

United States Senate

September 14, 2023

The Honorable Miriam E. Delphin-Rittmon
Assistant Secretary for Mental Health and Substance Use
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20857

Ms. Marion Mollegen McFadden
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Community Planning and Development
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Assistant Secretary Delphin-Rittmon and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary McFadden:

We write to inquire about the status of a critical pilot program to address the issue of housing insecurity and its intersection with mental health and substance misuse. In December 2022, Congress directed the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to establish a pilot program to provide mental health, substance use, and other supportive services for people experiencing homelessness, at imminent risk of becoming homeless, or in HUD-assisted housing.¹ To carry out the pilot, Congress directed funding from SAMHSA's Projects for Assistance in Transition from Homelessness (PATH) program.² It is our understanding that this program has not yet been implemented.

Although there are many factors behind housing insecurity, behavioral health challenges such as serious mental illness or substance use disorder can be both a cause and consequence. Barriers to health care leave people untreated, sick, unable to work, and at risk of homelessness. In turn, homelessness makes it harder to get care and creates stressors that worsen behavioral health or may result in the development of substance use disorder.³⁴ Seamless coordination of health care and housing is essential to prevent housing insecurity and treat behavioral health conditions.

Coordinating health and housing support has been shown to effectively help people get, and keep, their housing and improve their health. The joint supportive housing program that HUD operates with the Veterans Administration (HUD-VASH), which assists veterans and their

¹ Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, P.L. 117-328, 117th Cong. (2022).

² *Id.*

³ *Mental Illness and Homelessness*, Nat'l Coalition for the Homeless (July 2009), https://www.nationalhomeless.org/factsheets/Mental_Illness.pdf.

⁴ *Homelessness & Health: What's the Connection*, Nat'l Health Care for the Homeless Council (Feb. 2019), <https://nhchc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/homelessness-and-health.pdf>; see also *Mental Health Care*, Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program, <https://www.bhchp.org/services/mental-health-care/>.

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families find and sustain permanent housing, has successfully reduced the number of veterans experiencing chronic homelessness.⁵ Likewise, SAMHSA's Grants for the Benefit of Homeless Individuals (GBHI) program, which partnered with public housing agencies, achieved positive health outcomes with reduced substance use.⁶

In 2022, 582,500 people experienced homelessness in the United States,⁷ and the housing crisis continues. It is essential that we strengthen services to ensure that every person experiencing homelessness can get the services they need, and this pilot between HUD and SAMHSA can help in that effort. We look forward to working with you to ensure its successful implementation. To help us better understand its status, we ask that you answer the following questions in writing by October 1, 2023:

1. What progress has been made to date to establish a HUD/SAMHSA supportive housing pilot through the PATH program?
2. What is the anticipated launch date for the pilot?
3. What are the barriers or challenges to establishing and carrying out the pilot?
4. How do HUD and SAMHSA currently formally collaborate on programs to pair housing and health-related wraparound services?
5. How many interagency working groups between HUD and HHS exist? Of those, how many are statutorily mandated?


Thank you for your attention to this matter. Your responses will enable us to more fully support a coordinated response to the current twin crises in housing and behavioral health. We welcome engaging more fully on the above questions, and we look forward to receiving your response.

Sincerely,

⁵ *JVSG Companion Program: Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the HUD-VASH program*, Nat'l Veterans' Training Inst. (December 2020), <https://www.nvti.org/News/Featured-Articles/Department-of-Veterans-Affairs-and-the-HUD-VASH-program>.

⁶ *SAMHSA Justification of Estimates for Appropriations Committees: Fiscal Year 2024*, U.S. Dep't Health and Human Servs. (2024), <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/samhsa-fy-2024-cj.pdf>.

⁷ Tanya de Sousa et al., *The 2022 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report to Congress*, U.S. Dep't of Housing and Urban Dev. (Dec. 2022), <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2022-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>.



Edward J. Markey
United States Senator



Alex Padilla
United States Senator



Tim Kaine
United States Senator