



**AN UNWAVERING
PATH FORWARD TO
HOUSING JUSTICE**
NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION

CAPITOL HILL DAY ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

MARCH 2024



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Capitol Hill Day Overview

Dear Advocates,

We know what it takes to prevent and end homelessness. During the pandemic, Congress passed unprecedented resources and protections, including a national moratorium on evictions for nonpayment of rent, over \$46 billion in emergency rental assistance, Emergency Housing Vouchers, and other resources, to ensure people could remain in their homes. State and local governments responded by enacting eviction protections and using new resources to help meet the housing needs of people experiencing homelessness. These resources and protections worked – eviction filings dropped by [more than half](#), and the number of people experiencing homelessness [declined by 17%](#)!

Now, emergency rental assistance and other resources are depleted in many communities, the affordable housing crisis is worsening, and the gap between incomes and the cost of rent continues to widen. [HUD's 2023 Point-In-Time](#) (PIT) count confirmed what many of us see and experience every day: the number of people living without homes has reached record levels.

The report showed an estimated 653,100 people experienced homelessness on any given night in 2023, a 12% increase from the previous year and the highest number since the report was first published in 2007. Almost 40% experienced unsheltered homelessness. Because of systemic racism – past and present – there are significant racial disparities in who experiences housing insecurity and homelessness, with Black, Latino, and Native people significantly more likely than white people to experience both.

Homelessness is the tragic but predictable consequence of policy choices. For decades, Congress has drastically underfunded the long-term, large-scale investments required to prevent and end homelessness. At current funding levels, [only one in four households](#) whose income qualifies them for rental assistance receives the help they need, and nationally there are fewer than four homes affordable and available for every 10 people with the lowest incomes.

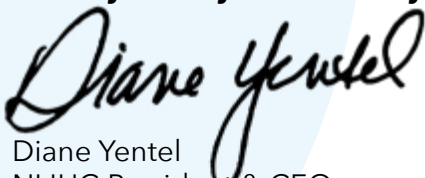
The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) invites advocates across the nation to participate in our Capitol Hill Day on Thursday, March 21. Together, we will demand that Congress advance the long-term solutions needed to address our nation's housing and homelessness crisis.

These solutions include ensuring rental assistance is universally available to all households in need; expanding and preserving the supply of homes affordable and accessible to people with the lowest incomes; creating permanent tools to prevent evictions and homelessness; and strengthening and enforcing renter protections.

This toolkit includes key resources to help you participate, including factsheets on NLIHC's legislative priorities and resources to help you have a successful visit with your members of Congress.

Your voice and your story matter! It is important for policymakers to hear from you about why everyone needs a safe, affordable, accessible place to call home.

Thank you for your advocacy!



Diane Yentel
NLIHC President & CEO

Top Priorities for Capitol Hill Day

NLIHC's [HoUSed campaign](#) works to achieve the large-scale, sustained investments and reforms necessary to ensure that renters with the lowest incomes have an affordable place to call home. The campaign focuses on four major solutions: bridging the gap between incomes and housing costs, expanding and preserving the supply of rental homes affordable and accessible to people with the lowest incomes, creating permanent tools to prevent evictions and homelessness, and strengthening and enforcing renter protections.

In 2024, NLIHC urges all senators and representatives to:

1. **SUPPORT THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF FUNDING POSSIBLE FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS IN FISCAL YEARS (FY) 2024 AND 2025.**

Congress is still working to finalize a 2024 budget for HUD's vital affordable housing and homelessness programs and may have a final 2024 spending agreement by Hill Day. Further delays in passing a final 2024 budget push Congress closer to a long-term continuing resolution, which would result in disastrous cuts to HUD programs. Congress must pass a final 2024 budget by April 30, while simultaneously beginning the process of determining the 2025 budget.

Advocates should urge their members of Congress to provide the highest possible funding for HUD's vital affordable housing and homelessness programs, including:

- Full funding to renew all existing Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) contracts.
- Guaranteeing full funding for HUD's Homeless Assistance Grants program to address the needs of people experiencing homelessness.
- Ensuring full funding for public housing operations and repairs.
- Maintaining funding for HUD's Eviction Prevention Grant Program (EPGP).
- Additional funding for the competitive Tribal housing program, targeted to tribes with the greatest needs.

2. **COSPONSOR THE "EVICITION CRISIS ACT" TO HELP PREVENT EVICTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS.**

Advocates should urge their members of Congress to cosponsor the "Eviction Crisis Act," soon to be introduced with bipartisan support by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Todd Young (R-IN), and the **"Stable Families Act,"** introduced by Representative Ritchie Torres (D-NY) in the 117th Congress. These bills would create a permanent program to provide emergency rental assistance (ERA) and housing stability services to renters facing temporary financial setbacks that put them at risk of housing instability, eviction, and homelessness. The bills would build on the success of the pandemic-era ERA programs that helped reduce eviction filings and keep households stably housed.

3. COSPONSOR THE “FAMILY STABILITY AND OPPORTUNITY VOUCHERS ACT” TO HELP FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN ACCESS AFFORDABLE HOMES.

Advocates should urge their members of Congress to cosponsor the “Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act,” introduced with bipartisan support by Senators Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and Todd Young (R-IN) and Representatives Joe Neguse (D-CO) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA). The bill would provide 250,000 new housing vouchers and mobility counseling services to families with young children, helping them move to safe, affordable housing connected to high-performing schools, well-paying jobs, healthcare services, and transit.

4. COSPONSOR THE “FAIR HOUSING IMPROVEMENT ACT” AND SUPPORT OTHER EFFORTS TO EXPAND TENANTS’ RIGHTS AND ADDRESS THE POWER IMBALANCE BETWEEN RENTERS AND LANDLORDS.

Advocates should urge their members of Congress to cosponsor the “Fair Housing Improvement Act,” from Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA) and Representative Scott Peters (D-CA), which would expand the Fair Housing Act to prohibit housing discrimination based on “source of income,” as well as military and veteran status. These protections would make it easier for households with tenant-based rental assistance, veterans, and servicemembers to find homes in neighborhoods of their choice.

Advocates should also encourage their members of Congress to support vital [renter protections](#), including “just cause” eviction standards, access to legal counsel for evictions, reducing barriers to housing for people with conviction records, and supporting tenant organizing, among many other measures.

5. OPPOSE EFFORTS TO UNDERMINE HOUSING FIRST OR CRIMINALIZE HOMELESSNESS.

Advocates should encourage their members of Congress to oppose misguided efforts to undermine Housing First or criminalize homelessness.

Congress should oppose the “[Housing Promotes Livelihood and Ultimate Success \(PLUS\) Act](#),” from Representative Andy Barr (R-KY). This bill would undermine federal investments in proven solutions to homelessness and divert scarce resources to outdated, ineffective, and costly strategies. Any attempt to divert limited federal resources to ineffective programs will result in fewer people becoming stably housed.

In April, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear the case of *City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Johnson* and determine whether a local government can arrest or fine people for sleeping outside when adequate shelter is not available. Instead of using [outdated and dehumanizing approaches like criminalization](#), policymakers at all levels of government should invest in those solutions proven to be most effective in addressing homelessness: [providing access to affordable housing and voluntary wraparound services](#).

Critical Long-Term Solutions: Additional Legislative Priorities

NLIHC and our members, partners, and allies will continue building Congressional support for legislation to advance the long-term, large-scale investments needed to end homelessness and housing poverty.

Critical, Long-Term Housing Solutions

Ending Homelessness Act of 2023 (H.R.4232) – Rep. Waters (D-CA). This bill would ensure rental assistance is universally available to all eligible households. The bill would also prohibit source-of-income discrimination to help increase housing choice and would invest \$5 billion over five years in the national Housing Trust Fund to address the shortage of affordable housing and to combat homelessness. For more information, see Rep. Waters’s [factsheet](#) on the Ending Homelessness Act.

Housing Crisis Response Act of 2023 (H.R.4233) – Rep. Waters (D-CA). This bill proposes \$150 billion in critical investments to help renters with the lowest incomes afford the cost of rent. Investments would include funding for NLIHC’s top priorities: \$25 billion to expand rental assistance, \$65 billion to repair and preserve public housing, and \$15 billion to build rental homes for those with the greatest needs through the national Housing Trust Fund. If enacted, this legislation would amount to the single largest investment in affordable housing in our nation’s history, creating nearly 1.4 million affordable and accessible homes, and helping nearly 300,000 households afford their rent. For more information, see Rep. Waters’s [factsheet](#) on the bill.

Bipartisan Legislative Opportunities

Eviction Crisis Act, Stable Families Act (S.2182 and H.R.8327 in the 117th Congress) – Sens. Bennet (D-CO) and Young (R-IN) and Rep. Torres (D-NY). This bill would create a permanent program to provide emergency rental assistance (ERA) and housing stability services to renters facing temporary financial setbacks that put them at risk of housing instability, eviction, and homelessness. The bill would build on the success of the pandemic-era ERA programs that helped reduce eviction filings and keep households stably housed. The bill is supported by NLIHC’s Opportunity Starts at Home (OSAH) campaign. After reintroduction in the Senate, NLIHC will share a factsheet on the bill with our partners.

Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act (S.1257, H.R.3776) – Sens. Van Hollen (D-MD) and Young (R-IN) and Reps. Neguse (D-CO) and Fitzpatrick (R-PA). This bipartisan bill would provide 250,000 new housing vouchers and mobility counseling services to families with young children, helping them move to safe, affordable housing in communities of their choice, including areas connected to high-performing schools, well-paying jobs, healthcare services, and transit. The bill is supported by NLIHC’s Opportunity Starts at Home campaign. To learn more, see this [factsheet](#) on the Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act.

Choice in Affordable Housing Act (S.32, H.R.4606) – Sens. Coons (D-DE) and Cramer (R-ND) and Reps. Cleaver (D-MO) and Chavez-DeRemer (R-OR). This bill would expand access to affordable housing options by removing barriers to landlord participation in HUD’s Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program.

Yes In My Back Yard (YIMBY) Act (S.1688, H.R.3507) – Sens. Young (R-IN) and Schatz (D-HI) and Rep. Kilmer (D-WA). This bill would require HUD Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) grantees to report on actions taken to address zoning and land-use barriers.

Reforming Disaster Recovery Act (S.1686, H.R.5940) – Sens. Schatz (D-HI) and Collins (R-ME) and Rep. Green (D-TX). This bill would permanently authorize the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program and provide important safeguards and tools to help ensure that federal disaster recovery efforts reach the lowest-income and most marginalized disaster survivors.

Fair Housing Improvement Act (S.1267, H.R.2846) – Sen. Kaine (D-VA) and Reps. Peters (D-CA), Schiff (D-CA), Evans (D-PA), Bonamici (D-OR), and Norton (D-DC). This bill would protect veterans and low-income families from housing discrimination by expanding the Fair Housing Act to prohibit housing discrimination based on source of income and military or veteran status. To learn more, see NLIHC’s [factsheet](#) on the bill. Past versions of the bill were led by former Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT).

Rural Housing Service Reform Act (S.1389) – Sens. Smith (D-MN) and Rounds (R-SD). This bill would improve USDA rural housing programs and help preserve affordability in rural communities. The bill would preserve access to rental assistance, permanently authorize preservation tools, and improve staff training and capacity, among many other reforms.

Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act (S.1557, H.R.3238) – Sens. Cantwell (D-WA) and Young (R-IN) and Reps. LaHood (R-IL) and DelBene (D-WA). This bill would expand and reform the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC). NLIHC supports key reforms to better serve households with the greatest needs and those in rural and Tribal communities. For more information, see NLIHC’s [factsheet](#) on critically needed reforms to LIHTC.

Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act (S.2285) – Sens. Schatz (D-HI) and Murkowski (R-AK). This bill would reauthorize key tribal housing programs for seven years and include reforms to expand local control of the programming, streamline environmental reviews for tribal housing projects, and incentivize private partnerships.

Talking Points

Bridge the gap between income and housing costs.

- A major cause of the affordable housing crisis is the growing gap between income and the cost of rent. People with the lowest incomes - those making 30% or less of area median income (AMI), or living below the poverty line - are most impacted.
- Because of decades of underinvestment, only [one in four households](#) that are income-eligible for rental assistance receives it, leaving the other 75% of eligible households to struggle to afford the cost of rent.
- A [growing body of research](#) finds that rental assistance can improve longer-term health and educational outcomes, increase children's chances of long-term success, and increase racial equity.
- People of color, as well as people with disabilities, are most harmed by the housing crisis. Black households account for 13% of all households but make up 26% of the lowest-income households and [37% of people experiencing homelessness](#). Households with members who have a disability requiring long-term care are [nearly twice as likely](#) to be severely housing cost burdened as households in which no one has a disability requiring long-term care.
- Find more talking points and resources [here](#).

Expand and preserve the supply of affordable, accessible rental homes for people with the lowest incomes.

- The market failure that results in a severe shortage of affordable, available rental homes for people with the lowest incomes is a central cause of the nation's affordable housing crisis. The private sector cannot - on its own - build and maintain homes affordable to the lowest-income households without federal subsidies.
- While local zoning and land use reforms can help increase the supply of affordable housing for middle- and even low-income renters, federal investments are required to build, preserve, and operate quality, accessible homes that are affordable to people with the lowest incomes.
- Increasing the supply of deeply affordable, accessible housing for the lowest-income renters helps alleviate growing rent pressure on people with higher incomes. Without additional affordable stock, millions of the lowest-income renters occupy units they cannot afford. A greater supply of affordable, accessible rental housing for those with the lowest incomes would allow these renters to move into affordable units, freeing up their original units for those who can better afford them.
- Find more talking points and resources [here](#).

Provide emergency rental assistance to households in crisis.

- Emergency rental assistance (ERA) programs played a critically important role in preventing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic by providing funds to help [over 5.3 million](#) renter households afford their housing expenses and avoid eviction.
- Thanks to ERA and other COVID-era policies, eviction filings fell by more than half between the start of the pandemic and the end of 2021. These funds were also well-targeted to help those most at-risk of eviction, with [64% of recipients](#) identifying as extremely low-income.
- Now that nearly all the 514 ERA programs launched during the pandemic have exhausted their funds and closed their doors despite clear and ongoing need, the number of extremely low-income renter households is growing and median rents have skyrocketed in many rental markets.
- Learn more about the continued need for ERA [here](#).

Strengthen and enforce renter protections.

- The power imbalance between renters and landlords puts renters at greater risk of housing instability, harassment, evictions, and homelessness, while also fueling racial inequity.
- Fewer than 3% of renters have access to legal counsel when facing eviction, compared to 81% of landlords. In communities with right-to-counsel laws, 86% of renters facing evictions remained in their homes, and eviction filings decreased by 10%.
- Discrimination by landlords against renters prevents households from utilizing federal, state, or local rental assistance and is often a pretext for illegal discrimination against renters of color, women, and people with disabilities.
- Find more talking points and resources [here](#).

Oppose efforts to undermine Housing First and criminalize homelessness.

- Housing First is a proven strategy to end homelessness that prioritizes access to safe, stable housing, with services and support when needed, to provide people with the foundation needed for long-term housing stability.
- Housing First has been shown to quickly end homelessness, increase housing and economic stability, and improve quality of life, among other outcomes.
- Housing First is flexible and can be adjusted to meet the short- and long-term needs of people who have experienced housing instability or homelessness.
- Criminalizing homelessness is counterproductive, expensive, dehumanizing, and ineffective. These policies do nothing to alleviate homelessness because they do nothing to address the root causes of homelessness: the severe shortage of affordable, accessible housing available to people with the lowest incomes, and the growing gap between income and housing costs.
- Learn more about Housing First [here](#).

Meeting Tips

Scheduling a Meeting

Advocates joining NLHC's Capitol Hill Day will be assigned to a group from their state when possible. Each state group is typically headed by a State Captain, a representative from one of NLHC's [State and Tribal Partners](#) who will be responsible for scheduling meetings with member offices (where applicable).

Advocates who do not have a State Captain or who wish to schedule their own meetings can use the tips below for scheduling a meeting with their elected officials.

- Request a meeting about two weeks in advance by phone or email using the Meeting Request Template below. Contact your [Housing Advocacy Organizer](#) for help acquiring scheduler contact info.
- Ask to meet with the member of Congress or a housing staffer. Note: Meeting with staff members can be just as effective or even more effective than meeting with the senator or representative. Staff inform members of Congress as they make decisions and likely have more time to explore the various issues you are discussing.
- Share what issue you will be discussing, the number of people joining you, whether constituents will be joining, and your available times. Follow up as needed to ensure your request was received.
- Once the meeting is scheduled, confirm the building and room number, or if you are meeting virtually, which virtual platform will be used (e.g., a conference call, Zoom, or Google Meet), the link or phone number, and any passcodes needed. Share this information with others attending your meeting.

Preparing for a Meeting

- Review the talking points, data resources, and storytelling tips included in this toolkit.
- Outline an agenda that includes the amount of time to spend on each section. You should include numbers and stories relevant to the issues you are talking about where appropriate.
- If you are conducting a meeting with a group of advocates, you may want to determine in advance who will discuss what and who in your group will open, close, and deliver specific asks. Make sure to establish cues for when each person should speak.
- Do research on the person you are meeting with. For example, being able to say, e.g., "It's great to be meeting with you today. I was happy to see that the congresswoman received an award on a particular issue" shows that you're interested in what the member is doing and not only focused on advancing your own agenda. If possible, knowing and referring to your legislator's past votes on housing policy will also strengthen your persuasiveness.
- Practice, practice, practice! Plan what you want to say and rehearse.

- Practice and test technology if you are meeting virtually.
- Gather materials you want to share with the office (in addition to the factsheets and state-level data that NLIHC will make available at the Housing Policy Forum).

During the Meeting

- Dress professionally. If meeting virtually, reduce background clutter and/or noise.
- Be punctual - arrive 10 minutes before the start time.
- Open your meeting with introductions, including your connection to the state or district represented by the office you are meeting with, such as whether you are a constituent or your organization serves the office's constituents.
- Provide the elected official or legislative staff with the NLIHC materials and refer to those materials during your meeting. You can provide these materials via email ahead of time.
- Follow your agenda. If the staff member or your elected official does not have much knowledge of affordable housing challenges in your community, use this as an opportunity to educate them. Connect your work to the elected official's interests as much as possible.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, simply say, "I don't know. I will follow up with an answer."
- Always make a specific ask in your meeting using a question with a "yes" or "no" answer, such as "Will you support increased investments in affordable homes for the lowest-income renters in the federal budget?" If the answer is "maybe," use that as an opportunity to follow up later.
- Ask for a picture to share on social media!
- Thank the elected official or legislative staff for their time and consideration.

After the Meeting

Remember: The best advocacy focuses on sustained relationship building rather than a single conversation.

- Tweet and mention @NLIHC and your members of Congress to thank them for the meeting, including a photo if you have one. Doing so publicly strengthens your relationship and reminds them of any commitments they made to you. Include the hashtag #HillDay24.
- Share what you learned with your [Housing Advocacy Organizer](#) or other NLIHC staff at Capitol Hill Day. We are all in a better advocacy position when we know the outcomes of your meetings.
- Share information about your meeting(s) with your network - including your members, your board, and your volunteers.
- Stay in touch by sending a follow up email or thank you card to everyone you met with. You can also follow up to check in about the status of the request you made during your meeting.

Meeting Request Template

Below is an email template you can use to request meetings with your members of Congress. Please personalize the bolded portions before sending. Also, please remove information that may not be pertinent to your meeting. Some House or Senate offices may have online forms for you to fill out, but most often sending an email to the office's scheduler is fine. To find who the schedulers are for sending a meeting request email, contact your [Housing Advocacy Organizer](#) or email outreach@nlihc.org. For more information, contact NLIHC Director of Field Organizing Brooke Schipporeit at bschipporeit@nlihc.org.

NOTE: This template was inspired by an example from our partners at RESULTS.

Email subject line: Request for meeting

Dear **[scheduler name]**:

My name is **[your name]** and I work at **[your organization]** OR I am a constituent of **Representative/Senator [member of Congress's name]** and I live in **[insert name of community / city community/city]**.

[Insert details about your organization if applicable: In a couple of sentences, who are you and what is your mission?] I will be in Washington, DC, on Thursday, March 21, and request the opportunity to meet with the **Representative/Senator** as **his/her** schedule permits. There will be **[insert number of people]** of us attending the meeting.

I/We would like to speak with the Representative/Senator about practical solutions to housing instability and homelessness in the communities they represent. These solutions address both immediate and long-term needs.

I/We will also be willing to meet with staff if the **Senator/Representative** is not available. Thank you for considering this meeting request. **I/We** look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Insert your name]

[Insert your organization, if applicable]

Storytelling Tips and Tricks

Storytelling can add emotional weight to your meeting and help form connections with lawmakers by pointing out shared values. It can also help lawmakers see how their policy decisions impact real people.

Elements of an Effective Story

- Describe your direct experience about the topic at hand, such as your time working at an organization that provides shelter to others, or what an affordable home means to you.
- Share your values that are informed by these experiences.
- Describe what needs to happen next - actionable steps that relate to your story - and emphasize that homelessness and housing instability are solvable!

Tips and Reminders

- The story you tell must be true, and it must relate to the topic at hand.
- Explain the impact of your experience.
- Keep it simple - don't overcomplicate it - and keep it brief (under 3-5 minutes).
- Don't explain a culture or community that is not your own. If you are telling someone else's story, make sure you have permission to share it.

Prompts for People with Lived Experience

- Describe your home and your living conditions.
- How did you get to where you are today as it relates to housing? If you've received housing assistance, how has it impacted your life?
- Describe how housing issues have played a role in the challenges you've faced and, if applicable, what you have accomplished as a result of securing a stable, accessible, and affordable home.
- What makes you proud to live in the place you call home?
- How would your community improve with more housing assistance available for households who are struggling?
- Describe your hopes for the future and how your home is a part of these hopes.

Prompts for Housing Services Providers

- Describe the community and the clients you serve.
- How has access to affordable housing, or a lack of access to affordable housing, impacted your community?
- What makes you proud of your organization's mission and the work you accomplish?
- How would more housing assistance improve your community?
- How have federal housing assistance and production programs enhanced your work?

Other Possible Prompts

- Why do you care about housing justice?
- Why did you join the organization you are representing?

Additional Resources

[Housing Needs by State](#): (Select your state and navigate to “resources tab” to find the following.)

- State Housing Profiles include key data for each state, such as the shortage of affordable homes, housing cost burdens by income group, and the demographic makeup of extremely low-income renter households. This is a compelling factsheet to present to members of Congress and their staff.
- Congressional District Profiles include several dimensions of housing affordability for renter households in by Congressional district, the surrounding area, and the state. These are especially helpful in meetings with representatives who might not believe statewide data applies to their district.

[State Housing Preservation Profiles](#): Preservation Profiles use data from the National Housing Preservation Database to provide an overview of the affordable housing inventory at the state level. Each profile features a graph depicting the number of affordable homes with subsidies set to expire in the near future. Use this data sheet to advocate for expanding investments to preserve these homes before many developments convert to market rents.

[The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes](#): The data from this NLIHC report demonstrate the gap between the number of renter households and the number of rental homes that are affordable and available to them. The report also breaks down the number of households who are cost burdened by income group. Much of this information is also available on the State Housing Profiles.

[Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing](#): This NLIHC report shows that affordable rental homes are out of reach for millions of low-wage workers and their families. The report calculates the “Housing Wage” nationally and by state, metropolitan areas, and counties, demonstrating the estimated hourly wages full-time workers must earn to afford rental homes at fair market rent. State reports with this data are available for every state and its respective metropolitan areas and counties.

For more information, contact your [Housing Advocacy Organizer](#) directly or email outreach@nlihc.org.