

October 6, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. President, Speaker Pelosi, and Majority Leader Schumer:

We write to express the urgent need to invest in housing within legislation to enact President Biden's Build Back Better plan.

Housing is the most expensive part of most families' budget. Nearly a quarter of renters – 10.5 million families – spend more than half their income on housing each month, and too many families who want to own their own home are locked out of the market.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 19 million people live in a food desert, and 35 million homes have at least one health or safety hazard<sup>2</sup>, including more than 4 million homes with young children that have lead paint hazards.<sup>3</sup> Others require renovation to help an elderly family member or a person with a disability to remain in their home. And still more families do not have adequate housing at all. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic began, more than 580,000 people<sup>4</sup>, including children and seniors, had no safe place to stay on any given night, and more than 3.7 million evictions were filed during the course of a year.<sup>5</sup>

The Build Back Better plan is a rare opportunity to deliver critical investments that we have failed to make for far too long. Housing challenges are different in every community, and we need different tools to address the growing problems they face. But with comprehensive investments, we can create, preserve, and improve millions of homes so that we bring down the cost of housing and improve its condition. And an investment in safe, affordable housing is central to the success of proposed investments in education<sup>6</sup>, health<sup>7</sup>, and our local economies.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, investments in sustainable, energy-efficient housing can lower families' bills, make our homes and communities more resilient to climate-driven disasters, and reduce our impact on the planet – all while creating good paying jobs.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/reports/files/Harvard\\_JCHS\\_State\\_Nations\\_Housing\\_2021.pdf](https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/reports/files/Harvard_JCHS_State_Nations_Housing_2021.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.banking.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Jacobs%20Testimony%207-20-21.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/nceh/lead/prevention/children.htm>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/2020-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://evictionlab.org/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/25331/412554-Housing-as-a-Platform-for-Improving-Education-Outcomes-among-Low-Income-Children.PDF>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.opportunityhome.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Housing-as-a-Health-Care-Investment.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/four-reasons-why-employers-should-care-about-housing>

Last month, the House Financial Services Committee advanced legislation to provide investments to expand affordable rental housing, help families access homeownership, remove lead paint and other health hazards from homes, repair public and assisted rural housing, address climate change, and invest in neighborhoods. Build Back Better legislation must include these kinds of comprehensive investments in rental housing, affordable homeownership, and community needs in urban, rural, and Tribal areas.

To invest in American families, we must invest in the homes and the communities where those families live. As we work to create a Build Back Better package, we must make investments in housing opportunity a central pillar of the plan because, as *Evicted* author Matthew Desmond wrote last week, “the success of all other opportunity-expanding initiatives depends on it.”<sup>9</sup>

The COVID-19 crisis revealed the depth of our country’s affordable housing crisis at the same time that it revealed how important our homes are to our health, our well-being, and our lives. We must take this opportunity to build back better by addressing housing needs in communities across the nation.

Sincerely,

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<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/30/opinion/sunday/eviction-covid-pandemic-housing.html>