

**Statement of Lawrence A. Swanson to the Democratic Caucus Policy Committee
on the Importance of Home Repair to Preserve Affordable Housing in Pa.**

December 8, 2021 10:00 Am.

The best solution to the emerging affordable housing crisis in Pennsylvania is to ensure we preserve the existing stock of housing while we use all the tools available to add to the inventory. The preservation of older single family and small scale housing that is both homeowner and rental housing is key to this. The inventory in some Urban neighborhoods, older suburbs and the small cities and towns of Pa is aging and in need of repair. Critical structural repairs, if not performed result in the deterioration and loss of use of these units. A targeted effort to provide improvements through locally administered programs can be preserve units at a fraction of the cost of providing new affordable units.

ACTION -Housing had been involved in home repair and housing rehabilitation in single family and 1-4 unit housing at various levels of engagement for the last 45 years. The essential issue is to create the capacity to deliver quality improvements that are carefully specified and with strong quality control. Currently we operate the State funded Weatherization Program in all of Allegheny, Washington and Greene Counties. It has a basic weatherization component, a Crisis HVAC program that repairs and replaces HVAC systems and a limited home repair component when the basic work can not be completed due to the condition of the property. ACTION completes about 800 Crisis jobs each year, some 600 Weatherization jobs and 30 repairs to allow work to be done. The work done by ACTION - Housing is performed by private contractors who are trained, certified and whose workers are also trained through State sponsored programs.

The components that are most critical to keeping a home sound and habitable are listed below and they primarily involve structural issues that are necessary measures to protect the structural integrity of the building. The critical measures are (in addition to the energy saving measures we provide through PA DCED) :

1. Roof repair or replacement for the whole roof or parts of the roof to prevent water penetration which will eventually destroy structural supports and create mold that makes the unit unable to be used.
2. Elimination of water penetration to the foundation area and to the exterior walls for the protection of structural support.
3. Repair or replacement of older unsafe wiring of electrical systems in home.
4. Repair or replacement of entrance areas , steps and ancillary roof structures that are failing.
5. Repair and or replacement of plumbing that has failed in the property .
6. Repair or replacement of failed sewage systems and connections to main sewer lines.
7. Limited provision of cooling systems repair or installation when the medical condition as verified of the resident requires that to allow the person to remain in their home.
8. Minor modifications throughout the home related to safety , accessibility and general useability.

The essential elements of a successful small repair/ home preservation program involve stable funding over a period time that permits local administering agencies to add the staff , contractors or work crews, to provide appropriate training to all of them and to have staff experienced in construction who can perform quality control and resolve potential issues.

What makes it work at the local level:

1. Outreach to local code officials whose standards vary so that we can perform work in a cost effective and approved manner. Code and code enforcement vary by jurisdiction and essentially we need agreement to bring any system improved to current standard. Its cost prohibitive to bring all systems to current standard. This should be performed by the local programs as they implement the program.
2. Staff to administer the program with construction experience to identify the measures to be conducted, understand fair pricing of the work and supervise its completion. Many of the Weatherization agencies and Redevelopment Authorities have these core staff members.
3. Contractors and /or work crews who can accomplish the work safely , efficiently and perform work that meets current standards. Training that supports the contractors or work crews since there a many entry level jobs and we encourage hiring disadvantaged workers. There will be need to link to certified training programs at the State level or the Community College level.
4. Sufficient funding to operate program and achieve a work volume that supports the staff and keeps work crews/contractors busy.
5. Contingency funding that supports the programs ability to resolve construction matters. Simply put all parties can do exactly what was intended but the result may not work and satisfy the need. Successful repair programs have funding and procedures to resolve the 1 in 20 cases sot they don't consume an extraordinary amount of time.

We want to thank the Committee for this opportunity to provide input and we have attached a list of sample jobs and some photos of work done under the DCED limited repair program. We have not entirely redacted names and addresses so that members can see impact. Although this is all public record information we always treat all client information with sensitivity and ask the Committee to do so as well.

Sample jobs as attachments.

Barbara R owns her own home which she shares with her elderly parents, both of whom are in poor health; her father constrained to a wheelchair. The family has owned the house, which was built in the nineteen-twenties, for over thirty years.

ACTION-Housing was engaged to help the family resolve some major structural issues in the home, most of which were simply due to deferred maintenance. The main structure of the house was sound, but the exterior attachments were dangerously failing. The most striking issue was a front porch roof that had collapsed in the middle and was sagging low, about four feet from the floor, partially blocking the front door which was the only entrance available to the family. In addition, the exterior walls and ceiling of a rear bump-out three-season room had rotted so completely that the roof was simply defying gravity. Finally, a rear deck was so structurally unsound that one of the contractors assessing it for repairs fell through the floor and was seriously injured. A single, heavy snow-load could easily have torn all three structures from the house.

ACTION-Housing removed all three dangerous structures from the house. The bump-out was simply removed and its door from the main house closed off with a window installed with properly insulated walls around it. That back porch was torn down. In its place a new rear stoop with stairs to the ground was built, creating a safe secondary means of egress for the family in case of emergency. Finally, the entire front porch roof was removed. An architect was hired to draw a structural plan to satisfy the permitting process, and a new porch roof was constructed. The house also received a new roof, some minor plumbing and electrical repairs, and a local heating contractor donated time and material improve the family's boiler.

Except for this work, there was a serious possibility that one or more of the family members might have been injured in the event of a collapse of any of those structures, and in the event of such a collapse the house could have been further damaged by falling debris. The work ACTION-Housing performed preserved the family's ability to safely live in this home.

Tammy C and her daughter lived in a modest house that she'd purchased ten years prior. While living there she'd completed her education, working her way through college. As she was approaching graduation, she reached out to ACTION Housing for assistance with some serious safety issues with her home.

Her roof was leaking causing a portion of her bedroom ceiling to collapse, the floor surface of her front porch was rotting, and most dangerously, Knob & Tube wiring in the upstairs of the house had ceased to work at all, leaving two of the bedrooms without electricity. The family was running extension cords between the floors of the house to provide lighting and air conditioning to those rooms; a dangerous way to deliver electricity. Finally, several windows in the house had broken sashes and panes. The family was using plastic sheeting to try to prevent cold air from penetrating the living areas.

First, ACTION-Housing engaged an electrician to do a full Knob & Tube abatement to the entire second floor, replacing all the cloth-covered wiring, switches, outlets and sub-standard fixtures (the downstairs wiring and electric panel had already been replaced by a prior owner). Once that was complete the other issues were resolved. Three layers of shingles on the roof added significant costs to the job and required some structural repairs to the front porch roof as well as the deck. Most of the windows in the house were replaced, and finally, the bedroom ceiling that had collapsed was insulated, and new drywall installed.

Situations like these, with multiple serious deferred maintenance issues in a single home, are ubiquitous. A client may contact us for assistance with one issue, but when the house is inspected four more issues invariably appear. In general, any one of these types of repairs is beyond the financial capacity of low and moderate-income homeowners, let alone multiple serious conditions, especially for seniors and people with disabilities living on modest fixed incomes. The need for these types of home improvements is virtually limitless across Pennsylvania.





Larry Swanson

From: LuEthel Nesbit
Sent: Tuesday, November 30, 2021 9:53 AM
To: Larry Swanson
Subject: LiHeap Pilot/Deferral Jobs-4/1/19 -9/30/2019 & 3/11/20 - 9/30/20

Good Morning Larry,

These are the jobs from the Mon Valley Area:

1. Robert and Harriet Brysh, LP18-107-02/L18-024-02) 2717 Jenny Lind Street, McKeesport 15132. The right side of their roof was replaced so that we could weatherize her home. As you know because of the leaking part of the roof, we would not have been able to insulate which is one of the main components of weatherization.
2. Timothy Metzger (LP18-110-02/D18-344-02), 1001 Toman Avenue, Clairton, Pa115025. The back are of the roof was leaking and needed to be repaired as well as old roof vent needed to be replaced. This had to be done for same reason as above.
3. Gitel Blumberger & family- (LP19-113-02/D19-252-02) 305 Cypress Street, Homestead, PA 15120. She had Knob and Tube wiring in the attic which had to be removed before any weatherization services could be done. If not, we would have had to walk away.
4. Dennis Gore- (LP18-116-02/L18-011-02) 1803 Duquesne Avenue, McKeesport, PA 15132. He also had Knob and Tube wiring in attic that had to be removed before any weatherization services could be

Many of the homes in our cities are old and occupied by low income and elderly families who have these sort of home issues. With limited money, the small home issues just keep growing worse until they can no longer stay in their homes. Please let me know if I need to send you additional information.

Thanks for caring!

Lu Ethel Nesbit

Program Administrator

Weatherization/Mon Valley

Action Housing, Inc.

2901 Brownlee Street

McKeesport, PA 15132

412-678-8622 Ext. 124

lnesbit@wea.actionhousing.com

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Larry Swanson

From: Eric Anderson
Sent: Tuesday, November 30, 2021 1:20 PM
To: Larry Swanson
Subject: RE: examples for testimony

Hi Larry. Here are 2 Clients for you.

50 year old , disabled African American woman living at 734 Tokay St in Homewood. She started out in the Crisis Program 1/16/2018. Her furnace was leaking Carbon monoxide and we replaced it. She applied for weatherization and on the initial audit it was discovered that she had a leaking roof, missing siding and her main sewer line was backed up. She was deferred from Weatherization. The pilot program started and we receive a couple estimates. We were able to replace the sewer line from the basement to the street. 40' of 6" pvc pipe and fittings. This was **\$8000.00** We also replace the roof on the rear addition along with the gutters and the vinyl siding on the rear of the house. This cost **\$4000.00**. We paid **\$2000.00** from the pilot program and **\$2000.00** From the united way. We also did Weatherization work in the house. Insulation, 3 Windows, 2 Doors and other air sealing measures. **\$7500.00**.

We wouldn't have been able to do anything without the pilot program. We made her house more energy efficient and much healthier. She said she wouldn't have been able to stay in the house without our repairs.

#2

81Year old African American woman living at 125 E McIntyre Ave in the Northside, 15214. She came through the Crisis Program and needed her boiler replaced. **\$8000.00**. She applied for the Weatherization Program and on the initial audit she was deferred because of a leaking side roof. We replaced that roof through the pilot program. **\$2500.00**. We were then able to do Weatherization air sealing measures. She already had Insulation. **\$2000.00**. Again, we wouldn't have been able to do anything without the LIHEAP Pilot Program. She had buckets all over the living room and had no way of doing these repairs herself.

Thank you,

Eric Anderson

Program Administrator

Action Housing Inc

611 William Penn Place

Suite 800

Pittsburgh Pa 15219-6927

412-281-2102 Ext **2020**

412-227-6977 Fax

eanderson@wea.actionhousing.org



From: Larry Swanson <LSwanson@actionhousing.org>

Sent: Monday, November 29, 2021 8:34 AM

To: Pam Miljus <PMiljus@actionhousing.org>; Greg Simmons <gsimmons@actionhousing.org>; Eric Anderson <EAnderson@wea.actionhousing.org>; LuEthel Nesbit <LNesbit@wea.actionhousing.org>; Ken Provlic <KProvlic@actionhousing.org>