

ALEX A. DALLMAN

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 41ST ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony in Favor of Assembly Bill 689

Assembly Committee on Housing and Real Estate

January 9th, 2024

Thank you, Chairman Brooks and committee members, for allowing me to testify before you concerning Assembly Bill 689, legislation that would create a pay for performance structure for future state-funded grants to organizations addressing homelessness. I would also like to thank Senator Tomczyk for his leadership on this legislation.

Public spending on programs that address homelessness have little accountability. These programs have inconsistent outcomes and minimal incentive to innovate. As a result, homelessness in Wisconsin, like in many places across the country, is getting worse.

According to the State of Wisconsin Interagency Council on Homelessness, there are 4,474 people in emergency shelters, transitional housing, Safe Havens, or unsheltered in Wisconsin, as of 2022. Of those persons, 651 people are experiencing chronic homelessness. Between 2007 and 2022, individuals experiencing homelessness increased by 20 percent. During that same period, temporary housing beds decreased by 33 percent, from 3,858 in 2007 to 2,549 in 2022. Temporary housing includes emergency shelters and Safe Haven beds.

Other states have taken several policy approaches to address these issues and Wisconsin should pursue these as well. This bill creates a pay for performance structure for future state-funded grants to organizations addressing homelessness. This bill also establishes a framework in which to move individuals who are camping illegally on the streets to structured and sanctioned camping areas on public property away from dense commercial and residential areas.

As we continue to see homelessness rise across the United States, I believe this bill will strengthen the public and private partnerships that help to alleviate the hurdles that many in the homeless population face when trying to get back on their feet. We should focus on securing safe and adequate housing for all of our citizens in need.

Thank you again, Chairman Brooks, for the opportunity to testify before this committee today and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.



CORY TOMCZYK

STATE SENATOR • 29TH SENATE DISTRICT

AB 689

Assembly Committee on Housing and Real Estate
Tuesday, January 9, 2024

Unfortunately, it is a misnomer that homelessness is only an issue in larger cities like Madison and Milwaukee. Recently, we have seen an increase of homeless populations in smaller cities such as Wausau. This puts a strain on local infrastructure and businesses are becoming increasingly concerned about the welfare of the homeless population and the safety of their employees.

Public spending on programs that address homelessness has little accountability. These programs have inconsistent outcomes and minimal incentive to innovate. As a result, homelessness in Wisconsin, like in many places across the country, is getting worse.

AB 689 creates a 'pay for performance' structure for future state-funded grants to organizations addressing homelessness. This bill also establishes a framework in which to move individuals who are camping illegally on the streets into structured and sanctioned camping areas on public property away from dense commercial and residential areas.

To incentivize success, the Department of Administration (DOA) will withhold between 10 and 50% of the entire funding award for eligible grants for at least six months. DOA will pay the withheld funding only if the eligible grant has successfully met one or more of the following goals: increased permanent housing placement, increased employment, or decreased attrition back to homelessness.

The bill grants DOA the authority to sanction specific public property as a "structured camping facility" that can be used for temporary residences for homeless individuals or families. Any individual or family assigned to one of these structured camping facilities is allowed to bring camping equipment, and DOA is required to ensure the safety of these establishments as well as provide potable water and sanitary facilities. Not only is it important for homeless individuals to find a place to safely sleep, but those locations must be sanitary.

DOA can only designate a structured camping facility in an area after the approval of the relevant political subdivision unless the homeless population per capita in that area is higher than the statewide homeless population per capita according to the two most-recent homelessness counts.

AB 689 also requires mental health or substance abuse evaluations prior to admission to the structured camping facility. DOA would be required to evaluate an individual for mental health and/or substance abuse and reserves the right to deny entry into the structured camping facility if an individual refuses to be evaluated.

Will this bill end homelessness once and for all? No, it won't. However, this bill uses resources already allocated at the state level to fight homelessness and spends them wisely in order to properly place homeless individuals in a safe, sanitary space until they are able to get back on their feet.

The City of Milwaukee has been recognized recently by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for having the lowest homeless population of any community per capita in the United States. This is a result of hard work by leaders in Milwaukee who are committed to ending homelessness in their city. The last thing we want is to pass a piece of legislation that will hinder what Milwaukee is doing. Representative Dallman and I are engaged in conversations with representatives from the City of Milwaukee and Milwaukee County to ensure that our legislation work for all of Wisconsin.

Homelessness is an unfortunate reality we face across the nation and it is my hope that by passing commonsense legislation, we can at least help communities in Wisconsin effectively deal with the issue to keep their residents safe and their public spaces clean.



January 8, 2023

Christopher Schaefer
Clerk of Housing and Real Estate Committee
Christopher.Schaefer@legis.wisconsin.gov

Dear Clerk:

I am writing today in reference to AB 689: Pay for performance grant requirements, use of public lands to provide temporary residence for the homeless, and providing a penalty.

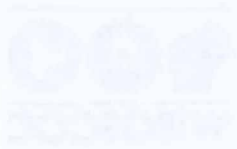
I am a Grants Specialist with the Wisconsin Balance of State CoC. The Balance of State is a 501c3 non-profit organization covering all the counties in Wisconsin except Dane, Racine, and Milwaukee. The purpose of the organization is to (1) promote community-wide commitment to the goal of ending homelessness; (2) promote the quick rehousing of homeless individuals (including unaccompanied youth) and families, while minimizing the trauma and dislocation caused to homeless individual, families, and communities by homelessness; (3) promote access to and effective utilization of mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families; and (4) optimize self-sufficiency among individual and families experiencing homelessness.

I am concerned about the creation of "structured camping facilities." This will limit even further choices people experiencing homelessness will have. Who will be trained to make the determination that someone is homeless? What is the plan for communities that do not have a homeless shelter? Or the homeless shelters in the community are restrictive to who can enter and do not receive funding from the State? It should be priority to provide housing and long-term services of that person's choosing, not a structured camping facility.

In addition to the determination of homelessness, I am concerned about how much assistance will be provided to the person to find a safe alternative. Who will be conducting the mental health and substance abuse evaluations? What happens to those evaluation? What is the purpose of the evaluation?

Finally, I am concerned about the cost of setting up these structured facilities. Someone will have to pay for portable restrooms, shower facilities, first aid stations, private space to conduct evaluations, along with trash collection and cleaning services. What funding source will be used to pay for all this?

I am concerned about the criminalization of homelessness by authorizing penalties or jail time for non-compliance. These punitive measures exacerbate the challenges of finding permanent housing for people who have limited or no income and/or issues on their criminal-housing-credit histories. Now there will be additional fines that they cannot pay or be forced into jail because they are homeless.



If the purpose of this bill is to help people who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness find safe and sanitary places to live, then the commitment should be on increasing funding for:

- shelters and motel vouchers operated by organizations that promote housing first, low-barrier services, where people are treated with dignity even if they are living with mental health challenges or use substances;
- outreach to hire more and increase training for staff that work directly with those experiencing unsheltered homelessness to find safe alternatives, build relationships based on trust and consistency to encourage the use of shelters;
- diversion to hire more and increase training for staff to work with people in a crisis and assess alternatives to shelter before they become homeless; and
- landlord incentives to encourage already existing housing options to be available for those with challenging backgrounds, to help people experiencing homelessness get housed.

The only way to end homelessness in Wisconsin is to find more permanent housing solutions and services for people. This is not achieved through structured camping facilities.

Thank you for working on this issue.

Sincerely,

Erika Olson
Grants Specialist
Wisconsin Balance of State CoC
Erika.olson@wiboscoc.org

Thank you for your time today. My name is Torrie Kopp Mueller and I am here today on behalf of the Dane County Continuum of Care and the Wisconsin Housing First Coalition.

The WI Housing First Coalition is a statewide group of housing service providers and community members who promote the policies and statewide practice of the Housing First philosophy. The Dane CoC, known as the Homeless Services Consortium (HSC), is the federally designated body charged with implementing strategies to address and reduce homelessness. The HSC's vision is that all persons should have the right to secure and maintain safe, stable and affordable housing. Members believe that housing is a human right.

Pay for Performance

The philosophy behind pay for performance makes complete sense. We all want funding to go to projects that are having success and implementing best practices. The State of WI provides a very small amount of funding for homeless services. Adding additional performance metrics that puts an agency's funding at risk, will not improve outcomes. Agencies need adequate funding to pay staff decent wages, provide ongoing professional development and space and supplies for programs to have improved outcomes. Additionally, implementing a pay for performance strategy does not address the larger societal issues with the work of ending homelessness. To be successful in this work, communities need sufficient resources to operate programs, adequate housing stock, and property owners willing to partner with programs.

Sanctioned Encampments

This is not a solution to homelessness. People camping, even in a designated area, are still experiencing homelessness. This portion of the bill is concerning in that it may require communities to set up camping facilities without additional funding. The Dane CoC does have Dairy Drive which provides pallet shelters for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness. This intervention has funding for the shelters, operation of the campground and significant staffing to address behavioral health and housing concerns for the people staying there. With this model, folks have connected to long-term housing solutions, but it relied on them choosing to move to the campground and the significant investment in support services.

Criminalization of Homelessness

The Homeless Services Consortium (HSC) and WI Housing First Coalition are against policies that criminalize homelessness. These policies often result in prolonged episodes of homelessness. The HSC's [statement of values on criminalization](#) states: "All policy decisions must be grounded in an equitable and systemic approach to address homelessness. By viewing homelessness as a failure of our systems rather than an individual choice, we can start a transformative change. True progress lies in providing secure and stable housing, ultimately solving homelessness."

While I appreciate the time and thought put into developing legislation to address homelessness, I don't feel this bill will have the intended outcomes. In order to improve outcomes, we need to prevent homelessness whenever we can. We need fully funded emergency services, such as street outreach and emergency shelter, for people in a housing crisis. Our communities need resources to develop truly affordable housing that is accessible to our neighbors experiencing homelessness and adequate funding to provide ongoing support services to people who need them.

I appreciate your time today and welcome continued conversation.

Torrie Kopp Mueller,
CoC Coordinator
Dane County Homeless Services Consortium

Treasurer
WI Housing First Coalition

tkoppmueller@cityofmadison.com
(608)266-6254



December 28, 2023

Dear Esteemed Members of the Legislature:

We represent the Wisconsin Housing First Coalition and the four local continua of care operating throughout Wisconsin. We are writing to express our concerns and opposition for SB 669/AB 689. The Wisconsin Housing First Coalition is a statewide group of housing service providers and community members who promote the policies and statewide practice of the Housing First philosophy. The four local continua of care are the federally designated bodies charged with implementing strategies to address and reduce homelessness. This letter serves to share our local knowledge of homelessness and the direct impact these policies can have on statewide efforts to address and reduce homelessness on the local levels throughout the state.

PAY-for-PERFORMANCE

We appreciate the housing-focused language in the Pay for Performance section of the bill but are concerned with the ability of housing service agencies to implement the requirements without sufficient resources. There are numerous areas throughout our state that have shortages in safe habitable housing stock for individuals, particularly those with low or fixed incomes. Street outreach services and shelters are often the difference between individuals and families having a safe place to stay while working to find housing during crisis situations. Decreasing funding for programs such as street outreach and shelters based on a systemic lack of resources drastically blocks opportunities to effectively reduce the numbers of those at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness.

While the intent of the author was to increase transparency and accountability, the mark of success in homelessness is the successful housing of people; a goal we believe you share with our organizations. We cannot do that without more funding of services, along with more housing resources, housing stock, partnering landlords, and landlord incentives including funding to make repairs so units will pass inspection.

DESIGNATED CAMPING SITES

We can appreciate the intention around designating camping spots for people experiencing homelessness however, we find the language problematic. States and the federal government can and should support local efforts to address homelessness by providing adequate resources; we maintain solutions must remain connected to local control. Local policy makers, advocates, and service providers working directly with homeless people on a daily basis understand which strategies are the best fit locally to keep people safe. We believe this bill will remove local control and restrict local action to address homelessness. Second, designating camping spots without sufficient resources to care for people has the potential to decrease public safety and increase public health issues. The often-cited community concerns surrounding the expense of maintaining security and sanitary conditions will exist regardless of whether or not a camping site is designated for those experiencing homelessness.

UNDESIGNATED CAMPING AREAS

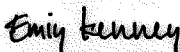
The third portion of the bill focuses on repercussions placed on homeless individuals residing in areas not designated as approved homeless camping spots. Our main concern is the criminalization of homeless individuals who are unable to pay fines. Often they end up in an already overcrowded and overworked criminal justice system. We know that connections with the criminal justice system have negative impacts when seeking housing and employment. We are concerned about the cumulative


impact this will have on individuals and families experiencing homelessness. We believe that the alternative is for homeless service agencies to work with these individuals, most likely in crisis, to find local resources and housing.


Overall, our data demonstrates that imposing fines and jail sentences is much more expensive than focusing on housing solutions. The cost to process tickets, jail time, and staffing of police, judges, and others who work in corrections far outweighs the cost to increase homeless services and housing solutions. Furthermore, jailing people does not resolve their homelessness, further perpetuating homelessness in Wisconsin.


We believe the bill will increase the barriers for people experiencing homelessness rather than provide services or support. We believe the bill is not in line with the best practices or research. We collectively encourage funding and support for Housing First initiatives, additional funding for case management, outreach, diversion, and shelter. We welcome conversations with committee members and members of both caucuses to increase opportunities to work together to address the housing and homelessness crisis in our State. Please contact Emily Kenney, Chair of the WI Housing First Coalition, at emilyjanekenney@gmail.com, with questions or to schedule a meeting.


Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

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Emily Kenney
WI Housing First Housing Coalition

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Torrie Kopp-Mueller
Dane County Homeless Services Consortium

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Carrie Poser
Balance of State Continuum of Care

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Rafael Acevedo
Milwaukee Coalition on and Homelessness

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Teresa Reinders
Continuum of Care for the City & County of Racine



January 8, 2024

Dear Members of the Legislature:

I write you on behalf of ESTHER, an interfaith social justice organization in the Fox Valley working to build community and to identify and act on issues of injustice. We are one of 11 affiliates of our state partner WISDOM.

ESTHER opposes AB 689.

Our ESTHER Housing Advocates team has been working over the past year to interview over 200 people who have been struggling to find affordable housing in Oshkosh. We have been listening to what people need to avoid homelessness.

In putting together this piece of legislation, AB 689, did you talk to anyone who is homeless? Did you speak to any of the community organizations who serve them? Have you reviewed studies that identify best practices? No one can resolve this public emergency and health emergency without making a commitment to actively listen to people to see what they need. We need to find ways to address the problem long before it becomes a personal crisis.

In a Sept 25, 2023 article in the Center Square, Wisconsin, it was reported six of 10 people in 2022 who were homeless in Wisconsin were finding some kind of shelter. There are still 4 of ten who are unsheltered.

Bill Van Lopik, who directs ESTHER's affordable housing study, reminds you, "Homeless shelters are already overburdened with a huge influx of new clients. They cannot find people permanent housing and full-time employment if there is none to be had. They cannot control the economic and societal factors that lead to homelessness. Asking housing service organizations to "step up their performance" is unrealistic and mean-spirited when they are already doing all they can."

Local policy makers, advocates, and service providers best understand which strategies are best to keep people in their community safe. Service organizations often report they need more funding of services, more housing resources, housing stock, partnering landlords and landlord incentives including funding to make repairs so units will pass inspection.

Designating camping spots without sufficient resource to care for people will undoubtedly decrease public safety and increase public health issues. People will die in winter. Imposing fines and jail sentences is much more expensive than focusing on housing solutions. Fining people who are homeless is criminalizing poverty.

We believe this bill increases barriers for people who are experiencing homelessness and makes it more difficult for existing organizations to provide services. AB 689 does not recognize best practices or research. We need to address our systemic causes of unavailable housing without further punishment to the very people in our community we wish to help.

ESTHER opposes AB 689.

We join other organizations who advocate for the those experiencing homelessness by encouraging funding and support for Housing First initiatives, additional funding for case management, outreach, diversion, and shelter. We welcome conversations with service providers and we would be happy to share what ESTHER has learned through our interviews with people struggling to find affordable housing in the Fox Cities.

Sincerely,

Connie Kanitz ESTHER president
Katie Olson, ESTHER organizer
ESTHER Housing Advocates Team

Testimony for Wisconsin AB 689, Homelessness

Devon Kurtz

Cicero Action

Dear Chairman and Honorable Committee Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on AB 689, which aims to address the important issue of homelessness in Wisconsin. My name is Devon Kurtz, and I am the director of public safety policy with Cicero Action. Cicero Action is a nonpartisan, non-profit, based in Austin, Texas, that advocates for entrepreneurial solutions to public sector problems. Outside of my role with Cicero Action, I am also on the board of directors of a transitional housing non-profit.

Cicero Action was founded in San Francisco in 2018, during the height of success of the Bay Area's technology industry. Beside the enormous wealth created by the city's private sector was a different reality on the city's streets. Decades of misguided government policies at the local, state, and federal level fostered the alarming growth of San Francisco's homeless population and turned a blind eye to the suffering of people living on the streets and the ire of its residents witnessing their city's devolution.

When our institution left California, we committed ourselves to making sure that other states learn from these failures and follow a better path in helping the homeless. AB 689 is the first step on that better pathway.

AB 689 does three primary things. First, it sets clear metrics by which policymakers and the public can measure the success of its homelessness programs and holds those programs

accountable for their performance. Second, it creates a framework for municipalities to designate so-called structured camping facilities, which are safe, clean, and affordable alternatives to people sleeping on the street. Finally, it empowers law enforcement to remove street camps and direct homeless individuals to available shelter options.

AB 689 is a necessary response to get homeless people in Wisconsin the help they need. There are approximately 4,700 people experiencing homelessness in this state, with about 300 living on the streets who refuse to accept short-term shelter. This represents a modest decrease of about 4 percent from five years ago.¹ What has changed in that time, however, is the composition of Wisconsin's homeless population. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 33 percent more homeless people suffer from serious mental health issues and 31 percent more struggle with substance abuse disorder today than five years ago.²

The people who we often encounter sleeping on the street, which are categorized as 'unsheltered homeless' are disproportionately likely to be homeless frequently and to suffer from mental illness and substance abuse disorder. This is the category of homelessness that has grown by one-third nationwide since 2016 even as homelessness more broadly declines.³

Across the country, the street homelessness crisis has left America's once-great cities dangerous shells of what they were. While crime rates vary but have generally worsened, the concentration of crime in and around homelessness is undeniable. The San Diego County DA's

¹ https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports/?filter_Year=&filter_Scope=State&filter_State=WI&filter_CoC=&program=CoC&group=PopSub

² https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-homeless-populations-and-subpopulations-reports/?filter_Year=&filter_Scope=State&filter_State=WI&filter_CoC=&program=CoC&group=PopSub

³ <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/homelessness-statistics/state-of-homelessness/>

office found that homeless individuals were 514 times more likely to commit a crime than the average citizen, and in 98 percent of cases, a homeless offender is a repeat offender.⁴ In the largest-ever study of homelessness in America, the University of California at San Francisco found in 2023 that two-thirds of homeless people reported regularly using hard narcotics like methamphetamine, crack cocaine, and opiates, less than half of which reported ever receiving treatment.⁵

Despite the clear evidence that street homelessness is a complex social issue that impacts public safety and health, certain groups of activists claim that homelessness is simply a housing problem that can be solved by giving everyone on the street a permanent apartment paid for by taxpayers. Until these free apartments are built, so these advocates often say, people should be left on the street in their sleeping bags and tents. This is the preferred policy of the federal government, many state housing agencies, and most of the publicly funded non-profits in the homelessness space, even though only 4 percent of homeless people cite housing costs as the main reason they are homeless.⁶

The “Housing First” narrative is unfounded and misguided. Not only has this prevailing approach totally failed in California and contributed to that state’s current condition, but it has been woefully ineffective in Wisconsin as well. Since 2017, Wisconsin has increased its supply of permanent supportive housing for the homeless by 46 percent, investing in nine units of government subsidized housing for everyone homeless person taken off the streets over the

⁴ <https://kogo.iheart.com/featured/the-demaio-report/content/2022-03-29-new-data-reveals-link-between-homelessness-and-crime-wave-in-california/>

⁵ https://homelessness.ucsf.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/CASPEH_Report_62023.pdf

⁶ https://homelessness.ucsf.edu/sites/default/files/2023-06/CASPEH_Report_62023.pdf

same period.⁷ Not only has the creation of thousands of more units of permanent supportive housing failed to commensurately reduce the homeless population, but a direct result of these policies has been a decrease in short-term shelter, in particular transitional housing units have fallen by 50 percent in the last five years.⁸ Moreover, permanent housing-focused policies disregard the mental health and substance abuse needs of many of the most vulnerable people they serve. Because of this, Housing First programs consistently fail to improve the health outcomes of homeless people or decrease their involvement in the criminal justice system.⁹

Two specific case studies illuminate the limitations of Housing First as a solution to homelessness. Milwaukee boasts a generally positive record on homelessness—a success which it attributes to Housing First. Between 2017 and 2022, Milwaukee saw a modest decrease in homelessness of about 5 percent, as well as an impressive 86 percent reduction in unsheltered homelessness, according to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.¹⁰ Over this period it added about 500 units of permanent supportive housing, an increase of 24 percent. But Madison took the same approach between 2017 and 2022, and saw very different results. Madison increased its permanent supportive housing capacity by 56 percent, adding more than 800 new units of permanent supportive housing despite having only two-thirds as many homeless people as Milwaukee. Madison, in many ways, embraced Housing First even

⁷ https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-housing-inventory-count-reports/?filter_Year=&filter_Scope=State&filter_State=WI&filter_CoC=&program=CoC&group=HIC

⁸ https://www.hudexchange.info/programs/coc/coc-housing-inventory-count-reports/?filter_Year=&filter_Scope=State&filter_State=WI&filter_CoC=&program=CoC&group=HIC

⁹ [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366\(19\)30371-2/fulltext;](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanpsy/article/PIIS2215-0366(19)30371-2/fulltext;)
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/26620289/>

¹⁰ https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_CoC_WI-501-2017_WI_2017.pdf

more than Milwaukee, building 13.6 units of permanent supportive housing for every ten homeless people compared to 5.5 units in Milwaukee.

But Madison's efforts failed. Unsheltered homelessness climbed by 36 percent; total homelessness jumped 19.8 percent. And the homeless individuals now on the streets of Madison are worse off than in 2017: the number of chronically homeless nearly doubled, those suffering from severe mental illness grew by 61 percent, and the those chronically using illegal drugs increased by 65 percent.¹¹ Housing First did not help the people living on the streets of Madison.

And today, Milwaukee's progress has begun to erode. At the most recent point in time count, Milwaukee's had a 20 percent increase in its homeless population—leading to the highest rates of homelessness since 2016. The unsheltered population has exploded by an alarming 430 percent, just shy of levels last seen in 2019.¹²

Both Milwaukee and Madison have gone all in on Housing First, spending tens of millions of federal funds on increasing permanent supportive housing capacity by a combined 45 percent. But these investments in Housing First have not made Wisconsin better off. And they have left the state with 40 percent fewer transitional housing units.

The expansion of Housing First has left Wisconsin with three problems, all of which AB 689 aims to address.

¹¹ https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_CoC_WI-503-2022_WI_2022.pdf

¹² https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_CoC_WI-501-2023_WI_2023.pdf

First, homelessness programs have received funding without tracking clear outcome measurements that indicate the impact the programs are achieving and making those data available to policymakers and the public as transparently as possible. AB 689 sets clear metrics and ties a portion of the funding for those programs to their achievement of increased permanent housing placements, increased employment, or decreased attrition back to homelessness.

Second, although there are enough shelter beds statewide for every homeless person in the state, Wisconsin has lost a portion of its short-term shelter capacity since 2017. AB 689 creates structured encampments that offer homeless people who cannot or refuse access formal shelter a safer place away from city streets that have sanitary facilities and security. Austin, Texas and Denver, Colorado both successfully implemented structured encampments over the last three years, and Denver saw crime near structured camps decrease compared to the rest of the city.¹³

Finally, some homeless individuals resist short-term shelter options and insist on staying in dangerous street encampments. People cannot be left to choose whether or not to sleep on the street because these street camps pose serious public safety and public health risks. Cities like Los Angeles have found that as many as one in four homicides occur among the unsheltered homeless either as victims or perpetrators.¹⁴ In Vermont, an individual in a homeless

¹³

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5bc0c64290f904038485248a/t/623317056103406a10fe02f5/1647515400333/2021+Annual+Report.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.city-journal.org/multimedia/pushing-back-on-homeless-encampments>

encampment fired a gun at a school bus full of children, shattering its windshield.¹⁵ The National Institute of Health found that unsheltered homelessness was associated with a 270 percent increase in mortality compared with sheltered homelessness.¹⁶ In response, AB 689 formally bans unauthorized camping on public property so that homeless individuals can be effectively moved into short-term shelters or sanctioned encampments. Cities like Colorado Springs and Austin, Texas saw success with using camping bans to push unsheltered homeless people into shelter options. In Austin, the unsheltered homeless population in its downtown area dropped by one-third following its camping ban, and overall Austin saw a 19 percent increase in people seeking formal shelter alongside a 20 percent drop in unsheltered homelessness.¹⁷ Only one individual was formally arrested as part of the effort.¹⁸

AB 689 offers Wisconsin fresh solutions. Cicero Action is committed to bringing humanity, dignity, and safety to the streets of America's communities. We support policies that show compassion through their effectiveness as means to improving the lives of those affected by homelessness, rather than through well-intentioned paralysis of action. We encourage your support for AB 689.

Thank you for your time and attention, and I will answer any questions from the committee.

¹⁵ <https://x.com/vtdigger/status/1719304456775581708?s=12&t=whBhNZYPmj9rDoDcBOdklw>

¹⁶ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7189346/>

¹⁷ <https://communityimpact.com/austin/central-austin/city-county/2023/05/25/austins-homeless-population-dispersing-after-2-years-of-camping-ban-enforcement/>

¹⁸ Maria Aguilera, "On year after voters reinstated the camping ban, Austin's homeless woes continue," KVUE, May 2, 2022,

<https://www.kvue.com/article/news/local/homeless/austin-camping-ban-prop-b-homeless-housing-affordability/269-6ba7e3c2-e6de-4724-8839-72bed06b7105>



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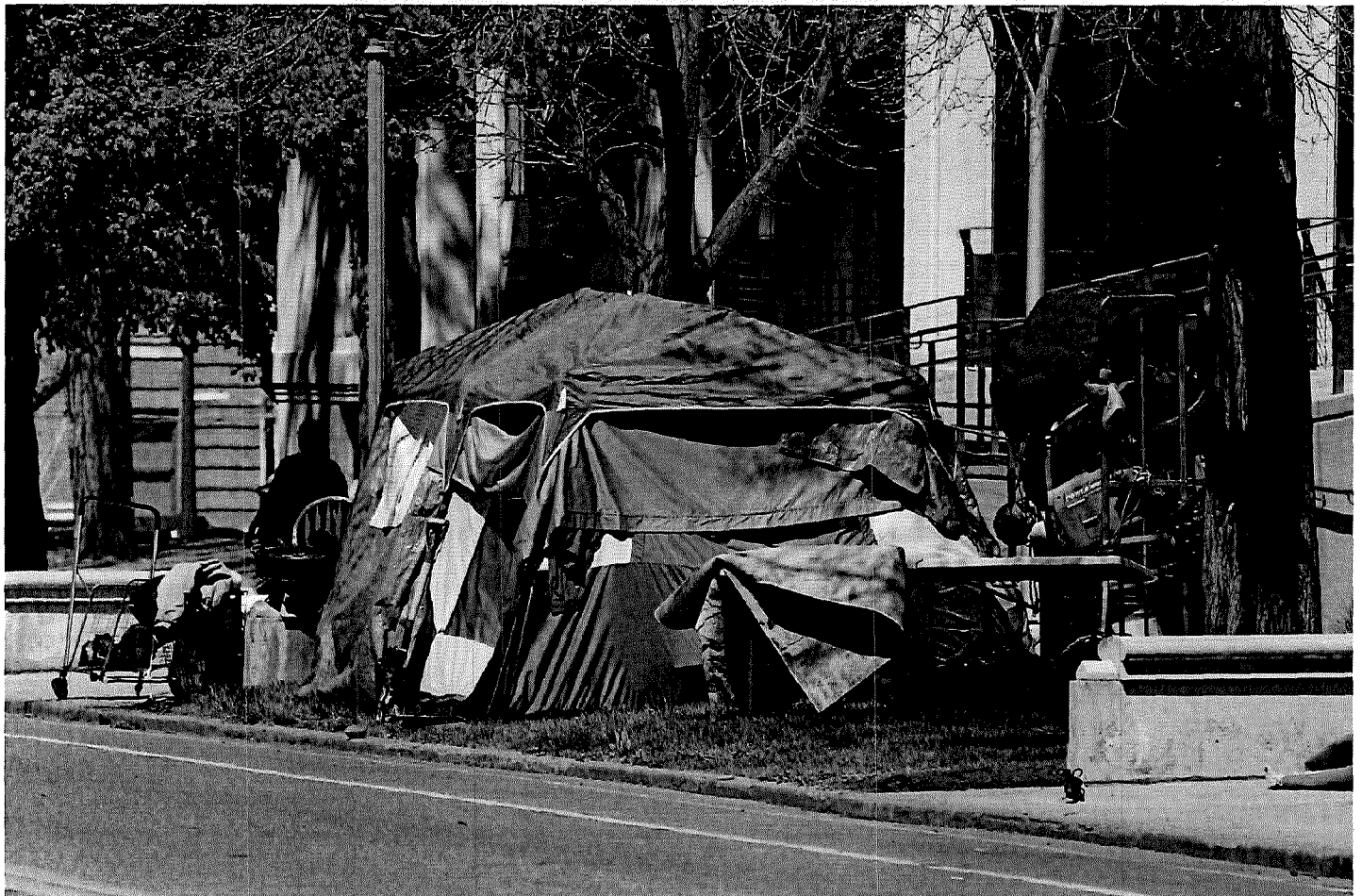
NEWSLETTER

SUPPORT CPR

New Denver study shows housing homeless not enough to reduce death rates

AP By The Associated Press · Oct. 1, 2022, 9:09 am

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Hart Van Denburg/CPR News

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By Jennifer Brown, The Colorado Sun

When people who had been homeless for years moved off the Denver streets and into apartments, they were far less likely to end up in hospital emergency rooms or get locked up in jail.


But they still died at the same rate as those who lived outside.

That's the grim finding from a new study of Denver's social impact bond program, which sends outreach workers to find the highest users of taxpayer-funded services including hospitals, detox centers and the jail. Hundreds of people who were chronically homeless have been housed through the program, which began seven years ago.

Previous research showed that the first 250 participants had cost the government a total of \$7.3 million per year when they lived outside and in shelters and cycled through the health care and criminal justice systems. After they were housed, researchers found a 40 percent reduction in arrests, a 30 percent reduction in jail stays, a 65 percent decrease in detox services and a 40 percent drop in emergency department visits.

The reductions made up for half of the cost of the program, which was started with \$8.6 million from eight private investors as well as local housing resources.

But as those researchers, from the Urban Institute based in Washington, D.C., worked on the previous study, they noticed high levels of mortality among those who were living in supportive housing, which comes not only with rent assistance but also mental health and addiction treatment.

 [Homelessness is growing in Douglas County – and there's little agreement on how to respond](#)

A second study confirmed it: the death rate among those in apartments was the same as those living outside.

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housing from 2016-19, then compared that to 529 people who were homeless and receiving community services through nonprofit and governmental organizations.

About 10 percent of the housed group — 53 people — had died, a number that researchers called “extremely tragic.” Meanwhile, 9 percent of those who were still homeless had died. This is despite the fact that program participants had a 155 percent increase in office-based medical visits.

The conclusion was that a few years in supportive housing was not enough to reverse the long-term health effects and stress of being homeless, which often include mental health problems and addiction.

“We just wanted to dig deeper into that number. It’s such a tragic number,” said Sarah Gillespie, the Urban Institute’s associate vice president of metropolitan housing and communities policy. “People were entering the program with very significant health challenges.”

Not one person who was housed died of exposure, while seven people in the homeless group died of exposure, a cause of death often linked to not having shelter during extreme hot or cold temperatures. It was of some comfort to discover that people who were housed are at least not freezing to death, Gillespie said.

“Dying inside with access to services is a lot different, as opposed to dying on the street,” she said.

The other causes of death for those in both groups varied. Drug overdoses accounted for 2 percent of deaths, while injuries, liver disease, circulatory disease and alcohol use disorder each made up 1 percent of deaths. Smaller fractions of the groups died of homicide, cancer, COVID, diabetes and alcohol overdose.


The average life expectancy for someone who is chronically homeless is 54 years old, according to the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless.

The death rate of those housed was so high, researchers concluded, because the program is targeted toward people who have the highest chances of dying on the street. The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless, the Mental Health Center of Denver and other

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nights in the hospital and jail. Then outreach workers visit encampments and shelters trying to find them.

Once found, they are offered a spot in the program, which is funded by government and private investments.

 [She was a world-class violinist who became homeless. Now her instrument is getting a new life, and a new concerto, in Greeley.](#)

Denver expanded the program in 2018, and in 2021, the U.S. Treasury Department offered the city \$6 million in new federal funding if the program can show a drop in Medicare and Medicaid billings during the next several years. If the city can keep 125 new people housed, it will not have to pay back the money.

Previous research found that 86 percent of people in the program were still housed after one year, and 77 percent were still housed after three years.

The program has provided a wealth of data and potential research on the costs of homelessness. “We’ve been able to shine light on common myths,” Gillespie said. “One of those is that people want to be homeless and they are choosing that.”

Out of hundreds offered housing, only a few have said no. It’s also a rare look at how intervention programs can help those who didn’t ask for help.

“The project succeeded in targeting the most vulnerable residents — not those who walked in the door and asked for it,” she said.

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