

Dear members of the House Human Services Committee:

Thank you for letting me share my story about the struggles of people without homes in our communities.

Picture yourself without a home, living on the streets. You understand why you're there, and you blame yourself, tears running down your face. When help comes, it's just a temporary place to stay—a roof over your head. But you're still crying in your room, dealing with your pain and the reasons you're in this tough spot. You still don't have the basic things you need to get your life back on track: food, medicine, help to gain skills and find jobs, respect, and a reason to keep going. Wouldn't you want help to find a lasting solution, so you can live without being looked down on by society?

My name is Danielle Robar, and I'm here to show you that I'm not just a number—I'm proof of the problem you're trying to solve. I live in Barre, Vermont. I've been homeless and stayed in temporary housing in Vermont. I was at the EconoLodge as part of a program, and now I have my own apartment.

Temporary housing gives us a place to stay, but it's not easy. Motels charge a lot for rooms that aren't great. And there's not enough help for problems like feeling sad, using drugs, or finding a job. Even though we spend money on these programs, it feels like we're not really getting the help we need. We shouldn't get rid of these programs because they at least give us a place to stay safe. Instead, we should make them better so people feel supported to find their own place and live a good life.

In these motels, there are people with chronic illnesses, families with kids, and others who need help. But just putting them in a motel doesn't fix the problem. We have to deal with the real reasons they don't have a home.

When you're in a tough situation like mine, doing paperwork feels impossible. Maybe you don't have a computer, or you don't know what to do and you're scared of making a mistake. Asking for help isn't easy when you don't have a phone or a way to get around, or you're scared of what people will think.

When I was moving to my new apartment, I looked for help. I'm thankful for the people at places like Capstone who helped me find the services I needed. I'm also grateful for programs like THRIVE in central Vermont, where I learned how to help others like me. But many people in temporary housing don't know about these resources or can't get to them because they don't have a ride, they're scared, or there's too much red tape.

When on streets, I have heard passerby people say that we should just get an apartment. When you are poor and broken, getting a house is next to impossible. Unless of course, you have a 600+ credit score, first and last months' rent and security deposit, no felonies (or any criminal charges), and the need to have an income that is 3 times the monthly rent. Even then, I am sure you are aware, there are not enough housing to begin with. People say we should just get a job, but it is not that easy when you are carrying everything you own with you and no safe place to keep it, or a place to shower or wash our clothes so we are presentable at work. Many of us have health challenges that makes it hard to go to work. Furthermore, many people I know who are unhoused are on fixed social security income because of their disability or age. So yes, it may look very simple to people who are passing by on their way to warm house or fancy dinner to call us names. But it is hard when you are living it, every day.

To truly support unhoused individuals, guiding their transition to permanent housing, we can't just offer them a room and call it a day. We must understand the challenges they face, such as childhood trauma, lack of jobs and skills, substance abuse, and mental health issues. By connecting them with services while providing temporary housing, we empower them to exit the program successfully. Otherwise, temporary solutions risk becoming permanent fixtures.

In conclusion, I beg you to consider the humanity behind the number and provide resources to support comprehensive solutions that address the root causes of homelessness. Together, we can ensure that every individual can live with dignity and security. Thank you.