

HUD shift challenges local control of funding for homeless

By Jim Steinberg, *The Sun*
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Angel Hoban, 31, of Victorville had just started to put it all together.

Next month, the victim of domestic violence — who in 2012 left her Fresno home with only the clothes on her back — plans to take biology, sociology and other prerequisite classes for the Registered Nurse program at Victor Valley Community College.

Her son had just started a pre-Head Start program,

Then word came out that the U.S. Housing and Urban Development program that has paid for her two-bedroom Victorville apartment since January was not going to be renewed.

Originally, that meant that 20 women and 32 children in the transitional-housing program of Victor Valley Domestic Violence — A Better Way were going to be homeless as of Thursday.

Recently, the San Bernardino County Housing Authority granted A Better Way a 60-day extension, said Supervisor Robert A. Lovingood.

“That buys us a little time to find a good place for these women,” said Margaret Diaz, executive director.

The transitional assistance program has been funded by HUD for 11 years.

The HUD decision to shift funds from A Better Way in Victorville to the Salvation Army in San Bernardino has irked all five San Bernardino County supervisors and Rep. Paul Cook, R-Yucca Valley.

William Vasquez, HUD director in Community Planning and Development in Los Angeles, said the agency does not make decisions arbitrarily and will likely issue a statement in a few days.

Despite the funding loss, A Better Way will still be able to maintain its emergency shelter but will lose its ability to provide a longer-term housing solution allowing women who are victims of domestic violence to rebuild their lives and get training to become more employable, Diaz said.

“We have never gotten a bad report from HUD,” Diaz said. “Our program was in good standing.”

Many women in the A Better Way transitional-housing program “are all worried and crying, they are so upset,” said Anita Gomez, case manager.

“We are trying to keep them calm,” she said.

The apartment, said Hoban, “is the best thing to happen to me in the past year.”

Diaz and county officials were surprised by HUD’s decision because A Better Way had been placed on a

Tier 1 list by the San Bernardino County Homeless Partnership.

But in its ultimate decision, HUD bypassed that list and selected the Salvation Army's San Bernardino transitional housing program, which the consortium of agencies had put on a Tier 2 list, meaning it would only be funded if there were revenues available after Tier 1 projects received money, county officials said.

The county supervisors and Cook are among those supporting an appeal of the HUD decision on behalf of A Better Way.

"Local governments best know the needs of their residents," said Matt Knox, district director for Cook.

"It's unfortunate that HUD and the bureaucracy has disregarded what San Bernardino County has said are the better programs. ...It is baffling why a Tier 1 program that has been successful in meeting its goals has its funding pulled," Knox said.

Salvation Army Maj. Daniel Henderson said that if the San Bernardino transitional-living program had not been funded by HUD, the adjacent emergency shelter would have had to close as well.

On a recent count, 39 people were in transitional housing and 29 in the emergency shelter, he said.

Since October 2013, Henderson said, he had been focused on lining up another funding source for the transitional program, but had not secured one.

"I would sincerely hope that community leaders, and people who are (financially) able, will step forward" and help A Better Way to continue its operations, Henderson said.

Meanwhile, Henderson said he will continue to seek alternative funding sources should HUD not fund the San Bernardino transitional living programs in the future.

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