P.E. Through Divine Intervention, Inc	\$ 1,666.66
Internal Reflections, LLC	\$ 28,625.00
Meals On Wheels Atlanta, Inc	\$ 334,865.00
Metro Fair Housing Ser, Inc	\$ 19,990.54
Midtown Assistance Center, Inc.	\$ 230,293.08
Nicholas House	\$ 10,493.51
Nicole's House Of Hope	\$ 20,460.00
Partnership Against Domestic Violence	\$ 35,009.66
Positive Transition Services, Inc.	\$ 3,748.00
Rebuilding Together Atlanta, Inc	\$ 24,076.59
Rubio & Son Interior Inc	\$ 158,569.00
Standard Of Care Psychological Services	\$ 11,100.00
Travelers Aid Of Metro Atlanta	\$ 900.00
Urban League Of Greater Atlanta	\$ 52,770.62
Westcare Georgia, Inc	\$ 91,830.00
Grand Total	\$ 2,303,418.51

Payment updates cont. - HOPWA



HOPWA AP Paid Invoice Report (01-01-2022 thru 08-08-2022)	
Row Labels	Sum of Distribution Amount
Africas Children Fund	\$ 191,542.94
Aid Atlanta Inc	\$ 768,650.07
Antioch Urban Ministries, Inc	\$ 432,682.62
Caringworks, Inc	\$ 161,565.00
Dekalb County Board of Health	\$ 44,297.66
FURNITURE BANK OF METRO ATLANTA INC	\$ 80,765.82
H.O.P.E. Through Divine Intervention, Inc	\$ 144,130.98
Here'S To Life Inc	\$ 63,514.33
Jerusalem House Inc.	\$ 3,541,859.47
Landmark Consulting LLC	\$ 98,233.75
Naesm, Inc	\$ 181,035.94
Positive Impact Health Centers, Inc.	\$ 981,367.65
Project Open Hand	\$ 87,428.79
Southside Medical Center, Inc	\$ 240,417.08
Travelers Aid Of Metro Atlanta	\$ 1,258,202.07
Veterans Empowerment Organization Of Georgia, Inc	\$ 6,669.80
Grand Total	\$ 8,283,587.28



HOPWA draw down updates

HOPWA Grant Year	HUD Allocation	Amount Remain	Grant Expiration
2018	\$23,101,950.00	\$0.00	2022
2019	\$23,000,301.00	\$20,174,365.00	2023
2020	\$22,795,464.00	\$22,795,464.00	2024
2021	\$22,712,066.00	\$22,712,066.00	2025
2022	\$12,997,884.00	\$12,997,884.00	2026



HOPWA Contracting Update

Program Year	HUD Award	Amount Awarded by City to Service Providers/Status
2019	23,000,301	All minus CoA admin funds, all fully executed
2020	22,795,464	All minus CoA admin funds, all fully executed
2021	22,712,066	All minus CoA admin funds, under review with PS, PS input

HOPWA Contracting Update



HOPWA PROJECT SPONSORS	Total Awarded
Atlanta Legal Aid Society, Inc.	\$ 140,000.00
Furniture Bank	\$ 82,212.00
Jerusalem House	\$ 1,561,042.00
Jerusalem House	\$ 1,414,318.00
Jerusalem House	\$ 583,742.00
Jerusalem House	\$ 10,182,287.00
NAESM	\$ 331,079.40
The Investors Academy Inc	\$ 562,500.00
Affordable Housing Solutions Inc	\$ 934,860.00
Meal Services	\$ 934,892.00
AIDS Athens, Inc Rural Housing	\$ 1,262,910.60
Renovation Building	\$ 320,000.00
New Hope-MHFM	\$ 193,226.00
CAPITAL Projects	\$ 3,527,635.02
ADMINISTRATIVE COST	681,361.98
GRAND TOTAL	22,712,066.00

DGCD Ongoing Plan of Action



Hire and retain qualified staff

- Only 2 key management positions remain vacant

Resolve the backlog of reimbursements

- Paid all outstanding 2020 reimbursement requests by April 1, 2022; Paid all completed reimbursement requests submitted in 2021 by June 30, 2022
- Transitioned to a monitoring-based approach for reimbursement submission on January 31, 2022
- Reimbursement process reduced from 144 days to 69 days to 47-day average

Conduct ongoing training for service providers

- Leveraged HUD TA, contractors, and City experts to conduct reimbursement and contract management trainings for grant service providers on a monthly basis for staff and quarterly basis for service providers; Ongoing comprehensive training for staff

DGCD Ongoing Plan of Action Concl.



Issue improved notices of funding availability (NOFA)

- Conducted separate NOFAs for CDBG, ESG, and HOPWA
- Completed NOFA process for previous HOME allocations
- Streamlined process for awarding grants, with each targeting service providers with stronger capabilities that will meet top priorities as identified in CoA's Consolidated Plan
- Upcoming NOFA for remaining CDBG/HOPWA funds and FY22 HOME funds

Conduct draw downs monthly and meet federal deadlines

- Completed draw of all HOPWA 2018 funds before April 30, 2022 deadline
- Conducting timely draws of entitlement funds

Purchase and implement an improved grant management system

- Developed a statement of work for a new grant management software system utilizing ARPA funds and currently procuring services
- Will implement an improved grant management system by December 31, 2022



Questions

E. Bruce Garner
Post Office Box 571251
Atlanta, Georgia 30357

August 10, 2022

Members of the Atlanta City Council:

My name is Bruce Garner and it is my honor to chair the Metropolitan Atlanta HIV Health Services Planning Council, also known as the Ryan White Planning Council. The Planning Council sets the priorities for the allocation of some 25 million dollars annually to provide services for people living with HIV/AIDS. The Planning Council monitors the expenditures of the agencies providing services to help insure that funds are utilized on a timely basis. Reports are provided on a regular basis to allow for the reallocation of funds as needed so that they are utilized to the fullest extent possible for the benefit of those being served.

Even though Ryan White grants do not presently fund housing, being housed is a critical part of what is needed for individuals to live and thrive with HIV/AIDS. Those who are unhoused are more concerned with finding shelter each day than with many of the other necessities of living. One who is not housed is less concerned with their medication regimens, keeping medical appointments and accessing the services provided via Ryan White funds than they are with seeking a safe place to spend their days and nights. There is an integral relationship between being housed and taking care of the other important aspects of living and thriving with HIV/AIDS. Accordingly the Planning Council has a vested interest in how funds that do provide housing are administered.

The federal program that provides housing for people living with HIV/AIDS is named the Housing Opportunities for People Living with HIV/AIDS or the HOPWA program. HOPWA is funded by United States Department of Housing and Urban Development or HUD. While HOPWA and Ryan White do not have an "official" relationship, they are linked through providing support for people living with HIV/AIDS.

Unfortunately, the HOPWA program in Atlanta has been plagued with problems for some two decades. The result has been that funds have not been provided to housing agencies on a timely basis, preventing them from being able to insure that people living with HIV/AIDS are properly housed. While the intent of the administrators with the City of Atlanta has always been to be helpful and efficient, various factors have kept them from meeting that mark.

One of the major problems seems to be the unusually complicated and difficult contracting and procurement processes used by the city. Delays have resulted in non-profit agencies being owed anywhere from thousands to over a million dollars from the HOPWA program. A major agency had to withdraw from the program because they could no longer carry the financial burden of not being reimbursed on a timely basis for services they had already provided.

We have been seeing some improvements over the last months, but the delays persist and the process continues to be cumbersome and seems less than transparent. Delays in disbursement of funds can cause the city to lose providers and fail in our efforts to serve some of the least of the least among us. Clearly some changes are needed.

The city must also address a reduction in HOPWA funding that had been on the horizon for several years and is now taking effect. That creates yet another issue impacting those trying to live and thrive with HIV/AIDS.

The following suggestions are offered in an effort to improve the entire process and make it more transparent:

- Provide regular data as to how many people are on whatever waiting lists that exist for housing people living with HIV/AIDS: How they are tracked once they get on the list? How are follow up contacts done if they are done?
- Provide data about how many unhoused people living with HIV/AIDS are in the metro area.
- Revise the overly complicated contracting/reimbursement process to be simplified and made more user friendly. It discourages participants and creates a system where non-profit providers are essentially funding the city's responsibilities. Address how will this problem be addressed and remedied.
- Provide information to combat what appears to be a lack of transparency in the contracting/reimbursement process and how that will be addressed? In an effort to help address this problem, the following should prove helpful:
 1. Provide quarterly budget reports per contract year, listing funds encumbered, spent and remaining per provider and line item totals per grant.
 2. Provide quarterly services reports per contract listing current capacity and available housing slots per providers. Reports should include “gaps” and waiting list for housing services.
 3. Create an expedited process for pass-through community related federal grants to ensure contracts are executed within 45 days
- Address how providers lost due to difficulties with the processes will be replaced.
- Address how the city will address the reduction in HOPWA funding that has now occurred.

I do not see the situation as hopeless and beyond achieving success. However, I also honestly

believe that there will have to be some major revisions in a process that has become far too cumbersome for something that is essentially a “pass through” of funds from the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The unhoused among us deserve better. The unhoused among us who are also struggling to live with HIV/AIDS also deserve better.

Thank you,

Bruce Garner, Chair
Metropolitan Atlanta HIV Health Services Planning Council and
Member, Atlanta HOPWA Advisory Committee

Honorable Andre Dickens
Mayor of the City of Atlanta
&
Esteemed City Council Members
from the City of Atlanta

Dear Mayor and City Council Members,

Congratulations on nearing your first 100 days in office. Thank you for your diligent efforts in working to address the many issues impacting communities in Atlanta. We wish you continued success in what remains of your terms in office. This letter serves as a notice and opportunity for Mayor Dickens and the City Council to work together to improve the lives of your constituents living with HIV. We ask that Mayor Dickens and the City Council address the **four points** in this letter.

First, when you took office, there was a crisis within the City of Atlanta, the ongoing crisis within the Housing Opportunities for People With AIDS (HOPWA) federal program. Recently, the Commissioner of the City of Atlanta's Department of Grants and Community Development, Deborah Lonon, has implemented a new monitoring-based reimbursement system that promises to streamline and rectify the long-standing issue of reimbursement payments to HOPWA service providers in Atlanta.

The community needs to be made aware of the progress of this new system, and the city needs to be fully transparent. Answers must be made available to questions such as "Will reports be publicly available? When will they be available? What percentage of organizations have been reimbursed, and what timeframe do the payments represent?" These answers should be expressed as a numerator, denominator, and percentage. In the past four months, two HOPWA providers in Atlanta have closed their doors to providing HOPWA services. They have ended their contracts with the city. We encourage you to do all you can to prevent more providers from being lost.

Second, reports have shown that between **150 to 1,400 individuals and families are currently on a waiting list seeking HOPWA services**. The disparity between both numbers is so large it should be alarming to everyone. We need to know precisely how many people are on the HOPWA waiting list and the status of their services. As we learned in early March, Congress passed the FY22 budget, funding HOPWA at \$450 million and falling deeply below funding the needs of persons living with HIV in Atlanta, which will become the hardest hit city by this funding. With this woeful funding decision, Atlanta will have \$10 million less to fund HOPWA. This is sure to exacerbate the list of people and families living with HIV and seeking HOPWA services on the city's waiting list.

Commissioner Lonon has stated that the waiting list is an issue for everyone to work together to fix and has agreed to be a part of those efforts. The city's mismanagement of the HOPWA program has contributed to the extensive waiting list, so it must take

some measure of ownership and accountability. Repairing relationships with providers and landlords will go a long way to increasing capacity by allowing more vouchers and assisting in alleviating the waitlist. **We encourage the mayor and city council to commit to supporting, addressing, and finding solutions for the waiting list of persons and families living with HIV seeking HOPWA services? Including seeking partnerships throughout the 29 county metropolitan area so that there is available housing to eliminate this waiting list.**

Third, Jenifer Keenan has been appointed by the mayor in a HOPWA liaison volunteer position. Mrs. Keenan has done a great job meeting with the community and providers to eliminate some of the issues that have come up in communications with the city. Unfortunately, her role as housing liaison is voluntary, which creates the perception of a lack of accountability. Atlanta's HOPWA crisis cannot be solved on a project basis; it requires the City to permanently improve its contract and reimbursement systems. We encourage the establishment of a full-time paid position, which will accomplish three things:

- Promote sustainability to alleviate issues and confidence that what is resolved is maintained.
- Demonstrate the City's commitment to the HOPWA program's issues and an understanding of its severity.
- Demonstrate the City takes seriously the housing needs of constituents living with HIV - who are predominantly black and/or marginalized populations.

Lastly, persons living with HIV and using HOPWA services are vulnerable to being detrimentally impacted by housing instability. Suppose circumstances lead individuals and families to become evicted from their homes. In that case, they face long-lasting consequences when seeking new housing. Landlords will refrain from offering housing to persons with an eviction history. HOPWA recipients shouldn't have to face these additional challenges and barriers to stable housing. An expungement of previous housing status is necessary for these individuals and families. Expungement procedures could be accomplished through a two-step process:

- **Step 1:** Investigate the number of individuals evicted in whole or in part due to late payment/non-payment from the City. This must be done in collaboration with HOPWA provider agencies (currently and historically funded).
- **Step 2:** Partner with Legal Aid or a similar community-based legal agency to provide legal assistance such as expungement. This partnership must be formally documented through appropriate methods.

The HOPWA program and the people it serves are facing an impending crisis as federal funding for this program is scheduled to be **reduced by as much as 63%** in the coming years due to changes in the federal funding formula approved by Congress in 2016. Additionally, Congress's passing of the **FY22 appropriations budget with funding of HOPWA of \$450 million leaves the Atlanta EMA with a \$10 million loss.** Because of the ongoing challenges with the management of the current program, the City of Atlanta has wasted valuable time over the past five years preparing for this eventuality.

Therefore, we encourage the Office of the Mayor and members of the City Council to work together to ensure that these four points are met. There is much to celebrate with the progress made so far with the leadership of Commissioner Lonon and the Department of Grants and Community Development, but much is left to do. We welcome the opportunity to work closely with you to ensure promises made before getting elected are kept and these four points addressed.

Sincerely,

Our collectively concerned community,

Jeff Graham, Executive Director
Georgia Equality

Eric Paulk, Deputy Director
Georgia Equality

Larry M. Lehman, CEO
Positive Impact Health Centers

Nicole Roebuck, Executive Director
AID Atlanta, Inc.

Bruce Garner, Chairman
The Metropolitan Atlanta HIV Health
Services Planning Council

Stephanie Burks, LCSW
Director of Residential Services
CaringWorks, Inc.

Margaret Shuelke, Co-CEO
Project Community Connections, Inc.

Daniel Driffin, MPH, Vice-Chair
The Metropolitan Atlanta HIV Health
Services Planning Council

Lauren Waits, Board of Directors
Project Community Connections, Inc.

Jamie Shank, Learning Collaborative
Program Coordinator
ThriveSS

Erik Moore, MSW, HRSA Program
Manager
Positive Impact Health Centers

Kenny Okafor, MPH
Program Manager
ThriveSS

Reginald Austin, Linkage Coordinator
ThriveSS

Kennedi Lowman, MT(AMT) Community
Member Engagement Case Manager
ThriveSS

Marshall Rancifer, Founder & CEO
Justice For All Coalition

Latonia Wilkins, Community Member
Case Manager
ThriveSS

Public Comments/ Questions from Jeff Graham, Executive Director, Georgia Equality

I have grown increasingly frustrated with the lack of ongoing and transparent communication from the City of Atlanta regarding the HOPWA program. While I am pleased that there is finally a HOPWA advisory committee that is meeting regularly, I worry that this group is being used to block information and transparency more than it is being used to facilitate the needed communication from the community, including people whose lives depend upon HOPWA.

My example of this is that Jenifer Keenan has said repeatedly earlier this year, that she would make sure any questions that folks had would be answered quickly. In one public meeting back in May, I asked the following questions:

Do you know when the impact of the federal funding cuts will begin to show up into provider contracts?

What conversations are taking place within the Mayor's office to secure additional dollars in the city budget to offset those cuts to ensure that there is not a further reduction to the number of housing units available to HOPWA eligible individuals and families?

What conversations are taking place to increase the funding available to HOPWA eligible individuals and families so that we can expand the number of available housing units to ensure that there are no more waiting lists for services?

Is there anything that advocates can be doing during the current City Council budget discussions to support the funding that is needed to eliminate the current waiting list for HOPWA eligible individuals and families?

At that time, Jenifer asked me to follow-up by submitting those questions in writing.

That happened on May 31.

During another meeting of housing providers on June 27, I asked Jenifer why I never received a response to those questions. She responded that the information was provided to the HOPWA Advisory Committee and that I would have to review the minutes from that meeting for the answers.

Later that day I sent a follow up email stating that I had reviewed the minutes, but the questions I had asked were not addressed at the HOPWA Advisory Committee, so I was re-submitting them to her.

I have yet to receive a response, so perhaps someone from the HOPWA office or City of Atlanta can provide answers to these questions today.

And I now have an additional question.

At the end of 2021, there were some 27 people living with HIV/AIDS whose rent obligations needed to be moved from Positive Impact Health Centers because this provider had decided to terminate their contract with the City of Atlanta. At the time, I was assured that these individuals and families would be handled by a newly authorized contract with Africa's Children's Fund and that no one would fall through the cracks in this process.

I was alarmed when I reviewed the materials present at the July 13 HOPWA Advisory Committee meeting that indicated that ACF had been reimbursed \$12,535 between January 1 and June 30, 2022. Therefore, my next question is:

How many individuals and families are being served by ACF through their HOPWA contract and does this include all of the 27 HOPWA recipients who were in need of support as of the end of December 2021?

As was the case with so many people, I started the year off with great hope that the chronic problems with HOPWA would be addressed and resolved. I know that turning the program around will require time and patience. And there has been some improvement in the timeliness of the reimbursements and I am happy that no additional funds have been returned to the federal government.

But I am beginning to lose that sense of hope that this program will serve its purpose. I am beginning to feel a great sense of despair that once again, people living with HIV/AIDS are not valued by the City of Atlanta.

My final question is: ***What can any of you say to me today to restore my sense of hope that these issues will be resolved in the near term and by when will we see significant movement to increase the number of available housing units for HOPWA eligible individuals and plans enacted to fill the federal funding gaps that have started?***

HOPWA Public Comment 8.11.22

Good morning, my name is Sam Park and I serve as General Counsel for Positive Impact Health Centers. As one of the largest nonprofit AIDS Service Organizations in the State of Georgia, we have been focused on ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic by providing preventative care and HIV comprehensive specialty care with wrap-around services that used to include housing services through the HOPWA program.

For approximately 27 years, we had a HOPWA contract through the City of Atlanta. Unfortunately, we had no choice, but to terminate our HOPWA contract at the end of last year for what we alleged was breach of contract and the City's violations of federal regulations regarding the mismanagement of the HOPWA program that undermined our ability to serve individuals at risk of and living with HIV as a medical clinic, not a housing organization.

Specifically, 2 CFR 200.305(b) states that "payment methods must minimize the time elapsing between the transfer of funds from [...] the pass-through entity [or the City of Atlanta] and the disbursement by the non-federal entity" such as the nonprofit AIDS service orgs with us today. Subsections (b)(3) and (6) further stipulate that "when the reimbursement method is used [...] the pass-through entity must make payment within 30 calendar days after receipt of the billing" unless certain conditions apply such as a reasonable basis that the request was improper.

Not only did the City of Atlanta, under the prior administration, fail to minimize time between receipt of federal dollars and disbursement, at the time or on September 24, 2021, our nonprofit had paid out-of-pocket approximately \$1.3 million in eligible HOPWA, housing related expenses, and had not been reimbursed by the City of Atlanta. That was \$1.3 million that we could not use to get folks into care or provide other wrap-around services to help keep folks virally suppressed.

While I am happy to report that Positive Impact Health Centers was made whole earlier this year, as a community-based organization, we remain concerned about the proper administration of the HOPWA program to provide housing services to individuals living with HIV to keep them stable and virally suppressed. Because of how important housing is to end the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Georgia, which is our mission, we respectfully urge transparency regarding any ongoing issues that may remain with any inherited problems; collaboration with partner nonprofit organizations who are delivering housing services; and humility to work with another governmental entity to transfer the program if systemic issues cannot be resolved.

To: Members of the Atlanta City Council
From: Will Ramirez, Housing is Health Coalition
Re: City Council HOPWA Special Work Session Comments
Date: August 9, 2022

For the past five years, HOPWA funds awarded to the City of Atlanta have averaged over \$22 million. During this time, thousands of low-income persons living with HIV and their families have been able to meet their housing needs. These families depend on this assistance; they deserve safe, stable housing, regardless of their income. Stable housing is a critical component of a successful strategy for HIV prevention.

Housing is health care for people living with HIV. The stability of a person living with HIV directly impacts their health outcomes. Data tells us that:

- Homelessness increases the risk for HIV, even when controlling for mental health, substance abuse, and access to other services.
- Homelessness increases HIV risk behaviors, such as condomless sex and injection drug use.
- HIV prevention strategies are proven to be less effective with people who are unstably housed ([NAHC](#))

Now HOPWA Modernization has arrived, and with that, a new award has been allocated to the City of Atlanta. As you all may be aware, the federal HOPWA funds for the current fiscal year were reduced by ~\$9.7 million. This extraordinary cut in funding translates to 42% less than the year before and 43% less than what was available to the City of Atlanta two years ago. For months advocates have been asking the City of Atlanta how they are preparing for the inevitable reduction in funding. To this day, we have not received a concrete plan.

For months, advocates have also asked about the lack of a plan to expand program capacity to address the waiting list for HOPWA services in the City. Properly managing this list of people living with HIV must be a priority for the city as it looks to expand to fully meet needs in the future.

It is of critical importance that these issues be addressed as soon as possible to avoid significant disruption of services to those currently depending upon this program for housing, as well as to ensure we can meet the growing needs in the years to come.

The community, advocates, people living with HIV, and provider organizations, need to know:

- 1. Is there a strategic plan to secure funds to cover the \$9.7 million loss to HOPWA FY22 funds?**

- 2. What sustainability measures are in discussion in case FY23 HOPWA appropriations remain flat funded?**
- 3. What conversations are taking place to increase the funding available to HOPWA-eligible individuals and families so that we can expand the number of available housing units to ensure that there are no more waiting lists for services?**
- 4. Is there anything that advocates can be doing during the current City Council budget discussions to support the funding that is needed to eliminate the current waiting list for HOPWA-eligible individuals and families?**

We encourage the Office of the Mayor and members of the City Council to work together to ensure that these four questions are addressed. There is much to celebrate in progress made so far with the leadership of Commissioner Lonon and the Department of Grants and Community Development, but much is left to do. We welcome the opportunity to work closely with you to ensure that there is a plan in place to address the waiting list of people living with HIV and that measures are implemented to fill the funding gap that has been brought on by HOPWA Modernization.

Thank you,

Will Ramirez, MPA, Founder
Housing is Health Coalition

AID Atlanta HOPWA Statement: Special Hearing: Atlanta City Council August 11, 2022

Good morning honorable council members. My name is Nicole Roebuck and I have the honor of serving as the Executive Director of AID Atlanta. AID Atlanta has been a HOPWA Provider for as long as the program has been in inception here in Atlanta over 30 years ago. We have seen many changes with this program and the City's administration of it during that time. However, I'm not here to harp on the past woes of the program, because honestly it doesn't serve me in maintaining a certain level of sanity. I am here to make you aware of the progress we have seen primarily in the past few months mainly during 2022, and to also make you aware of where we still have significant challenges:

I'll start off with the progress:

- When our last HOPWA invoice (November 2021) was finally approved (there's a huge caveat there that I will explain later), it was paid in under 30 days.
- Provision of updates by Commissioner Lonon have been occurring at the most recently reinvigorated HOPWA Advisory Committee meetings, and also at other HOPWA related special called meetings with the community.
- Good faith attempts are being made to provide as much clarity regarding community questions and concerns. The process created by Jenifer to take questions from the community and advisory committee, feed them to the Commissioner and her staff prior to meetings, and preparing the answers in advance is the best process I have ever seen adopted by the City HOPWA program.
- The Mayor allowing Jenifer Keenan to serve her City in a volunteer capacity to drive improvement measures with the HOPWA program has been a game changer.
- Responsiveness to me personally from Commissioner Lonon and Jenifer Keenan has been greatly appreciated and in most instances productive.

And now for the challenges:

- Approval of invoices are still a challenge. The City is not utilizing the updated streamlined invoicing policy implemented and shared by Commissioner Lonon on February 9th 2022. We are still being required to send hundreds of pages of supporting documents through the City's portal that is technically no longer required to be sent, and technically unable to receive our large documentation files. We were specifically told by Commissioner Lonon, that in an effort to drastically streamline the reimbursement process, we'd instead need to certify that we did indeed have the supporting documents for all expenses being invoiced for HOPWA, and be prepared to have files ready for regular/random desk monitoring reviews upon request. Eliminating the arduous and tedious process of physically uploading voluminous copies of paper to the portal. This still ensured that the agencies were collecting the needed supporting documentation for every invoice and in alignment with HOPWA requirements.
- Turnover of the HOPWA staff is extremely high and can be very disruptive to the process. Having to deal with staff who are new and not yet trained leads to a lot of confusion, miscommunications, misinterpretations, etc. Training for HOPWA staff is needed especially about updates to policies. We have seen several hires and resignations in the past few years even prior to COVID, and several this year alone.

- Agency sponsors should have received training on the new and improved processes for reimbursement and desk monitoring back in February, and regarding updated policies and procedures. Training for sponsors on at least an annual basis is necessary and definitely anytime a City policy is updated or changed. I am grateful the desk monitoring, reimbursement and other policy training is finally happening on August 30th.
- Contracting is still a painfully long process. To know that agencies are only receiving their 2021 contracts one year later, is unacceptable. The City should be embarrassed at this reality. And I will say for the record, this seems to be out of the control of the Grants office and therefore needs to be addressed by the greater City of Atlanta system. (which I am aware is in the works)
- COA website needs to be updated with the most recent City policies. We continue to be referred to the HUD exchange for information. The City is responsible for instating local policies, priorities, and procedures for the HOPWA program that of course are in alignment with HUD policy but should also be reflective of local policy and processes. The federal government doesn't dictate every detail to jurisdictions so we need guidance from local policies as well.
- There doesn't seem to be a clear plan to respond to the HOPWA modernization reduction in funding that has finally been realized by the City of Atlanta. We must work together to determine solutions to this issue, that will hopefully help us to avoid people with HIV becoming homeless, or without other options for housing.

In closing, I want you all to know that all of this above gravely impacts the people with HIV that we serve in ways we may not even be fully aware of. When HOPE Atlanta reports conducting over 2200 screens with clients and not being able to reach 81% due to having been on a wait list, and not knowing what happened to those people, I want us to remember that those are human lives that sucked up all the courage and pride they could muster up to reach out for help, only to be told "sorry we have nothing for you". Lives that are depending on us to get this right. I hope that we can keep them at the forefront of our minds and our actions.

Thank you.

Nicole Roebuck

Executive Director, AID Atlanta

To The Community Development / Human Services Committee

I am Daniel D. Driffin, DrPH(c), MPH, a member of the Housing Opportunities for People with HIV/AIDS Advisory Council, and I live in Collier Height in District 9.

I have had the opportunity to stand before this committee and City Council more than ten times to discuss the importance of HOPWA in reducing the number of new HIV diagnoses and improving the quality of life in the same marginalized community.

Over the last five months, a community-led initiative conducted a time shoot survey to capture the housing needs of the people living with HIV. A PowerPoint presentation is included in your documents for consideration. Unfortunately, I don't have enough time to present the eight slides. However, I want to provide a high-level overview.

More than 38,000 people live with HIV across our metropolitan, and we continue to see more than 1,300 new diagnoses among sexual minority men and trans and gender non-conforming individuals. We continue to see health's social and structural determinants as the primary driver of HIV disparities.

More than 19,000 are not connected to HIV medical care in our area, often related to stigmatizing conditions and not receiving essential medical and supportive services, including housing. **Housing is healthcare!** Housing is also a life or death determinant for people living with HIV in many communities across our nation, including Atlanta.

Our survey asked members across the community ten questions; on average, most answered within two minutes. **The survey elicited 172 responses, with 35% requesting housing assistance over the last 24 months, with rental and utility assistance the most significant ask. Eighty-nine percent of the respondents make less than \$29,999 a year, a vast difference from the Area Median Income of \$86,000. More than a third of these respondents also report having an eviction filed within the last five years.**

CDHS and DCDG must continue to prioritize additional housing protections for people living with HIV. Protection must be innovative and informed by people living with HIV. I eagerly await other opportunities to speak more about this critical work.



Housing Needs Assessment

Atlanta City Council Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) Working Session

August 11, 2022

Prepared by Daniel D. Driffin, DrPH(c), MPH

Objectives

- Review HIV epidemiological profile across Atlanta Metropolitan
- Discuss intersections between housing and HIV
- Discuss results from 2022 Housing Needs Assessment

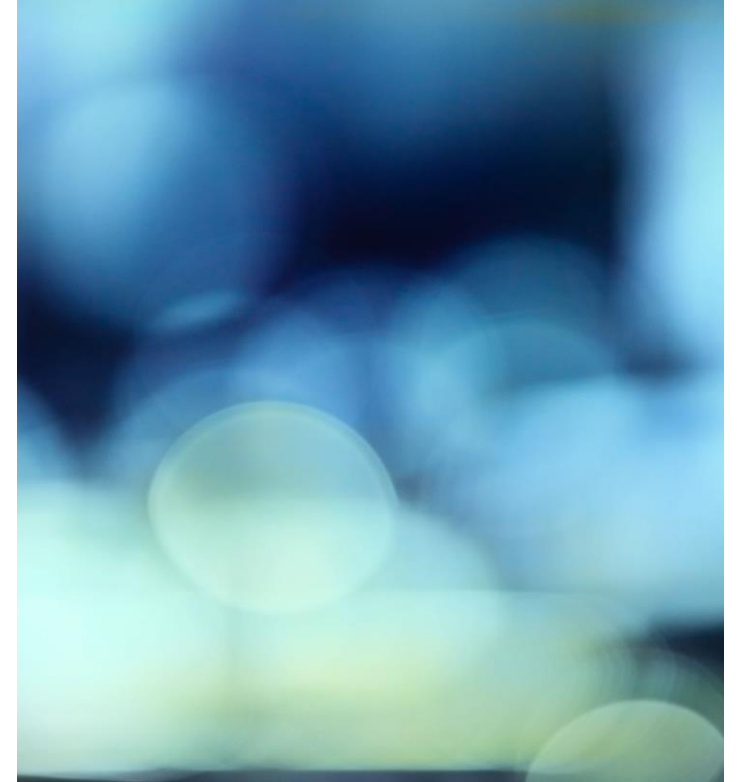
HIV Background

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) over time weaken the body

HIV untreated with antiretroviral therapy (ARV) can develop into Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)

More than 50 drugs used in combination can reduce and delay the onset of illness associated with HIV

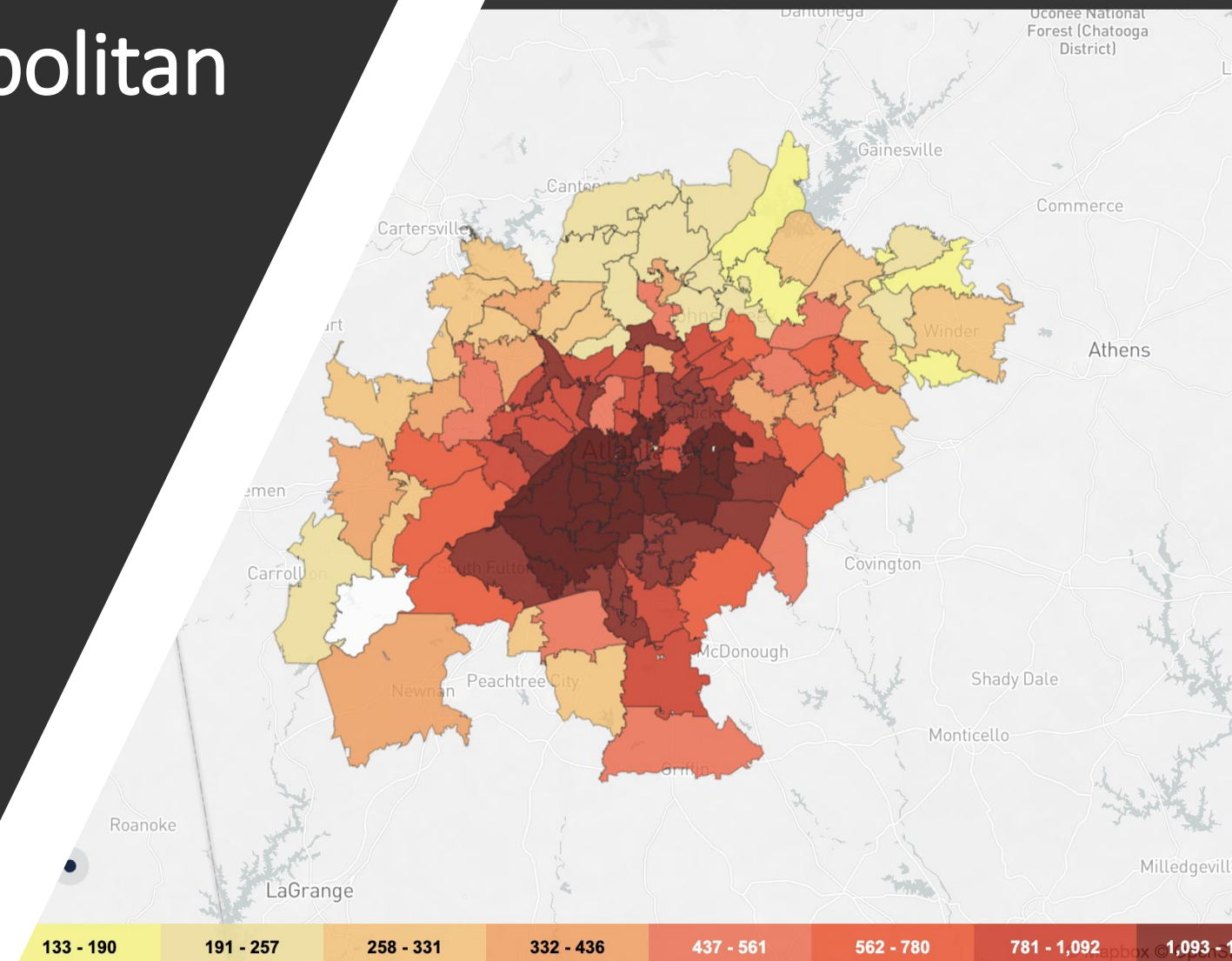
The best way to prevent new HIV diagnosis is guaranteeing that people living with HIV (PLWHIV) are prescribed and routinely take ARV (Undetectable = Undetectable)



(Penner, 2021)

HIV across Atlanta Metropolitan

- CY 2020 more than **38,000** people living with HIV in Atlanta Metro
- CY 2020 close to **1,300** new diagnosis of HIV across communities African Americans, sexual minority men and transgender and gender non-confirming persons
- **Higher prevalence** in urban center compared to suburban areas
- Implications includes **transportation access, medical care and supporting structures**



Accessing Medical Care for HIV across Atlanta

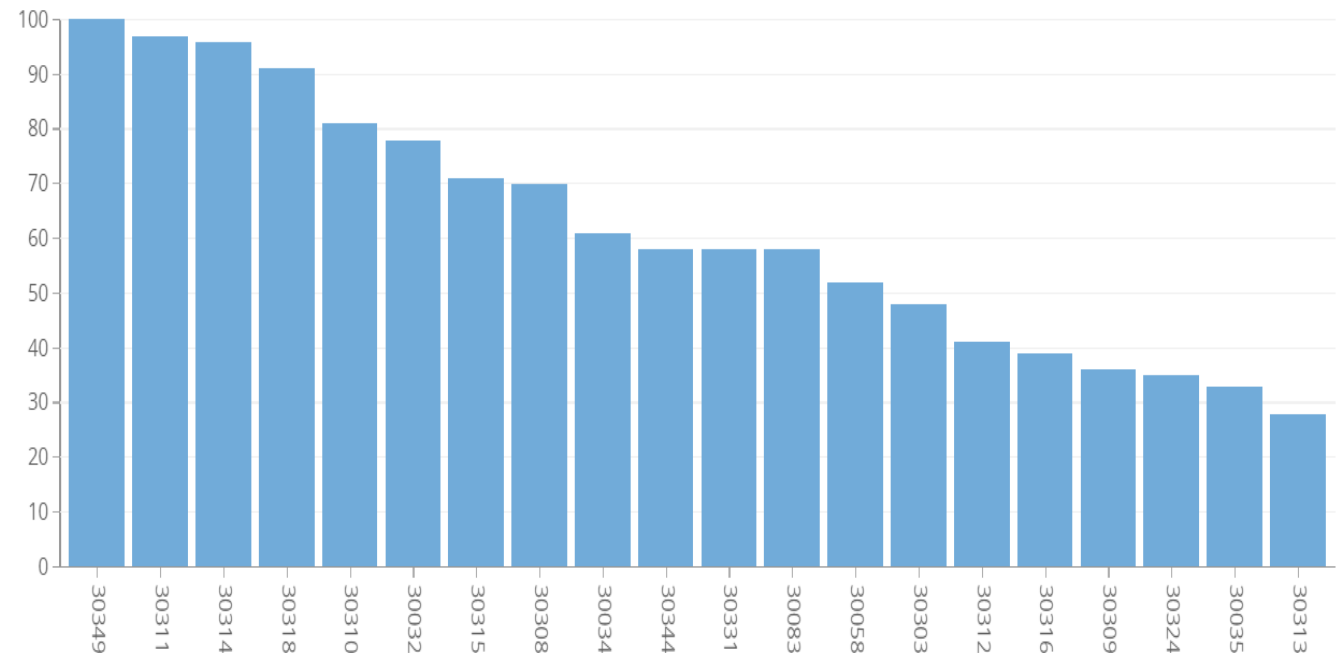
- Ryan White HIV/AIDS CARE Programs (RWHAP) create holistic medical and supportive services for PLWHIV
- Fulton County Department for HIV Elimination (DHE) provides daily implementation with 17 organizations for 18,000 PLWHIV
- DHE in partnership with the Metropolitan Atlanta HIV Health Services Planning Council coordinated close to \$28 M USD in services
- Key measures including linkage, retention to HIV medical care and HIV viral suppression are routinely tracked to assess success

Untreated HIV Across Atlanta

- More than 19,000 PLWHIV are not in HIV medical care
- Top ten zip codes across metro includes 30308,-10,-11,-14,-15,-18 & -31), East Point (30344), DeKalb (30032,-34) and South Fulton (30349)
- Additional collaboration between RWCP and DCDG

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Top 20 Zip Codes where clients have a detectable viral load



Housing and HIV



With **safe and affordable** housing, people with HIV are better able to **start and stay** on HIV treatment.

- “Our health is determined by resources and supports available in our homes, neighborhoods and communities” – Healthy People 2020
- Housing shapes daily life and a primary driver of HIV acquisition and living health with HIV
- Unhoused PLWHIV have 27-fold higher odds of death compared to those housed
- Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) is a concerted effort to address disparities explicitly for PLWHIV

Housing Needs Assessment

- Community led initiative to collect additional insights towards future recommendation for DGCD
- Subcommittee formed a ten question, two-minute survey
- Mixed method approach, mobile accessible and paper-format
- Feb 2022 – July 2022

Housing Needs Assessment

HIV Community Housing Planning Group

The HIV Community Housing Planning Group appreciates your time and assistance with this housing needs assessment. All information is anonymous and confidential. Please take two minutes and complete this survey. The information gathered will assist in making data-informed recommendations for improving housing access for people throughout our community.

OK

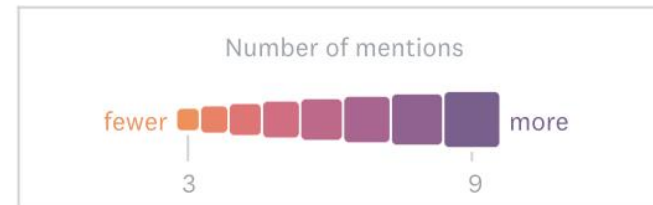
Results

- A total of **172 responses** were recorded
- **More than a third (35%)** had specific assistance request within last 24 months
 - Primary needs included **rental assistance and utility assistance**
 - Respondents requested opportunities for **1 – 2 bedroom and single-family units**
- **Transportation equity** remains to be a top interest
- Many respondents report some level of income
 - **41% - annual income below \$14,999**
 - **29% - \$15,000 – 29,999**
 - **15% - \$30,000 – 44,999**
- **More than a fifth (23.5%)** reported an **eviction** filed within last 5 years



Results

- Most reported zip codes
- **Overlap untreated HIV across HIV**



Focusing on most vulnerable

- Among those with greatest need:
 - The basics are continued to be requested (rent and utilities)
 - Close to 90% live under \$29,999
[Atlanta AMI = \$86,200] (Invest Atlanta, 2021)
 - Eviction rate rises to 38%
 - One out of six reported felony conviction



Limitations

- Convenience sample – majority of respondents recruited from HOPWA sub-awards
- Not generalizable to all PLWHIV across Atlanta
- Unsure of household size
- Unsure of comorbidities and mental health concerns



Discussion and Recommendation

- Atlanta City Council must continue to prioritize:
 - Most vulnerable to housing instabilities including PLWHIV
 - Highlight and increase additional protections for PLWHIV at lowest AMI



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- Fulton County Office of HIV Elimination. (2020). *RWHAP Part A Emergency Relief Grant Program-Fulton County Government H89HA00007*.
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