

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)

LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

Barriers to Accessing Housing

1. **RACHEL**: Legislation should be passed that prevents eviction filings that did not result in an eviction from showing up on landlord background checks, and that ensures any eviction record to be automatically expunged after 7 years.

a. **Who should implement?** – State legislature should pass a law

b. **Reasoning**: Public eviction filing and histories are a major barrier to housing. They keep people unstably housed and homeless and incentivize poor landlord behavior. Tenants will often self-evict to avoid a filing getting on their record, even if they are being asked to leave for an illegal reason. It also forces low-income tenants that may have had eviction histories to have to accept substandard housing options because they are screened out of better-quality housing options.

c. **Status**: *Committee support generally*

2. **SARAH**: Legislation should be passed to provide additional and sufficient funding to the DE Division of Human and Civil Rights to increase their capacity to enforce fair housing laws in DE.

a. **Who should implement?** – State legislature

b. **Reasoning**: Lack of adherence to fair housing law keeps many people from accessing and remaining in stable housing. DE's Division of Human and Civil Rights (DHCR) has extremely limited capacity and is therefore unable to enforce fair housing

violations, which are commonplace, particularly impacting people with disabilities and the aging population.

c. Status: Committee support generally

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3. **PORCHA:** Enact Rent Stabilization legislation.
 - a. **Who should implement?** - State legislature
 - b. **Reasoning:**

c. Status: Porsha presented, no clear outcome

REGULATORY RECOMMENDATIONS

Barriers to Accessing Housing

1. **SARAH:** Housing authorities in Delaware should limit criminal history screenings to recent and serious criminal offenses, and DE should implement the FRP program.
 - a. **Who should implement?** – Public Housing Authorities
 - b. **Reasoning:** People with criminal justice involvement/histories are largely underserved by the housing/rental market, even if their criminal history is not housing-related.

c. Status: Committee support generally

Services in Housing

2. **RACHEL:** SRAP should be evaluated. Recommendations for improvement should be made, including things like site-basing vouchers, service provision, and increases in funding.
 - a. **Who should implement?** – Consultant for State of DE, such as CSH
 - b. **Reasoning:** Because of major rent increases, the number of people assisted with SRAP has decreased each year. Very few people being served in the homeless assistance system ever get access to SRAP. Services provided to support SRAP tenants are insufficient to maintain housing.

c. Status: Committee support generally

3. **ED:** DE should increase the Medicaid Asset Limit

- a. Who should implement?
- b. Reasoning:
- c. **Status: Committee discussion, no clear outcome**

4. **SARAH:** Delaware should engage and partner across multiple sectors in the provision of supportive services and, specifically, the development of the workforce to provide those services.

- a. Who should implement?: DOL, DHSS, DOE, MCOs, etc.
- b. Reasoning: Supportive services through DE's systems of care/DHSS are often unable to meet the needs of clients due to high staff turnover, lack of capacity, etc. This directly impacts the ability for people to remain stable in housing, especially seniors and people with disabilities.

c. **Status: Not discussed**

Discussion: possibly add something about pay for workers providing support services

FUNDING RECOMMEDATIONS

1. **PORSHA & RACHEL:** Delaware should increase stock of supportive housing for people with disabilities and the lowest incomes, targeted to people experiencing homelessness and who are most vulnerable and living on the streets.

- a. **Who should implement:** DSHA & DHSS
- b. **Reasoning:** Supportive housing, when implemented correctly, meets the housing needs of the most vulnerable, including people with disabilities. Supportive housing saves lives.
- c. **Status: Not discussed**

Notes: not aware of carryover funds from DHSS; ERA funds - **Caitlin** will check with Brian to see if they can be used for housing production - amount remaining?

Need more units in opportunity zones; private developers get incentives for building in those zones; incentivize development of supportive housing by piggybacking off of existing incentives for building in these areas

Zoning reforms - incentivize or require age-friendly units; NCCo pocket neighborhood ordinance just passed; DENSITY = diversity

Engage UD/DSU/business - what is the cost of not solving the problem? Old study that shows economic value of building supportive housing

2. **RACHEL:** DE should match the federal government's Housing Trust Fund allocation each year with state funds (most recent federal allocation was \$3.1million). The funds would be used for supportive housing for very low-income people with disabilities.

- a. **Who should implement:** DSHA & DHSS
- b. **Reasoning:** Supportive housing, when implemented correctly, meets the housing needs of the most vulnerable, including people with disabilities. Supportive housing saves lives.
- c. **Status:** Not discussed

3. **SARAH:** DE should implement a statewide emergency rental assistance program for households in rental arrears.

- a. **Who should implement?:** DSHA
- b. **Reasoning:** The Delaware Housing Stability Program (HSP) previously Delaware Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) provides rental assistance to households who are struggling to pay rent and the funding for this program will largely disappear in 2025. Many households face eviction because one catastrophic event in their life has put them a few-hundred dollars behind. We must continue to consider how we can support the lowest-income households with one-time rental assistance during the current housing and economic crisis. DSHA has prevented thousands of families from becoming homeless through its administration of the DEHAP and HSP programs. This critical rental assistance has shown the absolute necessity of creating a permanent emergency rental assistance program in Delaware after the Covid relief funds expire.
- c. **Status:** Not discussed

Notes: DE eviction rates have not reached pre-pandemic levels

Could potentially be administered via nonprofit instead of DSHA; concept exists elsewhere (MD)

Program needs to exist in a way that is accessible, sustainable, predictable

CMIS to help coordinate; findhelp/UniteUs platforms; community health workers

Accessibility of the units to be produced - are there jurisdictions that require a certain number/percentage of units to be accessible

4. **SARAH:** Increase funding for Right to Representation to serve a larger portion of the household facing eviction.

a. Who should implement?:

b. Reasoning:

c. Status: Not discussed

5. **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; the requirement of new development to include at least X% of units to be 30% AMI or below.

a. Who should implement: DSHA

b. Reasoning: New affordable housing projects should be funded and designed to include housing for the lowest income households.

c. Status: Not discussed

Notes -reach out to Stephanie re: this rec

Not just talking about DSHA - local

Massachusetts 40B - can we recommend something like this? Zoning board of appeals - best practices shared from 2nd Full TF meeting

6. **RACHEL:** DE should create funding mechanisms to ensure that SROs and/or micro-housing units can be produced in DE: **EXAMPLE:** create funding incentives/pot/etc. that can be used to convert old motels to low income rentals/SROs.

a. Who should implement:

b. Reasoning:

c. Status: Not discussed

NOT YET DISCUSSED

PORSHA:

- **Lottery system to make use of vacant/blighted properties to be sold at low cost and renovated to be put back on the market.**
 - **Notes: Access for both individuals and developers; Sarah: seeing a lot of foreign investment - how do we ensure they are affordable to local population**
 - **Mechanism doesn't have to be lottery**
- **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.**
- **Increase training and education opportunities to ensure thorough understanding and the use of the "housing first" model.**
- **Respite housing for people who are experiencing medical challenges not severe enough for hospital admission but challenges too risky for living on the street.**
 - **Notes - partner with MCOs; Nick: concern about practicalities -**

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.**

Notes: state could partner with higher ed institutions (Center for Disabilities Studies at UD)