



August 24, 2021

Senator Michael Rodrigues, Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways and Means

Representative Aaron Michlewitz, Chair  
Joint Committee on Ways and Mean  
Representative Daniel Hunt, Chair  
Representative John Barrett, Vice-Chair  
House Committee on Federal Stimulus and  
Census Oversight

**Re: Testimony on American Rescue Plan Act Investments to Promote Housing Stability and Address Homelessness**

Dear Chair Rodrigues, Chair Michlewitz, Chair Hunt and Vice-Chair Barrett:

I am pleased to submit this testimony on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness on priority investments of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds that will prevent and end homelessness in Western Massachusetts and across the Commonwealth.

The [Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness](#) (“Network”), which includes [hundreds of partners](#) from every sector across the region, supports collaborative solutions across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties to prevent and end homelessness through a Housing First approach that centers racial equity.

The Network joins with its statewide partners, including the Right to Counsel Advisory Committee, Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless and CHAPA, to seek the **investments necessary to provide the right to counsel in eviction cases (\$78 million), provide supportive housing to end homelessness (\$300 million), repair our public housing stock (\$450 million), produce more affordable housing (\$300 million), and acquire affordable housing through investment in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (\$50 million).**

According to the most recent annual Point in Time count, 2,673 individuals experience homelessness in our four western counties alone (767 individuals, 1,906 family members). The racial disparity makes these already glaring numbers is even more glaring : the number of Blacks experiencing homelessness is 2.6 times greater than their representation in the general population while Hispanic/Latinos are 3 times as great. Unfortunately, these numbers are not unique for the Commonwealth or the nation.

Since the statewide eviction moratorium was lifted last October, 2020, there have been over 2,700 evictions filed in Western Massachusetts alone (20,000 statewide). We know from the courts’ database that in these eviction cases, 80 per cent of landlords have lawyers while under 10 per cent of tenants have representation. Addressing the racial disparity in homelessness requires addressing this grave imbalance in our judicial system.

The Network joins with the Right to Counsel Advisory Committee to support the committee's **recommendation to allocate \$78 million in ARPA funds over three years (\$26 million/year) to fund the implementation of the right to counsel.**

Our region has also seen up close the positive impact of non-congregate shelter on rehousing rates. Individuals having their own four walls, alongside critical case management, makes a difference: over a 10 month period in Hampden County, the rehousing rate out of non-congregate shelter (hotels) was 37 per cent as compared to 13 per cent out of non-congregate shelter. **We join with our statewide partners in urging the allocation of \$300 million in ARPA funds to create permanent supportive housing to end homelessness.**

All of our recommendations, including **repairing our public housing stock (\$450 million), producing more affordable housing (\$300 million), and acquiring affordable housing through investment in the Affordable Housing Trust Fund (\$50 million)**, when taken together with **Permanent Supportive Housing (\$300 million)** and **Right to Counsel (\$78 million)**, will provide true and lasting solutions to the affordable housing and homelessness crisis in our region.

We look forward to continuing to support this process to reach our shared goals to prevent and end homelessness in Western Massachusetts, and to prioritize investments that will end the racial injustice that underlies housing instability across the Commonwealth.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pamela Schwartz".

Pamela Schwartz, Director  
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