

Opening Statement
Opportunities and Challenges in Addressing Homelessness
July 19, 2022

[strike gavel]

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

This hearing is in a hybrid format. We will have witnesses testifying both in-person and by video. Senators may appear in-person or by video as well.

Thank you Senator Rounds for joining me in this bipartisan hearing focusing on the issue of homelessness. Senator Rounds found out late yesterday that he is needed at an important mark up on the Foreign Relations Committee, so he won't be able to stay for the entire subcommittee, which we understand.

And thank you to our panelists for joining us for this important hearing.

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

Based on data from 2020, almost 600,000 Americans experience homelessness on any given night. Of this number, 61 percent of those experiencing homelessness are sheltered, while the other 39 percent are unsheltered.¹

Homelessness is a significant challenge in our country, and getting worse. While current national data is sparse, we know that the number of people experiencing homelessness, already too high, began rising again around 2015. The pandemic has only exacerbated the challenges individuals and families have faced.

But addressing homelessness is an area of bipartisan interest in the Senate. For example, **Sen. Bennet** and **Sen. Portman, along with our full committee chair Senator Brown**, have introduced The Eviction Crisis Act which would direct assistance to families who are most at-risk of losing their homes and help prevent families from becoming homeless. Their bill draws on the lessons of the pandemic, and I look forward to hearing from our witnesses about that important bipartisan measure.

I also know that several other colleagues on this subcommittee have been working on important bills to address homelessness – and many of them bipartisan. Sen. Van Hollen leads legislation with Sen. Young to provide opportunities for family mobility. Sen. Reed and Sen. Collins have worked together for years to strengthen the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. And, while outside this subcommittee's jurisdiction, Sen. Cantwell and Sen. Young have a bill to reform and expand the Low Income Housing Tax Credit. These examples illustrate the

¹ <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf#page=10>

bipartisan important work happening in the Senate. I look forward to hearing from the witnesses about these bills and working with everyone to try to advance some of these measures.

It must also be acknowledged that the biggest factor in the rise in homelessness is the severe shortage of affordable housing and the lack of housing supply. People sometimes have the misunderstanding that folks end up unhoused because they experience mental illness or substance use disorder, when the reality is that most people become ill because they don't have a place to live. In my view, the answer is to provide shelter, and housing first and the supportive services that are necessary to get people stable and healthy.

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 finding 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.

The experience of Native people and Tribes around homelessness led me to partner with Senator Murkowski, Ranking Member of the Indian Affairs Committee, to write and pass our bipartisan *Tribal Access to Homeless Assistance Act*, which makes Tribes eligible for Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD)'s homeless assistance funds through the Continuum of Care program. We are now focused on implementation of this law, and hope to hear today what we can do to make sure it's successful.

Additionally, homelessness remains a significant challenge for veterans. No one who serves our country should find themselves without a safe, decent place to call home. In recent years, bipartisan efforts have sharply reduced the rate of homelessness among veterans, but there's more we must do. I know this is a priority for **Sen. Rounds**, and I look forward to working together with you on this issue.

Homelessness is not only a housing crisis, but also a public health crisis, as a lack of housing exacerbates health challenges. Simply put, housing is a social determinant of health. The COVID-19 public health emergency created new challenges for unhoused people – both for people living in congregate shelters, where there were deep worries about safety and public health, as well as people without shelter.

The **CARES Act** and the **American Rescue Plan** provided billions of dollars in Emergency Solutions Grants, rental assistance, and homeowner assistance to help people avoid foreclosure

and keep them in their homes. This emergency funding, directed to states and local providers, made a huge difference keeping people healthy, safe and sheltered. And, it created opportunities for community organizations to improvise and innovate. However, much of that funding is coming to an end. I hope to hear today about what we can learn from the last two years, what innovative strategies have worked, and what the experience of the last several years tells us about the importance of adequate funding for homelessness prevention efforts.

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. The Housing First model builds on what we know – that if you don't have a safe, stable place to call home, it's very hard to hold a job, go to school, or get the health care you need. It has been successful in reducing homelessness in many parts of the country, and I believe we should build on its success.

Addressing homelessness has long been an issue that Republicans and Democrats are 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.

Thank you and I will now turn to Senator Rounds for his opening statement.