

NLIHC Advocacy Guide

SUMMER/FALL 2016



Over the next few months, affordable housing and community development organizations have an opportunity to influence a number of critical issues before Congress. This includes increasing federal spending on key programs, expanding and improving the Low Income Housing Tax Credit, and ensuring that housing needs are addressed in criminal justice reform.

Advocates can also help make affordable housing an election issue. By joining together in a national effort led by Make Room—in partnership with NLIHC and other leaders—advocates can break through the noise of the Presidential elections and demand that Congress address the growing housing affordability crisis. Moreover, the campaign season gives advocates a unique opportunity to interact with candidates and mobilize voters ahead of election day.

Enclosed are five key ways that you can take action between now and the November elections to advocate for the issues that are most important to your mission, to the people you serve, and to your community.

We encourage you to make full use of the Congressional Recesses—between August 1 and September 6 and again between October 10 and November 11—to not only make your voice heard, but to continue to build strong, productive relationships with your Members of Congress.

If you have any questions, or need additional information, please feel free to contact me or NLIHC's Public Policy Director, Sarah Mickelson (smickelson@nlihc.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane Yentel". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Diane Yentel
President & CEO

1. INCREASE AFFORDABLE HOUSING RESOURCES

Please urge your Members of Congress to enact their final Fiscal Year (FY) 2017 spending bills as soon as possible.

State of Play: Congress's efforts to enact federal spending bills for FY 2017 have essentially stalled. None of the 12 spending bills—including spending for affordable housing and community development—have been signed into law.

When Congress returns from its recess on September 6, it will have just four weeks before the end of the fiscal year on September 30 to pass a Continuing Resolution (CR) to fund the federal government and avert a shutdown.

The question at hand is how long any CR will last—and what impact it will have on whether Congress is able to enact final FY 2017 spending bills. Some conservative Republicans are urging their leadership to enact a six-month CR to push off any decisions about spending into the next Congress and Presidency. Other members of Congress are pushing for a short-term CR to fund the government through the November election, so that Congress can enact their final spending bills by the end of the year.

Over the Congressional Recess, please reach out to your Members of Congress to urge them to enact full spending bills as soon as possible. Both the House and Senate proposed bills would significantly increase funding for affordable housing and community development, and a long-term CR would put these gains at risk.

Background on FY 2017 Spending Bills:

Overall, the House bill provides \$1.2 billion in additional funding for HUD's affordable housing and community development programs over FY 2016 enacted levels. The Senate bill—which was approved on the floor in May—provides \$1.5 billion in additional spending.

Both bills propose significant increases for Housing Choice Vouchers, Place-Based Rental Assistance, Section 202 Housing for the Elderly, Homeless Assistance Grants, and Lead-Based Paint Hazard Reduction. In addition, both the House and Senate bills provide level funding for the HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME) program, Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA) program.

For an overview of the proposed FY 2017 funding levels, see [NLIHC's updated budget chart](#).

Contact: Elayne Weiss, eweiss@nlihc.org

2. EXPAND AND IMPROVE THE HOUSING CREDIT

Please urge your Senators to cosponsor the expanded Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act of 2016 (S.3237), introduced by Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA), Orrin Hatch (R-UT), and Ron Wyden (D-OR).

Tell them that any expansion of the Housing Credit *must be tied to reforms* to ensure that this resource better serves our nation's most vulnerable families.

State of Play: On July 14, Senators Cantwell (D-WA), Hatch (R-UT), and Wyden (D-OR) introduced S.3237, the *Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act of 2016*.

This comprehensive bill goes beyond what the Senators originally proposed in previous legislation (S.2962). S. 3237 includes all of the provisions from S.2962, including an expansion of the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (Housing Credit) by 50% over five years. S. 3237 includes a number of important improvements to ensure that the Housing Credit can better address the housing needs of those with the greatest, clearest needs—homeless individuals, extremely low-income seniors, families with children, people with disabilities, and Native American communities.

Reforms included in S.3237 would provide a 50% basis boost—thereby increasing the investment of Housing Credits—for developments that set aside at least 20% of units for households with extremely low incomes or that are living in poverty. With this much-needed financial incentive, S. 3237 will help housing developments remain financially sustainable while serving families with limited means.

Additional program improvements would encourage Housing Credit development in rural communities and on Native American lands—areas with some of the most severe housing needs.

Moreover, the bill includes many other programmatic changes to strengthen and streamline the Housing Credit and to support the preservation of existing affordable housing.

Please reach out to your Senators to urge them to cosponsor S.3237. Tell them that any expansion of the Housing Credit **must be tied to reforms** to ensure that this resource better serves our nation's most vulnerable families.

It is especially important to reach out to Republican Senators. Senators Cantwell, Hatch, and Wyden want to ensure that for every Democrat who agrees to cosponsor the legislation, there is a Republican cosponsor as well. Having strong bipartisan support will make it easier for Congress to include these reforms in any tax reform legislation.

For more details, see [NLIHC's Fact Sheet on S.3237](#). Click here to read the legislation: <http://bit.ly/2aNpQSP>

Contact: Sarah Mickelson, smickelson@nlihc.org

3. INCLUDE HOUSING IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

Please tell your Representative to push for a vote on criminal justice reform legislation and support future legislation that includes a comprehensive plan to address the housing needs of justice-involved individuals.

State of Play: Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI) is working with colleagues from both sides of the aisle to bring a package of criminal justice reform bills to the House floor for votes in September.

While some of the bills include some language around housing, none include a comprehensive plan to meet the housing needs of—or reduce barriers for— people returning from prisons or jails. Affordable housing resources are already scarce in the low-income communities where formerly incarcerated individuals typically return. Because of their criminal records, justice-involved people face significant barriers in accessing affordable housing, placing them at risk of becoming homeless, or recidivating. One study has shown that formerly incarcerated individuals without stable housing were twice more likely to recidivate than those living in stable homes.

NLIHC and other partners have been working to support legislation that reduces barriers to stable, affordable housing for people with criminal records. Currently, public housing authorities (PHAs) and owners of federally assisted housing have broad discretion in screening out applicants with criminal records or precluding justice-involved individuals from rejoining their families. Please tell your Representatives to push for a vote on criminal justice reform legislation and support future legislation that includes a comprehensive plan to address the housing needs of justice-involved individuals. Unless Congress addresses the housing needs of formerly incarcerated individuals, criminal justice reform efforts will not be as effective.

Contact: Elayne Weiss, eweiss@nlihc.org

4. JOIN THE MAKE ROOM CAMPAIGN

Please join the [Make Room](#) campaign to send 1 million messages to Congress about the growing housing affordability crisis.

Background: Make Room—in partnership with NLIHC and other national organizations—have joined together for a national effort to send 1 million messages to Congress about the critical need to end housing insecurity once and for all.

Between August 1 and the November election, organizations across the nation will share a common message: our nation is facing a housing affordability crisis of record proportions that demands Congressional leadership.

NLIHC encourages all national, state, and local organizations, as well as individuals, to join the campaign.

Starting on August 1, Make Room will feature a national sign-on letter and an advocacy toolkit on the Make Room website.

Contact: Sarah Mickelson, smickelson@nlihc.org

5. MAKE AFFORDABLE HOUSING AN ELECTION ISSUE

Use NLIHC's Voterization materials to engage candidates and voters this election season.

Background: As part of our Voterization efforts, NLIHC helps local housing organizations register voters, engage candidates, raise the profile of affordable housing issues, and mobilize low-income renters and their allies on election day. This November 8, voters will not only elect a new President, but they will decide the outcome in 34 Senate and 438 House races.

The campaign season provides advocates—either as an individual or in an official organizational capacity—a unique opportunity to interact with candidates. Remember, nonprofit organizations are legally allowed to participate in elections, so long as all activities are done in a non-partisan manner.

Members of Congress are most accessible during the campaign season, and it is often the best opportunity to encourage them to commit to your priorities in front of a public audience.

Here are some activities you might consider as candidates run for office this summer and fall:

- Attend candidate forums or town hall meetings and ask each candidate how they plan to address the housing affordability crisis;
- Produce a candidate questionnaire that asks all candidates to state their positions on affordable housing policies and ending homelessness;
- Invite candidates to speak to your members or clients. Invite them to take a tour of your housing development or community center so they can see the need for decent, affordable housing first hand.
- Write articles for your newsletter or blog that challenge candidates to discuss affordable housing in their campaigns. Follow up on campaign statements or events with letters to the editor or op-eds explaining why affordable housing should be a top priority.

Voterization resources are available on NLIHC's [website](#).

Contact: Joey Lindstrom, jlindstrom@nlihc.org