

Gary Henderson Testimony – GOP Forum, Skyrocketing Energy Costs are Hurting Americans

Thank you, Ranking Member Westerman, Ranking Member Rodgers and Committee Members, for this honor to speak on behalf of our community.

- In March 2020 United Way of Denton County assembled a team of 10 nonprofits to join us in mobilizing Denton County's CARES Act programs, Consolidated Appropriations Act Emergency Rental Assistance 1 program and Emergency Rental Assistance 2 COVID eviction prevention program – since April 2020 over 11,000 Denton County households have been prevented from entering homelessness with more than 25,000 months of housing assistance. While we avoided a catastrophic rise in homelessness in Denton County during the pandemic, our Denton County Homelessness Data Dashboard reports that our housing crisis system has experienced a 68.5% increase in actively homeless households. United Way of Denton County continues to lead this collaborative team of nonprofits but recently we have recognized a change in the underlying source of financial needs that are driving increased in housing insecurity, food insecurity and overall financial fragility for some Denton County households. It is no longer COVID but inflation that is crippling many Denton County households.
- Denton County Poverty households and ALICE households (households that are Asset Limited, Income Constrained, Employed) comprise 1 in 3 Denton County households and are seeking help from our nonprofit sector in increasing numbers with issues not related to COVID but to the current rapid increase in their day-to-day household spending that the inflation economy is driving up. Pre-pandemic I would describe to our United Way donors that it took an "event" to throw ALICE & poverty households into crisis (a sick child or a car repair expense) now a trip to the gas station, or the grocery store or receiving a Texas summer utility bill brings ALICE & poverty households to one of our Denton County nonprofits for crisis assistance.
- Currently we have over 1,200 current active applications for financial assistance due to financial hardship. Less than 5% can be documented to COVID-19 financial impact, over 95% is due to inflation. Our food insecurity nonprofits are seeing 300% increases in weekly need. Our current norm has become households with financial impact due to rising fuel costs, increased grocery costs, increased utilities costs... all a reflection of inflation's impact on our ALICE and poverty households.
- Our Salvation Army homeless shelter in Denton County has now prioritized families over individuals due to the rise in housing instability in a commitment to not see an increase in homeless children. Individuals experiencing homelessness will not be eligible for their shelter services due to lack of capacity.
- Adding to the financial problems our ALICE & Poverty households face, we lost 24.5% of our childcare businesses in Denton County during the pandemic and 8 Denton County Zip Codes are classified as "Childcare Deserts" making it harder for some ALICE & Poverty households to work. And finally, as we work with local property managers we are consistently seeing rental leases for \$1,200 a month mature and renew at \$1,800 a

month. One of our local city managers shared with me recently that she has a staff member who has moved in with another family because she can't afford the rent increase.

- I have been a nonprofit leader for over 20 years, this looks & feels different than anything I've led through before. Your work to address the underlying and upstream causes of these problems is critical to our community and others across the country. Thank you.