

## MEET NEW NLIHC BOARD CHAIR MARK ALLISON



*NLIHC's New Board Chair, Mark Allison*

Dear Friend,

Whether you met him at NLIHC's Annual Housing Policy Conference or heard from him in this very column, everybody knows former Board Chair George Moses. George is an inspiring leader who truly embodies the mission of the Coalition. I am humbled to call him my friend. He might not have gotten us all the way to the promised land, but we're sure better off for following him these last six years!

No movement can be successful, and no organization can be effective, unless it includes the people it says it represents. Residents of public housing and tenants living in subsidized housing - and the millions more who are on waiting lists - are not only NLIHC's moral constituency but an essential part of everything we do and stand for. I am so proud to be associated with a group that recognizes your voice as one of its greatest strengths.

I was thrilled to meet many of you who attended NLIHC's conference in March. For those of you who were unable to join us, check out a conference wrap-up on page 7. Conference attendees received copies of NLIHC's most recent *Out of Reach* and *Housing Spotlight*, which we review on page 3. You'll see this issue is packed with much more including details about the proposed Affordable Housing and Self-Sufficiency Improvement Act, as well as a review of what's new with the federal budget.

As the new Chair of the Board, I hope to get to know each of you as well as George did, so that I can hear, understand and fight for your concerns and dreams. I hope you enjoy this issue of *Tenant Talk*, and I look forward to working with you all in our fight for affordable housing! As George would say, "You know what I mean?"

Yours in advocacy,

*Mark Allison*

Mark Allison, Chair

NLIHC Board of Directors

### THE NEW TENANT TALK ICONS!



Learn more about housing policy & what's happening on Capitol Hill.



In-depth info on housing policy & programs from a research perspective.



Information from residents' and tenants' perspectives.

### IN THIS ISSUE

#### CONGRATS

NLIHC honors George Moses on page 5.

#### LEARN

#### MORE

about the budget on page 2, and minimum rents on page 4.

#### GET THE

#### FACTS

The NLIHC Research team presents its latest findings from this year's *Out of Reach* and *Housing Spotlight* on page 3.

#### WHAT'S

#### NEW?

Take a look at the new NLIHC website on page 6.

## PRESIDENT, CONGRESS WORKING ON FY13 BUDGET FOR HOUSING



As we described in the Fall 2011 issue of *Tenant Talk*, the federal budget for each year begins with the President's budget proposal to Congress, detailing what each federal department needs to fund its programs for the next year. The House and Senate then consider the President's budget request, and come up with their own proposal for the federal budget.

The budget process for next year is already under way, with both the President and the Senate weighing in. On February 13, the President sent his fiscal year 2013 (FY13) budget request to Congress. The request includes funding for affordable housing programs at HUD and at the Department of Agriculture's Rural Housing Service. Congress held hearings on the President's budget request at which the HUD Secretary and Assistant Secretaries discussed the reasoning for their budget requests. The President's FY13 request does not include enough funding to fully fund tenant-based vouchers, project-based Section 8, or public housing. The President also asked Congress to change some HUD policies in a way that would be harmful for the lowest income tenants in these programs.

The House and Senate Committees on the Budget each set the overall spending level for discretionary spending that includes funding for housing programs for FY13 in late March. The Senate's spending level is in line with the Budget Control Act of 2011 that sets out Congress' spending agreement for the next ten years. The House decided to ignore the Budget Control Act and lower the amount of funding for discretionary spending in FY13.

The House and Senate Committees on Appropriations then announced how much each appropriations subcommittee has available for FY13. The subcommittees that fund housing programs are the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) Subcommittee and the Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Subcommittee.

The Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) marked up its FY13 spending bill on April 17. The Senate Appropriations Committee

then marked up the THUD Subcommittee bill on April 19. The Senate THUD Subcommittee's FY13 allocation is \$53.4 billion, a \$2 billion cut below the FY12 allocation and \$14 billion below the FY10 allocation. Nonetheless, the Subcommittee bill would provide a higher level of funding for numerous HUD programs than would the President's budget and would not implement several proposals that would be harmful to the poorest residents of HUD programs.

### **Terms to Know**

**Fiscal Year:** The 12 month period the government uses for bookkeeping purposes. The federal fiscal year is October 1 - September 30.

**Discretionary spending:** Congress must approve this funding every year and can choose to increase or decrease the amounts for a specific program, or cut a program's funding altogether.

**Mandatory spending:** Programs funded this way are also called entitlements. They continue to operate year after year unless Congress votes to change them.

**Mark-up:** The process Congress uses to debate, amend and rewrite proposed legislation. Committees will approve, or *pass*, bills at a mark-up session.

The Senate rejected the President's proposal to mandate new or increase minimum rents paid by the lowest income households served by the Tenant-Based Rental Assistance, Project-Based Rental Assistance, and Public Housing (see the article on minimum rents in this issue of *Tenant Talk* for more information).

In April 26, the Senate Appropriations Committee marked up its Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies bill, S. 2375, which funds Rural Housing. S. 2375 would fund some rural rental housing programs at the level requested by the President and other programs at levels higher than the President's request. Regardless, the Senate bill would still provide insufficient funding to meet rural housing needs.

The House THUD and Agriculture Subcommittees are expected to mark up their bills later in the spring or summer.

## GET THE FACTS!



Two new research reports from NLIHC show that rents are “out of reach” for many families, and that the supply of affordable housing is shrinking.

According to *Out of Reach 2012*, **a family must earn \$18.25 an hour, or about \$38,000 a year, to afford the rent and utility costs on a modest two-bedroom apartment in the U.S. This wage is known as the Housing Wage.** Yet, the report also shows us that many renters earn far less than \$18.25 an hour. **In fact, the average working renter only earns \$14.15 an hour.** This is over \$4 short of the Housing Wage.

The situation is even worse for minimum wage earners and the lowest income households. Extremely low income renters earn roughly \$20,000 a year in 2012. The rule of thumb is that a household should spend no more than 30% of their income towards rent. This means that an extremely low income family can only afford to spend about \$505 a month on rent and utilities. But, as *Out of Reach 2012* shows, finding an apartment at this price is almost impossible.

Many renters struggle to fill the gap between the cost of housing and their wages by taking on a second or third job or working extra hours. In the case of a worker earning the federal minimum wage of \$7.25, he or she must work 101 hours in a single week to afford the rent. And those unable to work so many hours are forced to rent apartments beyond their means, struggling to make ends meet and pay the rest of their bills.

In fact, according to NLIHC’s other recent research report *Housing Spotlight: The Shrinking Supply of Affordable Housing*, this is exactly what a huge number of low income renters are doing. Seventy-six percent of extremely low income renters were paying more than half of their income on rent and utility costs in 2010.

As we know from *Out of Reach 2012*, part of the problem is high rents. But we also see that another big problem is the huge shortage of affordable and available apartments. *Housing Spotlight* shows that there are only 30 affordable and available units for every 100 extremely low income renter households. This is fewer units than were affordable and available in 2009.

Go to the new Resource Library at [www.nlihc.org/library](http://www.nlihc.org/library) to read the reports and find out how things look your state. And feel free to contact our research team ([megan@nlihc.org](mailto:megan@nlihc.org) or [elina@nlihc.org](mailto:elina@nlihc.org)) if you have any questions about how to use these facts!



## JOIN THE NATIONAL HOUSING LAW PROJECT’S RESIDENT TRAINING ACADEMY

The Resident Training Academy is for residents, community organizers, and tenant advocates. The National Housing Law Project (NHLP) will present five web-based trainings. Learn the basics of the HUD housing programs and key issues that define residents’ rights without leaving your community! NHLP will offer each week’s training on the web in two sessions: first, a 60-minute virtual classroom on the topic of the week, followed by a second session of group discussion that explores the material in greater detail.

### What you’ll learn about HUD-Assisted Rental Programs:

- How they are alike and how they differ
- Participation and Organizing Rights
- Rent-Setting Policies
- Reasonable Accommodation Rights
- Tools residents can use to enforce their rights

### Read a few comments from recent NHLP Academy participants:

“Thanks so much for doing this! While some of the information was already known to me, I learned and gained a lot of valuable new information.”

“I truly thank you for taking the time to do this academy. I am especially loving the materials provided (which I will share). I learned a great deal about project-based vouchers vs. project-based section 8.”

**To Register Online, go to [www.nhlp.org](http://www.nhlp.org) or Call 415-546-7000, Ext. 3110**

Please share this information and help NLIHC and NHLP spread the word about these useful training sessions!

## MINIMUM RENTS: HUD, HOUSE PROPOSALS THREATEN SOME RESIDENTS' SECURITY



As readers of *Tenant Talk* may already know, HUD has a minimum rent policy for public housing, project-based Section 8 and voucher tenants. This policy states that residents will pay about 30% of their monthly income for rent. If 30% of a renter's monthly income is less than the housing agency's minimum rent, then the renter pays the minimum rent.

About 75% of public housing agencies have a \$50 minimum rent for voucher and public housing residents, and the rest either do not have any minimum rent or have one that is less than \$50 a month. All project-based Section 8 tenants have a minimum rent of \$25, which is set by HUD for all project-based tenants across the country.

Tenants and residents need to be aware of two proposals that could change minimum rents. The first proposal was introduced by HUD in the President's FY13 budget request. The second proposal comes from the House of Representatives.

HUD proposes to make minimum rents mandatory. HUD also proposes increasing the minimum rents. Currently, PHAs have the option to set the minimum rent for vouchers and public housing at up to \$50 per month. For project-based Section 8 units, minimum rents are \$25 per month. HUD proposes raising all three of these minimum rents to \$75 per month. HUD proposes implementing this mandatory minimum rent for other programs as well.

This would be a significant hike in rent for the households who earn the least amount of money. Some households would see their rent increase by 50%. Approximately 500,000 households would have their rents raised.

The House put a similar proposal in its housing reform bill, called the Affordable Housing and Self-Sufficiency Improvement Act (AHSSIA). This legislation would make many reforms to the voucher, public housing, and project-based Section 8 programs. Many of these proposed changes would directly impact HUD-assisted residents in each of these programs.

NLIHC and others are working to change the bill as it makes its way through the House. The House bill does not have a bill number yet.

NLIHC is urging Congress to support a housing reform bill that improves HUD-assisted housing programs for residents, as well as for housing authorities, landlords, and owners.

The latest would require that each voucher, public housing, and project-based Section 8 household pay \$69.45 a month as a minimum rent, even in those public housing agencies that so far have decided not to have a minimum rent of \$50. The bill would simultaneously improve current hardship policies and would allow housing agencies and owners to adopt minimum rents of less than \$69.45 if they had a good reason to do so.

The latest bill draft makes big changes to the draft bill's other most controversial section, that on expanding and making permanent the Moving to Work (MTW) demonstration program. NLIHC has long opposed any expansion of MTW as the demonstration has never been evaluated so that lessons learned can be incorporated into any expansion. However, NLIHC is participating with HUD and several national stakeholder groups in an attempt to reach agreement on a MTW program that could be included in the bill. The agreement of the stakeholder group is included in the latest draft bill.

There is some good news. In its FY13 HUD appropriations bill, the Senate Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) rejected HUD's proposal to increase minimum rents. According to the Subcommittee, HUD "has not provided sufficient assurance to the Committee that implementation of the minimum rent provision would not adversely affect vulnerable tenants. Given that Section 8 tenants have an average income of \$12,549 and some have no income, the Committee does not feel it is responsible to mandate new or higher contributions from the program's poorest families."

Public housing and project-based Section 8 residents and voucher tenants should urge their Members of Congress to reject an increase to minimum rents. Residents and tenants should also encourage Members to stop expansion of the MTW program.



## GEORGE MOSES RECEIVES NLIHC LIFETIME SERVICE AWARD



On March 27, George Moses, the immediate past chair of NLIHC's Board of Directors and a long-time housing advocate, was presented with the Cushing Niles Dolbeare Lifetime Service Award.

George was recognized for his lifetime of leadership on behalf of fellow residents and their rights to safe, decent and affordable homes. The award was presented at NLIHC's 30th Annual Leadership Awards Reception. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) received the Edward W. Brooke, III Housing Leadership Award at that same event.



Above: NLIHC Board Chair Mark Allison presents George Moses with the Cushing Niles Dolbeare Lifetime Service Award. Left: George Moses addresses the crowd at the 2012 Leadership Reception.

Larry Swanson, Executive Director of ACTION-Housing Inc. of Pittsburgh, regaled the audience with stories of George as an advocate at home. Sheila Crowley, President and CEO of NLIHC, read excerpts from a letter of congratulations from Representative Mike Doyle (D-PA), a certificate of recognition from Senator Patrick Toomey (R-PA), and a tribute to Mr. Moses that Senator Bob Casey (D-PA) had entered into the Congressional Record.

Congratulations, George!

## DEAR TENANT TALK: A CONVERSATION WITH OUR READERS

**Dear Tenant Talk,**

I've seen the *Out of Reach 2012* report on NLIHC's website. The statistics for my city and state are interesting (the housing wage here in Texas is \$15.88!), but how can I use the information to advocate for affordable housing? Do you have any suggestions?

**R.W., Beaumont, TX**

**Dear R.W.,**

Share the data! *Out of Reach* is a report, but it is also a tool. Talk about it with your neighbors. Do they earn less than the housing wage in your state? Reach out to local advocacy groups. They may see that there is a shortage of affordable housing, but do they know just how expensive housing is in your community? Connect the data to your own experience and talk to your elected officials about it. It is important that lawmakers see numbers and facts, but also that they hear how those numbers and facts affect their constituents. Or, write a letter to the editor of your hometown newspaper. If you are a social media user, post information from *Out of Reach* on your Facebook page or talk about it on Twitter!

**Dear Tenant Talk,**

NLIHC's new website looks great! Is there still a way that I can use it to find out information on my federal representatives?

**C.H., Richmond, VA**

**Dear C.H.,**

Absolutely. As with our old site, you can type in your zip code in the section titled "Contact Congress" to immediately find out who your elected officials are and how you can reach them. Now "Contact Congress" is located on the right hand side of every page on the site. Just above that on the website, you'll see a box where you can sign up to take action. By sharing your contact information with us, you'll receive our Calls to Action, which alert you to the ways you can advocate on a range of housing issues. We hope you'll explore our new website even further! You'll find housing policy fact sheets, our most recent research, information about how to become an NLIHC member, and more!

## INTRODUCING THE NEW NLIHC WEBSITE



Have you visited [www.nlihc.org](http://www.nlihc.org) recently? NLIHC has a brand new website! Our new website is designed to be easy to use and give you all the tools you need to be an informed advocate.

- Looking for our reports and newsletters? Visit our Resource Library to find *Out of Reach*, *Tenant Talk*, and all our other research and publications: <http://nlihc.org/library>
- Interested in learning more about housing policy? Visit our Policy Issues page to download fact sheets and read in-depth articles on many important issues: <http://nlihc.org/issues>

• Want to find information about your community? Looking for local events? Visit our Local Events and Resources page: <http://nlihc.org/involvement/local>

• Need information just for residents and tenants? Visit our Residents & Tenants page: <http://nlihc.org/involvement/residents>

• Do you need help with a housing problem? Click on “Looking for Housing” on the right side of any page. It will take you to instructions for how to find help.

We are always working to make our website better. We want to know what you think. How can we make our website easier to use? How can we improve our Tenants and Residents page? Let us know! Please contact our Outreach Team if you have suggestions or questions about our new website.

## NLIHC'S FIRST EVER RESIDENT ORGANIZING AWARD!

NLIHC's Resident Organizing Award is given for outstanding achievement in resident organizing activity at the state or local level that furthers the mission of NLIHC: achieving socially just public policy that assures people with the lowest incomes in the United States have affordable and decent homes. This award is presented at NLIHC's Annual Housing Policy Conference.

In 2012, NLIHC honored Mass Alliance of HUD Tenants (MAHT) for their 2011 Save Our Homes campaign that moved U. S. Senator Scott Brown to support full funding for HUD rental housing programs, and to help pass two amendments to the FY12 THUD Appropriations bill that will protect up to 80,000 families nationwide. The award was presented to MAHT at the 2012 NLIHC Housing Policy Conference.

For more information contact Mary Kolar, Outreach Associate, at [mary@nlihc.org](mailto:mary@nlihc.org).



Vice President of the MAHT Board of Directors, Kathleen Burke accepts the Resident Organizing Award from NLIHC Board Member Daisy Franklin.

## RESIDENTS & TENANTS ATTEND 2012 NLIHC HOUSING POLICY CONFERENCE



Residents and tenant organizing groups alike gathered in Washington, D.C. this March to attend NLIHC's Annual Housing and Policy Conference. After last year, NLIHC staff asked residents for feedback about how to improve their conference experience. From this feedback NLIHC increased the number of workshops focused on resident issues. Workshops this year included Understanding PHA Budgets, Section 3 Employment Opportunities, and Principles of Tenant Organizing.

NLIHC wanted to take its understanding of resident-related issues to the next level, so staff sat down for a series of interviews with residents and tenant organizing leaders. Here is what they had to say:

"I'm fortunate because I had the amazing opportunity to work with Public Housing Association of Residents (PHAR) on its tenant intern training program. I feel strongly that this program is the way towards lasting change. People know policy, they just need to share and organize. The intern program has been a way for us to pass knowledge on and expand our organizing abilities and we are going to go out and win this year. Residents interested in participating in the intern program next year can apply through our website at [www.phar.typepad.com](http://www.phar.typepad.com)."

**- Brandon Collins of PHAR shares his latest tenant organizing experience.**

"I feel it is an obligation of all elected officials to learn everything they can about what's happening on the federal level that is going to impact our residents. This is even more important when we are looking at such severe cuts to funding. It is critical to hear what other communities are doing to help lift people out of poverty, and the conference gives me this opportunity. My one suggestion would be to encourage all elected officials to attend the NLIHC Conference each year. We are the ones on the front lines that need to implement these decisions and we need to be more involved in the conversation."

**- Dave Norris, City Council member and former Mayor of Charlottesville, VA on why it's important to attend the NLIHC Conference.**

"Each year I find my source of strength when I come to this Conference. The power is when we come together and share our stories of struggles and successes. Sometimes I feel so helpless, but when I am here I feel so empowered. I want to see all types of residents come together and fight towards the same goal. We cannot afford to separate ourselves, but we must find strength in our similarities and numbers."

**- A message of unity from Kathy Watkins of the Alliance of Cambridge Tenants.**

"Keep the fight, this is a battle... this is a war. In war there is always collateral damage, but failure is not an option. You must persevere and there will be a victory. I know because I have persevered and pushed on, and I have won many battles. I myself was living in substandard housing and I had no idea. It was a community organizer like myself who helped open my eyes. I was taught how to fight for my rights. We must pass this knowledge on and help each other...that is where our strength is...in coming together."

**- Words of inspiration from community leader Erika Sipp.**



Community leader Erika Sipp discusses tenant rights at the NLIHC 2012 Conference.



Ira Westlund reviews workshop materials at the NLIHC 2012 Conference.



NLIHC Board Member Leonard Williams addresses a workshop session.

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Meet the New NLIHC Board  
Chair, Mark Allison!

## ABOUT NLIHC

The National Low Income Housing Coalition is dedicated solely to achieving socially just public policy that assures people with the lowest incomes in the United States have affordable and decent homes. Established in 1974 by Cushing N. Dolbeare, NLIHC educates, organizes, and advocates to ensure decent, affordable housing within healthy neighborhoods for everyone.

Contact NLIHC. Your first point of contact at NLIHC is your Outreach Associate. NLIHC's Outreach Associates are members' direct contacts for answers to federal policy or membership questions. NLIHC's Outreach Associates are each assigned to specific states. Email [outreach@nlihc.org](mailto:outreach@nlihc.org) or call 202-662-1530 x232 to be put in touch with your Outreach Associate today!

Become a Member. Join NLIHC today to stay informed about affordable housing issues, keep in touch with advocates around the country, and support NLIHC's work. Residents of public or assisted housing or other self-identified low income individuals can join for \$3 a year. Resident association memberships are \$10 per year.

Join at [www.nlihc.org/join](http://www.nlihc.org/join). You can also e-mail us at [outreach@nlihc.org](mailto:outreach@nlihc.org) or call 202-662-1530.



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ON THE HOME FRONT