



CITY OF TOPEKA

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To: House Committee on Welfare Reform
From: City of Topeka, submitted by Amanda Stanley, City Attorney
Date: March 5, 2024
Re: HB 2723 Proponent Testimony

Thank you Chairman Awerkamp for allowing the City of Topeka to submit proponent testimony on HB 2723 which would establish a grant program for 2025 to fund proposed homeless shelter infrastructure.

While the City of Topeka certainly supports establishing a grant program to be administered by the KDADS specifically to help local governments address homelessness in their communities, the proposed program limits the use of grant funds solely for the building or improvement of shelters that provide services for homeless individuals and families and persons at risk for homelessness.

Homelessness is a complex societal problem. Finding sustainable solutions will require adaptation and cannot be boiled down to simply building more shelter beds. Building shelter beds is expensive and it might not be the best or most sustainable solution for the community.

The City is actively working with community partners to find real solutions with our homelessness innovation initiative core team focusing on testing ideas for transitional housing and a one-stop shop approach to help individuals reach all the wraparound services needed for success. Additionally, our Housing Services Division is actively working to improve our Housing First approach with help from KDADS. While that work may increase shelter beds, it may not. Maybe the right solution is more transitional permanent housing or increased rapid rehousing vouchers? Maybe the one-stop shop is in a single location or maybe it is mobile? The Housing First model, first embraced at the federal level by President George W. Bush's administration, has reported greater long-term housing stability, at a lower cost, than the former treatment-based approach.¹ It has a greater probability of success than building more temporary shelter beds. Our work is still underway. What we know is there is not one solution for homelessness.

In order to truly address the increasing numbers of unsheltered citizens, local governments must think more broadly on ways to help their communities beyond providing rent free shelter. We would ask the language regarding the purpose of the grant be broadened to allow increased adaptability as best practices on homeless continue to evolve rather than get stuck in one particular model of service. The City is happy to work with proponents on language to accomplish this goal.

Thank you for your consideration and listening to our concerns. We would ask that the committee support the flexible grant concept and additionally support adding the necessary money to the budget for the upcoming fiscal year to fund the program.

¹ See HUD Office of Policy Development & Research, *Evidence Matters: Transforming Knowledge Into Housing & Community Development Policy*, Spring/Summer 2023, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/spring-summer-23/highlight2.html>.