

H5554 & S494

Frequently Asked Questions About Rental Vouchers & Winter Shelters

Q: Didn't we just pass a \$25 million bond that did this in 2012?

A: No. Rhode Islanders approved a bond that funds construction of affordable homes. While affordable homes can prevent homelessness, they alone aren't the solution to homelessness. Affordable housing in Rhode Island typically targets those who make 50%-80% of an area's median income. Rhode Islanders at risk of homelessness typically make 30% or less of area median income. H5554 and S494 fund rental vouchers for supportive housing that allows people to move out of shelters and into homes. With rental vouchers, people can get their lives back on track and eventually leave the homeless system altogether.

Q: What's supportive housing?

A: Supportive housing is an innovative and proven solution to some of communities' toughest problems. It combines affordable housing with services that help people who face the most complex challenges to live with stability, autonomy and dignity. It improves housing stability, employment, mental and physical health, and school attendance; and reduces active substance use. People in supportive housing live more stable and productive lives. It costs less than keeping people homeless and stuck in the revolving door of high-cost crisis care and emergency housing. Supportive housing helps build strong, healthy communities by improving the safety of neighborhoods, beautifying city blocks with new or rehabilitated properties, and increasing or stabilizing property values over time.

Q: Are other states doing this?

A: Yes. There are 26 states with some type of ongoing or transitional rental assistance program funded through state revenue. Four New England states have made a commitment to housing their people; New Hampshire and Rhode Island haven't.

Q: If we provide supportive housing, won't we see an influx of homeless individuals looking for services?

A: No. Being homeless is terribly demoralizing and causes horrific human suffering. People try to stay with the services and case workers they know and understand. Not only would it be extremely difficult to find the money to leave one's home state, learning Rhode Island's system would also be difficult. An improved system will benefit all of Rhode Island's citizens.

Q: Why do we need to fund winter shelters if it's spring?

A: Every year, our winter shelter system operates on a budgetary shortfall, and every year private donors find the compassion to shelter Rhode Islanders the state won't. And every year for six years the problem has gotten worse. The state should not rely on the limited goodwill of private citizens to bandage over a problem it is responsible for solving.

Q: Does this program work for people with mental health and drug/alcohol abuse issues?

A: Yes. By adding stability to the lives of those with such issues, supportive housing provides a foundation to make tremendous improvement in these people's lives. Furthermore, since such people also tend to be the most costly to the system, the greatest savings are found in stabilizing them. The alternative is to let them stay on the street and see their condition worsen at an overwhelming financial expense to the system.

Support Bills H5554 & S494

Rental Vouchers: Part of the Solution H5554 & S494

A Response to Address Rhode Island's Current Homelessness Crisis

The Facts

4,868

The number homeless individuals and families in 2012, the highest number since the start of the Great Recession (it was 3926 in 2007).

17%

The percent increase in the number of children in our shelter system between 2011 and 2012; from 1,092 children to 1,277 children.



\$0

The amount designated in the Governor's proposed state budget to appropriately address the rising number of homeless Rhode Islanders.

Rental Vouchers Move People from Homelessness to Housing

- The legislation provides a \$3.25 million dollar dedicated funding stream for rental vouchers and the creation of a more effective housing budget.
- \$3 million of that is used for rental vouchers and operational support to provide 300-350 units for individuals and families in the shelter system.
- Includes the state's annual shortfall of \$250,000 needed to fully fund the winter shelter system.
- Funds will be administered by the state's existing structures with proper oversight and accountability.
- Addresses the current situation, as called for in *Opening Doors RI: the Plan to End Homelessness*, as more comprehensive plans to deal with long-term solutions are put in place.



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