



Minute on Housing and Homelessness

– Assuring Access to Shelter for All People –

*From the Circle of Discernment on Housing and Homeless of the
Quaker Institute for the Future*

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We affirm that housing is a human right.

As Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights puts it, “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care.” We cannot have a Beloved Community if our economic, physical and social structures leave many of us without shelter.

We are deeply saddened and concerned that:

- In a country as rich as the United States, every night, hundreds of thousands of people cannot find a safe place to sleep and too many have to make tradeoffs between shelter, food, and other essentials.
- Dehumanization, as embodied in some government actions, leadership attitudes. and community ostracism, is exacerbating the housing crisis and undermining, and in some cases denying, our human rights. We decry and reject this attitude and approach. We dehumanize ourselves when we push others aside.
- The people who suffer in our housing system, who are either homeless or housing cost burdened, are disproportionately people of color, immigrants, veterans, people with disabilities, seniors, and women with children.
- We observe with pain that housing instability is one critical dimension of social vulnerability in the United States.

We recognize, after long discernment, that

- The housing crisis in the United States is generated by features of our social and economic systems as well as legal, property, and land use structures. These are within our collective control to change. Most of us are caught in an economic system that has made housing unaffordable.
 - There is an enormous mismatch between incomes and housing costs across America. Not a single US county has enough available housing for all of its very low-income residents.

- The crisis affects renters and homeowners, some of whom are at risk of becoming homeless.
- Many factors help to drive housing costs up, including a variety of public and private policies and choices at personal, local, state, and federal levels.
- All of this is happening within the context of our living on a planet with limited resources. Yet, some practical housing and shelter choices are currently illegal.
- Housing insecurity is deeply embedded in past and present racism. We cannot uproot systemic racism without also addressing housing justice.
- Many of the deep problems of the housing system are structural in nature, and we may as individuals be also contributing to those problems in various ways, including occupying more housing and owning more land than we need.
- There are more than a few good groups in the US that are tackling homelessness in a positive way and could be part of large-scale systemic change.

We as Quakers acknowledge that

- Some Quakers have been involved historically and presently in offering alternative housing arrangements that challenge the dominant systems.
- Some Quakers are experiencing homelessness, housing insecure, or cost-burdened in their housing arrangements.
- Some Quakers now are actively engaged in taking care of their unhoused neighbors, and some have struggled to help without being burdened.
- Some Quakers are frightened by people who are experiencing homelessness and actively exclude them from their spaces.
- Some Quakers experience owning property, including financial returns on home ownership, as an obstacle to living into housing justice.
- We acknowledge that we may not have connected our testimonies of simplicity, peace, integrity, community, equality and sustainability with our advocacy activities and personal housing choices, both individually and collectively.
- Our testimonies call on us to speak truth to power regarding this crisis, to make personal choices consistent with that truth, and to seek creative solutions that can enable shelter for all.

Acknowledging these facts, we have a responsibility to examine the ways our personal or inherited housing and community land use choices may be affecting others' access to housing and security and a responsibility to advocate for needed systems changes.

Therefore, for us, it is morally imperative to

- Speak out against stereotypes, dehumanization, criminalization and detention of people experiencing homelessness.
- Find ways to participate in efforts in our communities to find food and shelter for everyone; to support work to repair lives damaged by the experience of homelessness; and provide welcoming spaces in our communities.
- Stand in solidarity with our unhoused neighbors and their own campaigns for change, including the right to create safe self-governing communities that are accountable to their members and their neighbors.
- Oppose regulations and actions that harass people experiencing homelessness, make their survival more difficult and destroy the community among them.
- Support expanding the range and types of housing or shelter that are legally allowed, such as Safe Parking programs, allowing RVs, manufactured housing, tiny home villages, and Accessory Dwelling Units.
- Speak up in favor of community policies and planning, such as zoning, building codes, and tax policies, to address the disparities between incomes and housing options.
- Work with others to bring forward successful programs and approaches to making homelessness rare and brief in our local communities.
- Advocate for public investments that make more housing available at prices that people with modest income levels can afford. Housing is too important to leave to the market.
- Make personal choices that reflect both right sharing of resources and sustainability, such as smaller houses and shared dwellings made with simple materials that conserve energy.
- When possible, consider personal ways to leave a legacy to affordable housing.
- Consider using Meeting land and financial resources to build additional affordable housing.
- Question our biases, investigate the issues, and share information and resources.

We invite others to join us.

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You are welcome to use wording from this minute in crafting your own, but please acknowledge the extent to which you draw on this Minute. We would love to hear from you about how you are using it (housing.cod@quakerinstitute.org).