

Community Focus Groups Subcommittee

Subcommittee Charge:

Review supportive services needed and barriers to accessing housing for the populations represented on the Subcommittee

Populations/Stakeholders Represented:

- Individuals over 55
- Individuals with disabilities
- Veterans
- Victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, and/or human trafficking
- Behavioral health and substance use disorder counselors
- Cost-burdened residents (i.e., those who pay more than 30% of their income toward housing costs)

Questions for the Subcommittee to Consider:

1. What recommendations can we make to ensure that our populations can access future housing production?

- **RACHEL:** Legislation should be passed to prevent eviction filings (that did not result in eviction order/order of possession) from showing up on landlord backgrounds at all, and to expunge eviction records after 1 year.
 - Other states have mechanisms to shield public from civil records
 - Landlords can file an eviction in violation of federal laws such as VAWA - currently nothing would prevent such a filing from being public
 - Judgements that have since been satisfied - should they still show up?
 - If filing was withdrawn or dismissed, it should be immediately removed
 - Time period for cases not withdrawn or dismissed
- **Sarah:** Housing Authority screening should be limited to recent serious criminal offenses and the PHAs should increase the program for returning citizens to move in with family
 - Federal guidance - LLs shouldn't consider anything other than recent, serious offenses (level 1 sex offense, manufacturing meth)
 - Success in Housing: How Much Does Criminal Background Matter? Research report by Wilder Research
 - FRP - launched in 2019; DOC recently got ARPA funding for a coordinator; hoping to relaunch in 2025
- **Sarah:** Delaware should pass additional legislation and put more resources towards affirmatively furthering Fair Housing; increase enforcement related to access for individuals with disabilities; look at race disparity as many households in Delaware that need to access affordable housing have a black, female head of household
 - Fully fund Division of Human and Civil Rights - lack capacity to timely respond to fair housing complaints; no staff specific to fair housing
 - Increase DOJ capacity
 - Most of the fair housing complaints are related to disabilities
 - Lack of accessible/adaptable housing
 - Dates and times that services are available - may not be convenient for people who need them

- Wage disparity (by race and gender)
- **PORSHA:** More Senior Housing is needed. Designate an inventory of housing being produced as Section 202 housing to protect elderly adults with fixed income. 70.6 million people received benefits from programs administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) in 2022. Many of these individuals on fixed income will not be able to secure permanent housing which requires income be 3 times the monthly rent or afford monthly rent above fair market rate. Without familial support, landlord flexibility and/or legislative protection these individuals will face financial burden maintaining rising costs in rent and cost of living.
 - Sec 202 - housing and support (specific to seniors)
 - State support needed to supplement federal programming
- **RACHEL:** DE should evaluate and make any necessary reforms to how SRAP program operates, which would include things like: ensuring that recipients have appropriate and sufficient supports with identifying housing and maintaining housing, ensuring the most vulnerable people are getting access to SRAP (like people experiencing homelessness), considering project-basing SRAP, the state's SRAP allocation, etc.
 - SRAP - referred by case manager from a participating state agency (DHSS, DSCYF, etc.)
 - Are people experiencing homelessness getting these vouchers?
 - Training for case managers about SRAP
 - Increase allocation to SRAP
 - Stakeholder feedback as part of evaluation of SRAP
 - Allocation has stayed the same; but rents have gone up, meaning fewer people are served
 - Some of the division agencies have "bought" more vouchers from other sources of funding
- **PORSHA:** Enact Rent stabilization Legislation restricting the amount a landlord is allowed to increase rent charges yearly.
 - Bill introduced last session but not passed
 - Incentivize rent stabilization for new units
- **PORSHA:** Education of landlords on Fair Housing Law, encouraging flexible income and credit score requirements, and best practice in screening prospective tenants.
- **PORSHA:**

2. What recommendations can we make to ensure that supportive services accompany future production?

- **RACHEL:** The state of DE - probably DHSS and the DSHA - should work together to increase Delaware's stock of supportive housing for people with disabilities and the lowest incomes, targeted to people experiencing homelessness.
- **Sarah:** Delaware should engage the private sector in the provision of supportive services and, specifically, the development of the workforce to provide those services.
- **PORSHA:** Increase training and education opportunities to ensure thorough understanding and the use of the "housing first" model.
- **PORSHA:** Increase production of Supportive housing for people transitioning out of homelessness

- PORSHA: Respite housing for people who are experiencing medical challenges not severe enough for hospital admission but challenges too risky for living on the street.

3. What recommendations can we make to ensure that new units are produced to be affordable and accessible to our populations?

- **RACHEL**: DE should match the federal government's Housing Trust Fund allocation each year with state funds. The funds would be for supportive housing that is affordable to households at 30% or below AMI, and is for people with disabilities.
- **Sarah**: Incentives/subsidies for provision of housing for households under 30% AMI or with special needs. i.e. put 811 project-based units back into the LIHTC QAP as something that results in a higher score; requirement of new development to include at least 10% of units to be 30% AMI or below.
- **Sarah**: Provide emergency rental assistance in a meaningful way to households who encounter a financial crisis and need temporary support maintaining their affordable housing.
- **RACHEL**: I keep thinking about something along the lines of protecting renters from the kind of screening out software that a lot of big companies use, that often has disparate impacts by race. See here for recent DC win: <https://nlihc.org/resource/tenant-screening-discrimination-case-settled-dc> I just don't know enough to know what any kind of action here would/could look like...so I'm not sure it should be included.
- **RACHEL**: Any new housing production fund or housing trust fund of any kind should have a set aside of funds (no less than 20%) that must be used to finance units affordable at 30% AMI.
- **RACHEL**: Create mechanisms to ensure that efficiencies and SROs can be produced in DE: EXAMPLE: create funding incentives/pot/etc. that can be used to convert old motels to low income rentals/SROs.
- **Ed: Survey what other states and localities are doing to require that new construction is built to be affordable and accessible for persons across the range of disabilities.**
- **Ed: Work with persons with disabilities, their families and disability advocates for Delaware to update Medicaid asset limits for persons with disabilities as other states have started to do. Note: Email will be sent describing this.**
 - DE hasn't increased Medicaid asset limits (\$2,000); raising limit would help people obtain housing and healthcare
 - Asset limits prevent people from working/earning wages that would allow them to afford housing
 - There are waivers to the limits
 - Unclear how this would impact state finances
- **Rachel**: PHAs should project-base vouchers to create more units to serve very low income tenants
- Porsha: Rent stabilization
- Incentivize the conversion of vacant buildings, unused or unused motels and hotels into efficiency subsidized apartments or permanent supportive housing.
- Lottery system to make use of vacant/blighted properties to be sold at low cost and renovated to be put back on the market.

11.14.24