

Candidate Questionnaire on Housing Issues

2022



Liz Reyer

City/Town: Eagan

Legislative District: HD52A

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?**

The affordable housing crisis is due to decades of chronic underinvestment and that state funds play an important part in creating and preserving our housing supply. Further, the lack of affordable and accessible housing has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It's my belief that now is the time to invest in innovative solutions to tackle housing insecurity as we build back from the pandemic. All Minnesotans deserve safe, secure and affordable housing, no matter where they live or whether they are unhoused, rent or own their home. Moreover, because of long-standing inequities in housing, government has a requirement to act. House DFLers, in our 2022 housing bill, sought to make use of the historic budget surplus to provide \$410 million from the general fund available for housing over the next three years, as well as \$400 million of housing infrastructure bonds. Had the bill been signed into law, it would've created 4,000 new homes for 9,000 Minnesotans, helped 20,000 renters stay in their homes, created 1,600 first-generation homebuyers, and saved 5,000 affordable homes that would otherwise be lost to demolition or conversion to market-rate housing. Unfortunately, Senate GOP leadership walked away from negotiations, meaning that our robust housing bill wasn't signed into law.

Please be assured that I will continue to work with my House DFL colleagues to ensure that not only prevent the cost of housing from rising but also increase the abundance and availability of affordable housing.

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?**

Ending homelessness is one of my top priorities, and I was proud to be one of a number of legislators who successfully negotiated the 2021 housing budget bill that was the largest single investment in preventing homelessness in history. These investments included \$110 million of county homelessness aid for counties with the highest rates of youth homelessness, a \$12 million per biennium increase for grants for organizations that provide emergency housing services, a \$6 million per biennium increase to ensure that no veteran faces homelessness, and a \$2 million increase per biennium for emergency shelters. We also passed into law a number of policy proposals to aid those facing homelessness, including a requirement for the Department of Corrections to ensure that Minnesotans released from prison have access to safe housing, a streamlining of the process for unhoused youth to obtain their birth records, and the creation of a task force to address safety concerns at homeless shelters. I also chief authored a bill that would be a major expansion of funding for shelter services to help Minnesotans who are at the risk of homelessness.

In 2022, House DFLers tried to build on momentum by passing budget bills containing further investments to address homelessness. Though these bills were not ultimately signed into law, we fought hard for an additional \$150 million for shelter upgrades, additional support services, and transitional housing. Be assured that our efforts to end homelessness will continue next session.

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?**

The eviction moratorium implemented by Governor Walz saved lives. Now, as Minnesotans continue to bounce back from the pandemic, we must ensure that those who struggled to pay rent will continue to have a safe and secure roof over their heads.

Minnesota lags behind many states when it comes to offering even the most basic of protections to keep tenants from losing their homes. This is why I was glad to see a number of tenant protection measures included in the 2022 supplemental housing bill. Among others, these provisions include requiring a landlord to give a pre-eviction notice to a tenant, disallowing landlords from terminating tenancy at will for nonpayment of rent, prohibiting landlords from evicting tenants for nonpayment of rent if they have an open application for rental assistance, prohibiting the enactment of ill-defined “administrative fees” often present when a tenant moves in, and creating a housing mediation grant program to allow tenants to resolve their dispute outside of civil court.

Though Senate GOP leadership did not hear, nor sign into law any tenant protection measures during the 2021-21 biennium, please be assured that I will

continue to advocate for Minnesotans, ensuring that we all have safe and stable 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?**

Though Minnesota has one of the highest rates of homeownership in the nation, we suffer from wide racial disparities in homeownership that in turn drive the substantial racial wealth gap. We cannot discuss the gap in wealth, much less the gap in homeownership, without recognizing Minnesota's policy of racial covenants. Though outlawed more than 50 years ago, we still see the effects of these covenants today in establishing and reinforcing residential segregation, health inequities, housing insecurity, and, finally, depressed homeownership rates among Black Minnesotans. I am glad that organizations like the UMN's Mapping Prejudice project are taking a critical look at how racial covenants have affected our state.

We cannot overcome these disparities without thoughtful, community-centered approaches. I was encouraged to see action on this issue in 2019 when legislation was signed into law that would allow homeowners to file a document disavowing the racist covenants in their deeds. However, we must do more.

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?**

Over 550,000 Minnesotans live in households that struggle to pay rent each month. Though Minnesota has explored rental assistance in the past, 75% of the people who qualify for rent vouchers don't actually receive one because the voucher program is critically underfunded. The solution is clear: we need to sufficiently fund rental assistance and provide a transformational boost to the funds allocated to housing in the State budget. 0.3% simply is not sufficient.

This is why I am a strong supporter and advocate for bills like Rep. Mike Howards's "Bring It Home, Minnesota" bill. This bill would provide rent vouchers for all eligible low-income Minnesotans so that they don't have to pay more than 30% of their income toward rent. Making rent more affordable in this way combats housing instability, helps families budget for other expenses, and creates the ability to put money into savings.

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?**

I have been encouraged to see more and more discussion of the benefits of weatherization at the House. In fact, a large part of the Climate Action Caucus's climate action plan centered on the need to make bold investments in climate resilient infrastructure that can withstand extreme weather events, especially for under-resourced communities.

This is why I was glad to see historic investments in weatherization in our 2022 supplemental climate and energy bill. These investments sought to build upon the climate and energy solutions that we know work to help Minnesotans save money and use less energy to make their homes comfortable and safe. These investments included a one-time \$30 million increase in weatherization funding and \$15 million every year after, and the creation of a grant program to assist with the costs associated with developing a weatherization apprenticeship program for careers in the weatherization industry. Unfortunately, the passage of this bill was blocked by the Senate GOP. Please be assured that I and my Climate Action Caucus colleagues will continue to fight to see strong investments made into weatherization.

Additionally, I believe we can do more to ensure that new construction projects are designed with energy efficiency in mind. Whether this includes grants for intentional construction or some other incentive, I look forward to continuing to discuss how we reach this goal in the next legislative session.

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?**

It is clear that Minnesota is a great place to live; we have great schools, thriving businesses, and some of the most beautiful outdoor attractions in the country. Though many renters aspire to own a home to settle down in, raise their families in, grow old in, and pass on to the next generation, homeownership is often inaccessible due to high property values. This is why I support strategic investments to close the gap in homeownership, allowing Minnesotans to purchase homes and put down roots.

I was glad to see a \$170 million provision included in House DFLers' 2022 housing budget bill to establish a pilot program to provide down-payment assistance to first-generation homebuyers. The bill would offer loans of up to \$30,000 to eligible homebuyers and forgive the loan at a rate of 20% per year

of residence. The provision would support at least 5,000 first-generation homebuyers, allowing them to build generational wealth through homeownership. Though this bill was bipartisanly authored and supported, Senate GOP leadership was not willing to sign it into law.

We should also be looking at what's worked in other states, for example protecting the right of people in manufactured housing to own their homes or making it so that not all houses are bought up by out of state investors looking to turn them into rental properties. I will continue to explore options that have been successful elsewhere.

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?**

Including the community most affected by an issue in a discussion on how to fix that issue is always the best way to create good policy. This is one of the reasons why I have made a concerted effort since deciding to run for office to go into the community to learn directly from them about their housing needs and how they would like to solve them. Whether that has been during my time in district doing door knocking, or whether that has been on a legislative housing tour in another part of Minnesota, I applied what I heard to my service. As a member of the House's Housing Finance and Policy and Preventing Homelessness Committees, I was glad to see that those who would be most impacted by the bills coming before us were not only allowed but encouraged to speak to the committees and share their experiences. This testimony was imperative to the work we were doing and often was the decisive factor for my vote.

This is one of the reasons that I am pushing for the House to maintain our policy of allowing testifiers to testify virtually. Though legislators and staff are expected to physically be back in the committee room, we must keep the pandemic-era policy of allowing testifiers to "Zoom into" the hearing. This policy allows the testifying process to be more flexible and more accessible to those who are not willing or able to travel all the way to the Capitol to testify. My colleagues and our staff members will continue to look for ways to make the committee process more accessible and inclusive.

