



TESTIMONY

January 25, 2022

MAPLEWOOD BILL 6177 AND HOUSING VOUCHERS

By David Stokes

Testimony before the Maplewood City Council

TO THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THIS COMMITTEE

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is David Stokes, director of municipal policy at the Show-Me Institute, a nonprofit, nonpartisan, Missouri-based think tank that advances sensible, well-researched, free-market solutions to state and local policy issues. The ideas presented here are my own.

Bill 6177 requires landlords in Maplewood to accept housing vouchers for rental property in Maplewood. The housing voucher program, commonly referred to as Section 8 housing, is a federal program. There is no federal requirement that landlords participate in it. The voluntary nature of the program is one of the reasons for its relative success. People are not forced to participate in it, yet many landlords do, and there is no documented shortage of low-income housing in St. Louis County. In fact, the St. Louis metropolitan area was recently ranked

as the fourth-most affordable housing market in the county in one survey.¹

There are numerous examples of government social programs where participation is voluntary. Doctors are not forced to accept Medicaid payments, yet many do. Grocery stores are not required to accept food stamps, yet many if not most do. That is how the housing voucher program has worked for many years. Requiring a local mandate in Maplewood will force landlords either to accept the burden of joining the program against their will or to creatively find other reasons to deny potential renters.

Participation in social welfare or government relief programs should be voluntary to the largest extent possible. You are not required to accept unemployment funds when you are unemployed if you do not want to. You are not required to receive food stamps if you do not wish to. Mandating that landlords in Maplewood participate in this program would be an example of Maplewood improperly inserting

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itself into a federal program and interfering with private property rights. Furthermore, it would be an uncalled-for requirement for property owners to join in a federal welfare program they may have no desire to join. Such a mandate would not increase housing opportunities in Maplewood. There are numerous, legal ways for landlords to deny prospective tenants, and requiring them to claim alternative reasons for denial instead of a straightforward “I choose not to participate in the housing voucher program” would be a waste of everyone’s time, including the potential tenant’s.

If Maplewood wants to do something that might actually help lower-income people who wish to live in the city, it should rezone parts of the city near transit stops, especially the two MetroLink stations, to allow for more multi-family housing in those neighborhoods.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit these comments.

NOTE

1. <https://www.realestatewitch.com/house-price-to-income-ratio-2021>



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