

# Candidate Questionnaire on Housing Issues

# 2022



## Esther Agbaje

**City/Town:** Minneapolis

**Legislative District:** HD59B

**Party:** DFL

*Candidate responses in italics.*

1. In July 2021, a [national poll](#) found that 68% of the public believes that elected officials are not paying enough attention to the rising cost of housing and ensuring everyone can afford a place to live. **What do you believe is the role of government in ensuring everyone has a place to call home?**

*I will promote guaranteed housing for all. When people have a place to sleep and keep their belongings, it is easier to find and maintain a job. I believe that the government should play a stronger role in either providing housing—especially if housing is to be considered a fundamental right—through public housing, or ensuring that housing prices are reasonable for working people. I will also work to build mixed income neighborhoods through housing so that there is more social cohesion across class lines. When sheltering unhoused people, housing should also be specific to the ages, gender, family, and cultural needs of people facing housing insecurity.*

*As a renter, I am very aware of the rising costs of housing; this issue is personal to me. My record proves that I've prioritized the rights of renters during my time in office. I fought for the state to extend the eviction moratorium during the pandemic crisis. I will continue to fight for the rights of renters and work so that housing costs do not restrict Minnesotans from quality living options.*

2. Nearly all counties in Minnesota (92%) are not able to provide sufficient shelter or temporary housing to those who are homeless. **What will you do to end homelessness?**

*We have seen encampments bulldozed and people left with nothing, traumatized, and with no place to go. We must guarantee that everyone, regardless of socioeconomic status, has a safe and stable place to live.*

*I commit to supporting legislation that houses people, listens to their needs, and equips service providers across the state with the resources they need to address this issue.*

*I am also committed to making sure that there are enough resources to address workforce development so that people can be trained to secure a job, increase the minimum wage to a living wage so that people can afford a place to live, as well as provide greater access and coverage for mental health care and addiction recovery.*

3. Emergency rental assistance keeps people stably housed, as we saw with federal pandemic-related funding. Historically, nonpayment of rent is the most common reason landlords evict their tenants. During times of financial crisis, families without access to financial resources may be displaced, evicted, or even become homeless. **What will you do to prevent evictions?**

*During my previous term, I fought to extend the eviction moratorium for as long as possible. I was on the Housing Conference Committee that worked to provide an orderly off ramp to the eviction moratorium. I hosted events where people could access the RentHelp assistance provided by the state. One of the policies I will champion this upcoming session is the provision in the moratorium that if you are in line to receive emergency assistance, you cannot be evicted. Additionally, I will work to secure resources to ensure that counties or the state have enough funding to help keep people in their homes when they have trouble making rent or utility payments.*

*Assistance with rental costs and evictions is a priority of mine. Working together, we can implement stronger eviction-prevention programs and increase legal representation so that more people can stay in their homes.*

4. Minnesota's housing crisis disproportionately harms families of color, especially Black and Indigenous households. Minnesota is one of the worst states in the nation for racial disparities in homeownership. Additionally, 58 percent of Black renters are paying more than they can afford on housing costs. **What meaningful steps will you take to eliminate racial disparities in housing?**

*HLandlords must be held accountable. I support management audits when it comes to finances, civil rights, equity, and building conditions. Renters need to know that they deserve fair and dignified housing experiences. Addressing the disparities in housing is why I've signed the "Homes Guarantee" pledge.*

*On the homeownership side, the cost of a downpayment can be a significant barrier to entry for families of color. In my first term, I supported bills that would provide downpayment assistance to families of color and first-generation homebuyers. I will continue to push these policies and funding sources to begin to close the racial disparities in homeownership in Minnesota.*

5. There are approximately 170,000 renter households in the state that earn less than \$31,200 per year. But rental assistance is only available to one out of every four income-qualifying households. Even though more than 100,000 lowest income households need homes, the state only supports the production of 100 homes each year for these families. **What will you do to support the housing needs of those at the lowest income level in Minnesota?**

*It is important to address the disparities in income and housing prices. There aren't enough affordable housing options and a lot of individuals don't get paid enough to sustain housing and have a good quality of life. In my second term, I will continue to advocate for the state to be a good partner in providing safe, dignified, and affordable housing for everyone from seniors, to low-income families, to working professionals.*

*This means more funding for emergency rental assistance, increasing the timing to allow for applying and processing emergency assistance, and investing in public housing so that everyone has a safe and dignified place to live. I will continue to carry and support bills that bring investment to preserving naturally occurring affordable housing, to help bring prices down in the rental market. Finally, I am interested in seriously discussing how we can maintain affordability in the housing market and balancing that with corporate profits.*

6. Energy efficiency improvements in multifamily buildings and weatherizing single family homes improve indoor air quality, eliminate drafts, and protect residents from extreme cold and heat—delivering health benefits and lower health care costs. **What strategies do you support to improve housing conditions and reduce utility costs?**

*Ensuring that housing is energy efficient and made from sustainable materials is a major part of addressing climate change and health. This is a policy issue that I will work my hardest to address in my second term. As a state that has extreme weather seasons, it is important to have weatherized, quality homes. We must also make the transition to electrification simpler for homeowners and landlords. Then, especially in multifamily units, we should work to have the highest standards of indoor air quality to protect peoples' health from the effects of natural gas or viruses. I am interested in working more in this space and look forward to more conversations about how to update building codes and provide resources or incentives to do these renovations.*

7. Minnesota's home values are increasing rapidly, constraining low- and middle-income families from achieving affordable homeownership, including more than 64,000 households of color. **What steps will you take to increase opportunities for renters to purchase homes, condos, or cooperative ownership models?**

*With the high costs of housing, homeownership is out of reach for too many Minnesota families, especially families of color. I have authored bills that provide downpayment assistance for families of color or first-generation*

*homebuyers. I am interested in looking at more ways that renters of multifamily housing can work together to have ownership in their buildings. I am also interested in how we can expand access to ownership for different housing styles to support multigenerational families, seniors, or people with disabilities. Finally, we should also look at how to stabilize property taxes so that seniors and people with disabilities can maintain and keep homes that they already own.*

8. Including the recommendations of the community when developing policies and programs is a best practice for effective and lasting solutions. **How will you include those most impacted by housing needs in developing and implementing housing solutions?**

*I am committed to representing my constituents accurately and with strong advocacy. I will achieve this by listening and understanding the needs of individuals most impacted by housing. I do this by keeping a proximity to Hennepin County's Housing court via participation in the Housing Committee through the Volunteer Lawyers Network. I also engage with community organizations focused on housing to receive and give information to the community about what is happening in the housing space. Residents are the experts on inequitable housing and their voices need to be heard in order to implement housing policies that are accurately catered to those needs.*