

TESTIMONY OF
U.S. REPRESENTATIVE JAMES P. MCGOVERN (MA-02)

HOUSE FINANCIAL SERVICES COMMITTEE

MEMBER DAY HEARING

APRIL 27, 2021

Chairwoman Waters, Ranking Member McHenry, and distinguished members of the Financial Services Committee:

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify during your Member Day Hearing. As the Financial Services Committee begins to determine its priorities for this Congress, I draw your attention to legislation I have authored with my colleague from Massachusetts, Congresswoman Pressley. The Grandfamily Housing Act, which we will soon reintroduce, will provide safe, affordable housing for intergenerational families across the country.

I first began exploring this issue when so many grandparents were called upon to care for their grandchildren as a result of the opioid crisis, which has only deepened and expanded during the COVID-19 pandemic. Elderly caregivers are grappling with unique and pressing issues that require real solutions. Many of these families come together at a moment's notice, often with a call in the middle of the night. Frequently, grandparents are financially unprepared to care for a child. They often have difficulty accessing their grandchildren's school or medical records, and they often lack adequate and age-appropriate housing. The Grandfamily Housing Act would establish a new nationwide pilot program to modify appropriate housing and fund residential coordinators to help grandparents navigate the complexities of raising a grandchild.

This bill amends the LEGACY Act of 2003, which was enacted as part of the American Dream Downpayment Act. The LEGACY Act contains three key provisions:

1. Development and distribution of grants for demonstration projects to create housing for grandparents and other relatives raising children;
2. Training of HUD personnel on issues facing relatives raising children; and
3. A national study in partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau to determine the housing needs of grandparents and other relatives raising children.

Unfortunately, Congress has not done enough since then to further help this growing community of grandparents and those raising grandchildren.

Over the past few years, I have spent time participating in community roundtables with constituents who find themselves in impossible situations. Often on fixed incomes, these individuals do not hesitate to take in their grandchildren and provide for them. As a result, many are forced to find additional work or move out of their current housing. The COVID-19 pandemic has only exacerbated these conditions, as shelter-in-place orders have been issued for cities across the country and 26 million Americans have filed for unemployment. It is harder than ever for Americans to move out of unsafe or unsuitable housing. Yet, these grandparents do not complain or regret their decisions. I believe we can make their lives easier by providing them with safe, appropriate housing that meets each family member's individual needs.

We have already seen this model work successfully in Congress's own backyard – Plaza West opened in Washington, D.C. in late 2018 as the first affordable housing community for seniors, families, and grandfamilies. Fifty units have been set aside for grandfamilies with income levels between 30 to 40 percent of the Area Median Income. Plaza West has a range of amenities, including activity spaces and community rooms for children.

I respectfully ask the House Financial Services Committee to take up this important legislation this Congress so that we can ensure safe, affordable housing for intergenerational

families. I also welcome the opportunity to include this legislation as part of other packages that may be advancing through this Committee and Congress in the coming months related to housing infrastructure. We need to do everything in our power to ensure that all Americans can live in safe, affordable housing that meets their needs.

In addition to grandfamily housing, I'd like to bring your attention to another effort I am leading. As many of you know, ending hunger in the United States and across the world has been the cause of my career. I'm proud of the work we have done recently in response to the ongoing coronavirus pandemic to reduce poverty and address hunger. But there is so much more we can do.

Hunger is inextricably linked to safe, affordable housing. Millions of American families have to make difficult decisions when it comes to their limited resources. High housing costs mean some families have little money left for food after they pay their mortgages or rent. One study found that a \$500 average increase in yearly rental costs in a region is associated with an astounding 10% increase in food insecurity rates among low-income families.¹ For those experiencing homelessness, a lack of stable housing increases their risk of food insecurity and forces them to rely on charity which is often unsustainable and insufficient.²

Gaps in access to checking accounts and savings accounts also create a barrier to financial stability.³ Twenty-two percent of Americans are unbanked or underbanked,⁴ forcing many of these individuals to rely on alternative financial products that can be costly and preventing them from building savings to escape hunger and poverty.

¹ Enterprise Community Partners <https://homeforallsmc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/Impact-of-Affordable-Housing-on-Families-and-Communities.pdf>

² Urban Institute <https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/how-stable-affordable-housing-can-help-tackle-food-insecurity>

³ FDIC <https://www.fdic.gov/householdsurvey/2017/2017execsumm.pdf>

⁴ Federal Reserve <https://www.federalreserve.gov/publications/2019-economic-well-being-of-us-households-in-2018-banking-and-credit.htm>

Ending hunger will take a whole-of-government approach, which is why I am advocating for a White House Conference on Food, Nutrition, and Hunger. Such a conference will bring together experts, advocates, people with lived experiences of hunger and poverty, and agencies and departments from across the federal government, such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), to finally develop a roadmap to end hunger by 2030. Working with other committees, I will be hosting hearings, briefings, and roundtables at the Rules Committee in the coming months to build a record on what it will take to end hunger. I hope you will consider joining me in that effort.

I want to applaud Chairwoman Waters for your work in ensuring housing remains at the forefront of our agenda during the 117th Congress, and I appreciate the efforts of the members of this Committee in helping to provide safe and affordable housing for every American family. Thank you for your time and for your consideration.

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