

Health Equity Hearing Oral Testimony

Panel #16

Organization: Housing = Health

Topic: Racial and Economic Health Inequities

Good afternoon members of the Health Equity Task Force:

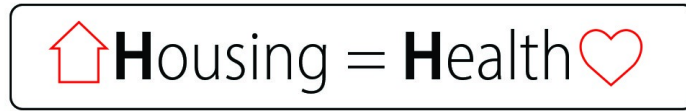
My name is Sarah Koolsbergen, and I am a member of Housing = Health. I became unhoused 17 years ago for 8 months. At that time, I was a low-wage worker who needed two jobs to pay my rent. Before 2003, I had been displaced many times after rent control was banned in Massachusetts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has revealed all the inequities that have always existed in the United States. Systemic racism and economic oppression fuel the health disparities and the housing crisis throughout our country. Black and Brown, low-wage, poor, and unhoused people were already rent burdened before the COVID-19 pandemic. They were and continue to be evicted and displaced. During the COVID-19 pandemic, all of these groups are at a higher risk to contract the SARS-CoV-2 virus and die.

Housing = Health believes rent control is the single most effective policy tool to reduce housing insecurity and stop displacement among Black and Brown, low-wage, and poor people who are also at a higher risk for chronic health conditions.

Housing = Health also knows unhoused people are more vulnerable during the COVID-19 pandemic because they don't have the private housing space to maintain social distancing. Therefore, the Commonwealth must provide private housing (described as isolation housing/hotels in the Task Force's October 14, 2020 Interim Report) to protect unhoused people and to prevent COVID-19 from spreading in communities.

As part of the Health Equity Task Force's final report, Housing = Health urges all of you to advocate for rent control and continuous state funding to move unhoused people into motels and hotels during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, we ask the Task Force to push for enduring state resources to help unhoused individuals obtain permanent housing. These immediate and long-term public health measures will save lives and confront the racial and economic health inequities that exist in Massachusetts.



Thank you for hearing us. Please act now to prevent more deaths in Massachusetts.

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