

Testimony to the Senate Committee on Commerce
House Bill 2119
Thursday, March 6, 2025

Good afternoon,

My name is Talita Leikam. I am an Overland Park, Kansas resident and a licensed clinical social worker providing mental health services at a community mental health center. I am speaking today to the human impact of the lack of adequate affordable housing in Kansas.

At previous hearings on this bill, I heard it said we have "plenty of other housing programs" that are "working well." My team and I spend countless hours assisting clients in navigating the meager housing resources available to them, and I am confident in saying that the programs are not plentiful, nor is the system working well.

Most eligible people spend months to years waiting to get on the HUD housing waiting list, where they wait for months or years for a voucher. Once they have a voucher, individuals often wait for months to find an available home, and often repeat the search when their landlords stop accepting HUD vouchers and/or the voucher goes into abatement because the condition of the apartment is not in compliance with HUD standards.

According to Johnson County's housing authority, my county lost 2,840 housing units accepting HUD vouchers during the COVID-19 pandemic, and we will see a significant number of LIHTC properties exiting the program over the next few years. I currently work with multiple individuals who would be homeless if not for the AHTCA and LIHTC programs.

My goal as a therapist is to assist people in their recovery from trauma, abuse and severe mental illness. I spend far too much of my time providing crisis services to individuals contemplating suicide because they are or will be homeless or assisting those who can't afford food or their \$15 medication copay because they have spent their entire income on housing. I see people repeatedly visiting the ER and having contact with law enforcement for issues directly related to their homelessness.

This is a Committee on Commerce, but your decisions affect the health, mental health and lives of the people I serve. They are the most vulnerable people in Kansas: children, the elderly, those with serious illness and survivors of abuse. I am asking you to not eliminate one of the very few affordable housing sources that we have and to instead partner with stakeholders and industry groups to reach a compromise that will allow AHTCA to continue to save lives. I am aware of multiple recent needs analysis and reports with specific recommendations that are available to assist with this and I am happy to refer anyone interested to these.

Thank you.