



A pillow, clothing and other personal effects are left near railroad tracks along Monona Bay, one of numerous sites in Madison where homeless people occasionally sleep.

M.P. KING, STATE JOURNAL

Movement at state level

Created just 21 months ago, the Wisconsin Coalition Against Homelessness this summer offered specific policy and budget recommendations, including a stronger interagency council led by the governor or lieutenant governor and including department heads, and at least tripling the state's direct funding to address homeless issues from \$3.3 million to \$10 million. That figure still would be far behind neighboring states such as Minnesota.

An interagency council is “the highest priority,” said Joseph Volk, the coalition's director. “It's a mechanism that works uniquely with the issue of homelessness because homelessness hits so many departments. To move forward, you have to get out of silos. It's a long-term strategy.”

The council would set priorities, order a much-needed state plan to end homelessness, and could be served by a new office to end homelessness, Volk said.

The state should at least double the current \$1.2 million in funding for emergency shelters, add money for support services for permanent housing, which would help secure federal housing funds, and add at least \$4 million in funds to help prevent homelessness, he said.

“There needs to be huge conversation on the state’s role in housing,” Volk said.

Soglin applauds the Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority, which uses federal tax credits to create housing for the homeless and low-cost units. But it’s not state investment, he said, adding, “Wisconsin is one of the worst examples of a state government ignoring its housing crisis.”

Parisi said that if you look at what the county and others have done locally in the last few years to address homelessness, “that type of effort has been completely missing at the state level.”



A homeless man known as "Maverick" sleeps on the sidewalk at the top of State Street. City and county officials are directing more focus and commitment to preventing homelessness and strengthening the safety net, though skeptics say decades of lax attention to the problem will make success difficult at the current pace.

JOHN HART, STATE JOURNAL

Lt. Gov. Rebecca Kleefisch, a Republican, has publicly made homelessness a priority and spent months studying the issue and meeting with Volk. She is refining proposals, focusing on collaboration, coordination and performance standards.