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By Mayor Ben McAdams

It's time for action to reduce and prevent homelessness

I am ready to begin making changes that will result in minimizing and preventing homelessness and moving individuals and families away from crisis in their lives toward stability and self-reliance. [Our action plan](#) follows two years of hard work by many groups who care deeply about the complicated, long-running challenge presented by people experiencing homelessness in our community.

We identified two issues. First, the main door to access Utah's homelessness services system turns out to literally be the door of the emergency shelter, when a crisis occurs in a person's life. Second, our large "one-size-fits-all" emergency services model does not serve people well, especially families, children, youth, domestic violence victims, individuals with disabilities and working single adults.

These challenges affect the entire state, so we asked for legislative help. The first installment (\$9.4 million) of our \$27 million legislative request is being put to use right now. We're ready with design concepts for two smaller emergency shelter facilities. One will offer 250 beds (with flexible overflow space) for single adult men. Another of the same size will be configured to serve single adult men, single adult women and single adult couples. (Separate spaces will be designed for men, women and couples.)

The plans will take into account what we've learned from months of research, that in order to support safety and a pathway to self-reliance, the shelter must provide more than a bed and a meal. Services such as medical and behavioral health care, job training and education must be part of the offering. Just as the causes of homelessness vary, so do the needs of the individuals that find themselves without a stable home. The system should recognize the unique circumstances and tailor service delivery based on what works for the people we serve. The services must also be geared towards self-sufficiency so people can exit crisis quickly. Most importantly, the same services must be available to help people avoid a crisis and a trip to an emergency shelter.

We've already moved many families out of the Road Home at Rio Grande and into the family shelter in Midvale, which is now open year-round. But emergency shelter is not the solution to homelessness. We must prevent children from experiencing homelessness. That's why my action plan calls for a new family and community resource center that pairs affordable, transitional, supportive market rate housing with proximity to school, health and employment opportunities to help families left themselves out of crisis.

We need to reorient our system towards prevention so families and individuals only rarely and briefly need to rely on emergency services.

Once we agreed on the challenges, we worked together under our Collective Impact model to find solutions. Along with developing the two facilities described above, and using a third strictly for families, my proposal includes:

Develop and support a common assessment and referral tool that meets people where they are and offers help. Homeless services will be integrated with each other and with public and private systems such as health care, job services, legal services and schools. People shouldn't have to be on the homeless shelter doorstep before they get help. Good programs are already in place and can be aligned to be more effective. Recently the county issued a contract request for a third party to help coordinate assessment and referral, starting with families and kids facing a crisis now.

Launch Salt Lake County's "Homes Not Jail" program, a Pay for Success program that will use the private housing market to increase stable housing options for single adults who are persistently homeless.

Increase the availability of affordable housing.

Develop and implement a 10-year initiative to end child homelessness.

We will reduce the numbers of families and individuals who rely on emergency shelter by effective individual support and by helping people find housing. That enables them to be self-reliant and as we bring the smaller emergency shelters online, we will have options that eventually lower the need for the Rio Grande facility to zero.

My plan gives the 'how' and 'what' of improvements to our services. Where the new facilities will be located is up to Salt Lake City officials, following their public process, which is designed to gather feedback on possible sites.

In 2014, when we started our county-led collective impact work to improve homeless services, we committed to achieving outcomes, and to measuring our efforts to track our progress. Our priorities include meeting the basic needs of people in our community who are in crisis, diverting individuals and families from emergency shelter whenever possible and providing access to the specific services and support necessary to avoid homelessness.

Many good, caring people and businesses have worked diligently over the past decade to address homelessness. In Utah, hearts are big and hands are generous. With this plan, I believe the fewest possible number of our residents will experience homelessness. We'll see improved services, and increased self-reliance for individuals and families in poverty and neighborhoods that are safe and welcoming for everyone.

The actions start now.