

The HoUSed Campaign

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With congressional champions and national, state, and local partners, NLIHC in March 2021 launched the HoUSed campaign to advance anti-racist policies and achieve the large-scale, sustained investments and reforms necessary to ensure renters with the lowest incomes have an affordable and accessible place to call home.

SOLUTIONS TO THE HOUSING CRISIS

The HoUSed campaign advocates for four solutions to America's housing crisis:

1. Bridge the gap between incomes and housing costs by expanding rental assistance to every eligible household.
2. Expand and preserve the supply of rental homes affordable and accessible to people with the lowest incomes.
3. Provide emergency rental assistance to households in crisis by creating a national housing stabilization fund.
4. Strengthen and enforce renter protections.

Expanding Rental Assistance

A major cause of today's housing crisis is the fundamental mismatch between growing housing costs and stagnant incomes for people with the lowest incomes. In the U.S., renters need an annual income of nearly \$50,000 or \$23.96 an hour on average to afford a modest, two-bedroom apartment. This is far above the incomes of many working families, seniors, and people with disabilities. Since 1960, renters' incomes have increased by 5%, while rents have risen 61%. In only 5% of all U.S. counties can a full-time minimum-wage worker afford a one-bedroom rental home at fair market rent. There are no counties where a minimum wage worker can afford a two-bedroom rental home at fair market rent. Eight million of the lowest-income renters



pay at least half of their income on rent, leaving them without the resources they need to put food on the table, purchase needed medications, or make ends meet.

People of color are most harmed. Black households account for 13% of all households, yet they account for 26% of all extremely low-income renters and 40% of people experiencing homelessness. Latino households account for 12% of all U.S. households, 21% of extremely low-income renters, and 22% of people experiencing homelessness. Native Americans are dramatically overrepresented among people experiencing homelessness. This harm is compounded for women of color.

Despite the clear and urgent need, only one in four households who qualify for housing assistance receives it due to decades of chronic underfunding by Congress. Millions of eligible households are on waiting lists – often for several years – waiting for help. While people wait for assistance, many are pushed into homelessness, institutionalization, or incarceration.

Making rental assistance available to all eligible households – a core element of President Biden's housing platform – is central to any successful strategy to solve the housing crisis. A growing body of research finds that rental assistance can improve health and educational outcomes, increase children's chances of long-term success and increase racial equity. Rental assistance is a critical tool for helping the lowest-income people afford decent, stable, accessible housing, and the program has a proven track record of reducing homelessness and housing poverty.

Additional reforms are needed to ensure equitable access to these resources, including employing small area Fair Market Rents, simplifying applications, aggressively enforcing fair housing and civil rights, expanding the “Fair Housing Act” to ban discrimination on the basis of source of income, sexual orientation and gender identity, and marital status, among others.

Building and Preserving Homes Affordable to People with the Lowest Incomes

A major cause of today’s housing crisis is the severe shortage of rental homes affordable and available to people with the lowest incomes. Nationally, there is a shortage of 7 million homes affordable and available to the lowest-income renters. For every 10 of the lowest-income renter households, there are fewer than four homes affordable and available to them. There is not a single state or congressional district in the country with enough affordable homes to meet this demand.

The shortage of affordable homes disproportionately impacts Black people, Native Americans, and Latinos, who are more likely than white households to have extremely low incomes, pay more than half of their income on rent, or experience homelessness. People with disabilities face barriers to affordable housing because of the lack of accessibility or locations far from critical services. Decades of structural racism and ongoing discrimination have created racial disparities in housing, which contribute to inequities in wealth, education, health, and more. Housing segregation was designed through intentional public policy, resulting in highly segregated communities today.

The private sector cannot – on its own – build and maintain homes affordable to the lowest-income renters without federal support. Zoning and land use reforms at the local level are needed to increase the supply of housing generally, and federal investments are needed to expand rental assistance and build and preserve decent homes affordable to the lowest-income renters.

To increase and preserve the supply of affordable rental homes, Congress should expand the

national Housing Trust Fund to at least \$40 billion annually to build and preserve homes affordable to people with the lowest incomes. Congress should also provide at least \$70 billion to preserve and rehabilitate our nation’s public housing infrastructure, make energy-efficient upgrades, and guarantee full funding for public housing in the future. By using federal transportation investments to require inclusive zoning and land use reforms, Congress can help reverse residential segregation and increase the supply of affordable and accessible homes.

Congress should also ensure states and communities use investments to affirmatively further fair housing, build the capacity of community-based organizations, including those led by Black and Asian people, Native Americans, and Latinos, and prioritize ownership by nonprofit entities, among other reforms.

Increasing the supply of deeply affordable housing not only helps the lowest-income people, but it can also alleviate rent pressure on those with higher incomes. Millions of low-income renters occupy units they cannot afford, and a greater supply of affordable, accessible rental housing for those with the lowest incomes would allow these renters to move into affordable units and free up their original units for renters who can better afford them.

Providing Emergency Rental Assistance to Stabilize Households

Today, tens of millions of households are one crisis away from major economic hardship that could quickly spiral out of control. Most families in poverty who rent spend at least half of their incomes on housing, leaving virtually no margin for an unexpected expense. Broken-down cars, unreimbursed medical bills, or temporary declines of income can quickly send vulnerable households down the spiral of housing instability, eviction, and even homelessness.

Black women face the greatest threat of losing their homes to eviction. Black women renters are twice as likely as white renters to have evictions filed against them. Families with children are also at particularly high risk of eviction.

Eviction is not just a condition, but a cause, of poverty. An eviction record makes it harder for a family to find decent housing in a safe neighborhood and negatively impacts employment, as well as physical and mental health.

Emergency rental assistance can stabilize households experiencing economic shocks before these shocks cause instability and homelessness, which often require more prolonged and extensive housing assistance. A National Housing Stabilization Fund would provide emergency assistance to cover the gaps between income and rental costs during a financial crisis. Resources could also be used to provide housing stability services, such as counselors and legal aid. When combined, emergency housing assistance and support services can significantly reduce evictions and homelessness.

During the pandemic, Congress provided \$46 billion in emergency rental assistance to help millions of struggling renters at risk of losing their homes. Congress should build on the successes and lessons learned from this program by creating a permanent National Housing Stabilization Fund.

Congress should enact the “Eviction Crisis Act,” introduced by Senators Bennet (D-CO) and Portman (R-OH). The bill would create a National Housing Stabilization Fund to provide short-term, emergency assistance to help renters avoid eviction and remain stably housed.

Strengthening and Enforcing Renter Protections

Affordable, stable, and accessible housing and robust housing choice are the foundation upon which just and equitable communities are built, but the power imbalance between renters and landlords puts renters at greater risk of housing instability, harassment, and homelessness, and it fuels racial inequity.

Congress should enact legislation to establish vital renter protections. A national right to counsel would help more renters stay in their homes and mitigate harm when eviction is unavoidable. “Just cause” eviction protections would ensure greater housing stability and

prevent arbitrary and harmful actions by landlords. Reforms are needed to ensure immigrants, people exiting the criminal legal system, and other marginalized people can fully access housing resources, among other needed changes.

“BUILD BACK BETTER ACT”

The best opportunity to advance the HoUSed campaign agenda was through the “Build Back Better Act.” The House-passed bill included the largest single investment in quality, affordable, accessible homes for the country’s lowest-income people in history: \$25 billion to expand rental assistance to more than 300,000 households; \$65 billion to preserve public housing for its 2.5 million residents; and \$15 billion for the national Housing Trust Fund to build and preserve over 150,000 affordable, accessible homes for households with the lowest incomes.

At the time of publication, however, these housing investments are at risk. After centrist Senator Joe Manchin (D-WV) announced in December 2021 that he would not vote for the House-approved bill, President Biden and congressional leaders are focused on enacting a scaled-back version of the economic recovery package that includes only those components that can garner the support of – and cost within the total amount approved by – all Senate Democrats.

Parts of the bill that do not make it into a scaled-back version could be repackaged into stand-alone bills. These would require support from all Senate Democrats and at least 10 Senate Republicans, as well as separate floor time during an election year, ensuring virtually no chance of enactment in 2022.

NLIHC and its members and partners continue to urge Congress to protect and advance the bill’s historic investments in rental assistance, public housing, and the Housing Trust Fund as part of any reconciliation bill that advances. As homelessness increases and millions of the lowest-income renters struggle to stay housed, we cannot let Congress miss this moment of opportunity.

OTHER LEGISLATION

NLIHC worked with members of Congress to introduce or advance legislation supported by the HoUsed campaign, including:

- “Housing is Infrastructure Act of 2021” (H.R.4497) – a bill introduced by House Financial Services Committee Chairwoman Maxine Waters (D-CA) that includes NLIHC’s top priorities for an infrastructure and economic recovery package: \$75 billion to fully address the capital needs to repair public housing, \$45 billion in the national Housing Trust Fund, and a major expansion of rental assistance.
- “Ending Homelessness Act of 2021” (H.R.4496) – a bill introduced by Representatives Waters (D-CA), Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO), and Ritchie Torres (D-NY) that proposes to establish a universal voucher program, bans source-of-income discrimination, increases housing choice, and invests \$5 billion over 5 years in the national Housing Trust Fund.
- “Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act” (S.1991) – a bill that would provide 500,000 new housing vouchers and counseling services to help families with children move to areas of opportunity.
- “Eviction Crisis Act” (S.2182) – a bill to establish a national housing stabilization fund to help families facing a financial shock avoid eviction. The bill is supported by the Opportunity Starts at Home campaign.
- “American Housing and Economic Mobility Act” (S.1368; H.R.2768) – a bill introduced by Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) and Representative Emanuel Cleaver (D-MO) that would invest nearly \$45 billion annually for the national Housing Trust Fund, provide resources to repair public housing, expand Fair Housing protections, and include additional resources to help end housing poverty and homelessness.

A full list of legislation endorsed by the HoUsed campaign is [here](#).

WHAT TO SAY TO LEGISLATORS

- Advocates should weigh in with the Administration and Congress on the importance of the HoUsed campaign and its top policy priorities.
- Advocates should encourage members of Congress to cosponsor legislation endorsed by the HoUsed campaign.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Visit the HoUsed campaign website at www.NLIHC.org/housed.