

Testimony By
Eric L. Johnson, Mayor of Dallas, Texas
Before the
United States Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
“Housing Roadblocks: Paving a New Way to Address Affordability”
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and distinguished members of this committee, for the opportunity to speak to you on the critical issues of homelessness and housing affordability in our country.

My name is Eric Johnson, and I have the honor of serving as the 60th Mayor of Dallas, Texas.

I was born and raised in Dallas. Growing up in a low-income household, my family bounced around between cramped apartments and small rental homes. I know firsthand what housing insecurity feels like and how important stable housing is for families.

It is true that in Dallas, we have made some noteworthy gains in addressing both homelessness and housing affordability.

Last year, we effectively ended veteran homelessness by ensuring that any veteran who falls into homelessness is housed within 90 days. This achievement means that in Dallas, the men and women who served our country are treated with dignity.

But honestly, I do not want to spend the time graciously allotted to me by this esteemed committee bragging about what Dallas has done right.

Instead, I want to help this committee understand what I have learned about both homelessness and housing affordability from serving on the frontlines as the mayor of America's ninth-largest city.

Over the past six years, I have come to understand that two major misconceptions stand in the way of real progress. If we do not correct these misconceptions, we will never move the needle on chronic homelessness or housing affordability in our nation's cities.

The first misconception is that housing affordability is the primary driver of chronic homelessness.

Homelessness is a complex issue, and affordable housing is a critical component of the solution. However, the overwhelming majority of the chronically homeless are not living on our streets because of housing affordability. They are doing so because they struggle with serious mental illnesses, drug addiction, and psychological and behavioral disorders.

Chronic homelessness is primarily a public health issue, but we are not addressing it as such. It is not primarily a housing affordability issue, and it is not even a public safety issue at its core. Although we can and should enforce local laws prohibiting camping in public spaces and public buildings, we cannot arrest our way out of chronic homelessness.

We must shift our focus toward thinking about chronic homelessness more as a public health issue, and less as a housing or public safety issue.

The second misconception is connected to the fact that many discuss and even shape policy related to housing as though it is not a market, when it in fact is.

Like in any other market, housing prices are determined by supply and demand.

Therefore, the most effective way to bring down housing prices is to encourage the private sector to increase home building throughout the United States, but particularly in cities like Dallas, where we see unprecedented demand for our existing housing stock because of our economic growth and success.

Now keep in mind, government itself is not an effective housing developer. But what government can do is step aside, cut the red tape, and encourage the private sector to build more homes faster.

In Dallas, we have shown that reducing barriers to home building works. We have cut permitting times, streamlined zoning, and worked with private developers to increase housing starts.

Over the past few years, we have prioritized efficiency, and as a result, we slashed the median time to issue a residential building permit from 68 days in 2022 to just eight days in 2024.

This expedited permitting process has enabled developers to bring new housing to the market more quickly, helping us to meet the skyrocketing demand for housing in Dallas.

I strongly believe that the most effective thing Congress can do to make housing more affordable for everyday Americans is not to create yet another federal program that pours millions of taxpayer dollars into subsidizing the already robust demand for housing.

What I need right now as the mayor of Dallas — the heart of the fastest-growing metropolitan area in the United States — is for Congress to reframe the narrative around homelessness and housing affordability by correcting the misconceptions that I have discussed today.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you, and I look forward to doing the best I can to answer any of your questions.