

Tyler Byrd IDEP2024 Statement

Thank you for the introduction.

Hello, my name is Tyler Byrd, I'm 20 years old, and I'm a housing advocate living in New York City.

I make a point of saying my age today because I feel like I've spent more of my life living in a homeless shelter, or housing that was inhumane and dangerous, compared living in a household that is not part of the homeless shelter system. By dangerous and inhumane I mean, the amount of people that are living in that space could be a fire hazard, and overcrowded to the point where it is taking a mental toll on everyone living there. I didn't recognize how much it was affecting me until I was 12 or 13 years old. You could feel how miserable everyone was living in an overcrowded, tiny space.

It was definitely very rough on my mom.

Shelter is meant to be temporary. But knowing our situation, it couldn't have ever been temporary. My mom was recently divorced, we lost our apartment, she was busy searching for a job, and childcare for the five of us, which included a one-year-old and a two-month-old, so she could be able to work. It never really worked out for her. We were stuck in a homeless shelter limbo; wanting to leave, but not having the means to leave.

A lot of the shelter systems around the city sees **YOU** as an issue to be fixed, rather than human beings. After being in shelter for over a year, the staff start to look down upon you, like you're not you're not trying to leave, or that you're just trying to feed off the government. Personally, I don't think there's anything wrong with seeking governmental help if there's some dire strait. It's not a crime to get the assistance you need that the government provides.

This is how social and institutional maltreatment become intertwined. People are seen as the problem, instead of the issue at hand.

The overall issue in terms of housing is affordability for a majority of Americans. We're in the midst of a major housing crisis, but that's purely because of the

number of apartments that sit empty around the city because people can't afford them. Realistically, affordable housing should mean I am able to live in this place and still have enough income to pay bills, buy groceries, and have enough money for leisurely activities. It's not just about affordability, but the *quality* of life.

Lack of housing plays a major role in mental health. If you feel a ticking clock to find somewhere for you and your family to go, to find somewhere to live, you're anxious almost all the time. You're trying to achieve that goal as quickly as possible. Realistically, in the world we live in today, no one's ever going to be able to achieve that in a short amount of time because it's just not feasible.

This is why we need to change the 90 days limit, meaning you can only stay here for 90 days, a lot of shelters set around the nation to “encourage” people to move out as quickly as possible. Realistically, that time frame has never been enough time for anyone to find a home.

People need support, especially from shelter staff. Support from shelter staff and having somebody help with the search for affordable housing is vital. Often, social workers act as if you're in this situation because you did something wrong and you got to fix it. Rather than looking at it as “You're in a tough spot. How do we get you out of this tough spot.” I understand, people can get burnt out in this type of work. But if you're coming into a conversation with a homeless individual or family with a preconceived notion of their mindset, or of what they're going to do, or what they're going to ask for, it doesn't help anybody. Whoever is asking for help already feels uncomfortable or feels bad that they're even asking for help.

Also, don't pit people against each other.

The treatment migrant families received when it comes to finding housing, even if it's temporary housing, has been abysmal. There also seems to be a forced sense of tension and competition, by media outlets and government officials, between documented homeless families and undocumented migrant families.

When migrants speak out about their homes, frustrations with the housing system, people look at them like, “Be grateful. You come to this great place and you're asking for this and that?” No. They're just asking to be treated in a humane way.

Many of them would have stayed in their country had they not felt unsafe; had they not felt like this is not the place to raise a family.

Documented families speak about the same issues around homelessness and how they are treated by the system. For them, the media and government paints it as you're in that situation because **You** must have messed up. What did you do wrong to get to that point? No, nobody messed up. Most of the time, nobody messes up the institution.

If these two groups joined together for their rights, together they would make one huge voice to fight for better systems.

The one thing I want to leave with you here today with is this:

No one wants to be in that situation where they're begging for help; begging for housing. **It's already hard on them. Don't be the reason it feels harder.**

Thank you.