

Volume 25, Issue 11
March 16, 2020

In This Issue:

Point of View

- Housing is Healthcare – *by Diane Yentel, NLIHC President and CEO*

Coronavirus and Housing

- House Passes COVID-19 Emergency Bill Without Housing Assistance
- Senate Democrats Release Proposal for Coronavirus Response, Include Important Provisions for Housing and Homelessness
- Senator Sherrod Brown Sends Letter to Administration Requesting They Address Serious Coronavirus Concerns in Assisted Housing
- NLIHC Signs Letters Urging Congress to Support Low-Income Workers During Coronavirus Outbreak
- NLIHC Provides New Resource to Guide Federal Coronavirus Response Related to Housing for Those Most in Need
- HUD Office of Multifamily Housing Issues Coronavirus FAQs
- HUD Posts Slides and Recording of Canceled Webinar on Infectious Disease Preparedness for Homeless Assistance Providers
- Join National Call on Coronavirus and Homelessness/Housing, Today 2:30 p.m. ET

Opportunity Starts at Home

- Campaign Urges Congress to Include Emergency Assistance Funding in Coronavirus Response

Disaster Housing Recovery

- Additional Disaster Housing Recovery Updates - March 16, 2020

Budget and Appropriations

- Senate THUD Subcommittee Questions HUD Secretary Carson on FY21 Funding Request, Coronavirus Response

NLIHC Housing Policy Forum and Leadership Awards Reception

- NLIHC Cancels Housing Policy Forum, Postpones Leadership Awards Reception due to Coronavirus

Our Homes, Our Votes: 2020

- Learn How to Get Candidates on the Record about Affordable Housing - March 19 Webinar!

Research

- NLIHC Releases *The Gap*, Finds Shortage of 7 Million Affordable and Available Homes for Extremely Low-Income Renter Households
- Survey Identifies Connections Between Criminalization of Homelessness and Environmental Injustice

Fact of the Week

- *The Gap*: Just 36 Affordable and Available Homes for Every 100 Extremely Low-Income U.S. Households

Census

- People with Disabilities and the 2020 Census

From the Field

- Utah Gains \$10 Million for Affordable Housing in Tough Budget Environment

NLIHC in the News

- NLIHC in the News for the Week of March 8

NLIHC News

- Where to Find Us – March 16

Point of View

Housing is Health Care – by *Diane Yentel, NLIHC President and CEO*

Congress is about to pass an emergency spending bill that neglects the urgent needs of people experiencing homelessness, a glaring and appalling oversight. People experiencing homelessness are at high risk of both severe illnesses from coronavirus and of potentially spreading it to others given their inability to isolate or self-quarantine after being exposed to the illness. It has never been clearer that housing is health care.

Homeless service providers and outreach workers are doing their best to respond to tremendous new challenges, but they are understaffed and under-resourced. Throughout last week and over the weekend, I heard from some who can't access hand-sanitizer and others struggling to find, prepare and staff the spaces needed to allow people in shelters to self-isolate if they get the coronavirus or to protect highly vulnerable residents from exposure. They are counting on congressional leadership to give them the funding they desperately need to keep their residents, themselves, and their communities safe.

Congress must get back to work to provide these needed resources to shelter providers and to quickly and permanently house people experiencing homelessness. The very least our country must do during a national health emergency, particularly when our collective protection against the spread of the illness depends on our ability to self-quarantine at home, is ensure we house the lowest-income and most vulnerable people. It is equally important to ensure more people are not pushed into homelessness through evictions and foreclosures; Congress should enact a national moratorium on both and provide temporary rental assistance to the lowest-income people in need.

Today at 2:30 p.m. ET, NLIHC's Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition will host a call on housing and homelessness needs and the impacts from the coronavirus. Over 1,300 people are registered to join the call, during which we will hear from providers in Seattle, New York, and California; discuss the urgent and unique needs of tribal communities, immigrants, people with disabilities, and others; and share updates from congressional offices and NLIHC staff on progress to achieve our [policy recommendations](#) to ensure housing stability for low-income individuals and people experiencing homelessness during the pandemic. NLIHC has also put together a [regularly-updated webpage](#) with relevant updates from across the country on COVID-19 and housing.

Join us on the call (you can register to join the call [here](#)) and in our advocacy to ensure the lowest-income people are prioritized in our nation's response to coronavirus. Providing resources to protect against an outbreak of coronavirus among people who are homeless and to keep the lowest-income people housed is not only a moral imperative; it's an urgent public health necessity.

Onward,

Diane



Coronavirus and Housing

House Passes COVID-19 Emergency Bill Without Housing Assistance

A COVID-19 [emergency bill passed](#) in the House by a bipartisan vote of 363-40 on the night of March 13. The vote came after a tentative agreement was reached between House Democrats and the administration on emergency funding for COVID-19 response. The bill includes two weeks of paid sick leave and up to three months of paid family and medical leave, and it enhances unemployment insurance and food assistance. But the bill includes no desperately needed funding for homelessness and housing. The bill's bipartisan support in the House and approval by President Trump put pressure on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to move on the bill quickly without changes.

While the bill as written is much needed, the legislation does not include critical resources for people experiencing homelessness, who are at great risk of COVID-19 infection, or for people at risk of homelessness. NLIHC and its Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC) pushed for the inclusion of a proposal released by Senate Democrats that included robust housing supports, including emergency rental assistance, eviction prevention, and resources for homeless service providers, among others. Many of the measures reflected the set of [recommendations](#) released by the DHRC to ensure housing stability during the crisis. Sadly, none of these measures were included in the bill.

“Congress is about to pass an emergency spending bill that entirely neglects the urgent needs of people experiencing homelessness, a shameful and glaring oversight,” said NLIHC President and CEO Diane Yentel in a [statement](#). “People experiencing homelessness are at high risk of both severe illness from coronavirus and of potentially spreading it to others given their inability to isolate or quarantine after being exposed to the illness. Providing resources to protect against an outbreak of coronavirus among people who are homeless is not only a moral imperative, it’s an urgent public health necessity.”

Read the text of the Emergency Package at: <https://bit.ly/3cS6ED4>

Read the DHRC’s Coronavirus Response Recommendations at: <https://bit.ly/2WfuJhk>

Read Diane’s statement on the House vote at: <https://bit.ly/2QgZwXk>

Senate Democrats Release Proposal for Coronavirus Response, Include Important Provisions for Housing and Homelessness

Senate Democrats released a [proposal](#) on March 11 to address the health and economic needs of individuals and communities impacted by the coronavirus. In addition to funding for emergency unemployment insurance, paid sick days, local economic relief, and nutrition programs, the proposal contains several important housing provisions to ensure low-income households and people experiencing homelessness are able to access shelter and housing-stability services.

The housing provisions include creating an emergency rental assistance fund, like the one proposed by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Rob Portman (R-OH) in the “Eviction Crisis Act” ([S.3030](#); see *Memo*, [12/16/19](#)), to help households struggling to afford rent or utilities because of a coronavirus-related drop in pay or job loss. This proposal is one that has been championed by the NLIHC-led *Opportunity Starts at Home* multisector affordable homes campaign. The senators also proposed supplemental financial assistance for public housing authorities, housing assistance providers, and homeless service organizations to better assist people experiencing homelessness and ensure residents of federally assisted housing can remain safely and stably housed.

Representatives Nina Lowey (D-NY), Bobby Scott (D-VA), Richard Neal (D-MA), Sanford Bishop (D-GA), Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Frank Pallone (D-NJ), and Collin Peterson (D-MN) introduced the “Families First

Coronavirus Response Act” ([H.R.6201](#)) in the House on March 11. While the emergency supplemental would provide important resources, including paid sick leave, emergency unemployment insurance, and additional funding for nutrition programs, the bill does not contain provisions to address the housing needs of low-income people and people experiencing homelessness, who are at an elevated risk in the coronavirus pandemic. In a [statement](#), NLIHC President and CEO Diane Yentel urged members of Congress to “amend the emergency supplemental to include robust resources to help protect our homeless populations and allow low-income people to continue to keep a roof over their head during and after this crisis.”

Read the Senate Democrats’ coronavirus proposal at: <https://bit.ly/3aQ1b0c>

Watch the Senate Democrats’ press conference on the proposal at: <https://bit.ly/2TZKLZX>

Learn more about the “Families First Coronavirus Response Act” at: <https://bit.ly/2WeoE4y>

Read Diane’s statement at: <https://bit.ly/2Q8Liru>

Senator Sherrod Brown Sends Letter to Administration Requesting They Address Serious Coronavirus Concerns in Assisted Housing

Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Sherrod Brown (D-OH) sent a letter on March 11 to Vice President Mike Pence, HUD Secretary Ben Carson, and Department of Agriculture (USDA) Secretary Sonny Purdue urging them to coordinate and provide owners and operators of federally assisted housing guidance for addressing the urgent health and economic concerns of their residents in light of the coronavirus pandemic.

Senator Brown noted that Medicare and Medicaid enrollees living in HUD- or USDA-assisted housing are more likely to have chronic health conditions than enrollees who do not need federal housing assistance. As such, coordinated guidance between federal agencies is necessary to ensure at-risk residents will be able to access resources such as food and medication during the coronavirus outbreak, and to help owners and operators take precautions to mitigate the potential spread of the virus. The senator also called on the administration to prevent households from being evicted and to provide economic relief for property owners and operators affected by coronavirus.

Senator Brown’s letter is at: <https://bit.ly/3aNEibm>

More about HUD-assisted private housing is on [page 4-46](#) of NLIHC’s 2019 *Advocates’ Guide*.

More about USDA-assisted private housing is on [page 4-59](#) of NLIHC’s 2019 *Advocates’ Guide*.

NLIHC Signs Letters Urging Congress to Support Low-Income Workers During Coronavirus Outbreak

NLIHC joined two sign-on letters urging Congress to take immediate action to support low-income workers during the coronavirus outbreak (now a pandemic). Interim guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) [recommends](#) that employees with potential coronavirus symptoms remain at home until symptoms subside, and COVID-19-infected individuals are instructed to self-quarantine for two weeks to avoid spreading the virus to others. These recommendations pose a challenge to low-income employees, who often work hourly jobs that do not offer paid sick leave. Taking time off of work due to an illness or to care for a sick

loved one can pose serious challenges for low-income households' ability to afford necessities like medicine, food, and rent.

The two sign-on letters aim to address this challenge by giving low-income workers the flexibility they need to take care of themselves or their loved ones while maintaining economic stability. The first letter, led by the National Partnership for Women and Families' Paid Leave for All Campaign, expresses support for the "Paid Sick Days for Public Health Emergencies and Personal and Family Care Act" ([H.R.6150/S.3415](#)) and urges members of Congress to co-sponsor the bill. Introduced by Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), the legislation would guarantee working people fourteen days of paid sick leave during any public health emergency, and provide up to seven paid sick and safe days annually to recover from an illness, visit a doctor, care for a sick loved one, or seek help related to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking.

The second letter, led by the National Women's Law Center and the National Employment Law Project, shares recommendations with Congress to strengthen the unemployment insurance system and ensure households facing coronavirus-related job loss can access unemployment insurance quickly. The recommendations would also help workers who need to quit their jobs to assume caregiving responsibilities get coverage under unemployment insurance by expanding the definition of "good cause quit" to include caring for a sick family member or caring for their children in the event of school closures.

Read additional information about Senate and House Democrats' proposals to address the health and economic needs of individuals and communities impacted by the coronavirus in a separate article in this *Memo to Members and Partners*.

Read the letter from the Paid Leave for All Campaign at: <https://bit.ly/2TGJ30u>

Read the letter from the National Women's Law Center and the National Employment Law Project at: <https://bit.ly/2Q89KsR>

Learn more about the "Paid Sick Days for Public Health Emergencies and Personal and Family Care Act" at: <https://bit.ly/2wMABxt>

Learn more about the "Families First Coronavirus Response Act" at: <https://bit.ly/2WeoE4y>

Read Diane's full statement at: <https://bit.ly/2Q8Liru>

NLIHC Provides New Resource to Guide Federal Coronavirus Response Related to Housing for Those Most in Need

The NLIHC-led Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC) launched on March 10 a [new resource](#) to guide the federal response to the coronavirus pandemic related to housing for those most in need. The DHRC is comprised of more than 850 national, state, and local organizations working to ensure complete and equitable housing recovery for people with the lowest incomes, who are often hit hardest by disasters and have the fewest resources to recover. It is crucial that any comprehensive response to the pandemic include resources to help ensure the safety and well-being of low-income households and people experiencing homelessness, who are at particularly high risk during the coronavirus pandemic.

The DHRC developed the [list of recommendations](#) for members of Congress to include in any legislative spending package aimed at addressing the impact of coronavirus on public health and the economy. These recommendations will be reviewed, refined, and updated regularly as the coronavirus pandemic evolves to

ensure they reflect the needs and priorities of the lowest-income households and people experiencing homelessness. Currently, the recommendations call for significant additional resources for McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants and for the implementation of the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) to provide housing and shelter for people experiencing homelessness. McKinney-Vento funds can be used by local communities to provide shelter, create separate spaces for individuals with mild respiratory symptoms, and minimize the number of people living in homeless encampments. DHAP can quickly move people into affordable homes, where they can more easily keep themselves and their neighbors healthy.

The recommendations also include creating an emergency assistance fund to help prevent evictions by providing short-term financial assistance and housing stabilization services. For families living in poverty, unreimbursed medical bills and temporary declines in income – which can be caused by taking time off of work to recover from an illness or care for a sick loved one – can pose a significant challenge to affording basic necessities like medicine, food, and rent. An emergency assistance fund, like the one proposed by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Rob Portman (R-OH) in the “Eviction Crisis Act” ([S.3030](#); see *Memo*, [12/16/19](#)), would help prevent housing instability and homelessness as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Access to legal services, foreclosure and eviction crisis counseling, and a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures during and immediately after the crisis should also be implemented to ensuring housing stability during the pandemic.

NLIHC launched a [webpage](#) detailing national and local responses to the coronavirus, as well as federal resources available to help communities prepare and respond to outbreaks. The DHRC is holding a [national call](#) on coronavirus, housing and homelessness to share local, state, and federal updates and plan for advocacy ahead. Speakers will include experts from impacted areas, city and federal departments, and Capitol Hill. The call will take place today, March 16, at 2:30 p.m. ET. You can register for the call [here](#).

Register for the call on coronavirus, housing and homelessness at: <https://bit.ly/39GZAHD>

Read DHRC’s recommendations to Congress at: <https://bit.ly/38KfwYd>

Visit NLIHC’s webpage on national and local responses to the coronavirus pandemic at: <https://bit.ly/2Q9mRKx>

HUD Office of Multifamily Housing Issues Coronavirus FAQs

HUD’s Office of Multifamily Housing Programs (Multifamily), which oversees contracts with private owners of HUD-assisted properties, issued “[Questions and Answers for Office of Multifamily Housing Stakeholders](#)” pertaining to the coronavirus and COVID-19.

In response to a number of theoretical questions the answer is often: “Follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance, directions given by local health officials, and [Chapter 38 of Multifamily Handbook 4350.1](#), Emergency and Disaster Guidance.”

HUD indicates it intends to provide regular updates to stakeholders via email to national stakeholder groups to forward to their members, as well as to HUD Multifamily Field Offices for distribution to stakeholders in their jurisdictions.

One hypothetical question asks, “If a person under quarantine has additional family members who need to be kept separate, what are a property manager’s options for meeting those needs? What if managers are being asked to use vacant units for quarantine?” HUD responds, “Resident requests to occupy vacant units or temporarily relocate should be verified before being granted. Verification could include written communication from a medical health professional or through communication with the local health department.”

An important hypothetical question asks whether HUD will make rent payment relief or additional assistance available if tenants fall under adverse conditions due to COVID-19. Because Congress has not provided additional funds for this purpose, HUD can only encourage property owners to work with affected residents to adjust rent payments or enter into forbearance agreements.

The FAQ states that property owners must process an interim income recertification if a resident reports a decrease in income due to COVID-19 that will last for more than one month. Property owners should already have a policy, according to Chapter 7 of Handbook 4350.1. In addition, property owners may consider granting extra time for income recertification if a resident who has COVID-19 or who is in quarantine requests an extension.

Regarding extra costs property owners might bear in response to preparedness, such as extra supplies and staff overtime, HUD says owners can access property operating accounts without HUD approval. To the extent advances to owners are needed, however, HUD approval is required. For properties with reserve-for-replacement accounts, funds should be accessed according to current policy in Chapter 4 of Handbook 4350.1.

“Questions and Answers for Office of Multifamily Housing Stakeholders” pertaining to the coronavirus and COVID-19 is at: <https://bit.ly/2IKaekO>

NLIHC has a new webpage about coronavirus and housing and homelessness at: <https://bit.ly/2wPKFMA>

More information about the Office of Multifamily’s Project-Based Rental Assistance program is on [page 4-46](#) of NLIHC’s *2019 Advocates’ Guide*.

HUD Posts Slides and Recording of Canceled Webinar on Infectious Disease Preparedness for Homeless Assistance Providers

HUD’s Office of Special Needs Assistance Programs (SNAPS) cancelled its March 10 webinar, “Infectious Disease Preparedness for Homeless Assistance Providers and Their Partners,” (*see Memo, 3/9*) due to technical difficulties. The slides and a recording of the 75-minute presentation, however, are now available on the [HUD Exchange training page](#).

SNAPS has an [Infectious Disease Prevention & Response](#) page that contains technical assistance materials from HUD as well as guidance issued from federal partners dedicated to preparing for and responding to infectious diseases, including COVID-19.

HUD is also available to provide technical assistance to homeless assistance providers who need support in preventing or responding to the spread of infectious disease. Submit questions to the [Ask A Question \(AAQ\) portal](#). In Step 2 of the question submission process, select “CoC: Continuum of Care Program” from the “My question is related to” drop down list and write “Health Preparedness and Response” in the subject line.

More about the coronavirus and homelessness is on NLIHC’s new webpage, [COVID-19: Coronavirus and Housing/Homelessness](#).

More about homelessness is on [page 4-65](#) of NLIHC’s *2019 Advocates’ Guide*.

Join National Call on Coronavirus and Homelessness/Housing, Today 2:30 p.m. ET

Join a national call on “[Coronavirus and Homelessness/Housing](#)” today at 2:30 p.m. ET. The call, hosted by NLIHC’s Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC), will feature homelessness services and housing providers in Seattle, New York, and California; explore the urgent and unique needs of tribal communities, immigrants, people with disabilities, and others; and share updates from congressional offices and NLIHC on progress to achieve our ["Responding to Coronavirus" recommendations](#). Register for the call at: <https://bit.ly/2ISBMVs>

Join the [call](#) and our advocacy to ensure people experiencing homelessness and the lowest-income people are prioritized in our nation’s response to coronavirus. Providing resources to protect against an outbreak of coronavirus among people experiencing homelessness is of the utmost urgency. We must also ensure other extremely low-income people at risk of homelessness remain stably housed.

Check out NLIHC’s [regularly-updated webpage](#) with relevant updates from across the country on COVID-19 and housing.

Opportunity Starts at Home

Campaign Urges Congress to Include Emergency Assistance Funding in Coronavirus Response

The [Opportunity Starts at Home](#) multi-sector affordable homes campaign sent a [letter](#) on March 12 to Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) and Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) and Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), urging them to include emergency assistance funding to help prevent housing instability and homelessness as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. This letter was sent to congressional leadership as they consider a legislative spending package aimed at addressing the impact of the coronavirus. The letter was signed by nearly 50 leading national organizations from the campaign’s multi-sector Steering Committee and Roundtable.

The campaign also released a new [podcast episode](#) featuring Dr. Barbara DiPietro, senior director of policy at the National Health Care for the Homeless Council, who speaks about the intersection between housing and the coronavirus pandemic. “Our housing crisis is a public health issue,” said Dr. DiPietro. “People experiencing homelessness should be a priority population in our emergency response to the coronavirus.”

The letter is at: <https://bit.ly/3cSg0id>

The podcast episode is at: <https://bit.ly/2w5X6Un>

Disaster Housing Recovery

Additional Disaster Housing Recovery Updates - March 16, 2020

The following is a review of additional disaster housing recovery developments since the last edition of *Memo to Members and Partners* (for the article in the previous Memo, see [3/09](#)).

Federal Action & National News

FEMA Administrator Peter Gaynor spoke to the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure on March 11 in a [hearing](#) on FEMA’s priorities for 2020 and beyond. The hearing covered a wide variety of topics, from flood insurance reform to FEMA staffing levels.

Congressman John Garamendi (D-CA), a senior member of the House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, introduced the “[FEMA Disaster Preparedness Improvement Act](#)” (H.R.6071) to increase FEMA support for disaster preparedness and emergency response in California and other states. Congressman Mike Thompson (D-CA) is the bill’s original cosponsor.

Tennessee Tornadoes

The potential [impacts](#) of displacement and gentrification were already a concern for some Tennessee communities, and those impacts could now be exacerbated as the communities deal with storm damages.

[Real estate speculators](#) hoping to cash-in on a Nashville Opportunity Zone were quick to move into tornado-damaged neighborhoods. The speculators offered cash to buy damaged homes, reaching disaster-affected households even before Disaster Recovery Centers could be set up.

Midwest Flooding

Nebraska officials provided [updates](#) on ongoing recovery efforts close to one year after damaging floods ravaged parts of the state. Providing access to affordable housing is a “top priority” in their recovery efforts as they continue to work on their long-term disaster recovery plan.

Nebraska officials are attempting to [stop predatory](#) landlord practices after last year’s flooding and to undertake long-term housing recovery.

Puerto Rico Earthquakes and Hurricane Maria

The government of Puerto Rico, the Central Office for Reconstruction, Recovery and Resiliency (COR3) and FEMA have partnered to open a [Joint Field Office](#) in Ponce. The office will serve as a central point of coordination and decision-making related to recovery for earthquake-impacted areas. The office’s priorities will be to receive and effectively deploy all federal assistance the island is eligible for under the law.

A Hurricane Maria memorial, honoring the victims of the hurricane, is being developed in Battery Park City, NY. Designs can be viewed [online](#).

Tropical Storm Imelda & Hurricane Harvey

Texas

The State of Texas has [appealed](#) FEMA’s denial of the state’s request for a major disaster declaration to release public assistance related to Tropical Storm Imelda. The governor initially requested a Presidential Disaster Declaration for Individual Assistance for six Texas counties in [October 2019](#). Although that request was approved, a subsequent request for public assistance, submitted by Texas Division of Emergency Management (TDEM) Chief Nim Kidd in December of 2019, was denied.

Hurricanes Matthew and Florence

North Carolina

Rebuild North Carolina is seeking feedback on the draft state action plan that would spend \$542 million in disaster recovery funding related to storm damage from Hurricane Florence. The state can begin using the funds to [implement](#) Hurricane Florence recovery programs following the public comment period and subsequent approval of the action plan by HUD.

Advocates in North Carolina are arguing there is more to disaster recovery efforts than housing and jobs. Though those are [vital](#), they say funding is also needed in the state’s recovery action plan for mental health and community rebuilding efforts.

Florida

Senator Marco Rubio (R-FL) [introduced](#) the “Fairness in Disaster Relief Act,” which would authorize the president to reimburse local governments for qualified interest payments. The legislation is a companion to the House bill Representative Neil Dunn (R-FL) introduced in November. The bill is intended to reduce the cost burdens experienced by local jurisdictions due to disaster recovery efforts.

Other Disasters

Hurricane Irma: The U.S. Virgin Islands Office of Disaster Recovery (ODR), in collaboration with the Virgin Islands Housing Finance Authority (VIHFA) and WTJX-TV Channel 12 (WTJX), has announced the launch of a new television program to provide the public with the most up-to-date information on the territory’s progress on recovery. “[Recovery in Focus](#)” aims to provide viewers with the most recent developments in the Office of Disaster Recovery’s five priority areas: hospitals, schools, roads, housing and power, as well as other critical projects that impact the daily lives of residents.

Texas 2019 Flooding: The City of San Marcos has declared affordable housing, public services, and public facilities as key [priorities](#) for Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding in response to the 2019 flooding.

Budget and Appropriations

Senate THUD Subcommittee Questions HUD Secretary Carson on FY21 Funding Request, Coronavirus Response

The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development held a hearing on March 11 to review HUD’s fiscal year (FY) 2021 funding request and budget justification. Members of the subcommittee questioned HUD Secretary Ben Carson on the president’s budget request to slash HUD funding by 15%, as well as HUD’s coronavirus prevention strategies.

The president’s FY21 budget request [proposed](#) cutting HUD funding by \$8.6 billion (15%) compared to FY20 enacted levels. Secretary Carson stated the requested cuts and program eliminations are necessary to reduce the national deficit. He acknowledged that several of the programs the budget proposed eliminating, such as the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program and the Federal Housing Administration, are excellent models, but he stated that state and local governments should be providing these resources rather than the federal government.

In her opening remarks, Subcommittee Chair Susan Collins (R-ME) quoted NLIHC’s report [The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes](#), noting “no state has an adequate supply of affordable rental housing.” She stated that programs like the national Housing Trust Fund (HTF) “are critical to meet the housing needs of low-income families,” and that the administration’s proposed elimination of the HTF, CDBG, the HOME Investment Partnerships Program, the Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing program, and youth homelessness grants are highly unlikely, given the fact “every state [suffers] from a lack of affordable rental housing.” Senator Collins also questioned the administration’s proposal for steep cuts to public housing programs and noted that the budget request’s proposed policy changes “would shift more of the cost of rental assistance to already struggling working families.”

Ranking Member Jack Reed (D-RI) noted his support for sustained funding for homeless assistance through the Continuum of Care program but expressed concern over the proposed cuts in resources for the Emergency Solutions Grant program, particularly during the coronavirus outbreak. “As the epidemic of the coronavirus continues to expand, unsheltered homeless are particularly vulnerable,” Senator Reed said. “There isn’t much direction for state and local communities . . . [to provide] temporary housing assistance for unsheltered homeless.” Senator Reed also questioned HUD’s disaster recovery response in Puerto Rico, calling the agency’s response “unfair, to say the least. . . . Out of the \$20 billion allocated to Puerto Rico after the catastrophic hurricanes of 2017, the island has only had access to a total of \$3.2 billion of the appropriated funding.”

Secretary Carson maintained that the proposed budget “will support HUD’s combined efforts to provide safe, decent, and affordable housing for the American people, while being good stewards of taxpayer dollars.” He also alluded to the administration’s “new initiative to reduce unsheltered homelessness” but did not offer any details about what the initiative would entail or how it would be administered.

Several senators expressed concerns over HUD’s response to the coronavirus pandemic. Senator Collins noted that two of HUD’s key constituents, people experiencing homelessness and seniors, have a higher risk of contracting the virus. When asked what HUD is doing to ensure people experiencing homelessness and residents of federally assisted housing are safe, Secretary Carson responded that HUD established a task force to discuss “how [HUD can] remain efficient, what contingency plans are needed in case [HUD staff] have to work from home, how to get the cleaning staff to clean appropriate places in the appropriate way.” The secretary noted that HUD has developed a toolkit for public housing authorities (PHAs), assisted housing providers, and operators of Section 202 housing for the elderly to share best practices and connect agencies with local health programs to contact should they need further assistance.

Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) said that she was “incredibly frustrated and very concerned” by the administration’s lack of urgency in responding to coronavirus. Senator Murray asked whether HUD was preparing for potential mass shelter needs; Secretary Carson responded by saying mass shelter needs were “primarily a FEMA issue” and providing people experiencing homelessness with medical care “[falls] to the state health agencies.” The senator noted that PHAs do not have adequate cleaning supplies and personal protective equipment to safely assist people experiencing homelessness and asked whether HUD has any plans to provide PHAs with additional supplies. “That would not be something that HUD would do,” Secretary Carson responded. “HUD does not have a mechanism for distributing all that material over the country.” Senator Murray pushed back, stating “these are our facilities, these are our employees, these are our people in these sites, and they need to know, should or when they have an outbreak, . . . they will be protected. Having personal protection and equipment so they can respond to an outbreak in one of our housing units is absolutely important . . . so as they respond to this, they are not getting the virus and spreading it to their families.”

Watch a recording of the hearing at: <http://bit.ly/2WiHuYE>

NLIHC Housing Policy Forum and Leadership Awards Reception

NLIHC Cancels Housing Policy Forum, Postpones Leadership Awards Reception due to Coronavirus

[NLIHC’s 2020 Housing Policy Forum](#) was scheduled to take place on March 25-27, and other NLIHC events planned that week included the our state partners’ meeting, a special session for resident leaders, a Capitol Hill Day, and our annual [Housing Leadership Awards Reception](#). With coronavirus spreading in the U.S., and with the health and safety of all attendees, their families, and their communities as our top priority, NLIHC has cancelled the Housing Policy Forum and Capitol Hill Day and postponed the Housing Leadership Awards

Reception. NLIHC will refund 100% of all registration fees and will process refunds in the coming days. Forum registrants have already received an email with more information.

This was an extremely difficult decision given how hard the NLIHC team had planned for an outstanding Forum, and how much we were looking forward to reconnecting, learning, strategizing, and building power with many of you. But you have important work to do back home in your communities, and we need our movement to end homelessness and housing poverty to be healthy and strong.

There is still much we do not know about the virus and its spread, and health professionals are providing [practical ways people can protect themselves](#) and their communities. Here's what we do know: the World Health Organization has declared the situation a pandemic, and the CDC has issued [guidance](#) advising that people over 60 years old or those with underlying health conditions should avoid crowds. Many of our Forum participants meet this definition. Additionally, the CDC [recommended issuing guidance](#) that seniors and people with underlying health issues not fly on commercial airlines because of the coronavirus, but the White House would not allow such guidance to be issued. We take this guidance from our country's leading health professionals very seriously.

Ultimately, we concluded that we simply could not risk having our gathering contribute to illness for our Forum attendees or for the people and communities they work with back home.

We at NLIHC look forward to talking with many of you on today's [National Call on Coronavirus and Housing/Homelessness at 2:30 p.m. ET](#). Please take care of yourselves and your neighbors, stay healthy and strong. Thank you for all you do.

Our Homes, Our Votes: 2020

Learn How to Get Candidates on the Record about Affordable Housing - March 19 Webinar!

Join the NLIHC-led *Our Homes, Our Votes 2020* nonpartisan voter and candidate engagement project, and participate in a webinar on **"Getting Candidates on the Record"** about their affordable housing solutions on March 19 at 3:00 p.m. ET. Register for this webinar and NLIHC's entire 15-month ["Third Thursdays at Three"](#) webinar and podcast series on nonpartisan voter and candidate engagement, free to the public, at: <https://tinyurl.com/y3t9gfr2>

This session will provide an exploration of the most common methods to get candidates for elected office on the record with their ideas for affordable housing solutions. The presenters will discuss the use of candidate questionnaires and legal considerations, along with tips on maximizing response rates from candidates. They will also explore the use of effective candidate intercepts and asking questions in town hall meetings, as well as effective use of question cards and training volunteers to attend candidate events. The discussion will feature ideas for social media engagement and conventional media op-eds and letters to the editor as ways to urge candidates to go on the record.

NLIHC provides [an array of nonpartisan resources, tools, and training](#) on increasing voter registration and turnout among low-income renters and on engaging candidates leading up to the 2020 elections, including these webinars and podcasts covering many facets of voter and candidate engagement, featuring experts and advocates with frontline experience.

The presentations take place at 3:00 p.m. ET on the third Thursday of each month. All sessions will be recorded and posted to the *Our Homes, Our Votes: 2020* website for those who cannot attend the live broadcasts. The full list of webinar topics:

- Session 1: Legal Considerations for Election Engagement for 501 (c3) organizations, September 19. (Watch recording at: <https://bit.ly/338Ydho>)
- Session 2: Developing an Effective Plan for Voter Engagement Work, October 17. (Watch recording at: <https://bit.ly/338Ydho>)
- Session 3: Helpful Tools and Partners for Election Engagement, November 21 (Watch recording at: <https://bit.ly/338Ydho>)
- Session 4: Voter Registration Part 1 – Messaging, Events, and Canvassing, December 19 (Watch recording at: <https://bit.ly/338Ydho>)
- Session 5: Voter Registration Part 2 – Finding and Registering Residents of Subsidized Housing, January 16 (Watch recording at: <https://bit.ly/338Ydho>)
- Session 6: The Role of Housing Providers in Registering and Mobilizing Voters, February 20 (Watch recording at: <https://bit.ly/338Ydho>)
- **Session 7: Getting Candidates on the Record, March 19**
- Session 8: Educating Voters, April 16
- Session 9: Housing Issues and Ballot Initiatives, May 21
- Session 10: Overcoming Common Obstacles to Voting, June 18
- Session 11: The Challenge of Voting While Homeless, July 16
- Session 12: Voter Mobilization Part 1 – Early Voting and Vote-by-Mail, August 20
- Session 13: Voter Mobilization Part 2 – Protecting Low Income People from Voter Intimidation and Voter Caging Tactics, September 17
- Session 14: Election Day! Getting Out the Vote, October 15
- Session 15: After the Vote – Holding Candidates to their Promises, November 19

Register once for all webinars/podcasts and receive reminders at: <https://tinyurl.com/y3t9gfr2>

Watch recordings of previous webinars at: <https://bit.ly/338Ydho>

Research

NLIHC Releases *The Gap*, Finds Shortage of 7 Million Affordable and Available Homes for Extremely Low-Income Renter Households

NLIHC released its annual report, [*The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes*](#), which finds that extremely low-income renters in the U.S. face a shortage of 7 million affordable and available rental homes. Only 36 affordable and available homes existed for every 100 extremely low-income renter households in 2018. This year, the report also examines in greater detail the racial inequities of the nation’s housing shortage, the relationship between the share of a metropolitan area’s housing stock that is HUD-assisted and the share of extremely low-income renter households who are severely housing cost-burdened, and the connection between housing affordability and housing justice.

Each year, NLIHC examines the American Community Survey (ACS) to determine the availability of rental homes affordable to extremely low-income households—households with incomes at or below the poverty line or 30% of the area median income, whichever is greater—and other groups. This year, the analysis found that 10.9 million renter households with extremely low incomes account for 25% of all renter households and 8% of all U.S. households. Seventy-one percent of those extremely low-income renters—7.7 million households—are severely housing cost-burdened, meaning they spend more than half of their incomes on rent and utilities. No state has an adequate supply of affordable and available homes for extremely low-income renters, ranging from 18 affordable and available homes for every 100 extremely low-income renter households in Nevada to 62 in

West Virginia. The report also illustrates that the shortage of affordable homes for households with higher incomes is driven by the shortage for the lowest-income renters who are forced to rent apartments they cannot afford, making those apartments unavailable to other income groups.

People of color are more likely than whites to be extremely low-income renters. Twenty percent of Black households, 17% of American Indian or Alaska Native households, 15% of Hispanic households, and 10% of Asian households are extremely low-income renters. By comparison, 6% of white non-Hispanic households are extremely low-income renters. While Black households account for 12% of all households in the U.S., they account for 19% of all renter households and 26% of all extremely low-income renter households. These patterns reflect longstanding inequalities of opportunity and the continuing impacts of historical and ongoing discrimination.

The report also examines the relationship between a metro area's HUD-assisted rental stock—that is, public housing or housing subsidized by Housing Choice Vouchers or project-based rental assistance—and renter households in that metro area who were severely housing cost-burdened. Even after considering other factors such as rental vacancy rates and the age of the housing stock, the greater the share of the rental stock that was HUD-assisted, the lower the share of renter households who were severely cost-burdened.

Finally, this year's report touches on the connection between housing affordability and justice. A wealth of evidence shows that stable, decent, accessible housing itself is an essential element of individual well-being. When households cannot afford their housing, they are forced to sacrifice other essential needs. To the extent our social, political, and economic system reliably creates and perpetuates a shortage of affordable and available housing, it unnecessarily imposes suffering on millions of people. In the absence of a defensible rationale for that system, it represents a fundamental injustice we have a collective moral responsibility to change. The report describes steps that could remedy the injustice: greater investments in the national Housing Trust Fund, Housing Choice Vouchers, public housing, and a national housing stabilization fund to prevent evictions could help eliminate the shortage of affordable and available housing and mitigate harms to the lowest-income households.

The Gap report and interactive website can be accessed at: <https://nlihc.org/gap>

Survey Identifies Connections Between Criminalization of Homelessness and Environmental Injustice

An article in *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space*, "[Intersecting Hazards, Intersectional Identities: A Baseline Critical Environmental Justice Analysis of Homelessness](#)," describes how the regulation and criminalization of homelessness can magnify the environmental hazards to which people experiencing homelessness are exposed. The author interviewed people experiencing homelessness who described concerns about being forced into campsites affected by soil and water contamination, air and noise pollution, severe weather events, fire, and pests and rodents.

The author draws on seven years of participant observation in Portland, OR, and a national phone survey of 47 "houseless community" representatives across the country. The participant observation was performed with Right 2 Survive, a Portland-based advocacy organization that has established two "self-governed houseless communities." These communities are self-organizing encampments with communal areas and shared services for people experiencing homelessness. For the national phone survey, the author identified 385 organized houseless communities throughout the country and conducted structured interviews with 47 community leaders in 19 states. The interviews focused on the nature of these communities, environmental hazards that affect residents, and strategies used to address such hazards. (Right 2 Survive refers to people living without shelter as

“houseless” rather than homeless because home is where the heart is, and just because someone lacks shelter does not mean they lack a heart.)

Environmental justice scholarship focuses on the fairness of environmental and health laws and policies—whether equal efforts are taken to protect everyone from environmental hazards and provide equal access to healthy environments. The author draws two major conclusions from interviews with houseless community representatives. First, the regulation and criminalization of homelessness increases the environmental hazard exposure risk for people experiencing homelessness. Second, a careful analysis of these environmental hazards should take into account how exposure risk varies for people of color, women, people with disabilities, and people with mental illness.

The interviewees identified a number of environmental hazards that people experiencing homelessness encounter. Among those environmental hazards were soil and water contamination, air and noise pollution, and exposure to severe weather events. Residents of houseless communities were also concerned about fire risks, mold and mildew, landslides, exposure to pests and rodents, and the threat of police or vigilante violence. In many cases, the lack of access to infrastructure (e.g., shelter, stormwater management, water and sanitation systems, electricity, heating, trash services) exacerbated their environmental hazard exposure. Over and above the everyday hazards created by lack of basic infrastructure, interviewees noted that people experiencing homelessness were exposed to greater environmental hazards during natural disasters. Interviewees described being denied FEMA assistance and refused emergency services after wildfires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and floods.

Interviewees described ways in which the regulation and criminalization of homelessness exacerbated these environmental hazards. Prohibitions on camping in safer public spaces and “move-along” orders reportedly drove some houseless communities into more dangerous areas. Interviewees reported having an easier time camping on federal land near railroad tracks, due to reduced police presence, though they expressed worries about pollution and noise in such spaces. Other interviewees reported similar experiences of being effectively encouraged to camp near subway tracks or in underpasses. Interviewees described how the seizure of belongings such as tents further limited their options and drove some to areas such as underpasses. Beyond driving them to less desirable locations, police interaction was itself described as an environmental hazard by interviewees—move-along orders in the middle of the night were described as noise pollution that deprived them of sleep.

Interviewees identified another connection between environmental justice and homelessness—namely, the way environmental justice concerns are used to justify evictions and sweeps. The author describes a 2016 incident in which an encampment was directed to City of Portland-owned land, only to be evicted after a belated discovery that the site had been a dumping ground for carcinogenic substances. Interviewees described other cases where they believed concerns about hygiene, public health, or environmental justice were used as a pretext to evict houseless communities, rather than to provide forms of support that could mitigate environmental hazards.

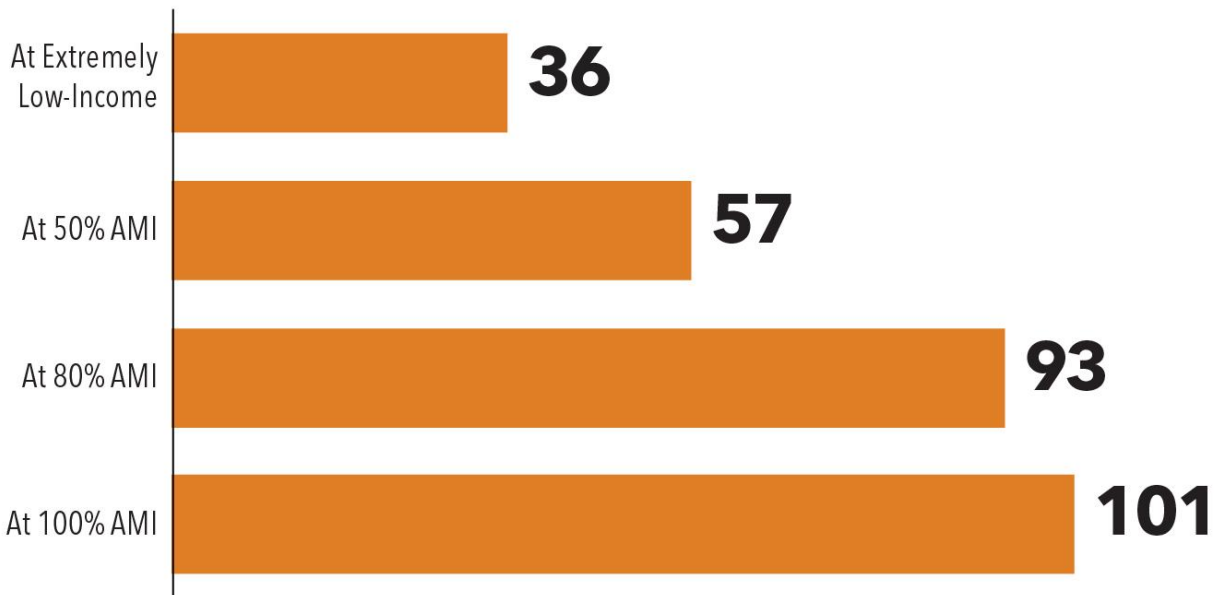
The paper is at: <https://bit.ly/33bC96T>

Fact of the Week

The Gap: Just 36 Affordable and Available Homes for Every 100 Extremely Low-Income U.S. Households

THE GAP

AFFORDABLE AND AVAILABLE RENTAL HOMES PER 100 RENTER HOUSEHOLDS, 2018



AMI = Area Median Income.
Source: NLIHC tabulations of 2018 ACS PUMS data.
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<https://nlihc.org/gap>



Source: NLIHC's *The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes, 2020*. NLIHC tabulations of 2018 ACS PUMS data.

Census

People with Disabilities and the 2020 Census

The U.S. Census Bureau has identified people with disabilities as a hard-to-count population, which means they are at a greater risk of being undercounted in the 2020 census. It is critically important for people with disabilities to be fully and accurately counted in order to better ensure their voices are heard by elected officials at all levels of government, federal, state, and local. The number of members of Congress and even state and local legislators are determined by the number of all residents in a geographic area. In addition, the amount of money many federally funded programs receive depends on a full census count.

Key programs important to people with disabilities include the Section 811 Supportive Housing for Persons with Disabilities program, Statewide Independent Living Councils, State Councils on Developmental Disabilities, Education Grants to States for Students with Disabilities, and the Vocational Rehabilitation State Grants Program. Unfortunately, the 2020 census will not have questions directly related to disabilities, but disability-related questions are asked in the American Community Survey (ACS), a more detailed survey which is sent only to a small sample of the population every month every year.

Most households will be asked to respond to the 2020 census online, using a desktop computer, laptop, tablet, or smart phone. Every household may also choose to respond by phone or by mail. According to a Census Bureau [fact sheet](#), people with disabilities will be able to respond to the 2020 census in a variety of accessible ways. For example:

- The online questionnaire will be accessible to people with a wide range of disabilities. According to “[An Accessible 2020 Census](#)” from The Economic Security and Opportunity Initiative and the 2020 Census at Georgetown Law School’s Center on Poverty and Inequality, the Census Bureau states people should be able to navigate online without a mouse and use assisted-living technology such as a screen reader. In addition, a video guide in American Sign Language with closed or open captioning will be available.
- According to [Census Counts](#), a collaborative campaign coordinated by Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, people with disabilities are about 20 percentage points less likely to own a computer, laptop, tablet, or smartphone, or to subscribe to home broadband. Therefore, some people with disabilities will want to respond by phone. Census Questionnaire Assistance phone lines will be available in English and 12 additional languages. People can also complete the census in English via a phone line that uses Telephone Device for the Deaf (TDD/TTY) technology. People can also request a visit from a census taker who uses American Sign Language.
- For people who prefer to respond by mail, those who are blind or who have low vision can print a guide in braille or in a large-print format from the Census Bureau’s “Language Guide” [webpage](#) (scroll to the bottom after all of the languages).

People living in group situations, such as group homes and residential treatment centers, will be counted by a separate Census Bureau operation called the Group Quarters (GQ) enumeration. Census staff will work with administrators of such group facilities to set a date, time, and preferred method of counting people.

To help ensure a more accurate count of people with disabilities, advocates and service providers should consider directly engaging with such individuals to share the importance of an accurate census and encourage their participation. In particular, trusted community members can play an important role in reassuring people with disabilities, including those who are undocumented or who distrust or fear government employees. Tell people with disabilities to look out for census materials starting March 12, reinforce the importance of being counted, and help them get the support they need to respond. Service providers can reach out to clients. For example, service providers at Independent Living Centers, Protection and Advocacy Systems, and parent associations can play a vital role as trusted partners to conduct effective outreach.

The Economic Security and Opportunity Initiative and the 2020 Census at Georgetown Law School’s Center on Poverty and Inequality has many resources about the 2020 census and various hard-to-count populations at: <https://bit.ly/2VJpZA9>. Scroll down to the third item to find “[An Accessible 2020 Census.](#)”

The Leadership Conference also has a special [Census Counts](#) webpage with fact sheets, webinars, and other materials about the 2020 census, including a fact sheet “[Why the Census Matters for People with Disabilities.](#)”

The [U.S. Census Bureau](#) website has many resources, including an [Outreach Materials page](#) with an extensive trove of outreach resources, including fact sheets and posters. For example, there is a fact sheet “Accessibility of the 2020 Census” at: <https://bit.ly/3aQ3eiB>

The Arc has a fact sheet “You Count. Be Counted” at: <https://bit.ly/39HyAYi> as well as a video at: <https://bit.ly/2VXxHqG>

The National Disability Rights Network and Census Counts have a fact sheet, “An Accessible Get Out the Count (GOTC) Plan,” at: <https://bit.ly/2IC9Ogl>

See previous *Memo* articles about the 2020 census, one about [people experiencing homeless and the census](#) and one a more [general discussion](#) about the 2020 census.

From the Field

Utah Gains \$10 Million for Affordable Housing in Tough Budget Environment

Utah Senate Bill 39 (SB39) cleared its final legislative hurdle on March 10 when the Utah House of Representatives approved a one-time allocation of \$10 million for affordable housing programs. The new money is expected to leverage tens of millions of additional dollars and will be used to create and preserve affordable rental homes across the state. SB39 now goes to Governor Gary Herbert's desk. The governor included \$20 million for affordable homes in his budget request and is expected to approve this measure.

Although SB39 sponsors originally sought \$35 million, many stakeholders agree the smaller number is still significant. A similar bill passed in last year's session was completely stripped of funding, and failed tax reform efforts led to a challenging budget year. Many state legislators resisted funding affordable rental housing, and even more were concerned with the \$35 million price tag.

The bill's original sponsor Senator Jake Anderegg (R-Lehi) led the effort to build support for SB39 with the help of Representative Val Potter (R-North Logan) who sponsored a version in the House. Various advocates and stakeholders, including NLIHC state partner the Utah Housing Coalition, helped get the bill across the finish line by making the case that the state's recent investments toward homelessness resource centers were in vain without also including new funding for affordable rental homes.

The \$10 million in new funding will go to the Olene Walker Housing Loan Fund that provides low-interest loans for development projects that include affordable homes for low- to moderate-income households. If approved by the Olene Walker Housing Loan Fund's board, \$1 million will be devoted to a new Utah Housing Preservation Fund. This preservation fund will be launched by the Utah Nonprofit Housing Corporation in partnership with some of Utah's biggest businesses. Ivory Foundation, Intermountain Healthcare, and Zions Bank announced they will commit \$20 million for an initial phase of funding to preserve 100 homes. These funders predict that they can grow public and private partnerships to leverage the fund to \$100 million to preserve up to 800 affordable rental homes.

The Utah Housing Preservation Fund will be managed by the Utah Nonprofit Housing Corporation. Its first contract will acquire 54 deeply affordable homes from Housing Connect, the public housing authority in Salt Lake County, to keep them affordable to households with incomes at or below 30% of the area median income. Housing Connect is expected to reinvest the proceeds of this deal to generate at least 100 additional rental homes affordable to extremely low-income households.

"This bill would have never reached the finish line if it was not for the incredible broad group of supporters at the table working on this. Leaders in our community stepped up like they have never stepped up before," said Tara Rollins, Utah Housing Coalition executive director.

NLIHC in the News

NLIHC in the News for the Week of March 8

The following are some of the news stories that NLIHC contributed to during the week of March 8:

- “Opinion: Think kids won’t suffer from COVID-19? Wrong: It threatens them with more poverty, hunger, homelessness,” *MarketWatch*, March 13 at: <https://tinyurl.com/s7m4e7c>
- “Central Florida no longer nation’s worst for affordable housing — but we’re close,” *Orlando Sentinel*, March 12 at: <https://tinyurl.com/tpwbksd>
- “Advocates urge action on affordable housing in central Ohio,” *The Columbus Dispatch*, March 12 at: <https://tinyurl.com/tahkdne>
- “Getting Access to Affordable Low-Income Housing,” *Scripps National News*, March 12 at: <https://youtu.be/731NFixzTiI>
- “Exclusive—Ben Carson says minimum wage is too low,” *Axios*, March 9 at: <https://tinyurl.com/yx6ppodw>
- “Bernie Sanders’ massive affordable housing plan would change the lives of millions of poor Americans, but also squeeze the middle class,” *Business Insider*, March 8 at: <https://tinyurl.com/uvx43h9>
- “Housing advocate: Trump administration proposals ‘would worsen homelessness in our country,’” *Yahoo! Finance*, March 8 at: <https://tinyurl.com/u68j23q>

NLIHC News

Where to Find Us – March 16

NLIHC President and CEO Diane Yentel and other NLIHC staff will be speaking at the following events in the coming months:

- [West Virginia Coalition to End Homelessness Annual Conference on Ending Homelessness](#), Davis, WV, April 1
- [Panel at George Mason University for Nonprofit Studies class](#), Fairfax, VA, April 2
- [YIMBY Town 2020](#), Portland, OR, April 3
- Humility Homes and Services 30 Years Celebration, Davenport, IA, April 18
- Thurgood Marshall Institute Lab/Forum, New York, NY, April 28
- [Building Michigan Communities Conference](#), Lansing, MI, April 28
- The Elder Alliance Summit, Tucson, AZ, May 1
- [National Association of Local Housing Finance Agencies Annual Conference](#), New York, NY, May 7
- [Princeton Community Housing Annual Homes Build Opportunity Gala](#), Princeton, NJ, June 13
- National Association of Social Workers Conference, Washington, DC, June 15
- Tulsa Mayor’s Development Roundtable, Tulsa, OK, September 24
- [HousingWorks RI Annual Factbook Lunch](#), Providence, RI, October 16
- [Maine Affordable Housing Coalition Conference](#), Portland, ME, November 18

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Diane Yentel, President and CEO, x225