

From: Marla Simpson [mailto:marla.simpson@ymail.com]
Sent: Wednesday, January 24, 2018 10:27 AM
To: Marla Simpson; Michael Sirotkin; Kayla Dewey; Laurie Emerson
Subject: *Important! ~ Simpson Testimony to Senate Committee on Housing (1/31/18)

Dear Chair Michael Sirotkin, Vice Chair Clarkson, & Committee Members:

Thank you, I am honored to be here. I normally have a wonderful sense of humor but this subject of housing & homelessness is very, very serious. I am personally & professionally affected by housing crises all the time. When I was 29 I was totally unable to afford my apartment. I had to move into a homeless shelter for 15 months, during which time I nearly died & my beloved comfort animal cat also died.

Thus, housing is intrinsically connected to life. "Housing is Everything!" What homelessness does to people is unthinkable: it causes people to become suicidal, wreaks infinite trauma on the individuals & families.....Veterans. A recent statistic shows there are 852!!! homeless households in VT right now. Nearly 100 Veterans homeless. There are over 300 children under age 18 without secure housing: homeless.

This "brave little state of Vermont" will never reach its "zero suicide goal" until this housing situation is fixed. The people I know who are on the edge of losing their homes or already homeless want to die.....it's not that they want to die but they are suffering so much they don't know how much more they can take.

I myself would be about 2 paychecks away from losing my housing. There is "no room to be sick, to break a bone....no room for an emergency." In fact when I was hospitalized in 2011 & 2012 I was unable to work at the time & almost immediately sent an eviction notice.

Luckily I was able to get some help to secure my housing.

A lot of people, as well, have comfort or therapy animals. The animals are homeless with them. I can't emphasize enough how expensive it is to treat trauma: \$3,000. dollars a day for in-patient psych units. Countless thousands of dollars if someone ends up in prison, God forbid.

Homelessness also increases the likelihood for addiction, illness, & even crime.

On the flip side, housing means security, a safe & clean place to sleep, eat, & take a hot shower. Having a home means I have stability. I have close relationships, meaningful ties. I also have a comfort animal, a beautiful 8 month old kitten who is the light of my life.

But this is not about me. This is about nearly 1000 homeless households in this beloved, beautiful state. I have included materials to hand out to you that have these recorded figures.

A life-long friend of mine will be homeless next week, even as I write. She is 70 years old. Is this what we're leaving for our elders, our children, grand-children, & Veterans? Young adults? No hope. Or.....do we increase funding for supportive housing....open up the section 8 program.....improve & build clean & safe shelters.....build tiny homes for those needing them.....offer housing, shelter & Care vouchers.....rapid re-housing vouchers.....these are all a fraction of the cost that the trauma & suffering & illness of homelessness can cause. The Pathways Vermont "Housing First" Model also deserves more funding. "Housing First" recognizes Housing as a basic human right.

In full disclosure I work for the Pathways VT Support Line. Every single week I hear crisis stories. People with no place else to turn. But, if they had secure housing & full supports, their lives would be so much more meaningful.

Once again, housing is a life & death situation. Because it's a life & death situation I would like to close with this poem, "Death is nothing at all." (Reads poem). Do we tell our Vermonters this death & homelessness was a negligible accident? Do we tell them housing & their lives are nothing at all? Do we let children & adults lose their sanity over this housing crisis? No. We take care of our own. Maslow's Basic Hierarchy of needs talks about shelter (housing); food; safety. Those are the basics.

It is the right & best thing humanitarian wise & economically to do whatever we can to provide safe & clean housing for all!

May God Bless us all as we move along this journey. May we be housed, fed, & safe. May we be loved.

Thank you very much, with all of my heart & soul.

Warmly,
M.S. Simpson, M.A.
Randolph, VT
1/24/18

****Now time for 10 minute Q & A from the Senate Committee on Housing w/ MSS