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Housing Policy Forum and Leadership Awards Reception

Recap of NLIHC's 2023 Housing Policy Forum Featuring Congressional Leaders, HUD Secretary Fudge, Policy Experts, Successful Organizers, and Others

Advocates from around the country gathered in Washington, D.C., and virtually last week for NLIHC's 2023 Housing Policy Forum. The first Forum held in person since 2019, this year's event was hosted at the Hilton Capitol Hill Hotel on March 21-23 and featured conversations with and presentations by key leaders in Congress and the Biden administration, including HUD Secretary Marcia L. Fudge, Representatives Maxine Waters (D-CA) and Pramila Jayapal (D-WA), U.S. Department of the Treasury Deputy Secretary Wally Adeyemo, and Federal Housing Finance Agency Director Sandra Thompson. The Forum also featured a keynote address by sociologist Matthew Desmond, as well as a book launch for Professor Desmond's new book, *Poverty, by America*, and a conversation with Ms. Shirley Sherrod, co-founder of New Communities Land Trust. The Forum offered an array of plenary panels, breakout sessions, and numerous other opportunities for advocates to engage with and learn from thought-leaders, tenant and community leaders, policy experts, researchers, and affordable housing practitioners about the fight for housing justice.

Following a series of pre-Forum sessions held on March 20 and the morning of March 21 – including a State and Tribal Partner Convening and two Tenant Leader sessions (see the additional articles in this issue of *Memo* for more information) – the 2023 Housing Policy Forum began with opening remarks from NLIHC Board of Directors Chair Dora Leong Gallo and NLIHC board member Loraine Brown before NLIHC President and CEO **Diane Yentel** took the stage to welcome guests to the Forum.

“It's been a long time coming – the first time we're gathering at NLIHC's Housing Policy Forum in four long years,” said Diane, referring to the fact that the COVID-19 pandemic prevented an in-person Forum from being held since 2019. Diane recounted the impacts of the pandemic on the struggle for affordable housing, and the extraordinary advocacy and impact that NLIHC and our partners led during the four years since we last met in person. “In these years, we experienced – and created – tremendous, momentous shifts in our work, our partnerships, and our impact,” Diane continued. “Together, we achieved \$46.5 billion in rental assistance – an unprecedented level of support for low-income renters... Together, we fought for and kept in place a national moratorium on evictions.”

Since Congress first allocated emergency rental assistance funding in December 2020, over 10 million emergency rental assistance payments have been made, keeping millions of people stably housed. Additional resources, in the form of Emergency Housing Vouchers and billions of dollars in State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds, “allowed communities to permanently rehouse 140,000 people experiencing homelessness, to prevent homelessness for nearly 50,000 families, and to put in the pipeline another 40,000 deeply affordable homes.” These historic resources and policies helped not only to provide housing assistance and divert the anticipated mass wave of evictions, but also ushered in a surge of state and local policies focused on protecting tenants and leveling the playing field between renters and landlords.

Diane also celebrated the work of NLIHC's partners in passing tenant protections around the country. "Since 2021 alone, all of you – and partners like you from across the country – organized, advocated for, and won over 180 new state and local tenant protections," she said. "From just-cause eviction protections, to right to counsel, to the sealing of eviction records, to protections from source-of-income discrimination, to preventing rent gouging – these 180 new tenant protections are shifting power in our housing system back to where it belongs: with renters and people experiencing homelessness."

Diane highlighted the White House's recent, unprecedented actions to advance renter protections. NLIHC's Tenant Leader Cohort has been a central force in advancing and shaping the White House's actions on renter protections, resulting in the recently released *Blueprint for a Renters Bill of Rights*. While noting that the document does not go as far as NLIHC and the Tenant Leader Cohort would have liked, Diane observed that "this is the first time in decades – probably since the Great Depression – that the federal government has acknowledge that there could be an important federal role in preventing rent gouging. This is significant, and it would not have happened without all of you organizing, pushing, and insisting that it did." Diane celebrated the leadership of NLIHC's Tenant Leader Cohort and of the over 120 impacted people attending the Forum in person.

Even with the successes of the last four years, Diane made clear that there remains more work ahead to achieve the long-term solutions needed to advance housing justice and truly end homelessness and housing poverty. "The truth is, despite our success, renters are struggling more than ever. Despite the clear success of pandemic programs in cutting eviction filing in half, and cutting child poverty in half, we don't yet have in this country the political will to continue these astonishingly successful programs," she said. "And, as effective and important as emergency rental assistance and temporary eviction protections were to keeping millions of people stably housed, they were a temporary patch to the gaping holes in our social safety net. They did not address the deep, structural flaws in our country's housing system that perpetually leave millions of the lowest-income people struggling to keep a roof over their head."

Diane concluded her remarks with a call to action and a reminder of what advocates have achieved by working together: "On those days when our goals feel impossible, when the everyday difficulties of the work and the challenges seem insurmountable; on those days when you feel like we can't, or we won't, remember that *we did*. We achieved the unimaginable. We did the impossible. Together, we can, and we will, do it again."

Diane next introduced the 2023 Housing Policy Forum's keynote speaker, **Matthew Desmond**, a professor of sociology at Princeton University and the author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. In addition to featuring remarks by Professor Desmond, the Forum also served to officially launch *Poverty, by America*. Professor Desmond's address explored the two questions at the heart of his new book: Why is there so much poverty in America, and what can we do to eliminate it? Professor Desmond contended that progress on poverty has stalled since the 1970s, not only because of inadequacies in our welfare system but also because many people benefit from allowing poverty to remain entrenched.

Entrenched poverty, Professor Desmond argues, is fundamentally a consequence of the exploitation of people with low incomes in the labor, housing, and financial markets. Therefore,

advocates need to focus their efforts on reforming the systems that perpetuate this exploitation and enrich and empower those benefiting from it, including corporations, consumers, and middle- and higher-income Americans. As evidence for his argument, he pointed to current policies that prioritize “subsidizing affluence” (e.g., homeowner subsidies) over the alleviation of poverty. Professor Desmond concluded his address by offering three ways to combat poverty in America: (1) invest in families by rebalancing the safety net, (2) empower the poor by reining in exploitation, and (3) integrate communities to promote broad prosperity.

Next, Dr. Bambi Hayes Brown, president and CEO of Georgia Advancing Communities Together and NLIHC board member, participated in a discussion with **Ms. Shirley Sherrod**, co-founder of New Communities Land Trust and president of Southwest Georgia Project. Ms. Sherrod is a national civil rights figure, advocate, and global leader in agriculture policy and its impact on Black farmers and the Black community. She and her late husband Rev. Charles Sherrod founded the New Communities Land Trust as a haven for Black farmers thrown off their land during the civil rights movement.

In her discussion with Dr. Hayes-Brown, Ms. Sherrod talked about her experiences fighting systematic racism in Southwest Georgia during the civil rights movement. Recognizing the importance of land ownership as a vehicle for freedom for Black families, Rev. Sherrod and other civil rights leaders acquired nearly 6,000 acres of land in Lee County, Georgia, to establish and develop a community for Black families and ensure equal access to housing, to a quality education, to voting, and to farming their own land. Ms. Sherrod explained how New Communities was created during a time when White Flight and racist land and zoning policies were moving crucial resources and tax revenue to the surrounding areas of Lee County, and she shared details about the battle to hold on to their land when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) foreclosed and seized the property. After a decade-long effort that resulted in a class action lawsuit against USDA to address injustices against Black farmers and the Black community, New Communities received a settlement in 1999 and was able to use the proceeds to reclaim former plantation land and transform it into a symbol of hope and healing for the community.

A series of breakout sessions followed. In “**Homelessness is a Housing Problem: Best Practices in Housing First**,” panelists discussed the underlying causes of and proven solutions to the homelessness crisis, examined how communities like Houston are successfully using Housing First to permanently house thousands of individuals, and addressed the importance of centering and amplifying the voices of people with lived experience throughout the process of designing and implementing solutions to the crisis. NLIHC Senior Housing Policy Analyst Alayna Calabro moderated the panel, which included Clayton Aldern, co-author of the book *Homelessness is a Housing Problem*; Ana Rausch, vice president of program operations for the Coalition for the Homeless in Houston/Harris County; and Claudine Sipili, director of lived experience and innovation at Destination: Home. The panelists explored research demonstrating that the affordable housing crisis is the primary driver of homelessness, discussed Housing First best practices, and addressed how to center lived experience as we work to change public perceptions of homelessness and advance evidence-based solutions to the crisis.

Another breakout session, “**Building Tenant Protections in the Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) Program**,” explored the connections between LIHTC and renter protections.

The session was moderated by NLIHC Senior Research Analyst Dan Emmanuel and featured Glenda Krouse Matute, senior planning manager at APD Urban Planning and Management; Faruq Hussein-Bey, resident services coordinator at the National Housing Trust; and Marcos Segura, staff attorney at the National Housing Law Project. The first half of the session consisted of a discussion among the panelists about the prevalence of LIHTC tenant protections, the subjective experience of LIHTC tenancy compared to HUD-assisted and private market housing, and opportunities to strengthen LIHTC tenant protection policies at the local, state, and federal levels. The discussion broadened to include the whole audience in the second half of the session. Audience members shared their own experiences and challenges with educating LIHTC tenants and engaging them in LIHTC advocacy, and the panelists fielded a range of audience questions about ways to improve tenant protections and data collected about evictions in the LIHTC program.

A third breakout session, “**Expanding the Multisector Affordable Housing Movement**,” brought together multi-sector partners from NLIHC’s Opportunity Starts at Home (OSAH) campaign, including Sarah Hassmer of the National Women’s Law Center, Sam Washington of Civil Rights Corps, Dr. Aura Obando of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and Hale Crumley of Prosperity Indiana. During the session, which was moderated by OSAH Campaign Manager Chantelle Wilkinson, the panelists discussed their involvement in the campaign, the campaign’s accomplishments, the impact of housing affordability on the communities they serve, the ways the campaign has helped communities thrive, advocacy successes, lessons learned, and new resources.

“**Tenant Leaders Advancing Housing Justice**” highlighted the work tenant leaders have conducted to advance housing justice in their communities. The session was moderated by NLIHC Housing Advocacy Organizer Sid Betancourt and included three knowledgeable and experienced leaders: Dee Ross, founder and CEO of The Ross Foundation; Mattye Berry-Evans, a member of Resident Action Project and resident services coordinator with Mercy Housing; and Taylar Nuevelle, executive director of Who Speaks for Me? The panelists shared what led them to advocacy, overviewed successful organizing tactics, discussed challenges in organizing, and inspired an audience of tenant organizers and other housing advocates to advocate and build coalitions in their local communities.

The second day of the 2023 Housing Policy Forum began with a plenary session featuring two officials from the Biden administration. In a discussion with NLIHC Senior Vice President of Public Policy and Field Organizing Sarah Saadian, **Sandra Thompson**, director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency (FHFA), explained that she is keenly aware of how FHFA policies affect people and of the necessity of ensuring those policies are fair and accessible and help guarantee safe, affordable housing. Referring to the White House’s recently released *Blueprint for a Renters Bill of Rights*, Director Thompson stated that rent increases for the lowest-income renters have been “egregious” and that consequently FHFA is seeking opportunities to adopt tenant protections, including policies that limit egregious rent increases at properties financed with loans backed by Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. In addition to receiving input from industry stakeholders, such as developers and owners, Ms. Thompson stated that it is essential that FHFA hear from tenants about their perspectives regarding tenant protection policies. To that end, FHFA will conduct listening session roundtables involving tenants, as well as workshops and

webinars. FHFA will also issue a Request for Information (RFI) encouraging members of the public to suggest ideas for tenant protections.

Next, NLIHC board member Moises Loza interviewed U.S. Department of the Treasury Deputy Secretary **Wally Adeyemo** about lessons learned from ERA program implementation and ways to increase affordable housing supply for those most in need. Deputy Secretary Adeyemo noted that implementation of program flexibilities and partnerships with advocates and impacted communities were key to turning ERA programs around. More than 10.8 million ERA payments have been made to households since the passage of the “American Rescue Plan Act.” The Deputy Secretary noted that ERA provided opportunities for people to stay in their homes but that rents are now increasing faster than incomes, making access to affordable housing more important than ever. Deputy Secretary Adeyemo concluded the conversation by observing that accessibility needs to be part of Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) standards in the future so that affordable housing is universally available.

The morning’s plenary session was followed by four breakout sessions. In “**Capitol Hill Insiders Panel**,” attendees heard from key congressional staff and experts about the prospects for housing legislation in 2023 and the significant threats facing the federal budget for housing and homelessness programs. Alia Fierro, director of the Subcommittee on Housing and Insurance in the Office of the House Financial Services Committee for Ranking Member Maxine Waters (D-CA), and Beth Cooper, a professional staff member in the Office of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs for Chair Sherrod Brown (D-OH), spoke about the possibility for bipartisan housing legislation and the important role of advocacy – especially by those with lived experience – in policymaking. Neil Siefring of Hilltop Advocacy LLC shared important insights about how House Republicans are approaching negotiations around the debt ceiling, budget cuts, and housing policy. The session was moderated by NLIHC Public Policy Manager Kim Johnson.

Another session, “**Racial Equity in Practice**,” focused on how a transformative justice framework can be applied to dismantle structural racism, strengthen accountability practices, and address the way public infrastructure investment has been used to harm communities of color and low-wealth communities. The panel was moderated by Pascale Leone, executive director of the Supportive Housing Network of New York and featured Ramona Ferreyra, an advocate with Save Section 9 and the founder of Ojala Threads, and Jay Williams, the statewide program and policy coordinator and ERASE lead with Collaborative Solutions. The panelists highlighted emerging practices, programs, and initiatives that support community-driven solutions, foster institutional change, and support more equitable outcomes in public investment, and they shared tools and resources to design equitable impacts. To help ground the conversation, Ramona Ferreyra shared a [brief video](#) that provides a racialized history of public housing in the U.S. and explains how racism has led to disinvestment in public housing.

In “**Achieving Affordable Housing Solutions in Native and Rural Areas**,” panelists discussed ERA implementation in Native America, shared how organizing against white supremacists in Tennessee led to fighting against utility shut offs, and discussed the local and federal need for rural housing preservation. Panelist Mel Willie testified to the strength of Native Nations, and both he and fellow panelist Dave Heisterkamp urged NLIHC’s members to humbly engage with Native Nations in their communities. Stephanie Isaacs, a panelist from Shelbyville, Tennessee

city councilor, inspired attendees to organize locally for improved housing conditions, and Leslie Strauss connected the dots between rural renters and USDA's technical assistance funding. The panel was moderated by NLIHC Housing Policy Analyst Kayla Laywell.

“The Status of Evictions and Eviction Prevention Work,” a session moderated by NLIHC ERASE Senior Project Director Sarah Gallagher, focused on state and local eviction prevention programs and explored what state and local community-based organizations are doing to sustain emergency rental assistance, eviction prevention, and tenant protections. Emily Benfer, a professor of clinical law at George Washington University Law School and a visiting research collaborator at Eviction Lab, provided an update on the status of evictions and the eviction crisis. Samira Nazem, principal court management consultant at the National Center for State Courts, described the core components of successful model eviction prevention and diversion programs and provided state and local examples of how housing providers and courts can work together to build effective partnerships that prevent evictions and support housing stability for low-income renters. Michelle Mapp, an Equal Justice Works Law Fellow with the ACLU of South Carolina, talked about her work creating opportunities for lawyers and community organizers to affirmatively pursue fair housing in low-income communities impacted by decades of discrimination. The session ended with a discussion by Andrew Bradley, policy director at Prosperity Indiana, about the Hoosier Housing Needs Coalition's “inside and outside approach” to supporting permanent ERA, eviction prevention and diversion programs, and tenant protections.

The breakout sessions were followed by a plenary session on **Best Practices in Organizing** that celebrated the achievements of NLIHC's 2023 Organizing Award recipients and highlighted key lessons learned from their victories. NLIHC recognized the **Illinois Coalition for Fair Housing** with the 2023 Statewide Organizing Award for its campaign to enact statewide source-of-income protections and recognized the **Miami Workers Center** with the 2023 Local Organizing Award for its campaign to establish the Miami-Dade County Tenant's Bill of Rights. Chrishelle Palay, NLIHC board member and executive director of the HOME Coalition, officially presented the awards to the winners. Following the presentation of the awards, the plenary session featured a panel discussion with Sharon Norwood, housing justice organizer at the Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance; Michael Chavarria, executive director of the HOPE Fair Housing Center; and Miami Workers Center tenant organizers Vanny Veras and Devetria Stratford. Panelists spoke of their focus on racial equity and leadership of directly impacted people, the political challenges they overcame, their tactics for coalition-building, and how their achievements will lay the groundwork for future victories in the housing justice movement.

The afternoon session of the Forum's second day kicked off with a plenary discussion between HUD Secretary **Marcia L. Fudge** and NLIHC board members and Tenant Cohort Leaders Zella Knight, Mindy Woods, and Loraine Brown. The panelists shared their personal stories with the Secretary and how they came to be involved with activism. Ms. Knight emphasized the legacy of pioneering Civil Rights leaders in the movement for housing justice today, proclaiming “We're going to restore, we're going to repair, and we're going to reclaim the debt that we said we were going to do with our ancestors.” Panelists opened a dialogue with Secretary Fudge about their top policy priorities for the federal government, including fair housing, environmental justice, veteran homelessness, mental health services, eviction prevention, and strengthening Section 3 to expand economic opportunities for tenants. Ms.

Woods emphasized the need for people with lived expertise at the decision-making table: “Every single one of us has a story, and those in the elected offices oftentimes are far removed from some of our stories. It’s not until we are able to humanize what we are going through that they actually hear us.” Mrs. Brown highlighted the importance of “strong and consistent monitoring, oversight, and enforcement” for tenant protections, and called attention to the recommendations included in the NLIHC Tenant Leader Cohort’s letter to the White House. While acknowledging that HUD has room to improve, Secretary Fudge thanked the panelists for their feedback and explained that she hopes to draw on the conversation as a springboard for further discussion. “This is the last job I’ll ever have, but I want it to be the best job I’ve ever done,” said Secretary Fudge, resolving to do everything within her power to strengthen HUD programs and meet tenants’ needs.

Following the discussion with Secretary Fudge, NLIHC President and CEO Diane Yentel led a plenary conversation with two long-time affordable housing champions in Congress: Representative **Maxine Waters** (D-CA), who serves as ranking member of the U.S. House of Representatives’ Committee on Financial Services, and Representative **Pramila Jayapal** (D-WA), who is chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus. Reps. Waters and Jayapal discussed their visions for housing justice and how the movement can build the political support needed to achieve major legislative victories. Rep. Waters reminded the audience repeatedly that dramatic increases in federal resources are needed to ensure everyone has a decent place to call home, but she also acknowledged the challenges posed by the political climate. However, she also assured the audience that “the fight is always on, and I’ve got some boxing gloves.” Rep. Jayapal echoed these sentiments, declaring emphatically that “housing is a human right” and arguing that “poverty is a policy choice – a very bad policy choice... We know with resources, with the right kind of resources, with sufficient resources, and with wrap-around resources, we can begin to address this issue.”

The afternoon continued with several more breakout sessions. “**Countering the Criminalization of Homelessness**” addressed the alarming rise in legislation that seeks to criminalize homelessness by jailing or fining individuals for sleeping outside when they have nowhere else to go. In the session, panelists addressed state and local efforts to criminalize homelessness and divert resources away from long-term solutions and explored how advocates, people with lived experience, and homeless service providers are pushing back against stigmatizing and counterproductive bills in Arizona and Missouri. NLIHC Senior Vice President of Public Policy and Field Organizing Sarah Saadian moderated the panel, which featured Lisa Glow, chief executive officer of Central Arizona Shelter Services; Carlton Martin, *pro bono* director at the National Homelessness Law Center; Marqueia Watson, executive director of the Greater Kansas City Coalition to End Homelessness; and Donald Whitehead Jr., executive director of the National Coalition for the Homeless. Attendees learned about a new, well-funded, coordinated push for criminalization laws; the wide-ranging impacts of criminalization on individuals experiencing homelessness; and the need to incorporate the voices of people with lived experience in our efforts to address homelessness and stop harmful legislation.

“**Effective Messaging and Communications Strategies to Advance Housing Justice**” provided attendees with success stories from industry leaders and tips on how to maximize audience engagement and response, elevate visibility, and expand reach across diverse platforms. Deidre (Dee Dee) Swensik, director of communications at the National Housing Law Project,

moderated a discussion about how effective communications strategies are executed through synergetic brand management, content creation, messaging, storytelling, and mobilization. The panel included Halley Holmes, senior director of communications with The Coalition for Nonprofit Housing & Economic Development; Tom Murphy, senior director of communications with the National Alliance to End Homelessness; and Nanci Flores, media relations manager at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. The panel members shared advice on what organizations with few resources, bandwidth, and capacity can do to support their communications goals. They also provided insights on how to build media relationships, establish policy and advocacy partner networks, create successful campaigns, manage brands, and utilize social media. The speakers discussed tips on how to expand audience reach through Spanish language and Latino media, leverage overlooked networks outside of one's organization, and partner with community leaders and people with lived experience and connections in the neighborhood.

“Rights, Retreats, and Red Tape: In Pursuit of a Just Disaster Recovery” focused on disaster housing recovery and featured NLIHC board member Chrishelle Palay, who is director of the Houston H.O.M.E. Coalition; Ariadna Michelle Godreau Aubert, the founder and executive director of Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico (which received NLIHC's 2023 Sheila Crowley Housing Justice Award for its recovery work); Hannah Perls, staff attorney at the Harvard Law Environmental & Energy Law Program; and David Wheaton, an economic justice fellow at the NAACP Legal Defense Fund. Moderated by NLIHC's Senior Policy Analyst for Disaster Recovery Noah Patton, the panel involved discussions about pre-existing issues in the communities in which each panelist worked, ambiguities in the concept of human rights and its application in an age of climate change, and what a “right to return” might mean for households with low incomes living in climate-vulnerable areas. The latter half of the discussion focused on how households can be given real choices to remain in climate-vulnerable areas or leave for areas less impacted by climate change and whether current disaster recovery systems and housing discrimination mean that this choice is in fact an illusion.

The Forum concluded with the Leadership Awards Presentation, during which NLIHC recognized Representative **Cori Bush** (D-MO), **John Parvensky**, and **Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico** for their outstanding contributions to the fight for housing justice. (See the article on the Leadership Awards Reception in this issue of *Memo*.)

Recorded messages to Forum participants from key congressional leaders were shared throughout the event, including from **Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer** (D-NY); Senator **Sherrod Brown** (D-OH); Representative **Cori Bush** (D-MO); Representative **Mike Quigley** (D-IL); and Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA).

NLIHC thanks all the speakers, panelists, and attendees who participated in this year's Forum and who helped make it such a great success!

NLIHC Hosts “We Are the Ones” Tenant Session at Housing Policy Forum

NLIHC has long offered tenant sessions to provide learning and networking opportunities for low-income tenants prior to the start of its larger Housing Policy Forum. This year, the pre-Forum Tenant Session, “We Are the Ones,” included tenant and community leaders engaging in thoughtful discussions about tenant rights and protections and tenant advocacy focusing on federal housing policy to achieve housing justice for all. For the first time, NLIHC extended the tenant session to two days, holding sessions on both the afternoon of March 20 and the morning of March 21.

The session began with a welcome from NLIHC board member Loraine Brown, president emeritus of the 334 East 92nd Street Tenant Association and a resident of New York, New York. NLIHC President and CEO Diane Yentel and NLIHC SVP for Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Renee Willis then spoke about NLIHC’s tenant engagement work, as well as opportunities and roadblocks ahead.

The first workshop of the Tenant Session, “Community Healing as a Pathway to Liberation,” was led by Rebeccah Bennett, founder and principal of Emerging Wisdom. In a society addicted to supremacy and stratified by racial, economic, and social caste systems, inclusion is a figment of our collective imagination without real work towards community healing. According to Rebeccah, “repressive behavior, sadistic power relations, competitive greed to exploit, dominate and humiliate – and our accommodations to these insults – are by now conditioned into the nervous systems of each member of our ‘civilized’ societies.” “Whatever our stations,” said Rebeccah, “the ubiquity of our wounding is breathtakingly inescapable and manifests as the high prevalence of personal dis-ease and societal distress.” Rebeccah told the audience that changing our current state requires an intentional focus on individual and community healing. Tenant leaders were introduced to an emerging framework for community healing that is arising from racial equity movement work, pandemic response initiatives, and deep-seated cultural practice. Rebeccah also shared insights to help tenant leaders process social harm and build transformative resilience.

The Tenant Session continued with a discussion featuring Mrs. Shirley Sherrod, co-founder of New Communities and president of Southwest Georgia Project, which focused on reclaiming land, space, and power. More than 50 years ago, Shirley Sherrod co-founded New Communities Land Trust as a haven for Black farmers thrown off their land during the civil rights movement. Today, New Communities, which is credited as being the country’s first Community Land Trust (CLT), continues to help Black farmers in southwest Georgia and serves as a model for solving the nation’s affordable housing crises. Ms. Sherrod currently sits on the Biden administration’s USDA Equity Commission, which studies systemic racism within the Department, and she helped co-found the Southwest Georgia Project for Community Education with her late husband, civil rights leader Rev. Charles Sherrod.

NLIHC Tenant and Community Cohort Leaders Kafi Dixon and Willie “JR” Fleming led the conversation with Shirley Sherrod, who shared heroic stories of triumph and power in the face of individual and systemic racism. Tenant leaders learned how Black resistance took shape in southwest Georgia. Kafi, who is founder of Common Good Cooperative and a resident of Boston, Massachusetts, and JR, who is executive director of Chicago Anti Eviction Campaign, NFP and a resident of Chicago, Illinois, shared how Black resistance shows up in Boston and Chicago and explored how tenants could reclaim land, space, and power in their communities.

Vincent Reina, senior policy advisor for housing and urban policy with the White House Domestic Policy Council, and Chang Chiu, special policy advisor with the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at HUD, also joined the Tenant Session for a conversation on tenant protections. On January 25, 2023, the Biden-Harris administration released a [*Blueprint for a Renter Bill of Rights*](#), which articulates key principles of resident-centered housing provisions. These principles include (1) safe, quality, accessible, and affordable housing; (2) clear and fair leases; (3) education, enforcement, and enhancement of renter rights; (4) the right to organize; and (5) eviction prevention, diversion, and relief. In addition to releasing the *Blueprint*, the administration unveiled several new actions that agencies will take to strengthen tenant protections and avoid unnecessary evictions, and it launched a Resident-Centered Housing Challenge to encourage Congress, state, local, and tribal policymakers, as well as private housing actors, to enhance or adopt policies and practices that promote fairness and transparency in the rental market.

Tenant leaders heard directly from the administration on what to expect from the White House and the agencies charged with implementing the strategies outlined in the *Blueprint for a Renters Bill of Rights*. NLIHC Tenant Cohort members focused on recommendations offered in their [letter to the administration](#) on December 5, 2022. Tenant leaders also took the opportunity to let the administration know what else must be done.

The first day of the Tenant Session concluded with a joint Tenant Leaders and State and Tribal Partner Dinner. Mrs. Loraine Brown joined Diane Yentel in welcoming partners to the joint dinner. NLIHC board member Dr. Bambie Hayes-Brown, who is president and CEO of the Georgia Advancing Communities Together, Inc. and a resident of Atlanta, Georgia, introduced guest performer Ms. Rutha Mae Harris, an original freedom singer who performed at the March on Washington. Singing was integral to the civil rights movement of the early 1960s and helped bring young Black Americans together to work for racial equality. Originally from Albany, Georgia, Ms. Harris has dedicated her career to advancing the civil rights movement. As a faithful member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, she remained focused on using her music to educate people about civil rights. Throughout her career, she has performed songs of freedom from the country's smallest towns to the White House. NLIHC as honored and delighted to have Ms. Harris perform at the joint dinner.

The evening concluded with a presentation of gifts to Ms. Rutha Mae Harris and Mrs. Shirley Sherrod for their heroic work in the movement. NLIHC board member Zella Knight, a member leader of Residents United Network Los Angeles and a resident of Los Angeles, California, joined Kafi Dixon in presenting the gifts to the honorees.

Rebecca Bennett kicked off the next day with reflections from the first day before introducing a panel on "Tenant Power in Action," which was moderated by NLIHC board member Geraldine Collins, who is executive director of the National Alliance of HUD Tenants and a resident of New York, New York.

This session featured tenant leaders who are using the power of media, organizing, and advocacy to effect change. Participants learned how tenant leaders from Washington, New York, and Virginia are preparing and empowering tenants to enter contested spaces; advocating for more effective housing programs and policies; and holding policymakers accountable to the

communities they serve. The panel included Danny Barber, president of the Citywide Council of Presidents and a resident of New York City; Joy Johnson, founder and chair of Charlottesville Public Housing Association of Residents and a resident of Charlottesville, Virginia; and NLIHC board member Mindy Woods, member leader of the Resident Action Project and a resident of Seattle, Washington.

Online participation for these sessions was overseen by Tenant Cohort Leaders Laura Ramos, the president of Everyone for Accessible Community Housing Rolls! Inc. and a resident of Clinton, New Jersey, and Linda Soderstrom, a board member of the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing (MICAHA) and a resident of St. Charles, Minnesota.

The final tenant session, “Visioning a Healed Future,” was led by Rebecca Bennett, who put participants in groups tasked with envisioning a healed future through song, art, and story. The session concluded in song. Rebecca Bennett taught tenant leaders the lyrics to the song “[We are the Ones](#),” which was written and performed by the *a cappella* group Sweet Honey in the Rock. The lyrics come from a poem by June Jordan:

*We are the ones
We are the ones
We've been waiting for*

NLIHC State and Tribal Partners and Racial Equity Cohort Members Convene in Washington, D.C.

NLIHC held a convening of its [state and tribal partners](#) in Washington, D.C., on March 20. More than 50 people representing 35 of NLIHC’s partner organizations, along with many NLIHC staff and board members, gathered for a day of networking, developing strategies for advancing advocacy initiatives, and deepening their commitments to racial equity. The convening’s agenda included a panel discussion focused on ways to work with the Biden-Harris administration and with HUD and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials, a discussion of strategies for better connecting with tribal communities, a presentation addressing NLIHC’s *Our Homes, Our Votes* campaign, and a panel discussion and break-out groups involving members of NLIHC’s Racial Equity Cohort.

NLIHC state and tribal partners are those member organizations with which NLIHC works most closely in each state or region of the country. They include housing and homelessness advocacy organizations that serve tribal communities or states, as well as regions within states, and are engaged in state or federal housing advocacy, while also boasting their own networks to mobilize in pursuit of NLIHC’s policy priorities. Currently, NLIHC has 67 state partners operating in 45 states and the District of Columbia, as well as one tribal partner operating in the Northern Plains region. The Racial Equity Cohort is a sub-group of 16 state and tribal partners from different geographic regions that are actively working to integrate racial equity policies, tools, and practices into their organizations.

NLIHC is always seeking to welcome new state and tribal partners, particularly in geographic regions where the Coalition has no existing partners. Partners must be existing NLIHC members and must complete a board approval process. For more information about becoming an NLIHC state or tribal partner, please contact outreach@nlihc.org.

NLIHC Hosts First Hybrid Capitol Hill Day

NLIHC hosted its first hybrid Capitol Hill Day on March 23, enabling advocates from around the country to push their members of Congress to advance essential affordable housing legislation. Held on the last day of NLIHC's 2023 Housing Policy Forum, Hill Day brought together state and tribal partners, housing providers, tenant associations, and homeless service agencies, as well as tenants with lived expertise, who together conducted more than 170 meetings with congressional offices representing 34 states, making this year's Hill Day the most active ever.

Participants met virtually and in person with their members of Congress to urge them to oppose cuts to federal investments in affordable housing and homelessness and instead provide the most funding possible for affordable housing programs in fiscal year (FY) 2024. Participants also discussed NLIHC's top policy priorities for the upcoming year, which include opposing work requirements and benefit cuts that would create barriers and prevent households from receiving needed housing assistance, as well as advocating for enactment of the "[Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act](#)" and the "[Eviction Crisis Act](#)."

NLIHC thanks all those advocates who participated in Hill Day virtually or in person in Washington D.C. To keep the momentum going, advocates are encouraged to contact your members of Congress [here](#). If you are interested in scheduling meetings with your senators and representatives, or would like to become more engaged in NLIHC's work, please reach out to your [state's field organizer](#) or contact NLIHC's Field Team at outreach@nlihc.org.

NLIHC Honors Housing Champions with Housing Leadership Awards!

NLIHC presented housing leadership awards to **Representative Cori Bush (D-MO)**, **John Parvensky**, and **Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico** at the 41st Annual Housing Leadership Awards Reception at the Hilton Capitol Hill Hotel in Washington, D.C., on March 22. The Housing Leadership Awards Reception is NLIHC's sole annual fundraiser. Representative Bush received the 2023 Edward W. Brooke Housing Leadership Award, while John Parvensky was awarded the 2023 Dolbeare Lifetime Service Award and Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico received the 2023 Sheila Crowley Housing Justice Award. The event was moderated by Dora Leong Gallo, chair of NLIHC's board of directors and President and CEO of A Community of Friends in Los Angeles, California.

Anne Mavity, executive director of Minnesota Housing Partnership and NLIHC board member, presented Representative Cori Bush with the 2023 Edward W. Brooke Housing Leadership Award for leading a movement to guarantee housing for all. The Brooke award is named for

Senator Edward Brooke (R-MA), who as a U.S. senator and later as chair of the NLIHC board of directors championed low-income housing.

In her first term in Congress, Representative Bush introduced legislation to end homelessness by 2025, led a demonstration on the steps of the U.S. Capitol that successfully called on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention to extend the eviction moratorium, and introduced legislation to permanently implement an eviction moratorium throughout the pandemic.

“Thank you so much to the National Low Income Housing Coalition for this award,” said Rep. Bush in recorded remarks. “And thank you for continuing to place data-driven solutions to the unhoused crisis where they belong: at the top of our national agenda. I have no doubt in my mind that together we can end the unhoused crisis once and for all. We will not give up until we deliver housing justice for all.”

Chrishelle Palay, executive director of the HOME Coalition in Houston, Texas, and NLIHC board member, presented Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico with the 2023 Sheila Crowley Housing Justice Award for its persistent efforts to ensure a just recovery – including access to safe and affordable housing – in the aftermath of numerous disasters. The award is named for former NLIHC President and CEO Sheila Crowley, who led NLIHC for more than 17 years.

Ayuda Legal Puerto Rico is a non-profit organization that provides free legal education to groups and communities in the defense of fundamental rights – especially the right to housing. “When we’re talking about human rights, it’s often so distant from the reality of the people that are denied their basic rights due to the political system, colonialism, systemic racism, austerity, budget cuts, a constant decision of who is left behind,” said Ariadna M. Godreau-Albert, who accepted the award on behalf of Ayuda Legal. She thanked “everyone that has been there opening so many doors, teaching us so many things, but also letting us learn from our own process, respectfully.”

Cathy Alderman, Chief Communications and Public Policy Officer at Colorado Coalition for the Homeless and NLIHC board member presented John Parvensky with the 2023 Dolbeare Lifetime Service Award for his longstanding leadership in the fight for housing and health care justice and equity as an advocate, a supportive housing developer, and a provider of health care for the homeless. The Dolbeare Lifetime Service Award is named for NLIHC’s founder, Cushing Niles Dolbeare, a pioneer of the affordable housing movement.

As CEO of the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless for the past 37 years, John led the development of more than 2,000 supportive housing units. “Over the last 30 years, we’ve built over 2,000 supportive housing units using every combination of state, local, private financing, tax credits – everything we could find to get the work done,” said John. As a result, “last night, the Colorado Coalition for the Homeless housed more than 4,500 households, many of whom would have been homeless but for the work that we did. In the last year, we provided integrated healthcare, mental health, addiction treatment, dental services to more than 15,000 individuals who otherwise may have been locked out of those services – not out of a sense of charity or service, but out of a pursuit for equity and justice.”

NLIHC President and CEO Diane Yentel congratulated the three exceptional leaders, saying, “We are inspired by you and so grateful for your leadership and impact.” Diane announced that NLIHC surpassed its fundraising goal for the event, thanking all donors and the event host Wells Fargo. Diane also thanked the event’s host committee, NLIHC board members Nan Roman, Anne Mavity, Rusty Bennett, and Chrishelle Palay, and the NLIHC staff who planned and executed the successful event.

Homelessness and Housing First

Reps. Jayapal and Meng Reintroduce Housing is a Human Right Act

Representatives Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) and Grace Meng (D-NY) reintroduced the “Housing is a Human Right Act” ([H.R.1708](#)) on March 22. If enacted, the NLIHC-endorsed bill would invest more than \$300 billion in essential affordable and accessible housing infrastructure, including \$200 billion for affordable housing and support services, \$27 billion annually for homelessness services, and \$100 million annually for community-driven alternatives to criminalization of people experiencing homelessness. The bill would also make targeted investments in communities whose members experience a disproportionate risk of homelessness.

“Experiencing homelessness is not a failure of individuals, but a structural failure of a country that has refused to make safe and affordable housing a priority,” said Congresswoman Jayapal. “The crisis of housing instability is one that can be fixed by investing in housing infrastructure and supportive services for vulnerable communities. And in the richest country in the world, it is a moral imperative that we take this issue head-on. Housing is a human right – and every person deserves to have a safe place to call home.”

“Housing is a human right, and nobody in the world should be without a place to call home, especially not in America,” said Congresswoman Meng. “That is why I am proud to reintroduce this legislation that invests billions of dollars with the goal of wiping out homelessness across our nation. This is an issue that impacts individuals for a number of reasons and sometimes isn’t fixed with just a physical roof above a person’s head. The bill addresses the issue at the root, and while providing funds for affordable housing, it also provides supportive services and invests in communities that are disproportionately at risk for homelessness.”

Learn more about the bill at: <https://bit.ly/3TOUBMA>

Read a press release about the bill at: <https://bit.ly/3FQkqGj>

USICH Hosts First Meeting since Releasing Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End Homelessness

The U.S. Interagency Council Homelessness (USICH) hosted in March its first [council meeting](#) since releasing [All In: The Federal Strategic Plan to Prevent and End on Homelessness](#). Representatives from all 19 federal agencies comprising USICH were present at the meeting.

During the council meeting, USICH invited community leaders to share their ideas about how the federal government can reduce or eliminate barriers to housing and services for people experiencing homelessness. Barriers to obtaining and retaining critical documents, such as birth certificates and Social Security cards, keep many people from accessing the housing and services they need. The *Federal Strategic Plan* includes several strategies that aim to reduce documentation as a barrier to housing entry, such as by providing regulatory flexibility for federal housing programs and eliminating requirements that applicants have permanent addresses or bank accounts to access federal assistance. USICH will use community input gathered before, during, and after the council meeting to inform the implementation of these strategies.

Additionally, council meeting attendees addressed a soon-to-be launched White House and USICH [initiative to reduce unsheltered homelessness](#). The initiative will help targeted cities and states adopt the strategies detailed in *All In* to move people off the streets and into homes.

Read a [Frequently Asked Questions](#) resource released by USICH that addresses the *Federal Strategic Plan*.

Read a summary of the council meeting at: <https://bit.ly/40IUmex>

Learn more about the *Federal Strategic Plan* at: <https://www.usich.gov/fsp>

VA Announces 2023 Goals for Preventing and Ending Veteran Homelessness

The U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) [announced](#) its 2023 goals for preventing and ending veteran homelessness on March 15. In 2023, the VA will aim to move at least 38,000 veterans experiencing homelessness into permanent housing and ensure that at least 95% of the veterans housed in 2023 do not return to homelessness during the year. Of those who do return to homelessness, the VA will ensure that at least 90% are rehoused or on a path to rehousing by the end of 2023. Additionally, the VA will engage with at least 28,000 unsheltered veterans in 2023 to help them obtain housing and wraparound services. The VA's initiative is part of the Biden-Harris administration's [broader efforts](#) to reduce homelessness for all Americans by 25% by 2025.

The number of veterans experiencing homelessness has [decreased by 11%](#) since early 2020 and by more than 55% since 2010. During 2022, the VA placed more than 40,000 veterans experiencing homelessness into permanent housing, exceeding its 2022 goal by more than 6%. The VA's efforts to combat veteran homelessness are grounded in the evidence-based [Housing First approach](#), which prioritizes helping veterans access housing and then providing them with voluntary wraparound services they need to stay housed – including health care, job training, legal and education assistance, and more.

The VA announced specific goals for combatting veteran homelessness in the Los Angeles area in 2023. During 2022, the VA provided 1,301 permanent housing placements to formerly homeless veterans, the most of any city in America. In 2023, VA will build on that progress by providing at least 1,500 permanent housing placements to unhoused veterans and conducting at least 1,888 engagements with unsheltered veterans to help them obtain housing and wraparound services.

Read the VA's press release for more information at: <https://bit.ly/3lpBUIV>

Recap of Homelessness and Housing First Webinar

More than 10,000 people registered for the Homelessness and Housing First webinar hosted by NLIHC, the National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) on March 20! The webinar, "Housing First Serves Veterans and Promotes Recovery," provided an overview of how the Housing First approach has resulted in deep reductions in the number of veterans experiencing homelessness across our nation and how Recovery Housing fits into the Housing First approach. NAEH CEO Ann Oliva moderated the webinar.

Senator Jon Tester (D-MT), chairman of the U.S. Senate's Committee on Veterans' Affairs, expressed his support for the Housing First approach, which has been credited with reducing veteran homelessness by 11% since 2020 and by over 55% since 2010. "We have had a lot of success getting more veterans into permanent housing over the last decade, and these numbers make clear the Housing First approach works," [said Chairman Tester](#). "Veterans have the best chance of getting back on their feet when they have a safe place to call home."

Representative Mike Bost (R-IL), chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Veterans' Affairs, highlighted the success of federal veteran homelessness programs, including HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) and Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF), which are based on the Housing First model. These programs have been instrumental in reducing veteran homelessness over the past decade. "This Congress, we will continue working to not only get veterans housed but keep them housed and provide them with the support they need to keep them from falling back into homelessness," [said Chairman Bost](#).

Representative Mark Takano (D-CA), ranking member of the House's Committee on Veterans' Affairs, stated that committee Democrats are committed to protecting U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) resources and services. "This includes taking the necessary steps to preserve evidence-based Housing First principles, a key tool in the fight to prevent and end veteran homelessness," [said Ranking Member Takano](#). He noted that Housing First does not mean "housing only." Rather, Housing First empowers the VA and its partners to quickly house veterans experiencing homelessness and then provide the wraparound services they need to remain housed.

Ann Oliva noted that, as evidenced by the recorded remarks from members of Congress, support for the Housing First approach in veterans' programs is strong and bipartisan. She encouraged

advocates to remind lawmakers that Housing First has been critical to reducing veteran homelessness over the last decade when speaking with them about the need to preserve Housing First.

Monica Diaz, executive director of the VA's Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Homeless Programs Office, highlighted the department's success in reducing veteran homelessness over the last decade and described the key components that have led to this success: Housing First, federal resources, and the VA's comprehensive portfolio of services. "We practice, believe, reinforce, advocate and say proudly that Housing First is at the cornerstone of every action, program, and initiative because we know that it works," [said Monica Diaz](#).

Shawn Liu, director of communications for the VHA Homeless Programs Office, [defined Housing First](#) and explained the guiding principles of the approach. He emphasized that Housing First includes wraparound services but does not determine who is "housing ready" or demand treatment prior to housing. He discussed the VA's 2023 goals for preventing and ending homelessness and highlighted how 83 communities and three states have achieved an effective end to veteran homelessness.

Ann Oliva commented on the lessons learned from the successes in reducing veteran homelessness. "This shows that when we have leadership at the federal level, leadership at the state and local level, resources to scale, and good policy and program design, we can actually make the progress that we need to make on veterans, and take what we've learned with veterans and apply that to other groups," [she said](#).

William E. Higgins, Jr. – executive director of Homeless Advocacy for All, at-large officer with lived experience on the Maine Continuum of Care (CoC) Board, and board member of the National Coalition for the Homeless – [shared](#) his experience as a veteran who was formerly unhoused. He described how Housing First helped him obtain and maintain housing, emphasized the importance of robust funding for supportive services, and discussed his homeless advocacy work.

Dr. LaMont Green – director of diversity, equity, and inclusion at the Technical Assistance Collaborative (TAC) – [shared](#) his personal story of being a veteran who experienced homelessness and addressed how Housing First combined with culturally responsive interventions can help support people experiencing homelessness with substance use disorders. Dr. Green spoke about the effectiveness of the Housing First model and how combining the approach with interventions like supportive housing, harm reduction, recovery supports, and on-demand substance use disorder treatment can help address overdose deaths.

"Often, critics of Housing First complain that it does not accommodate people who want to pursue recovery from substance use, but in fact, as an approach, Housing First is usually tailored to the needs and choices of people who are experiencing homelessness, so it does in fact support the choice to pursue recovery," [explained Ann Oliva](#). "Housing First supports choice, and choice is incredibly important for folks who are in recovery from homelessness or want to be in recovery from substance use or other challenges in their life." The Housing First model is premised on choice and provides people in recovery with several options – including supportive housing and recovery housing – to address their health and housing needs. When recovery

housing is operated to center individual choice, Housing First and recovery housing can be complementary, not in conflict.

NAEH Chief Policy Officer Steve Berg wrapped up the call by sharing how advocates can [take action](#) in support of Housing First and against criminalization. Steve encouraged advocates to urge their members of Congress to support robust homelessness funding, Housing First, and a cost-of-living pay increase for frontline homeless service workers.

We have uploaded a [recording](#) of the call, as well as the [presentation slides](#).

Did you miss the previous webinars on homelessness and Housing First? Check out the [webinar recaps](#), including links to the recordings and presentation slides.

The next webinar will be held on Monday, April 17, from 2:30 to 4 pm ET. Register for the series at: <https://bit.ly/3vIbn5o>

Read more about Housing First at: <https://bit.ly/3vHf8YR>

Budget and Appropriations

House Republicans Struggle to Reach Consensus on Budget, Delaying Debt Ceiling Negotiations

Republicans in the U.S. House of Representatives who have threatened to use negotiations over raising the debt ceiling to secure major funding concessions in fiscal year (FY) 2024 are struggling to unite their caucus behind a budget plan, stalling discussions to avert a default on the country's debt obligations. Economists warn that failure to raise the debt ceiling – which would result in the U.S. defaulting on its debt obligations – would be “catastrophic,” not only for the nation's economy but the global economy.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) sent a [letter](#) to President Biden on March 28 outlining a list of spending cuts demanded by Republicans in exchange for raising the debt ceiling. The demands include freezing non-defense discretionary spending levels at pre-inflationary levels and strengthening work requirements, among others.

Speaker McCarthy's letter includes several demands made by members of the House Freedom Caucus – a group of ultra-conservative Republicans in the House led by Representative Scott Perry (R-PA). Several weeks ago, the House Freedom Caucus released a [broad outline](#) of the concessions its members are demanding of House leadership in order to secure Freedom Caucus members' votes in favor of raising the debt ceiling. While still scant on details, the outline calls for “[capping] future spending by setting topline discretionary spending at the [fiscal year] 2022 level for 10 years” and “restoring Clinton-era work requirements on welfare programs,” despite the fact that programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), which helps low-income families keep food on the table, already have work requirements in place.

Representative Andy Biggs (R-AZ) – former chairman of the House Freedom Caucus – introduced legislation on March 28 that would cap appropriation line items at the FY22 or FY19 levels – whichever is lower – and cut funding entirely from certain programs. According to an [analysis](#) by the Senate Democratic Policy and Communications Committee (DPCC), House Republicans’ proposal to cap FY24 spending at FY22 levels would result in a funding decrease of between 12% and 30%, depending on how cuts are made. These cuts could reduce funding for programs like HUD’s rental assistance and homelessness assistance programs by an estimated \$6.6 billion, putting the hundreds of thousands of people who rely on this assistance at risk of housing instability, eviction, and homelessness. (For more information, see the article in this edition of *Memo* on how House Republicans’ proposed cuts would impact HUD programs.)

The House Freedom Caucus’ demands follow the publication of President Biden’s [FY24 budget request](#) (see *Memo*, [3/13](#)), which calls for funding HUD programs at \$73.3 billion, a 1.6% increase over FY23-enacted funding, as well as billions of dollars in additional housing investments through mandatory funding. The House Freedom Caucus’ outline, while far from a consensus document among House Republicans, is an important indicator of the appropriations proposals that may come out of the House.

President Biden [continues to insist](#) he will not negotiate over conditions for raising the debt ceiling. The president is willing to have separate conversations with Republicans about spending, but he will not meet with Speaker McCarthy until Republicans release a budget. According to House Budget Chairman Jodey Arrington, House Republicans might not unveil a budget for several months. The largest bloc of House conservatives – the Republican Study Committee – plans to issue its own budget plan during the week of April 17.

Cuts to housing benefits – through the imposition of work requirements, time limits for receiving assistance, or other means – increase hardship among individuals and families with low incomes. Meeting basic, life-sustaining needs, like safe, stable housing, should not be contingent upon meeting arbitrary work requirements, and removing assistance from households that are already struggling does little to improve long-term employment and economic stability, according to a [recent paper](#) published by the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

Take Action

It is unacceptable to balance the federal budget by demanding cuts to programs that help the lowest-income households survive. There is a national shortage of approximately 7 million affordable, available homes for people with the lowest incomes, and only one in four households who qualify for federal housing assistance receives the help it needs. Without adequate funding for vital federal affordable housing and homeless assistance programs, households with the lowest incomes will continue to live precariously, only one missed paycheck or unexpected emergency away from housing instability, eviction, and, in the worst cases, homelessness.

- [Sign your organization on to the Campaign for Housing and Community Development Funding’s \(CHCDF\) annual budget letter](#), calling on Congress to reject spending cuts and instead provide the highest possible allocation for HUD’s and USDA’s affordable housing, homelessness, and community development programs in FY24.

- [Email your members of Congress today](#) and urge them to increase – not cut – resources for affordable housing and homelessness in FY24 and to support NLIHC’s top appropriations priorities:
 - \$32.7 billion for the TBRA program to renew existing vouchers and to expand the program to an additional 200,000 households.
 - \$5.4 billion for public housing operations and \$5 billion for public housing repairs.
 - \$3.8 billion for HUD’s Homeless Assistance Grants program.
 - \$100 million for legal assistance to prevent evictions.
 - \$3 billion for a permanent Emergency Rental Assistance program.
 - \$300 million for the competitive tribal housing grants, targeted to tribes with the greatest needs.
 - [Check out NLIHC’s advocacy toolkit](#), “Oppose Dramatic Cuts to Federal Investments in Affordable Housing,” for talking points, sample social media messages, and more!
-

HUD Secretary Fudge Responds to House Appropriations Ranking Member’s Request for Information on Impact of Potential Budget Cuts

Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), ranking member of the U.S. House of Representatives’ Committee on Appropriations, sent [letters](#) to federal agencies on January 19 requesting information about how the House Republican leadership’s reported proposal to cut fiscal year (FY) 2024 discretionary spending to FY2022-enacted levels – which would result in a cut of at least 22% for essential programs – would impact crucial federal programs, including affordable housing and homelessness services programs managed by [HUD](#) and the [U.S. Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)](#) (see *Memo*, [1/23](#)).

HUD Secretary Marcia L. Fudge [responded](#) to Ranking Member DeLauro’s request on March 17, explaining that the House Republican leadership’s reported proposal would “represent the most devastating impacts in HUD’s history” and “make it impossible to stave off mass evictions.” Among other effects, Secretary Fudge listed the following impacts on HUD programs if House Republicans cut federal spending back to the FY22 level:

- 640,000 families would lose access to Housing Choice Vouchers and more than 430,000 families would be evicted from Section 8 housing.
- Families living in public housing would be exposed to unsafe living conditions due to drastic cuts to the Public Housing Operating Fund and a projected \$700 million cut from the capital grants.
- Any cuts to the FY23 levels for HUD’s Project-Based Rental Assistance (PBRA) program would eliminate funding for approximately 286,000 families, leading to an unprecedented loss of existing affordable housing and mass evictions.
- The average Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) annual grant would be reduced by approximately \$440,000. The average HOME Investment Partnerships grant would be reduced by \$330,000, resulting in more than 6,700 fewer units of affordable housing produced.

- Cuts to the Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) program would result in over 24,000 fewer people receiving assistance, likely resulting in significant increases in the number of people experiencing homelessness. A 22% cut from FY23 levels would result in nearly 95,000 fewer people receiving assistance through the Continuum of Care program.
- With a 22% cut, funding for Native American Housing Block Grants would be reduced to its lowest level since the program was implemented in 1996, making it nearly impossible for most Tribal grantees to develop new affordable housing units and meet the basic operations and maintenance needs of their existing housing stock.

The White House released [51 state and territory fact sheets](#) on March 30 documenting how families in each state would be impacted by cuts to domestic programs, including housing.

Read Ranking Member DeLauro's letter to Secretary Fudge at: <https://bit.ly/3XywZN8>

Read Secretary Fudge's letter to Ranking Member DeLauro at: <https://bit.ly/40xlOpV>

The White House fact sheets are available at: <https://bit.ly/42XYcw4>

Events

Join Today's "Tenant Talk Live" Webinar on Tenant Power in Action

NLIHC will host the next session of "Tenant Talk Live" – a webinar with and for tenant and resident leaders – today, April 3, at 6 pm ET. During our annual Housing Policy Forum, held on March 20-23 in Washington, D.C., NLIHC hosted a tenant session designed to help tenants and residents learn more about the federal and local housing advocacy being carried out by leaders around the country. On today's Tenant Talk Live call, NLIHC staff will offer one of the Forum's tenant session workshops – "Tenant Power in Action" – again to allow Tenant Talk Live attendees who were not at the Forum to participate. NLIHC staff will be joined by members of NLIHC's Tenant Leader Cohort to discuss the ongoing advocacy being conducted in their communities. Register for today's Tenant Talk Live webinar at: <https://bit.ly/361rmy2>

The webinar will spotlight tenant leaders who are using the power of media, organizing, and advocacy to effect change. Attendees will learn how tenant leaders from Washington, New York, and Florida are empowering tenants to enter contested spaces, advocating for more effective housing programs and policies, and holding policymakers accountable to the communities they serve.

Tenant Talk Live would not be possible without tenants like you! We strive to connect and engage with tenants and tenant leaders through our webinars. If you are a low-income tenant and have a topic you would like to propose for an upcoming Tenant Talk Live, or if you would like to participate as a speaker on an upcoming call or webinar, please email: sbetancourt@nlihc.org

Register for today's Tenant Talk Live webinar at: bit.ly/361rmy2

Please note: Beginning in April, NLIHC will host Tenant Talk Live webinars on both the first and third Monday of every month. For more information about future webinar topics, visit our Tenant Talk Live website at: <https://nlihc.org/tenant-talk-live-webinar>

Emergency Rental Assistance

More Than \$37 Billion in ERA Funds Spent between January 2021 and December 2022

The U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury) released emergency rental assistance (ERA) [spending and demographic data](#) through December 2022. Since January 2021, over \$22.7 billion of ERA1 has been spent on financial assistance to households, housing stability services, and administrative expenses by state, local, and territorial grantees. This amount represents nearly 91% of the \$25 billion available under ERA1. Overall, \$37.8 billion of ERA1 and ERA2 have been spent on assistance to households, administrative expenses, and housing stability services. The ERA program has made nearly 10.8 million payments to households since January 2021.

Spending data through December 2022 reveal continued variability in spending rates across states. Grantees in 18 states and the District of Columbia have reported disbursing over 90% of total ERA funds currently available. Conversely, grantees in four states have reported spending less than 50% of their total ERA funds currently available.

ERA1 Trends: Through the end of December 2022, state grantees had spent nearly \$16.4 billion in ERA1 funds, or 97% of \$16.8 billion allocated to them. Local grantees had spent over \$6.1 billion or 87% of \$7.0 billion allocated to localities. Most grantees were statutorily required to obligate all ERA1 funds by September 2022. Grantees that received reallocated ERA1 funds had until December 2022 to obligate all ERA1 funds. Grantees are required to submit a final report with cumulative financial and performance information; therefore, the total amount expended by grantees may change. Nearly two-thirds (65%) of households served since January 2021 had extremely low incomes.

ERA2 Trends: State grantees had spent nearly \$11.3 billion of ERA2 funds by the end of December 2022, approximately 81% of the \$14.0 billion allocated to them. Similarly, local grantees had spent approximately 73% of their allocation, or \$3.8 billion of the \$5.2 billion allocated to localities. Twenty-one state grantees and the District of Columbia reported spending over 75% of their ERA2 allocations by the end of December 2022. Three state grantees – Indiana, Iowa, and Tennessee – reported spending less than 20% of their ERA2 funds. Two state grantees – Arkansas and Nebraska – did not accept ERA2 funds. Over 62% of households served through ERA2 have had extremely low incomes.

The spending and demographic data can be accessed at: <https://bit.ly/3MloWRB>

From the Field

HUD

Rural Housing

NLIHC Joins Other Organizations in Letter Urging USDA Rural Housing Service to Strengthen Tenant Communication and Rights in USDA Properties

NLIHC joined the National Housing Law Project (NHLP) and the Housing Assistance Council (HAC) in submitting a [letter](#) to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Rural Housing Service regarding its efforts to improve tenant communication procedures in the Rural Housing Voucher program (Section 542). The comment letter follows a Prepayment/Voucher Letter Listening Session held on March 9 during which USDA staff presented an improved process for notifying tenants that their USDA property had been prepaid and that their voucher terms would change.

Because USDA Section 521 Rental Assistance (RA) is available only while USDA financing is in place, when a USDA mortgage is fully paid off, the property loses its RA status. The USDA can offer Section 542 vouchers for tenants when a mortgage is prepaid but not when a mortgage matures. During the March 9 Listening Session, USDA staff presented new notice letters to tenants with regard to the Section 515 mortgage prepayment process and RD Voucher program (Section 542).

“While the letters that RD has developed are an improvement over the ones currently used by the Agency,” the letter states, “additional modifications are needed to the letters and attachments so that they clearly and correctly communicate to tenants the RD prepayment process, the tenants’ rights and options when the prepayment is being considered, and the forms of assistance that are available to them once a prepayment decision is made.”

NLIHC, NHLP, and HAC provided general recommendations for the tenant notification process, as well as recommendations for each draft letter and recommendations on tenants’ rights in the USDA programs. The organizations also listed five proposals for USDA model letters to tenants.

View the comment letter at: <https://bit.ly/40NSIIL>

Read more about USDA’s Rural Rental Housing Programs in the *2023 Advocate’s Guide* at: <https://bit.ly/3zhUTCf>

Disaster Housing Recovery

Tornados Tear through Southeast; Focus Shifts from Search and Rescue to Recovery

A series of storms moving [across](#) the Southeastern U.S. produced several destructive tornados on the evening of March 24, killing 26 people. The damage was greatest in Mississippi, where an EF-4 tornado with winds in excess of 170 miles per hour tore through the town of Rolling Fork,

killing 13 people and leveling homes and businesses. Satellite images showed that the tornado continued its destructive path across the state for nearly 60 miles. Analysis of the same images resulted in a preliminary damage assessment of 313 structures destroyed, 212 structures sustaining major damage, and 520 structures sustaining minor damage. In Georgia, the tornados damaged nearly 100 structures and killed 1 person. Another fatality occurred in Alabama.

Worsening the impact of the storms were the lack of tornado safe rooms in the impacted areas, the strength of the tornados, the prevalence of tornado-vulnerable manufactured housing in the impacted areas, and the fact that the tornado struck at night when individuals were more likely to be asleep or unaware of the danger. Individuals in Rolling Fork reported that the town's tornado warning siren did not sound prior to the tornado's arrival.

Rolling Fork and other areas impacted by the tornado outbreak consist of largely majority Black and impoverished communities. The lack of resources will severely complicate efforts to replace damaged housing, find alternative shelter, and begin the process of long-term recovery.

President Biden quickly [approved](#) federal assistance, including FEMA's Individual Assistance Program – which can provide temporary housing assistance and funding for basic home repairs – for impacted counties in Mississippi, including Carroll, Humphreys, Monroe, Montgomery, Panola, and Sharkey counties. HUD also [announced](#) it would provide greater flexibility to allocated HUD housing funds and is assisting FEMA in identifying vacant housing units for use as temporary shelters. The President [visited](#) Rolling Fork along with FEMA Administrator Deanne Criswell and HUD Secretary Marcia L. Fudge on March 31.

The NLIHC-led Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC), a group of over 890 local, state, and national organizations working to ensure that all disaster survivors receive the assistance they need to fully recover, will continue to monitor the situation and work with DHRC members and partners from impacted areas to ensure access to recovery assistance is being provided.

Find more information on the DHRC at: <https://bit.ly/2NOHusW>

Fair Housing

Protecting Immigrant Families Coalition to Host Week of Action to Urge Congress to Eliminate Five-Year Bar

The Protecting Immigrant Families Coalition (PIF) is hosting a Week of Action from May 1 to May 5 to urge Congress to enact the “Lifting Immigrant Families through Benefits Access Restoration Act” (LIFT the BAR Act). The bill would lift an arbitrary five-year waiting period for immigrants to access vital healthcare and social service programs. For 25 years, the “five-year bar” has denied lawfully present immigrant families of color access to critical health and social services. Learn more about the Week of Action and commit to taking action using this [form](#).

The LIFT the BAR Act ([H.R. 5227](#)) would repeal harmful barriers created by the “Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996” (PRWORA). PRWORA created an arbitrary five-year waiting period for immigrants to access vital healthcare and social service programs, including Medicaid, the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and certain housing assistance programs, such as public housing, Housing Choice Vouchers, Section 8 Project-Based Rental Assistance, and some rural housing programs. This barrier has stoked fear and confusion among immigrants and their families, reducing participation in essential social safety net programs.

The LIFT the BAR Act was introduced in the 117th Congress by Representatives Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) and Tony Cárdenas (D-CA). A companion bill was introduced in the U.S. Senate ([S. 4311](#)) by Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI) and cosponsors Cory Booker (D-NJ), Patty Murray (D-WA), Patrick Leahy (D-VT), Ed Markey (D-MA), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Bernie Sanders (I-VT), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Alex Padilla (D-CA), and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). NLIHC and PIF have [consistently supported](#) the LIFT the BAR Act and other efforts to ensure that immigrant populations have access to vital housing and public health programs.

PIF’s Week of Action will include several opportunities to urge support for the LIFT the BAR Act. Advocates can commit to the Week of Action and learn more using this form:

<https://bit.ly/3ntNqxn>

Learn more about the “five-year bar” at: <https://bit.ly/40QYJxU>

Commit to PIF’s Week of Action using this form: <https://bit.ly/3ntNqxn>

Opportunity Starts at Home

California Moves to Use Medicaid Funds for Housing

California Governor Gavin Newsom has unveiled a proposal to allocate more than \$100 million annually from the state’s Medicaid program to pay for up to six months of housing for people who are or are at risk of becoming homeless; who are leaving the criminal legal system or foster care; or who are at risk of hospitalization or emergency room visits. The move represents a step by the state toward implementing more cross-sector solutions to housing instability and is especially noteworthy insofar as it would involve the country’s largest Medicaid program. “It’s a huge step toward breaking down the silos that have gotten in the way of taking care of the whole person rather than limb by limb and illness by illness,” said Anthony Wright, executive director of Health Access California, a consumer advocacy group. Read an article about the policy proposal [here](#).

Research

Study Finds Significant Barriers to Applying for Federal Rental Assistance

An article published in *Social Problems*, “[‘The Squeaky Wheel Gets the Grease’: Rental Assistance Applicants’ Quests for a Rationed and Scarce Resource](#),” documents various challenges faced by applicants for federal housing assistance programs. These challenges include complex and time-consuming application and waiting list processes, as well as burdensome prioritization systems that often require applicants to advocate for their deservingness. The challenges are especially pronounced for applicants with criminal records and those who are experiencing homelessness or housing instability. The authors argue that their findings indicate a need to reduce administrative barriers to assistance and call for universal rental assistance for all eligible households.

To conduct their study, the authors used data from the Justice, Housing, and Health Study, which interviewed 54 low-income residents of New Haven, Connecticut, in six-month increments between 2017 and 2020. Interview topics included the interviewees’ current and prior housing, criminal justice involvement, economic situation, and health. The authors analyzed all sections of interviews where interviewees discussed rental assistance.

Interviewees reported various challenges with the application and waiting process for rental assistance. These included a lack of clarity about how to access waiting lists, uncertainty about how the lists worked, and frustration with the length of the wait. The complexity of prioritization systems employed by housing authorities also contributed to a lack of transparency and created distrust in the process for some. The authors noted that there was additional uncertainty for those with criminal justice histories, who were unsure how their records would affect their eligibility. This uncertainty deterred some participants from applying in the first place. Those with a criminal record who were found eligible by the housing authorities and received a voucher often faced further barriers to being housed, as landlords denied many applicants with criminal histories.

Once admitted to waiting lists, some participants found monitoring their spot on the list to be labor-intensive. Many described spending time calling or visiting housing authorities in person to actively monitor their status. This was burdensome for some, including those with work obligations, as well as those who did not have stable mailing addresses to receive updates. Some participants also reported that navigating prioritization systems required significant self-advocacy to highlight the precarity of their housing and health circumstances. Further, many needed outside advocates such as case managers, mental health counselors, and medical providers to engage housing authorities on their behalf and certify the participants’ housing needs. The participants did not have uniform success in navigating this process. As the authors note, a third of the participants remained on waitlists despite the fact that almost all experienced extreme housing needs and health issues.

Some participants’ efforts to ensure that they would be assigned priority status had unintended consequences. For instance, some described deciding to live in shelters rather than accept temporary living arrangements available to them. Shelters can certify applicants’ chronically homeless status to housing authorities, thereby giving them priority status, and sometimes have

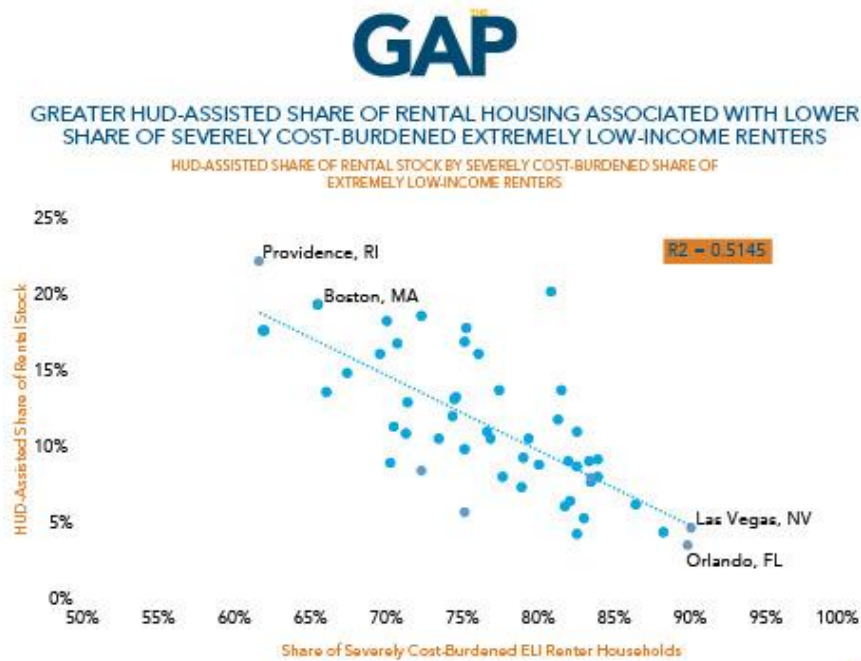
vouchers that are specifically reserved for their residents. This incentivized some to opt for shelters, which were perceived as one of the only pathways to housing assistance, rather than living with friends or relatives. Similarly, some participants applied for disability benefits and entered other health-related programs not because they were interested in receiving services but because they recognized that it was an important avenue for obtaining rental assistance.

The authors recommend removing administrative barriers by simplifying the application process and reducing the need to monitor waitlist status to improve access to rental assistance for those most in need. Further, to address the challenges of navigating prioritization systems, the authors call for policies that guarantee rental assistance for all eligible households.

Read the article at: <https://bit.ly/3TNRTXY>

Fact of the Week

Metro Areas with a Greater Share of Rental Housing with HUD Assistance Have a Lower Prevalence of Severe Cost Burdens



Source: 2021 ACS PUMS and HUD Picture of Subsidized Households
NLIHC's The Gap 2023 <https://nlihc.org/gap>



NLIHC in the News

NLIHC in the News for the Week of March 26

The following are some of the news stories to which NLIHC contributed during the week of March 26:

- “Low-income renters continue to be hit hardest by housing shortage” *Route Fifty*, March 23 at: <http://bit.ly/3lSeC8L>
 - “Glendale complex is first to use state affordable housing tax credit” *KTAR News*, March 28 at: <http://bit.ly/3MmqFWP>
 - “Renter says she was forced to pay a legal bill to get federal rent assistance” *The Salt Lake Tribune*, March 26 at: <http://bit.ly/3lQqAzM>
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NLIHC News

Where to Find Us – April 3

- Citizens’ Housing and Planning Association, “Federal Forum on Affordable Housing” – Boston, MA April 4 (Sarah Saadian)
 - University of Virginia, Student Affordable Housing Group – Charlottesville, VA, April 10 (Diane Yentel)
 - Columbia University, Finance of Real Estate class for MBA students, Guest Lecturer – New York, NY, April 19 (Diane Yentel)
 - [NeighborWorks Training Institute](#) – San Francisco, CA, May 3 (Courtney Cooperman)
 - South Dakota Housing for the Homeless Consortium, Annual Homeless Summit – Pierre, SD, June 13-14 (Diane Yentel and Courtney Cooperman)
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