

# NH Coalition to End Homelessness

Representative Diane Pauer, Chairman  
House Municipal and County Government Committee  
Legislative Office Building, Room 301-303  
33 N State Street  
Concord, NH 03301

January 23, 2025

Dear Chairman Pauer and Honorable Members of the House Municipal and County Government Committee:

My name is Jennifer Chisholm, and I am the Executive Director of the NH Coalition to End Homelessness (NHCEH). On behalf of NHCEH, I present this testimony in opposition to HB 348, relative to eligibility for local assistance. NHCEH is extremely concerned about the unintended negative effects that the bill would have in preventing those most in need from accessing local welfare support.

Homelessness continues to be a critical – and growing – issue in the Granite State:

- **From 2022-2023, NH had the highest percentage increase (52%) in its annual Point in Time (PIT) Count numbers of any state in the nation;** this count provides an estimate of the number of people experiencing homelessness during a twenty-four-hour period at the end of January.
- **Since 2019, chronic (long-term) homelessness has grown over 150% in the Granite State.**
- **PIT Count data shows that the number of people experiencing unsheltered homelessness – living in a tent or their car, for example – has nearly quadrupled from 2019 to 2024.**

The passage of HB 348 will make it virtually impossible for those who are chronically homeless and/or living unsheltered to access local welfare, a resource that Chapter 165 created to support the Granite State's most vulnerable residents.

**HB 348 would create a waiting period for accessing local welfare support that could literally mean the difference between life and death when it comes to basic needs that affect a person's health and safety.** For instance, it was -11°F when I woke up yesterday morning. Hypothermia is possible when temperatures drop below 40°F, and frostbite can occur at temperatures starting at 5°F. People who are unsheltered in this frigid weather are at significant risk of injury or even death. In many areas of the state, local welfare offices play a vital role in helping people access emergency shelters and warming centers, as some municipalities are over an hour away from their nearest emergency shelter, with no public transportation available. In these cases, local welfare can pay transportation costs to the shelter (in the unlikely chance that there is a bed open) or provide a local motel voucher as a fatality prevention measure. It may sound overly dramatic, but the reality truly is that denying timely access to local welfare support could cost residents' lives.

Equally as troubling, **HB 348's proof of residency requirements would serve as an insurmountable obstacle for the vast majority of those who are living unhoused. People who are unsheltered do not have current lease agreements or utility bills that they can show.** In my experience as an outreach Social Worker, car ownership in the encampments was very rare. If someone had a history of car ownership, the loss of a vehicle was generally a steppingstone to ending up living in an encampment. HB 348 requires documentation that people do not have and cannot get without resources that the lack of documentation denies them from ever getting. **This presents a terrible Catch-22:**

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***People who are homeless need resources to stabilize and obtain housing. Yet under HB 348, housing would essentially be required to be eligible for resources. No housing, no resources; no resources, no housing.***

Given this, NHCEH respectfully poses the following question: Under HB 348, how *would* someone who is stuck in the cycle of homelessness and does not have the means to have a lease, a utility bill, or a vehicle registration qualify for the local welfare relief that Chapter 165 provides? As written, it seems that HB 348 effectively eliminates this possibility through its extremely limiting definition of acceptable proofs of residency.

Of note, the documentation barriers that HB 348 would institute do not only apply to those who are unhoused; individuals and families living in emergency shelters also do not have leases or utilities, yet they may have been staying in the same shelter for months on end, especially given today's rental market and wage economy. People who are doubled up, staying with friends and family who have temporarily taken them in are another large and nearly invisible population of housing-unstable NH residents without leases or utility bills that the HUD-based homelessness data does not reflect. HB 348 would, in fact, punish a broad range of people for being too poor to afford their own housing or transportation.

**NHCEH does understand that is the duty of local welfare offices to be mindful of their responsibilities to their taxpayers, but HB 348 erodes the intent of Chapter 165 – to provide support our neighbors who are most in need. As such, NHCEH respectfully encourages the members of the Committee to oppose the passage of this bill.**

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. NHCEH's mission is to be a statewide partner in reversing the trends NH is experiencing in its homelessness rates and making safe, stable housing accessible to everyone. If you have any questions or would like any additional information, please do not hesitate to contact me at [jchisholm@nhceh.org](mailto:jchisholm@nhceh.org).

Respectfully,



Jennifer Chisholm, LICSW, MLADC  
Executive Director  
NH Coalition to End Homelessness

## A Summary of NH's Rental Market and Wage Challenges

- According to NH Housing, the state's housing finance authority, the vacancy rate for two- bedroom rental units in NH in 2023 was 0.6%; in a healthy rental market, the vacancy rate would be at least 5%.
- Since 2019, statewide median gross rents have increased 36.1%, from \$1,347 to \$1,833 – an extra \$5,832 per year
- A household would need to earn \$73,300/year to afford the median rent of a two-bedroom apartment in NH; the median NH household makes \$56,814 – over \$16,000/year short.
- In 2024, median-income households can afford the gross rent of only 13% of the two-bedroom rental units on the market in the Granite State.
- Additionally, inflation of goods and services has also impacted families' ability to make ends meet, afford basic needs, and save for their futures. For example, according to NH Fiscal Policy Institute, in 2023, the average cost of childcare for NH families with two children under the age of five in daycare was \$32,000/year.