

Candidate Questionnaire on Housing Issues

2022



Robert Bierman

City/Town: Apple Valley

Legislative District: HD 56A

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?**

Housing is a fundamental need of everyone. Government's role is to help make communities better and stronger. Communities are better and stronger when they are more stable and everyone has a place to rest, recharge, be safe and mentally secure. If we can muster the will we can solve the housing crisis across our state. Government's role is to fill the need that exists with multifaceted responses at every tier of need. The private housing market needs to thrive. But where the private market fails to meet the needs of our communities, government needs to step in and augment the forms of home creation needed. This can be in private/ public partnership, incentives for individuals and business to invest in housing, changing ordinance laws to broaden housing types permitted in local communities and implementing a more robust building of Section 8 housing units. We also need to protect older inventories of aging housing and create pathways to property improvements, such as weatherization, to keep from losing existing housing inventory.

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?**

State, County and city leaders need to face the reality that homelessness is a social ill that needs far more attention. I will continue to advocate in my community for the establishment of a permanent shelter. While the rotating system of shelters is helpful it will only solve some immediate needs. The backlog of those needing assistance continues to grow. A focus on homelessness, with funding directed at developing centers to address the social needs of the homeless populace will take time, energy and financing we have yet to commit. As a state we have reduced homelessness among Veterans. We can

succeed at reducing homelessness while creating economic benefit for builders at the same time. More upstream approaches to this problem exist. While the problem is complex the solutions revolve around the fundamental human rights of health and shelter.

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?**

Tenants in the state of Minnesota are hard pressed. There are eviction laws that need to be changed and I have already voted for them. We need to get them passed. Beyond that rent assistance programs at the County level need to be expanded to help tenants remain stable with housing when challenges present obstacles to meeting rent. A reprieve of a month or two can make a big difference.

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?**

Targeted policies for addressing disparities has been a refrain across the spectrum of committees in which I serve. In Housing I support the First Generation Home Buyer Assistance bill. I also support Pre-weatherization and Weatherization assistance expansion for low income residents. To be truly effective we also need this funding to be tied to rental property improvement that will then result in energy costs being reduced for the actual residents in the buildings. Affordable housing means very different things to people. What people can afford, by area and by income, needs to drive the solutions we seek to enact. At the present time we need to build substantially more Section 8 housing to uplift the disparities we face. Presently in my county the backlog is over a 2 year wait.

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?**

We need to use a large portion of the current surplus to address this problem. Decades ago Minnesota faced a similar crisis. We solved it by building housing units for the homeless. We need to do so again. Combining the creation of homes with community centers designed to assist people with health care, education and workforce development would go a long way to breaking the cycle.

A stable home lends itself to provide the next steps to engage in productive activities. This comprehensive approach will also help keep people from falling back into homelessness again.

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 am the Chief-Author of the Weatherization bill in the House of Representatives. This bill was agreed to with the Senate but did not pass before the end of last session. I intend to reintroduce next session. This bill included general fund dollars to expand efforts in Minnesota.

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?**

I will support legislation to directly address this area of disparity. I am not presently aware of any pending legislation but would like to see restrictions on outside investors buying up properties for sale across the state. I believe they are taking too many homes off the market and increasing costs.

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?**

Engagement. We must hear from all stakeholders to find solutions. Without it nothing will pass and nothing will change. In my community we lack the 5 bedroom units that some families need. We also need to be mindful of transportation corridors and situate sites in the right spot.