

Opening Statement
HTCD Hearing: Federal Strategic Plan to Reduce and End Homelessness

[strike gavel]

Good afternoon. The Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development will come to order.

I'm glad to have Sen. Lummis as my new partner and ranking member on this subcommittee. I look forward to working with you over the next two years.

Both Senator Lummis and I are concerned about the shortage of housing in rural communities, and the unique challenges we see on tribal lands. And we both are focused on getting things done. So I'm confident we can find common ground, and I look forward to the work ahead.

I'm also glad to welcome Sen. Fetterman, Sen. Kennedy, Sen. Vance, and Sen. Britt to the subcommittee this year.

Without safe, decent housing, nothing in your life works. It's nearly impossible to maintain a job, go to school, or stay healthy.

Almost 600,000 Americans experience homelessness on any typical night. Of this number, 60 percent of those experiencing homelessness are sheltered, while the other 40 percent are unsheltered.

Homelessness is a significant challenge in our country, and getting worse. While our nation made significant strides in reducing homelessness in the first half of the last decade, we know that the number of people experiencing homelessness, began rising again around 2016. The pandemic only exacerbated the challenges individuals and families have faced.

The backdrop to the issue of homelessness is that our nation is facing an affordable housing crisis. According to data published by the National Low Income Housing Coalition, *not one state* in our country has an adequate supply of affordable rental housing for the lowest income renters. In fact, for the 10.8 million families with extremely low incomes in the U.S., there is a shortage of more than 7 million affordable homes. This is an incredibly alarming problem that we are facing.

The challenge of funding and keeping a safe, affordable place to live is real in every part of our country - urban, suburban, and rural. It affects everyone.

However, homelessness also disproportionately affects some communities more than others, including Black, Latino, and Native communities. In my home state of Minnesota, while Native Americans make up only 1 percent of the adult population, the 2018 Statewide Homeless study found that Native Americans made up 12 percent of adults experiencing homelessness.

In December, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness published All In: the Federal Strategic Plan to Reduce and End Homelessness. The plan calls for a 25% reduction in homelessness by 2025. That's an aggressive goal, but I'm glad they're aiming high.

We've learned a lot in the last few years about what it takes to effectively address homelessness. The American Rescue Plan provided 70,000 emergency housing vouchers to rapidly re-house individuals at risk of homelessness, especially veterans and victims of domestic violence and sexual assault.

And just last month, Secretary Fudge announced \$315 million in awards to address unsheltered homelessness and homelessness in rural communities along with thousands of vouchers. This is the first time HUD has coordinated grants and vouchers. This type of coordination is critical, and I look forward to hearing more about it from our witnesses.

I'm also looking forward to hearing more about how we can cut red tape, improve staffing, and make it easier for service providers and housing providers to do their jobs, instead of worrying about administrative tasks. We heard a number of suggestions at the hearing Sen. Rounds and I held in this subcommittee last year and I hope we can find some bipartisan ways to make existing programs work more effectively.

I often hear from people who work on homelessness that we know what to do to solve this problem, we just need the will to fix it. We have data-driven strategies that have proven effective in addressing homelessness in recent years. Those approaches can be effective, most of the time, in helping people who fall into homelessness. But we must also address the housing affordability challenges at all levels that are driving people into homelessness in the first place.

Addressing homelessness and the challenges of housing affordability has long been an issue that Republicans and Democrats are both concerned about. I hope that in this hearing we can continue this bipartisan work, and look for concrete steps we can take together to address this deep challenge – with a comprehensive approach, effective strategies and the resources we need.

[recognize Sen. Lummis]