



Housing First
for Hampden, Hampshire,
Franklin and Berkshire Counties

May 12, 2025

The Honorable Patricia Jehlen
Joint Committee on Elder Affairs
State House, Room 424
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Thomas Stanley
Joint Committee on Elder Affairs
State House, Room 167
Boston, MA 02133

Re: Testimony in Support of S.475, An Act promoting housing stability for older adults across the Commonwealth

Dear Chair Jehlen, Chair Stanley and Members of the Committee:

I am writing on behalf of the Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness (“Network”) in support of S.475, An Act promoting housing stability for older adults across the Commonwealth.

The Network includes roughly 200 partners committed to coordinating efforts to prevent and end homelessness across Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin and Berkshire Counties with a Housing First approach that centers racial equity.

This bill is one of the Network’s top priorities because of the urgent need to interrupt the dramatic increase in older adult homelessness we are seeing in our western Massachusetts communities.

In Hampden County alone, in the Homelessness Point In Time count in January 2025, 42 individuals over the age of 65 were identified as homeless, 5 of whom were sleeping outside. Over the full year of 2024, 99 older adults slept in emergency shelter or other temporary shelter programs. These numbers are cause for alarm, and for action.

Our Network partners also asked me to relay two experiences of seniors that are happening right now:

- Matthew is 84 years old and has been homeless for the last 4 years in Holyoke. While he held steady jobs throughout his life, his retirement income was not sufficient to meet his market rent and he became homeless. He has been on multiple wait lists for subsidized housing for years. He continues to be homeless.
- Tom is in his mid-70's and lives in the town of Adams in Berkshire County. He fell behind in his rent and the landlord filed for eviction. Thanks to the intervention and support of Berkshire area providers, the eviction was delayed long enough for Tom to enter a rehabilitation facility to treat his acute physical and mental health challenges. He has nowhere to go when he is discharged and faces shelter or street homelessness as the likely alternatives.

I am bringing to you today the collective urgency from our region for the Legislature to act quickly to pass this bill to prevent more older adults from entering homelessness. We are pleased that the pilot program in Somerville is demonstrating the impact of this resource. This bill allows us to expand the

program to allow older adults from across the Commonwealth to protect against homelessness until permanent housing is located.

Please report out Senate Bill 475 favorably as soon as possible. It is a critical step towards treating our older community members in a manner that is most true to our Commonwealth's values, providing them the care and the dignity they deserve.

Thank you for your consideration.

Best,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Pamela Schwartz". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Best,".

Pamela Schwartz, Director
Western Massachusetts Network to End Homelessness
pschwartz@westernmasshousingfirst.org
413-219-5658
<http://westernmasshousingfirst.org>