

Housing = Health

Public Comment on Final Report

Although Housing = Health referenced H3924, our public hearing testimony to the Health Equity Task Force on February 1, 2021 supports HD3676/SD2348, An Act Enabling Local Options for Tenant Protections because it gives municipalities the option to protect tenants from housing insecurity with Rent Control, a structural change.

We resubmitted testimony on Rent Control as a public health policy tool to address the public health crisis we already faced due to displacement driven by housing insecurity. Life expectancy in Roxbury was 59 years (before the pandemic) versus life expectancy in Back Bay of over 90 years. This is structural racism. [Draft of final report, page 2, paragraph 4]

Housing security is foundational to health, education, employment, and transgenerational wealth as it is a social determinant of health. [Draft of final report, page 4, paragraph 5] During this pandemic, housing is key to the most important nonpharmaceutical intervention to fight COVID-19 -- social distancing.

The social isolation housing -- hotel/motel -- recommended in the Task Force's interim report of October 14, 2020 must include unhoused people at **no cost** instead of low cost. [Draft of final report, page 26, paragraph 4, sec. 2.2] Charging homeless people a "lower cost" for housing makes no sense, even if we were not in the middle of a pandemic.

Housing = Health agrees with the Task Force's assessment that "... returning to the pre-pandemic "normal" is not an option. " [Draft of final report, page 3 paragraph 9] In addition, we concur with the Task Force's decision: "...that while it needed to respond to the immediate inequitable impacts of COVID-19, it also needed to address the underlying root causes to prevent such inequities in the future." [Draft of final report, page 3, paragraph 4]

While HD3030/SD1802, An Act to prevent COVID-19 evictions and foreclosures and promote and equitable housing recovery is vital as an immediate temporary response to save lives now, the Commonwealth must, at the same time, address the root cause, structural racism. Rent Control is the single most efficacious systemic policy to provide "durable progress on longstanding and systemic inequities" in housing security leading to racial and economic health inequities.

Quoting Daniel Patrick Moynihan:

"Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts."

It is a fact that Rent Control is a systemic policy. The Commonwealth cannot end structural/systemic racism without making structural change.

In its final report, Housing = Health asks the Task Force to explicitly differentiate between policies that make long-term structural change and policies that provide vital ad hoc/temporary relief.

We urge the Task Force to recommend structural change to redress long-term housing security and health inequities. HD3676/SD2348 would give the Commonwealth this option.

Respectfully,

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