Affordable Housing

Recommendations from the Bucks-Mont Collaborative's The Collaborative Advocacy Netwok:

Raise the PHARE Funding Cap.

PHARE is the Pennsylvania Housing Affordability and Rehabilitation Enhancement Fund, administered by the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA).

Also known as the state housing trust fund, PHARE delivers tens of millions each year to communities in every county to expand low-income housing, prevent homelessness, remediate blight, and promote home ownership.

The goal is to increase the program's cap to $100 million over three years.

Revenue for PHARE is derived from the Realty Transfer Tax. However, the PHARE portion is currently capped at $40 million. Lifting this cap to $100 million would allow for significant investment into a range of housing and homeless services across the Commonwealth.

Increase Homeless Assistance Program funding to $20 million in theFY24-25 Budget.

Funding for the Homeless Assistance Program, which is the state's only dedicated line item for funding emergency shelter operations, has been maintained at a $12.6 million allocation since 2016.

The recommendation is to raise the Homeless Assistance Program to $20 million. This would more closely mirror actual expenditures, which have totaled over $19 million annually in recent years.

Homelessness has grown tremendously since the pandemic. In 2022, on a single night in January an estimated 13,000 in Pennsylvania were experiencing homelessness, including 7,600 individuals; 4,800 people in families with children; and 580 unaccompanied youth.

The Homeless Assistance Program is a dedicated line item in the Department of Human Services Block Grant Program. Counties are able to determine local priorities for projects that meet eligibility requirements.

Homeless Assistance Program funding can be used for emergency shelter, bridge or transitional housing, case management, rental assistance, and innovative supportive housing services.

As counties experience growing homelessness and housing costs, increased funding for local supports allows communities across the state to determine the most appropriate, locally driven solutions.

Take action to seal or expunge eviction records.

Pennsylvania already seals certain non-violent criminal records to aid those seeking employment after years of maintaining a clean record. It is only fair that we extend those protections to cover eviction records as well.

A single eviction record often does irreparable harm to the lives of families and individuals as they struggle to secure safe housing. The vast majority of landlords screen out and will not rent to those with an eviction or eviction filing on their record.

Eviction filings are always recorded regardless of the outcome of the case in court. A record is permanently attached to an individual even if they have never actually been evicted.

The recommendation is to hold a public hearing in 2024 to further elevate the issue and explore policy solutions. This initiative is critical to removing an enormous barrier that prevents access to housing for thousands of Pennsylvanians. Landlords are entitled to pursue legal action, but tenants must be provided second chances to restore balance to the legal system.