

Dear Chairman Burchett, Ranking Member Stansbury, and Members of the Subcommittee,

Thank you for the invitation to testify at the September 15, 2026 hearing on “Fixing Fraud and Failure in Federally Funded Homelessness Services.” In an effort to avoid any confusion stemming from my remarks to Representative Gill about a post on Twitter from 2020, following the hearing I located a prior, now-defunct Twitter account under which I had retweeted the thread that Representative Gill referenced. That thread included a request for increased funding for housing and services for people experiencing homelessness, and I added the comment Representative Gill referenced, thanking the staff of the individual who had made the post for its leadership. My thanks to the staff for its leadership was not intended to express support of any policy to curtail law enforcement funding, but rather, a recognition of the work the poster’s organization and staff were doing, much of which was focused on creating systems change in the homelessness space, including the pursuit of increased funding for housing and related services. I appreciate this opportunity to elaborate on my remarks to clear up any misunderstanding from my testimony. As I said in the hearing, I did not recall the six-year-old post that Representative Gill asked about, could not see the printout he held up, did not recognize the name “DEIPetty,” and never used the two Twitter handles he asked about, “@SamanthaBatko” or “@TheSamanthaAB.”

My team has a substantial body of work on unsheltered homelessness, police, and alternative responses to homelessness that may be relevant to Representative Gill’s initial line of inquiry.¹ People experiencing homelessness are more likely to interact with police because being forced to live outside can lead to citations or arrests for low-level offenses like loitering or sleeping in parks. Research on these arrests shows they fail to connect people with housing and services and that this cycle is costly for taxpayers. In Denver, where I am part of a team evaluating a number of city responses to homelessness, a person experiencing long-term homelessness in 2016 had 24 contacts with police over 90 days, including four citations, one arrest, one jail stay, and 18 other kinds of contacts, such as being ordered to move from one block to another. This 90-day period cost the city nearly \$4,000 and represents the experience of just one person and the costs related to them among the hundreds of people in Denver stuck in this cycle.² Cities across the United States have developed community responder models to better serve people in crisis. In these models, mental health practitioners and behavioral health clinicians respond to noncriminal emergencies in lieu of or in addition to police units. A study of one such program in Denver found that encounters with the program were associated with lower rates of criminal justice involvement and a reduced probability of arrest in the year following an encounter.³ Additionally, research shows that when a community reduces the burden of homelessness on police it means police have more time and resources to spend on other community priorities.⁴

Thank you again for the chance to speak to the Committee about such an important topic, and I look forward to continuing to provide the Committee and Congress with the data and evidence you need to make informed decisions about how to most effectively reduce homelessness.

Sincerely,

Samantha Batko

¹ <https://www.urban.org/policy-centers/metropolitan-housing-and-communities-policy-center/projects/elevating-alternatives-arrest-response-unsheltered-homelessness>

² <https://www.urban.org/features/five-charts-explain-homelessness-jail-cycle-and-how-break-it>

³ <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/aligning-crisis-response-community-needs>

⁴ <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/value-ending-veteran-and-chronic-homelessness-four-communities>