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November 26,2021

County Manager Gregory Zinser
York County Government
45 Kennebunk Rd.
Alfred, ME 04002

Dear County Manager Zinser:

On behalf of the thousands of York County residents who continue to depend on, and benefit from, the York County Shelter Programs since 1979, I am pleased to submit our agency's Two-Part request for financial assistance from the American Rescue Plan funds.

Part One of our request is an appeal for better coordination and sharing of available resources county-wide, followed by our Part Two request for funding to help assure our services reach their fullest potential and remain available to all who need them.

January marks our forty-third anniversary in partnership with York County Government. It began with the county's offer of the Old Old Jail in which to begin our Emergency Shelter services, eventually morphing into our OUI Offender Jail Diversion Program, then as the provider of behavioral health services for the York County Jail, and presently exists in our partnership with the Layman Way Recovery Program. Our partnership has been a very positive relationship, resulting in countless numbers of once-troubled people now living more productive and satisfying lives, as a result.

We continue to appreciate and value this partnership, and look forward to a discussion regarding our funding requests.

Respectfully,

Megan Gean-Gendron
Executive Director

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Part One: Sharing Better

Part One is less of an appeal for funds, than it is an appeal for an opportunity to inventory, quantify, and catalogue the existing services available in York County, which are intended to assist homeless and other very low-income residents. Once we have a clear understanding of the depth and breadth of those services, we will be able to bring the providers together to create better and more innovative ways in which to help one another make those services more accessible to the people who need them most. There will never be enough money, for instance, to provide open-heart surgery in every York County town from Kittery to Parsonsfield, or to have an emergency shelter staffed day and night in each of those towns. With some creativity and a genuine desire to get the most good out of each dollar, we can stretch those resources by identifying ways to match up needs with availability from one corner of the County to the other.

To help prove this point, our agency has started the process of evaluating the current use of each of our units of housing throughout York County. This process of examining our housing inventory comes at a time when York County service providers -- working with people experiencing homelessness in our county -- are forming what will come to be known as HUB-1 in the newly redesigned system that will streamline services for those in need of safe housing (shelter as well as permanent housing). This new system, along with a new coordinated entry system, will help to streamline the process of applying for assistance but will also help to avoid the exhausting and often traumatizing process of retelling their story to every single service

provider in hopes of finding someone who can help. This evaluation also comes at a time when housing prices in York County have skyrocketed making affordable housing completely out of reach for the folks we serve. The increase in housing prices has also made acquiring property to create affordable housing nearly impossible.

We have properties in multiple cities throughout York County, including Biddeford, Kittery, West Newfield, Sanford, Springvale, Saco, and Alfred. We plan to evaluate how best we might allocate the availability of those units to our partner agencies in those areas.

These agencies provide a great many vital services for homeless and near-homeless residents, yet it's forty-five miles to the nearest Maine emergency shelter in Alfred. If they have immediate access to housing they control admission into, they will be able to divert those individuals and families away from entering the "shelter-shuffle," thus saving the \$7,000, on average, it takes to get them back in a place of their own, as well as the shelter costs, not to mention the trauma and chaos they suffer going into a shelter.

There is a finite amount of Federal, State, and local money available for emergency shelters, and the competition for those dollars is fierce. Shelters almost always lose money, and do not survive for long unless the agency sponsoring them has developed other sources of revenue which produce a profit used to cover shelter costs. The York County Shelter has worked for nearly four decades to develop those additional programs and fund-raising events, which have helped to cover the costs of the family shelters, adult shelter, Food Pantry, and Free Meals Kitchens.

With the onset of the pandemic, much of that has been scaled way back as our fund-raising events, which brought in between three hundred thousand dollars each year before the pandemic,

have yielded almost nothing these last two years. We are hopeful that with the increase in vaccinations, we will be able to resuscitate the Bakery, Catering, Conference Center, and Apple Festival, and work our way back out of this hole. Until then, and beyond, we need to encourage all providers facing the same uncertainties to get smarter, and share better.

We respectfully request that the York County Commissioners allocate \$20,000 to fund a series of facilitated workshops to which all of the York County providers of services to homeless and other very low-income residents, will be invited. The workshops would be hosted on our Alfred Campus under Covid protection guidelines, utilizing our Campus Conference Center and Food Services Catering program, so we know we'll get a good rate. We will contract with a knowledgeable facilitator(s) who has the demonstrated skills to bring folks together to find common grounds on which to build a smarter and more creative continuum of care for the people we serve, who is well-versed on York County. Once completed, we will provide the York County Commissioners with that report, as well as an action Plan designed to make more resources available to more low-income people in York County.

Though not complete, the list of participants will include the York County Commissioners, and County Manager, Executive Director and one other staff person from the York County Community Action Corporation, York County Shelter Programs, Caring Unlimited, Seeds of Hope, Fair Tide, York Community Service Association, Biddeford Housing Authority, Sanford Housing Authority, Good Shepherd Food Bank, area food pantries, area Police Departments, and the United Way of Southern Maine. We will also invite the Director of the Maine State Housing Authority, and Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services.

Part Two: The Brothers' Campus

We respectfully request that the York County Commissioners allocate \$775,000 of the American Rescue Plan funds to the York County Shelter Programs with which we will pay-off the remaining balance owed to the Brothers of Christian Instruction for the purchase of their entire Alfred property. This property consists of nearly three hundred acres, including a seventeen acre apple orchard, approximately one hundred and seventy acres of woodland, twelve buildings, eight of which provide housing, one Conference Center, a Chapel, Cafeteria, barn, and several storage and work buildings. The property also includes a football field, cross-country running Trail, Bakery, and several acres of established organic gardens. Attached to one building, Denis Hall, is a newly constructed addition in which the eight remaining Brothers live and will continue to live as long as they would like.

Brothers' Campus History

"Simple Gifts"

"Tis the gift to be simple, 'tis the gift to be free,
'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,

'Twill be in the valley of love and delight."

During 1848 many European and South American countries were ravaged by political uprisings and revolution, construction on the George Washington Monument began, and a gentle soul by the name of Elder Joseph Brackett penned the music and words to "Simple Gifts" on the porch of a Shaker home in Alfred, Maine. Little did he know that eight decades later, Aaron Copeland would memorialize the tune in a ballet he named Appalachian Spring, and the world would hum along forever.

"'Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be."

How prophetic are those words when one considers the volumes of good works that have come from this "place just right" in the past two-hundred and twenty-five years. The United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Appearing (Shakers) were a unique and industrious Christian religious community, and by today's standard, were also the first organized shelters for people who were homeless, as they reached out to accept those attracted to their message, who were often those who had no home, or simply did not "fit in." Additionally, they became expert in the

sustainable stewardship of the land, which remains alive and well in the organic farming and land conservation communities of today.

The Brothers of Christian Instruction were attracted to the positive and healing spirit of the land and moved here in 1931, a time when the world's economy threatened most individuals, organizations, and governments. The move here was a courageous act on the part of the Brothers, not unlike that of the pioneers in setting off to the Western Frontier a hundred years before. The Brothers believed deeply in the power of "their common mission of human and Christian education, with special consideration for the poor and the marginalized, both at home and abroad."

Their presence in Alfred left a lasting and inspirational imprint on the land, the hundreds of young people who came here to learn in their schools, and the New England community at large. Their selflessness, willingness to help, and commitment to their mission, have inspired generations who continue to reflect those positive attributes through their continuing good works.

Since the York County Shelter Programs' arrival in this special place in 1986, thousands of people who were hungry and homeless have found the sustenance, support, and inspiration to get up from their knees and move ahead with their lives. These good works continue, though at an alarmingly increased rate, all of which would not be possible had the Brothers not invited the agency to share in their good fortune, caring, and belief in the value of all human beings.

The agency remains the very last option poor people have in southern Maine, without which, as bold and dramatic as it sounds, they would become incarcerated, institutionalized, more

deeply mentally and physically ill, and die prematurely. Absent the YCSPI services and programs, that remains a well known certainty.

The Shakers, the Brothers, and the Shelter, for over two-hundred and twenty-five years, have provided community for tens of thousands of people, into which they were accepted as persons who have great worth. When reading of the Abenaki people and the many centuries they lived on this ridge, it is clear that they, too, knew of the seemingly magical power of this place, and it is said that to the east of the Campus, high on the ridge from where one can see both Mt. Washington and the Atlantic Ocean, there is a special place that the Abenaki held as sacred ground, and from which they gathered wisdom, courage, and faith. We have all been to that place, and it is, indeed, a very special place, and “where we ought to be.”

York County Shelter Programs, Inc.

In 1979 the York County Commissioners leased the abandoned Old, Old jail on Rt. 111 in Alfred to the fledgling York County Alcoholism Shelter, for \$1 per year. The fifty-six York County resident Incorporators, soon filled the rooms with beds, tables, chairs, followed by a flood of people off the streets and out of the woodlots of Maine towns. The little shelter was immediately overwhelmed by a flood of folks, some of whom were probably alcoholic, but most were refugees from the deinstitutionalization efforts underway at the State Mental Health Institutes. It became clear that "three hots and a cot" didn't come close to meeting the needs of the growing population of people who were homeless in Maine.

Knowing that "anybody can fill up a shelter, but it takes near magic to empty it," the Shelter began to build toward that goal by leasing the Bakery at Notre Dame from the Brothers of

Christian Instruction in 1986. This served as the first step toward the nearly three decades of Vocational Training in Food Services, which has been available to hundreds of homeless clients, while beefing up an otherwise skinny budget. The success of the Bakery/Central Kitchen and Training program (Food Services Department) spawned the growth of the York County Food Pantry, and Free Meals Kitchens in Biddeford, Sanford, and Springvale, while continuing to feed six hundred Shelter clients each year, as well as agency treatment program clients. Many dozens of formerly homeless shelter guests have been able to find jobs in the Maine hospitality industry with this experience on their resume.

The next challenge facing formerly homeless folks was finding an affordable place to live, which offered support for staying sober and continuing to access behavioral health treatment services. For the vast majority of those early clients, there are far too few affordable housing options available, since they simply don't have enough money, and many formerly homeless people presented negative housing histories to prospective landlords. It was evident that if they were to find that level of housing, we'd have to create it. And, we have.

York County Shelter Programs Housing Inventory

1. **Family Apartments** (2,3,4 bedroom apartments in Sanford, Kittery, Biddeford, Springvale and Saco = fifty-nine (59);
2. **Single Rooms/Efficiencies with Bathrooms** in Alfred, Sanford, Saco, Kittery, and Newfield = fifty-nine (59);
3. **Adult Shelter Beds** in Alfred, = thirty-seven (37);

4. **Family Emergency Shelter Beds**, in Sanford, sixteen beds for approximately five (5) families.
5. **At any given time**, there are approximately four hundred (400) homeless and formerly homeless agency clients living in some level of agency-owned and operated housing in York County, eighty (80) percent of whom entered the Emergency Shelter from Towns in York County.

It took many years to acquire the needed funding streams to develop and offer substance abuse and mental health treatment services, but we were able to develop three different Residential Treatment Programs for people entering our Emergency Shelter, thus enabling our clients to easily access otherwise unavailable behavioral services needed to remain employed, housed, and part of a community. Although the previous Administration decided to eliminate those original Residential Treatment Programs, the agency has partnered with York County, the District Attorney's Office, and County Jail to develop and operate the Layman Way Recovery Center for the past three years, while offering outpatient Substance Abuse counseling services to agency clients, under the Clinical and Medical Supervision of Dr. Marie Guay, a York County Psychiatrist who has provided psychiatric services for agency and Jail clients since about 1989.

Within the next six months, we plan to work with the Maine DHHS to relicense two Residential Substance Abuse Treatment programs in Alfred and Sanford, or possibly our Farm in Newfield. Additionally, in partnership with the Sanford Housing Authority, we have recently completed the repair of our six unit Recovery Residence for Women on Cottage Street in Sanford. During a spring windstorm a tree nearly knocked the roof off, and we had to place the

women living and awaiting placement there in other facilities. We anticipate opening around the first of the year, and opening other Recovery Houses, based on emerging needs.

The Purchase Contract

In 2015 we entered into a ten-year "Lease-To-Own and Management Contract " with the Brothers of Christian Instruction to purchase all of their Alfred property (the signed confidential document is available for review by the County Manager and Commissioners in an executive Session along with any financial data and information needed for review). The payment schedule amounts, both the cash and operational costs, were based on fund-raising earnings from previous years, which are dedicated to covering these expenses. The agency was able to maintain our scheduled payment plan until the pandemic hit, which has basically eliminated those fund-raising dollars from our Revenue stream. Recognizing the problem, and noting it was something over which we had no control, the Brothers offered a "Forbearance" to the payment schedule, for a period of three years to allow us time to resurrect the fund-raising efforts. All other responsibilities continue to be met by the agency as operating costs, Room And Board obligations have not been interrupted.

If we are fortunate enough to receive ARPA funding to finish the purchase of the Brothers' property, it will free up a considerable amount of revenue each year to support the other agency programs such as Family and Adult Emergency Shelter, Food Pantry, Free Meals Kitchens, Substance Abuse Treatment Programs, permanent housing, and Psychiatric services for homeless

guests, and allow us to resume our Vocational Training efforts in Food Services, Property Management, and our direct support professional training

. An agency objective is to research various options for sustainability of the land on Shaker Hill to preserve it in perpetuity for the citizens of Maine -- from youth sporting access of the trails and fields to recreational use to the general public..

We plan to have discussions with area farmers about the possibility of converting the 1833 Shaker Barn into a three or four season Farmers' Market, which would complement our hope that we can make office, classroom, and garden spaces available to the York County Extension Service, and the Master Gardeners who have supplied our Food Pantry with fresh produce for twenty years. We presently lease the Apple Orchard to a local farmer, who has managed the orchard for many years, and plan to continue that relationship, while increasing the food production efforts across the Campus.

The Board of Directors recently adopted principles under "Sustainability," declaring that within ten years, the agency energy needs will be derived from renewable energy sources such as solar, wood, geo-thermal, and wind. We already supply all energy to seven apartments in Springvale from the solar array at our Farm in West Newfield, and harvest firewood from the farm to heat the Farm itself, as well as Vinton Hall on the Alfred Campus. We have installed solar hot water and photo voltaic appliances at seven other agency residences, and will return to recycling and composting nearly ninety percent of all food and other agency waste.

ARPA Funding Benefits

January marks our forty-third year providing Emergency Shelter services for York County's most vulnerable neighbors. We've come a long way from nine beds in the Old Old York County Jail, and literally thousands of poor people in southern Maine have been able to live happier more productive lives because of the partnership formed between York County Government and the York County Shelter Programs.

We are at a once-in-a-lifetime moment where the granting of our ARPA funding request will carry this mission another four decades, while maintaining and strengthening the Poor People's Safety-Net in southern Maine. This funding will produce:

- Immediate results: we already have legal and physical control of the property,
- expanded services and programming at the Family Shelter;
- multiple housing arrangements on Campus will continue to house low-income residents,
- continued availability, and expansion, of food services, mental health and substance abuse treatment services, vocational training, sustainability, and agricultural enterprises;
- the potential opportunity to create a large addition to a regional Land Trust;
- significantly strengthening of the agency's financial footing;
- more and more of these resources become available to a great many more York County residents.

In closing, York County Shelter Programs, Inc. is requesting financial support to complete the acquisition of the Shaker Hill Campus in the amount of \$100,000,000; \$775,000 for the direct

acquisition of the entire property, and, \$225,000 (estimated) to repair, replace and upgrade the infrastructure of the sewage treatment system throughout the campus, which in its current condition prevents us from expanding our programs as described.