

2021 PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES



NLIHC works with members of Congress, the Administration, affordable housing and community development organizations and advocates, low-income renters and other stakeholders across the nation to ensure the lowest-income people – including people of color, seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, people experiencing homelessness, and others – have a safe, affordable and accessible place to call home.

In 2021, NLIHC will focus on the immediate and urgent challenges facing low-income renters and people experiencing homelessness during the coronavirus pandemic.

NLIHC will also advocate for our long-term policy priorities, including:

- Ensuring federal responses to the pandemic and other disasters are fair and equitable;
- Protecting, monitoring and expanding the national Housing Trust Fund;
- Preserving and increasing resources for federal affordable housing programs serving extremely low-income families;
- Ensuring protections for low-income renters;
- Promoting equitable access to affordable housing; and
- Championing anti-poverty solutions

ENSURE FEDERAL RESPONSES TO THE PANDEMIC AND DISASTERS ARE FAIR AND EQUITABLE

NLIHC leads the [Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition](#) of 850 national, state, and local organizations, including many working directly with disaster-impacted communities and with first-hand experience recovering after disasters. We work to ensure a

complete and equitable housing recovery for the lowest-income and most marginalized households, including people of color, people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, seniors, families with children, immigrants, and other individuals and their communities.

During the coronavirus pandemic, NLIHC and the NLIHC-led DHRC has advocated for [essential resources and protections](#) to address the health and housing needs of people experiencing homelessness and low-income renters. We helped secure \$12 billion in housing and homelessness funds through the CARES Act, but far more resources are needed.

During 2021, we will continue to lead our national coalition to advocate for a federal, uniform moratorium on evictions, at least \$100 billion in emergency rental assistance, resources to respond to and prevent outbreaks among people experiencing homelessness, and other funds and protections to ensure housing stability. We will continue to host national calls to share information about the responses being carried out by federal, state, and local governments, homeless service providers, housing providers, and advocates, and we will help increase awareness of available federal resources. More information is available on [NLIHC's website](#).

This coalition will also work in 2021 to advance a comprehensive set of recommendations for [Congress](#), [FEMA](#), and [HUD](#) on disaster housing recovery [issues](#).

PROTECT AND EXPAND THE NATIONAL HOUSING TRUST FUND

The national Housing Trust Fund is the first new federal housing resource in a generation that is exclusively targeted to help build, preserve, and rehabilitate housing for people with the lowest incomes. NLIHC, its members, and

other stakeholders played a critical role in the creation of the Housing Trust Fund in the Housing and Economic Recovery Act of 2008. In 2016, the first \$174 million in HTF dollars were allocated to states. In 2020, \$322 million was available nationally.

Far more resources for the HTF are needed to address the severe shortage of housing affordable and available to people most impacted by America's housing crisis - those with the lowest incomes. NLIHC leads the [Housing Trust Fund Implementation and Policy Group](#), a coalition of national advocates committed to protecting and expanding this new resource.

In 2021, NLIHC will continue to build Congressional support to increase funding to the Housing Trust Fund through investments in infrastructure and other legislative opportunities.

PRESERVE AND INCREASE RESOURCES FOR FEDERAL AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROGRAMS

Any new federal housing resources must be targeted to address the underlying cause of the affordable housing crisis - the severe shortage of affordable homes for people with extremely low incomes.

Increasing Federal Budgets for Affordable Housing

Despite a proven track record, federal housing programs have been chronically underfunded. Today, just one in four families eligible for federal housing assistance get the help they need. NLIHC leads the [Campaign for Housing and Community Development Funding \(CHCDF\)](#), a coalition of 75 national and regional organizations dedicated to ensuring the highest allocation of resources possible to support affordable housing and community development. NLIHC advocates for increased funding for Housing Choice Vouchers, public housing, project-based rental assistance, and homeless assistance grants, among many other programs.

In 2021, Congress will have the first opportunity in a decade to invest in affordable housing at the scale necessary after the Budget Control Act - and the low spending caps required by the law - expire.

Expanding and Reforming Resources in the Tax Code

NLIHC supports the creation of a new, innovative renters' tax credit to help the lowest-income families afford a place to call home, as well as an expansion of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (Housing Credit) program. Any expansion of the Housing Credit must also reform and improve the program to increase its ability to serve extremely low-income renters and encourage development in challenging markets, like rural communities and tribal lands. Any effort to divert scarce federal resources to address the limited housing challenges faced by higher income households is wasteful and misguided.

Increasing Resources to Build and Preserve Housing in Tribal and Rural Areas

Native Americans living in tribal areas have some of the worst housing needs in the United States, with exceptionally high poverty rates, low incomes, overcrowding, lack of plumbing and heat, and unique development issues. Despite the pressing need for safe, decent homes, federal investments in affordable housing on tribal lands have been chronically underfunded for decades. NLIHC works with tribal leaders and advocates to increase housing resources for tribal nations with the greatest needs, improve data collection on tribal housing needs, and reduce federal barriers to housing development. In 2021, there may be an opportunity to expand tribal housing resources through the reauthorization of Native American Housing Assistance and Self Determination Act, an infrastructure package, and other legislative opportunities.

NLIHC also works to preserve and expand affordable housing available in rural areas by supporting funding for USDA Rural Development programs and through opportunities to preserve the agency's rental housing portfolio.

ENSURE PROTECTIONS FOR LOW-INCOME RENTERS

Opposing Efforts to Cut Housing Benefits

NLIHC opposes efforts to cut housing benefits through rent increases, work requirements, time limits, and other restrictions. These so-called reforms are neither cost effective nor a solution to the very real issue of poverty impacting millions of families living in subsidized housing or in need of housing. NLIHC leads the [Preventing Benefit Cuts](#) coalition to educate members of Congress on proven solutions to ending housing poverty, including expanding—not slashing—investments in affordable homes, job training, education, childcare, and other policies to help families thrive.

Opposing Anti-Immigrant Proposals

NLIHC opposes proposals that deter eligible immigrant families from seeking housing benefits or that force immigrant families currently receiving housing benefits to forego that assistance or face eviction. NLIHC co-leads the [Keep Families Together](#) campaign with the National Housing Law Project to oppose proposals to prohibit “mixed-status” families from living in public and other subsidized housing at HUD and USDA. NLIHC also participates in the [Protecting Immigrant Families](#) campaign to oppose proposals to make it easier for the Departments of Homeland Security and Justice to declare certain immigrants to be a “public charge,” denying them admission to the U.S. and possibly threatening deportation. In 2021, these coalitions will work to expand access to housing for immigrant households.

Preventing Evictions and Housing Instability

NLIHC advocates for the creation of a national housing stabilization fund to provide emergency assistance to extremely low-income households to prevent housing instability and homelessness. Temporary assistance can stabilize households experiencing sudden economic shocks before it leads to situations

requiring more prolonged and extensive housing assistance. NLIHC supports legislation advocating for just cause evictions and a national right to counsel, among other anti-eviction protections.

Promoting Healthy Housing

All low-income renters deserve to live in healthy, accessible, high-quality homes. NLIHC supports efforts to improve housing conditions in federally assisted housing, including efforts to revise the REAC inspection process and address lead-based paint, carbon monoxide poisoning, and other unsafe and unhealthy housing conditions.

Protecting HUD Residents

For decades, Congress has failed to provide adequate funding to maintain public housing in good condition, and as a result, public housing faces a more than \$70 billion backlog in capital improvement needs. In response, HUD has sought to “reposition” public housing by reducing the number of homes in the public housing stock through the demolition or disposition of public housing, voluntary conversion of public housing to vouchers, and the retention of assets after a Declaration of Trust release. NLIHC monitors these efforts to help ensure that current and future public housing residents are not negatively impacted.

NLIHC also monitors the Rental Assistance Demonstration – which converts public housing to Section 8 funding streams in order to better access other forms of needed financing – to ensure resident protections and other requirements are enforced.

In 2021, NLIHC will work to secure major investments to repair and rehabilitate public housing, and to advance policies that protect renters living in public housing.

Protecting Survivors of Domestic Violence

NLIHC supports federal protections to ensure survivors of domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking have access to safe, accessible homes and the ability to leave an unsafe housing situation without risking

possible homelessness. NLIHC supports legislation to bar federally assisted housing providers from screening out applicants or evicting tenants because of the criminal activity of an abuser and to prohibit retaliation against a tenant for calling law enforcement or emergency assistance for help.

PROMOTE EQUITABLE ACCESS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND OPPORTUNITY

NLIHC believes in just communities, where everyone has access to economic and educational opportunities, as well as affordable housing. Evidence shows that access to stable, affordable housing in communities of opportunity has broad, positive impacts. It can lead to better health and education outcomes and higher lifetime earnings, especially for children.

Advancing Fair Housing

For more than 50 years, the Fair Housing Act has barred housing discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, familial status, national origin, or disability and required communities take active steps to end racial segregation.

In 2021, NLIHC will continue to lead efforts to advance fair housing and other important regulations, such as the 2015 Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule, the 2013 Disparate Impact rule, and the 2016 Equal Access in Accordance with an Individual's Gender Identity rule. These policies help promote more equitable communities, prevent hidden discrimination through biased policies or practices, and ensure appropriate access to services regardless of race, sexual orientation or gender identity. NLIHC also supports expanding the Fair Housing Act to bar discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity, marital status, and source of income.

NLIHC supports increasing mobility opportunities through new allocations of mobility vouchers, expanded mobility counseling and regional mobility programs, and continued implementation of HUD Small Area Fair Market Rents (SAFMRs) in certain metropolitan areas that protect current and future tenants.

Achieving Criminal Legal Reform

The United States incarcerates its citizens at a shockingly high rate and nearly one in three Americans has a criminal record. Black and Latino people, people with a disability, and members of the LGBTQ community are disproportionately impacted by the criminal legal system. As more formerly incarcerated individuals return to their communities, they face barriers to accessing affordable housing, putting them at risk of homelessness and recidivism. NLIHC advocates for safe, stable, affordable and accessible housing for those who have been involved in the criminal or juvenile legal system so that formerly incarcerated people can successfully reintegrate into their communities and make the most of their second chance. In 2021, there may be a significant opportunity to advance these priorities if Congress enacts criminal legal reform legislation or racial justice legislation.

In addition, NLIHC advocates to end the criminalization of homelessness. Nationwide, people experiencing homelessness are targeted, arrested, and jailed under laws that criminalize homelessness by making illegal basic acts that are necessary for life. These laws are ineffective, expensive, and often violate homeless persons' civil and human rights. NLIHC will work in 2021 to ensure federal policies discourage local governments from criminalizing homelessness.

Creating Greater Opportunities for Employment

NLIHC supports efforts to improve HUD's Section 3 program, which has the potential to serve as a robust resource for job creation in low-income communities. Section 3 aims to ensure jobs, training, and contracting

opportunities associated with HUD-assisted projects go to low-income people, including residents of federally assisted housing, and to the businesses that hire them. NLIHC also supports an expansion of the Family Self Sufficiency program, linking HUD residents to services and educational opportunities that can lead to improved employment and earned income.

CHAMPION ANTI-POVERTY SOLUTIONS

Beyond ensuring access to affordable housing, NLIHC is strongly committed to enacting legislation and protecting resources that alleviate poverty. NLIHC supports efforts to protect vital safety net programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), unemployment insurance, Social Security, Medicaid, Medicare, the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Affordable Care Act, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Social Security Disability Income (SSDI) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Moreover, NLIHC strongly supports efforts to increase the minimum wage and to target federal resources to communities with persistent poverty.

For more information or to get involved, contact Sarah Saadian, NLIHC's Vice President of Policy, at ssaadian@nlihc.org.