

*Opinion*

## **Our View: Thumbs up to initiative to improve coordinated service for the homeless**

*The Editorial Board of The State Journal-Register offers this week's Thumbs Up.*

**Thumbs up to the leadership** of the city of Springfield, the Community Foundation for the Land of Lincoln and the Heartland Continuum of Care for their initiative to secure improved service coordination for the homeless. The group announced plans to hire a coordinator by early February of 2020. Though this action does not eliminate homelessness, this one step — creating a centralized point of contact — has the potential for much improved outcomes.

Since the 1980s, the Federal agency for Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has required areas to establish local continuums of care, that is, agencies providing services to homeless should collaborate to assure coordination of services. Locally, representatives of some 20 agencies come together through board and task force meetings to improve coordination, all the while, working full time at their respective agencies. Heartland Continuum of Care, then, serves as the primary HUD designated body designated to develop, coordinate and implement long-range plans meeting the needs of homeless persons. These leaders began to imagine the value of a full-time, paid coordinator who will improve the communication between and among these member agencies, who finds and applies for grants to further their collective work, and who will identify overlaps and gaps in these services to strengthen the safety net.

Like waves on a beach and over many years, homelessness has come to our attention and then receded. Events of the last summer and fall, though, have prompted a deeper commitment to addressing this challenge in a permanent, thoughtful, and systemic fashion. Listening to what service providers said they needed, staff of the Community Foundation of the Land of Lincoln identified this initiative and secured the generous support of the Foundation's Jane and Paul Ford Family Fund and the Sommer Family Fund. John Stremsterfer, Community Foundation president and CEO, sees the person in this position making "sustainable system-level improvements" by better coordinating our system of care and bringing additional resources. Mayor Jim Langfelder noted that the city "is proud to enhance this partnership in order to provide greater efficiencies to all our efforts to end homelessness in our community."

We applaud this important first step to assure the long-term resolution of homelessness.