



## **House Bill 5: Testimony from Matthew Howard, Homeless Case Manager**

Good Morning,

My name is Matthew Howard, and I am an employee of Family Health Centers in Louisville. I work in our healthcare for the homeless clinic, Phoenix, as a Homeless Case Manager. Specifically, I am part of a sub-program, called the Common Assessment Team, where our staff administer an assessment to measure a household's risk factors in homelessness. Our entry process and assessment serve to qualify homeless households for housing programs in the Continuum of Care network. With the help of community partners, we work alongside homeless individuals or families to prepare for housing and overcome identified barriers. Our team serves over 1,500 homeless households at any given time and are firmly embedded in Louisville's emergency shelters as well as street outreach.

Some of the sections of House Bill 5 are concerning to, not just Family Health Centers, but also myself as an individual who values community service. I believe my experiences with the homeless population and background in Law Enforcement give me a unique perspective on provisions affecting the homeless in House Bill 5. I would like to take my time to discuss what I encounter as a public servant, working with the homeless population in Louisville.

- Causes of Homelessness:
  - I think it is important to know that the homeless population is infinitely complex and cannot be categorized as just mentally ill or with the disease of addiction. We encounter the elderly individuals whose fixed retirement income has been outpaced by increased rental rates, as well as young adults who age out of foster care with nowhere to go. We encounter families who drown due to increased costs of food and energy, to single fathers who, awaiting his long-term disability insurance, cannot afford to support his household without work.

### Overnight Shelter Availability:

- Emergency shelters are full, leaving hundreds of people to sleep outdoors daily. The small number of emergency shelter spaces are competed for every morning, and families with children are placed on long wait lists for family emergency shelter. A large number of households seek shelter placement daily and are turned away due to the lack of supply. These individuals do not have the option to wait at home for the space to become available, so they take residence in their cars or on the streets of our communities in desperation.
- Permanent Housing Opportunities:
  - As I mentioned earlier, we work with over 1,500 households at any given time, and the community does not have the number of affordable housing opportunities to support that population. Housing resources are shared by community partners for the benefit of all, but the fact remains if a household cannot afford increasing market rate rent, they must join hundreds of others on wait lists for subsidized housing. Long-term and chronic homeless status are often obtained in the interim, and it is not rare for a person to pass away only with the hopes of housing.
- The Criminal Offense of Poverty:
  - Sections of this bill propose a criminal offense for those who sleep outdoors, which seems, to me, like putting the cart before the horse. We have seen this type of policy in practice in Louisville already, where they herd homeless humans around the city. Like a beloved client we continually lost contact with due to these practices, causing her to lose her housing assistance, and shortly after passed away without the dignity of housing. This strains public and non-profit resources and makes it difficult to productively work toward getting someone into housing. Not only that, but it forces our law enforcement and criminal justice system to impose the arm of the law on people who have very little opportunity to change their circumstances. The efficiency of the courts, crowding of our jails, and already strained community relationships with our police will undoubtedly see the effects of that specific legislation.

It is my hope that the homeless provisions in this bill will not become statute, and we can begin to discuss the root causes of homelessness with the goal of serving those Kentuckians who exist in the margins. Thank you for your time.