



12/12/2023

Dear Senator Samra Brouk and Members of the Standing Senate Committee on Cities 2,

I am writing to you to submit for public record the following remarks. The Father Tracy Advocacy Center (FTAC), a grassroots organization located in Rochester's 14605 zip code, (the second-poorest zip code in New York State) serves those who are struggling in the Opioid Crisis and homelessness in the heart of North Clinton Ave's open drug market. As the Executive Director, I am intimately familiar with the challenges faced by the homeless and those grappling with substance use disorders in our community, challenges intricately linked to the overarching issue of concentrated poverty.

On a daily basis, we witness the profound impact of concentrated poverty in our community. Research conducted by FTAC reveals a distressing trend: clients with substance use disorders often have a history of significant childhood poverty and trauma, contributing to the cycle of substance misuse. This is particularly alarming given that nearly half of Rochester's children live in poverty.

Drawing upon our experience and understanding of the 14605 community, we propose several policy changes to address and mitigate the pervasive issue of poverty.

1. Reforming State Funding Policies:

We strongly recommend a revision of New York State's policies governing payments and reimbursement for state contracts and grants. Currently structured for reimbursement only, this approach poses a significant barrier for grassroots organizations with limited budgets. Unable to front the necessary funds for activities and wait for reimbursement, these organizations, often the most connected and credible within the community, are unjustly excluded from state-funded programs. This exclusion undermines the efficacy of State-funded programs and hinders the crucial work of organizations deeply embedded in community needs.

2. Facilitating Access to Identification for the Homeless:

We urge the State to examine policies that impede individuals in poverty, particularly the homeless, from obtaining photo identification. Photo IDs are essential for accessing vital



social services, including housing and employment. Homeless individuals face challenges in retaining personal crucial documents such as birth certificates and social security cards. Birth certificates also don't count as points. It is incredibly difficult to obtain 6 points for a NYS ID only but especially when you are grappling with other issues and your starting point is zero. This creates a significant barrier for our most impoverished community members in accessing essential services, as they almost all require ID.

3. Increased Investment in Transitional Housing:

Our third recommendation involves a strategic increase in state funding for transitional housing—a critical gap in the current housing continuum. In Rochester, the average waiting time for private landlord housing is six months, with affordable housing complexes boasting waitlists ranging from one to five years. This exacerbates housing instability for the homeless and increases the risk of homelessness for those transitioning out of apartments due to eviction or other circumstances. We propose increased investment in short-term transitional housing, utilizing the over 400 vacant structures in FTAC's target area. These structures could be rehabilitated and repurposed to provide safe homes for individuals awaiting more permanent housing solutions. This is particularly pertinent for those transitioning out of substance use treatment programs, who often find themselves discharged back onto the streets or into shelters—environments known to exacerbate substance use issues. In addition those suffering from addiction are often not considered appropriate for shelter, and often are kicked back out. This cycle breaks when we offer real solutions in meeting people where they are at, and providing the necessary supports along the way.

In conclusion, we appreciate your dedication to addressing the challenges faced by our communities. We trust that the proposed policy changes will contribute significantly to breaking the cycle of concentrated poverty in our state. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Beatriz Lebron
Executive Director
Father Tracy Advocacy Center