

HUD homeless grant money gone, what next?

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- Loss of HUD homeless grant will hurt domestic violence victims
- Homeless Trust is preparing its appeal to HUD
- Meanwhile, Sen. Marco Rubio will appeal to the HUD secretary on Tuesday

In Miami-Dade, 767 homeless people trying to heal while living in transitional housing, including 260 women and their children who are victims of domestic violence, are in danger of having their lives upended — again.

Last week, the Editorial Board expressed its dismay at the decision by U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development not to award \$5 million to the Miami-Dade Homeless Trust, which planned to use the money to fund vital homeless programs through December. The HUD money is awarded in a competitive grant-writing process with other cities; the more success proven, the more money awarded. Miami-Dade scored low, losing the millions that the Homeless Trust for years has counted for the transition programs.

Ronald Book, head of the Miami-Dade Homeless Trust, says the loss of this slice of HUD money has put his agency in dire straits. “In the 22 years I have worked with the homeless, I have never seen this kind of crisis,” Mr. Book reiterated to the Editorial Board on Monday.

The Trust says it is gearing up for an official appeal to HUD, which it has 45 days to do; Miami Republican Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, who is on the House Appropriations Committee, which funds HUD, quickly stepped in and met with HUD Secretary Julián Castro to speak on behalf of Miami-Dade. “I’m not conceding yet that we won’t get this money,” he told the Editorial Board. “But we’re trying to find out why Miami-Dade scored so low in performance. I want to make sure that HUD’s grading was correct and that they were comparing apples and apples.” We can hope.

But Miami-Dade Mayor Carlos Gimenez also met with Secretary Castro and told the Editorial Board that he fears the full HUD funding is gone.

“I’m not overly optimistic we’ll get the \$5 million back; maybe a part of it. They explained to us that money would have to be taken away from other cities to give to Miami-Dade, and that’s not likely to happen,” Mayor Gimenez said.

The mayor, who this year has dealt with numerous financial crises, is flexing some leadership muscle; he’s already considering a financial Plan B for the Trust to keep the 767 people affected in place — but not at any more taxpayer expense.

He says his budget staffers are sitting down with the Homeless Trust’s financial team to see how they can cover the costs of the unfunded programs for the rest of the year by using reserves, or tabling capital projects for now. Smart move. There is nothing to be gained by casting 767 traumatized residents onto the streets.

But Mr. Book fears restrictions in how he can fund some of the programs from the beverage tax, which makes up a large chunk of the trust’s budget, will limit the moving around of money. Given the emergency, this sounds like the glass is half full to us.

Up next to plead Miami-Dade’s case with HUD is Sen. Marco Rubio, who is scheduled to meet with Secretary Castro on Tuesday.

In any case, the Trust needs to do some soul searching and find out why other cities scored better in their goals to end homelessness. Was it a grant-writing lapse? Maybe it did not heed HUD’s directive that it favors funding permanent housing over transitional housing. That said, HUD’s focus is skewed. Transitional housing is a crucial bridge across which individuals and families are moved from the streets to having a permanent roof over their heads — everyone’s ultimate goal, right?