

By [Henry Schwan](#)[Print Page](#)

March 16, 2016 11:53AM

Homeless advocates call for housing reform at Concord forum

Frank Austin stood up at the end of a forum on family homelessness and told those in attendance, “We have to recognize the inhumanity of homelessness.”

Austin represents the Advocacy Network to End Family Homelessness, which held its 12th annual forum on March 13 at the Trinity Episcopal Church in Concord.

The network, according to its website, is committed to eliminating the root causes and adverse consequences of family homelessness thorough public education and advocacy.

Advocates, bureaucrats and lawmakers attended the forum, and the topic most often repeated was a lack of affordable housing in Massachusetts.

According to Chrystal Kornegay, undersecretary for the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, a troubling issue is the skyrocketing cost of housing.

Kornegay said Massachusetts has the fourth-highest home values and the ninth-highest rents in the nation, and affordability isn’t limited to low-income families, because she said it’s hitting working families just as hard.

A lack of multi-family housing was another topic, because homeless advocates believe more is needed to provide shelter for struggling families.

Kornegay said zoning regulations that differ from town to town are creating a barrier to the construction of multi-family housing, and to highlight the point, Kornegay said 207 of the 351 cities and towns in Massachusetts haven’t permitted any multi-family housing in the past 10 years.

To combat that barrier, Sen. Jamie Eldridge, D-Acton, cosponsored Housing Production Bill H.1111 with Rep. Kevin Honan, D-Brighton, calling for more low-income housing through zoning reform.

“(Massachusetts) zoning reform is among the most outdated in the country,” Eldridge said. “More low-income housing has to be built.” He added that 40B, a state statute that enables local zoning boards of appeals to approve affordable housing developments, is “more strictly for the middle class.”

According to Marcia Rasmussen, Concord’s Director of Planning and Land Management, there are 628 multi-family units in Concord’s Subsidized Housing Inventory, and the town has satisfied the state mandate of 10 percent affordable units. However, if there is no large project in the future, according to Rasmussen, Concord will fall below the 10 percent requirement and could face a hostile 40B proposal.

Chapter 40B is a state law that allows Zoning Boards of Appeals to approve affordable housing developments under flexible rules if at least 20-25 percent of the units have long-term affordability restrictions. A hostile proposal would limit Concord’s control over the project.

The problem for many families is, they can’t afford the high rents in Massachusetts, according to Deborah Goddard, former managing director of policy and program development at Mass Housing.

Goddard said someone earning minimum wage, working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year, and taking no vacation and sick time, is limited to paying a maximum of \$520 monthly for rent, which severely limits the chances of finding suitable housing.

Kelly Turley, director of legislative advocacy for the Massachusetts Coalition for the Homeless, said there are 702 homeless families currently living in Massachusetts motels. Turley called that number “the tip of the iceberg,” because of the more than 6,000 families that applied for the Massachusetts Emergency Assistance Family Shelter Program in the year that ended January 2016, 43 percent were denied for a variety of reasons, including income eligibility.

Aileen Buford, Concord’s Community Services Coordinator, said there are families in transition in Concord that are struggling to find permanent housing.

“They might stay with a friend, family member or at a hotel for a short period of time,” Buford said.

Austin summed up the forum by challenging the audience members to speak with their legislators to find ways to end family homelessness, adding that “the only prerequisite necessary to do this work is, you have to care.”

Follow Henry Schwan on Twitter @henrycojo.



Chrystal Kornegay, undersecretary of the Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, speaks at a forum to end family homelessness on March 13 at Trinity Episcopal Church in Concord. Wicked Local photo/Henry Schwan

<http://concord.wickedlocal.com/article/20160316/NEWS/160316724>

Print Page