

Health Equity Hearing Oral Testimony

Panel #16 Housing = Health and Housing Stability

Organization Housing = Health

Topic: Rent Control as a Durable Change to Eliminate Racial and Economic Health Disparities

Good afternoon members of the Health Inequities Task Force. Thank you for hearing from us; people who are living with systemic racial and economic health inequities.

My name is Lady Lawrence Carty. I live in Roxbury. I'm a first generation college graduate, disabled, black, gender nonconforming person with lived experience of displacement. My sister fought terminal cancer and displacement until evicted on a technicality. She died months later.

Systemic racism is a disease and housing insecurity is one of the vectors by which racism shortens the lives of black and brown people. In Roxbury where I live life expectancy is 59 years but in Back Bay life expectancy is over 90 years. Race and economic class matter.

Our communities were already in crisis from pandemic racism before COVID. In January 2020 Housing = Health testified in support of bill H3924 the local option because we need Rent Control as a public health policy tool.

COVID makes it easier to see this. Medical science has only one tool to stop the transmission of COVID, social distancing. Social distancing is impossible without housing.

We are submitting our H3924 written testimony to this hearing because it bears directly on the health inequities in the COVID response and the durable changes needed to eliminate these inequities.

- In April 2020 Housing = Health called for Rent Control as a systemic policy tool needed to address a long term public health crisis. Fenway Health signed our letter and White Coats for Black Lives national endorsed our call for Rent Control in response to the pandemic.
- In an August 2020 MA Coalition on Health Inequities press conference, Housing = Health supported the COVID-19 Housing Stability bill, which this Task Force endorsed in your interim report, as a temporary measure.

To make “durable” change, pass enabling legislation for Rent Control. Rent Control will permanently improve housing security, and consequently health, for marginalized communities after recovery from the pandemic.

Using root cause analysis, it is clear we must eliminate systemic racism to eliminate these historic health inequities.

Systemic racism is a disease causing sepsis in the body politic. Even if we reduce the spike in temperature that we call COVID, we have just masked the symptoms of this disease. That is why we must treat racial and economic health inequities with systemic policies – Rent Control and structural change.

People have died, are dying, and will die who do not need to die because of racial and economic health inequities. Urgent measures such as the COVID-19 Housing bill *and* the systemic change Rent Control provides are not substitutes, they must be used together to save lives. Choosing to act “later” is choosing more unjust deaths now.

Treat the symptoms *and* the disease. Now.

Thank you for listening and we hope the state government will act.

Lady Lawrence Carty

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