

HSB 705

February 10, 2026

Thank you, House Subcommittee members Gustoff, Gearhart, and Levin for the opportunity to submit comments on HSB 705.

We acknowledge the pressure that you are facing from constituents to help people who are experiencing homelessness, and we agree that more can be done. But, addressing homelessness through increased enforcement, mandated substance use treatment, and expanded law enforcement involvement have historically proven to be both costly and ineffective, with cities, counties, and states carrying the cost burden of financing homelessness enforcement since federal funding for homelessness cannot be used for policing.

Homelessness continues to rise across the United States. A record 8.4 million people are living in “worst case” housing situations nationally, paying more than 50% of their income on rent and/or living in severely inadequate housing conditions, placing them at high risk of homelessness. In Iowa, there are approximately 95,000 renter households who are extremely low income. Working at the Iowa \$7.25 minimum wage, a person would have to work 89 hours each week to afford a 1-bedroom rental home at Iowa fair market rent.

High-barrier shelters and recovery-focused transitional housing programs were the dominant model in the homeless system for 30 years and resulted in high exits/returns to homelessness. In fact, they were the primary approach to ending homelessness from 1990-2007 and homelessness grew significantly during this time.

Mandating treatment without housing fails to address the root causes of homelessness, ignores the overwhelming data on our housing shortage, and will once again prove to be a financial burden for states and localities. - Deborah De Santis President and CEO, Corporation for Supportive Housing

Local ordinances aimed at arresting and fining people who are homeless have been increasing for many years and have not reduced homelessness. More than 150 local ordinances have been adopted across the country, with a significant number occurring more than 10 years ago. A recent study shows that on average homelessness increases after camping ban ordinances are adopted. After the state of Kentucky adopted a statewide camping ban, unsheltered homelessness increased, and hundreds of people received citations and fines, making it harder for them to exit homelessness. Fining people for crimes related to homelessness, such as sleeping outside, makes homelessness worse.

Additionally criminalizing Iowa's safety net for working with Iowans with the highest challenges to long-term health outcomes is like blaming the weather man for the tornado. It is both lacking awareness of the multi-factor causes of homelessness and the inability to differentiate between the large, systemic causes of homelessness and the successful interventions that correct those causes.

We know what works. We need to start acting like it. The state of Iowa should invest in proven solutions to homelessness.

- Recent federal increases in affordable housing financing should be used to help produce more rental housing for extremely low-income people.
- No state or community should accept unsheltered homelessness as part of the permanent landscape. It is simply unsafe for people to live outside. State and local leaders must respond with urgency to this challenge. Not all communities have street outreach. Federal outreach models are facing federal funding cuts. States should at minimum ensure that street outreach covers the whole state and helps people exit homelessness.
- Large and small communities across the country have successfully reduced homelessness by using a housing-focused approach that brings together coordinated outreach, health systems, and housing partners. Investing in these partners and systems in Iowa will pay dividends for generations to come.
- Iowa must increase funding for deeply affordable housing with services – what is known as supportive housing. Supportive housing is a proven intervention for individuals, families and youth, including those with disabilities and long histories of homelessness. The evidence clearly shows that it promotes housing stability, reduces the use of crisis services and institutions, and improves health and well-being. It is a cost-effective approach for communities that helps to promote public safety and thriving neighborhoods.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Amy Stetzel', with a long, sweeping tail extending to the right.

Amy Stetzel
Director, Upper Midwest Region
Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)