

Health Equity Hearing Written Testimony
Panel #16: Housing = Health and Housing Stability
Organization: National Union of the Homeless
Topic: The Unhoused in Massachusetts

Written Testimony of Paul Johnson: February 1 2021

Without spending a lot of time on statistics, I'll presume all present are aware closer proximity increases the chance of person to person Covid 19 spread.

This testimony goes low on data and high on broader questions and possible solutions for Super Spreader conditions faced by the unhoused in Massachusetts for Winter 2021:

Intro:

1 out of every 350 people in Massachusetts is "Unhoused". [1][2]

Unhoused persons, especially those at emergency shelters are considered extremely high risk for the contraction and spread of Covid 19. Also, death numbers from Covid 19 of the unhoused are staggering relative to the general population.

Vaccines:

Masslive January 13, 2021: Headline

"COVID vaccines to be available for homeless, group home residents, prisoners and staff in Massachusetts starting Monday" [3]

Continued →

Questions for Policy makers:

- 1) What data do you have in terms of numbers of unhoused Massachusetts residents vaccinated to date February 1, 2021?
- 2) What number of unhoused Massachusetts citizens can you project will get vaccinated between now and May 1, 2021?

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Mitigation:

OSF Healthcare - July 2020

Superspreaders: "These factors affect how fast COVID-19 can spread" [4]

"If you have a person who has a high viral load ... [and] that person is shouting in a location that has very little ventilation, there is a higher risk of exposure to contagious droplets to the people around them." ...

It may not be possible to describe the environment in a Homeless Shelter more accurately than that... Close proximity, loud, with people talking over each other, shouting matches and sometimes physical altercations.

Ventilation is usually poor.. It's also a highly common practice for shelter guests to smoke from the same cigarette or drink from the same beverage container.

For those unhoused choosing against the oppressive conditions of the shelter system, many will double up in small enclosures or even the same sleeping bag.

Continued →

Questions for Policy makers:

- 1) What Commonwealth of Mass guidelines, and documentation do you have in hand for the mitigation of these Super Spreader conditions in the Massachusetts Shelter system? Could you please share?
- 2) When was the documentation last updated?

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Emergency Housing:

“Prompted by Pandemic, Some States Buy Hotels for the Homeless” [5]

You may have heard that numerous states across the country are placing unhoused persons in Hotels California and Oregon are now PURCHASING the nearly empty Hotels all over their regions as opposed paying nightly rates

Questions for Policy makers:

- 1) Please provide verbal, or any written data you can share on the number of unhoused Massachusetts residents are a) housed in hotel rooms in Mass at

present? b) number of unhoused residents housed in hotels February 1, 2020 - February 1, 2021?

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Thank you for your consideration of these comments and questions; finally,

The unhoused or "homeless" are in many ways invisible and easily forgotten in policy decisions:

So, an easy way to keep them in mind in your future policy actions and advocacy is each time you check the weather remember that a human being will be sleeping outside that night.

End Testimony

Contact:

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Homeless 2013-2015

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Homeless Calculations: Massachusetts (rounded)

7,000,000 - Massachusetts Population

divided by

20,000 - Unhoused

350 persons - 1 out of every 350 citizens = unhoused

Source and Citations:

[1] As of January 2019, Massachusetts had an estimated **18,471** experiencing homelessness on any given day, as reported by Continuums of Care to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Of that Total, **3,766** were family households, **917** were Veterans, **480** were unaccompanied young adults (aged 18-24), and **2,370** were individuals experiencing chronic homelessness.

Massachusetts Homelessness Statistics

[https://www.usich.gov/homelessness-statistics/ma/#:~:text=As%20of%20January%202019%2C%20Massachusetts,and%20Urban%20Development%20\(HUD\).](https://www.usich.gov/homelessness-statistics/ma/#:~:text=As%20of%20January%202019%2C%20Massachusetts,and%20Urban%20Development%20(HUD).)

[2] Population of Massachusetts = +/- 7,000,000

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Massachusetts>

[3] Masslive: Steph Solis 1/13/21

<https://www.masslive.com/coronavirus/2021/01/covid-vaccines-to-be-available-for-homeless-gro-up-home-residents-prisoners-and-staff-in-massachusetts-starting-monday.html>

[4] <https://www.osfhealthcare.org/blog/superspreaders-these-factors-affect-how-fast-covid-19-can-spread/> Laura Nightingale

[5] Prompted by Pandemic, Some States Buy Hotels for the Homeless
<https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/blogs/stateline/2020/12/04/prompted-by-pandemic-some-states-buy-hotels-for-the-homeless#:~:text=Gavin%20Newsom%20launched%20California's%20initial,of%20federal%20and%20state%20money.>

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