



Housing Alliance  
of Pennsylvania

## **A Humane Encampment Resolution Strategy**

Current responses to encampments are reactive and divisive, often escalating into forced clearings that merely shift residents to nearby encampment sites without resolving the problem.

**This proposal introduces a practical approach that unites stakeholders and calls for additional resources to provide options to those residing in encampments.** Unlike typical current responses, **it can engage municipalities, property owners, citizens, and service providers in a coordinated effort to resolve encampments one by one.**

The proposed model is informed by conversations across Pennsylvania and national best practices from other communities that have successfully closed encampments. Four core elements define this approach and drive its effectiveness.

### **Why This Works**

This strategy avoids the conflict typically seen in reactive encampment strategies by aligning stakeholders around a common goal: closing encampments permanently. It replaces costly, ineffective clearings with a collaborative approach that reduces homelessness, improves public safety, and restores community confidence.

It enables advance planning to coordinate and line up the resources needed to assist individuals in encampments, preventing providers from having to respond under compressed or crisis-driven timelines.

**The following four core elements represent a new approach and are the keys to success.**

### **Four Core Elements:**

#### **1. Encampment-Focused Strategy**

There is currently no proactive focus on encampment resolution. Current responses to encampments are largely reactive and adversarial. This proposal instead offers a proactive strategy that avoids such outcomes.

It:

- Moves beyond ad hoc clearings to a coordinated, proactive plan.
- Engages municipalities, property owners, and residents as partners in solutions rather than opponents.
- Prevents displacement by resolving encampments permanently, not shifting them elsewhere.

Communities would identify an encampment to target and would set a timeframe for cleaning and closing the site. At the end of the specified timeframe, the municipality and / or law enforcement can more easily monitor the site to prevent returns.

## **2. Bring Services to the Encampments**

People living in encampments frequently fail to access services not because of unwillingness, but because the system is fragmented, complex, and inaccessible.

What appears as “choosing” street homelessness is often the result of the absence of viable options in addition to individual frustration and stress.

This approach instead:

- Removes the need to navigate fragmented, confusing systems.
- Provides on-site outreach, advocacy, case management, and housing location assistance so individuals can access services without navigating endless referrals.
- Quickly makes available a range of needed services and resources rather than solely adding individuals to a wait list.

## **3. Line Up Landlords in Advance to Accept a Rental Subsidy**

While some individuals living in encampments are employed or receive benefits, they usually lack adequate income to afford rent as well as the rental history, credit, or savings needed to secure a unit. To bridge this gap, the strategy includes:

- Short-term rental subsidies (typically 12–24 months) to make units affordable.
- Landlord financial incentives to offset perceived risk and encourage participation.
- Flexible funding to cover deposits, application fees, and minor repairs.
- A set of pre-committed landlords who agree in advance to accept subsidies and work in partnership with service providers.

Landlords are also offered “customer service” benefits in addition to the above-mentioned financial benefits. The service provider organization is available to help the landlord mediate any conflicts with the tenant. This is an attractive benefit to many landlords

These measures reduce barriers for residents while giving landlords confidence that rent will be paid and units supported.

#### **4. Housing Centered Response, Not Shelter**

The proposal emphasizes permanent housing—not shelter—as the core solution.

This proposal:

- Offers permanent housing options rather than shelter.
- Uses short-term rental subsidies and landlord incentives to overcome barriers like security deposits or lack of rental history.
- Gives people the stability to address health, employment, and recovery.

This strategy prioritizes direct offers of housing and utilizes rental subsidies and landlord partnerships to expand access. Landlords are often reluctant to rent to individuals with limited rental histories or savings; therefore, the program includes incentives and short-term rental assistance (1–2 years) to overcome these barriers.

Stabilization in housing increases the likelihood of successful engagement in treatment and long-term recovery. Housing is the foundation, not the endpoint, of a comprehensive response.

Individuals often do not want shelter because:

- It is not available in every community.
- Shelters often fail to meet basic needs for safety, privacy, and stability.
- For individuals with mental health challenges or past trauma, shelters may be unsafe or retraumatizing.

## Resource Investments and Local Partnerships

The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania proposes that a competitive state funding program serve 500 individuals residing in encampments in 5-7 communities.<sup>1</sup>

Eligible uses:

- Short-term one to two year rental subsidies
- Expanded street outreach and case management capacity to provide navigation, advocacy, and ongoing support
- Staff to engage landlords
- Landlord financial incentives – flexible funds could be utilized for the following but not limited to sign-on bonuses of approximately \$500-1000 or a payment equal to the amount of rent required to hold a unit vacant until the tenant can be moved in or a damage fund
- Staff support
- Data collection and training

An effective encampment resolution approach requires coordination across multiple sectors. This proposal strengthens local partnerships among municipalities, service providers, landlords, and community members.

An investment of \$20 million would support the implementation of a comprehensive response.

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<sup>1</sup> This figure is based on rough estimates of the current number of tents and encampments in communities. It is not the total number of people currently identified as living in encampments across Pennsylvania.