

MHSA Cornerstone Award Acceptance Speech – Pamela Schwartz
May 5, 2022

First and foremost, I'm so excited to acknowledge my partners in this work. I am joined here by some of our Network leaders - here representing dozens of others - who in turn represent hundreds of others across our region - who actually make the Network what it is: Gerry McCafferty, one of our Network Co-chairs, and our Steering Committee members: Steve Connor, John Bidwell, Gina Govoni, Jay Levy, Kevin Noonan. I am honored to share this honor with you.

And that, I think, is what this work is all about. Sharing in this mission and the convictions that come with it, starting with a shared conviction that there is no excuse for homelessness in our country. Alongside a shared determination to make the change that is necessary to end it. And alongside that a shared willingness to innovate and push and create the systems needed to make that change happen.

There is no mistaking we are still far from the goal post on this one. As it happens, the Network is convening tomorrow morning for its annual event - close to 300 of us will be there across our computer screens - together with our Western Massachusetts legislators and mayors and other state leaders and dozens of partners - staring at data that shows an increase in unsheltered and chronic homelessness in our region, and a vastly disproportionate impact of homelessness on people of color. This is not surprising, as we are living the data every day. But the clarion call for urgent action will be rightly before us.

The good news here is that we actually know what to do. We've got proven solutions. We've got statewide organizations like MHSA and others providing the leadership and support we need to make the Network's rallying cry as powerful as it can be. We've got the ingredients right now to make some serious headway and we are on our way. We will keep on pushing for more and better because we know we can do more and do better. And I am so proud of Western Massachusetts' ever-growing presence in the push.

I know I speak on behalf of the entire Network when I express my heartfelt thanks to MHSA for this recognition. And I am certainly speaking on behalf of myself. Working closely alongside Joe and Joyce and Caitlin for all these years is a built-in inspiration - their doggedness is a lesson in, well, doggedness. Thank you for continually teaching me through your example. And of course I get to thank my amazing husband Joel whose support and partnership in the world of housing justice inspires me every day, and my children Isaiah, Gabriel and Talia who are preparing to lead in their own worlds for greater justice and healing. Partnership and baton-passing at all levels make for the sweetest combination there is. Thank you so much for this chance to honor it all. Western Massachusetts, this is for you!