

# Patty Schachtner: Preventing rural homelessness

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As I joined my family around the Thanksgiving table a couple weeks ago, I gave thanks for my kids and grandkids, the health of my loved ones, and the beautiful community we are a part of. I also thought of the struggles of those that are experiencing homelessness and poverty.

Though the economy is stable and unemployment is at a low, the average American isn't as financially stable. According to one report, millions of [Americans are just one missed paycheck away from poverty](#). They found that 40% of American households don't have enough money put away to make ends meet if they miss a paycheck or lose their job. Many of us are shockingly close to ending up in that situation.

Financial instability is a slippery slope to poverty and eventually homelessness. It is a scary reality that many of our neighbors are dealing with every day. Homelessness goes beyond financial instability, of course, and is frequently caused by a combination of mental health issues and addiction. We need to work on prevention with more resources for healthcare and treatment, but we also must support people who've already slid into homelessness.

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According to the annual [State of Homelessness in Wisconsin report](#), 22,087 people across the state experienced homelessness last year and almost 5,500 of those were children. Almost 1,000 people are without a home in Northwest Wisconsin. The largest barrier for these folks in our area is access to affordable housing or shelters

that can connect them with food, job trainings, clothing, and more. Just a few months ago, I [co-sponsored legislation](#) to put more money behind those efforts.

As medical examiner, I have made connections with many of the people and families of those who have passed away while homeless. As a healthcare provider at the Somerset schools, I have worked with kids that weren't in a secure home to try to keep them fed and safe so they can focus on being a kid. I have seen the face of homelessness and it's affecting our neighbors and community members every day.

As we work on preventing future homelessness, we also have to make sure that those who are about to head into a cold Wisconsin winter have a warm, safe, and comforting place to stay. Wisconsinites help each other- it is one of the things that makes me proudest to be a part of this community. I know that together, we can make sure everyone has a table to gather around with their loved ones.

*- Schachtner, D-Somerset, represents the 10th Senate District, which covers parts of Burnett, Dunn, Pierce, Polk, and St. Croix counties.*