



HOME FOR ALL

January 23, 2025

Dear Chairwoman Pauer and Members of the Municipal and County Government Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on House Bill 348, which proposes allowing municipalities to require up to 90 days of residency before individuals can apply for local welfare assistance. My name is Kara Anne Rodenhizer, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Home for All Coalition, a diverse partnership of over 90 individuals and organizations working to ensure that affordable, accessible housing is within reach for all residents of New Hampshire's Seacoast. Our coalition is comprised of shelter and housing providers, social service providers, municipal welfare, public housing authorities, non-profits, faith organizations, businesses, and community advocates. I am here to express the Coalition's strong opposition to HB 348, as it is unreasonable, unworkable, and poses devastating consequences for New Hampshire's most vulnerable residents during a severe housing crisis.

HB 348 would deny local welfare assistance to anyone who has moved within the last three months, leaving individuals and families facing housing insecurity, homelessness, or financial instability without a safety net. Consider the resident who relocates from Seabrook to Concord for a new job but suffers an unexpected injury, leaving them unable to work. Or imagine an elderly widow downsizing to a smaller, more affordable home who needs help with the second month's rent due to the financial strain of moving on a fixed income. Under HB 348, both individuals would be barred from receiving assistance in either their former or current municipality until they meet the 90-day residency requirement. This policy punishes mobility—often a necessity for work, family, or safety—leaving people without critical support in times of hardship or an emergency.

This bill would also disproportionately harm homeless and housing insecure individuals. Anyone without fixed addresses, utility bills, or car registrations would find it nearly impossible to prove 90 consecutive days of residency in any municipality. ***As a result, the vast majority of unsheltered and housing-insecure individuals, including those seeking shelter in a new town, relocating for safety while fleeing domestic violence, or simply trying to find stability, would be excluded from local welfare assistance altogether.*** Instead of providing support, HB 348 effectively punishes people for seeking shelter, stability, or survival.

The potential consequences of HB 348 are dire. New Hampshire's housing crisis is already at a breaking point, with a rental vacancy rate of just 0.6%—far below the 5% threshold for a balanced market—and a 52% increase in homelessness from 2022 to 2023. Our state's shelter system is underfunded and overwhelmed, with many shelters struggling to maintain operations and unable to meet the growing demand. In rural areas, where shelters are scarce, local welfare offices play a critical role in helping unhoused residents access transportation to shelter beds in other municipalities. If HB 348 becomes law, these individuals—our most vulnerable neighbors—could be denied both welfare assistance and transportation to life-saving services. During harsh winter months, this could lead to preventable deaths.

It is not just housing advocates and members of our own Coalition who recognize the significant flaws in this bill. The Municipal Welfare Association and local welfare directors across the state—experts who understand the real-world impact of this legislation better than any one of us—have expressed their strong opposition for HB 348, describing it as unreasonable, unworkable, and riddled with unintended consequences. ***Forcing individuals into "residency purgatory" would create confusion, inefficiency, and unnecessary suffering for those already in crisis.***

HB 348 does not reflect the values of compassion, community, and practical problem-solving that we hold dear in New Hampshire. At a time of increasing homelessness and housing insecurity, we should be removing barriers to services that promote housing stability and help individuals rebuild their lives—not adding new obstacles.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the committee to vote against HB 348. Thank you for your time and for your commitment to serving New Hampshire's residents.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kara Anne Rodenhizer', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kara Anne Rodenhizer, Ph.D.
Executive Director, Home for All Coalition