

Worcester State University announces Housing Justice Summit open to the community

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By: Deborah Alvarez O'Neil

Worcester State University will bring together community organizations, affordable housing advocates, housing experts, and city officials Tuesday, March 12, for its first Housing Justice Summit. The half-day event is open to the public.

With panel discussions, presentations, and a networking event, the summit will focus on issues surrounding the region's housing crisis and housing insecurity. The state of Massachusetts has been challenged by high housing costs, a dire shortage of affordable housing, and increasing demand for emergency shelter.

"There are so many aspects to housing security," said Dr. Danielle Morales, a sociologist and acting director of the Urban Action Institute, which organized the event. "Our goal is to start by giving an overall picture of the housing crisis, especially in Worcester. We want to build this community and connect people across Worcester State, Quinsigamond Community College, local agencies, and government."

The event is co-sponsored by Worcester State's Urban Studies Department and the Binienda Center for Civic Engagement, Quinsigamond Community College, and UniBank. The summit is the first in a series of Urban Action Institute events on housing justice.

"With Massachusetts being one of the wealthiest states, having housing insecurity issues is itself an injustice," said Midaly Carrasquillo Delgado, assistant director of the Urban Action Institute, who developed the idea for the summit.

The summit will be held in Sullivan Academic Center's Eager Auditorium/Room 146. It opens at noon with remarks from QCC President Luis Pedraja and Worcester State Provost Lois Wims. At 1

p.m. a panel discussion, “Worcester’s housing crisis: A view from the frontlines,” and audience Q&A will follow. Panelists include:

- Tim Garvin, president and CEO of United Way of Central Massachusetts
- Evis Terpollari, City of Worcester homeless projects manager
- Sean Harris, director of Community Engagement at Quinsigamond Community College
- Steve Stolberg, housing assistance coordinator at Center for Living & Working in Worcester
- Benji Kemper, community organizer at the Center for Living & Working
- Trish Appert, executive director of Friendly House
- Annessia Jimenez, community organizer at Worcester Common Ground
- Alex Corrales, CEO of Worcester Housing Authority
- Tasia Cerezo, co-founder and CEO of Meryl’s Safe Haven
- Darshia Diaz, system navigator at Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance

At 2:15 p.m., State Sen. Robyn Kennedy will give a presentation, “Who is part of Worcester’s future?” The presentation will be followed at 3 p.m. by a networking event, “How to get involved with housing justice,” that will feature exhibits by local agencies and campus departments working to make change in the current housing crisis.