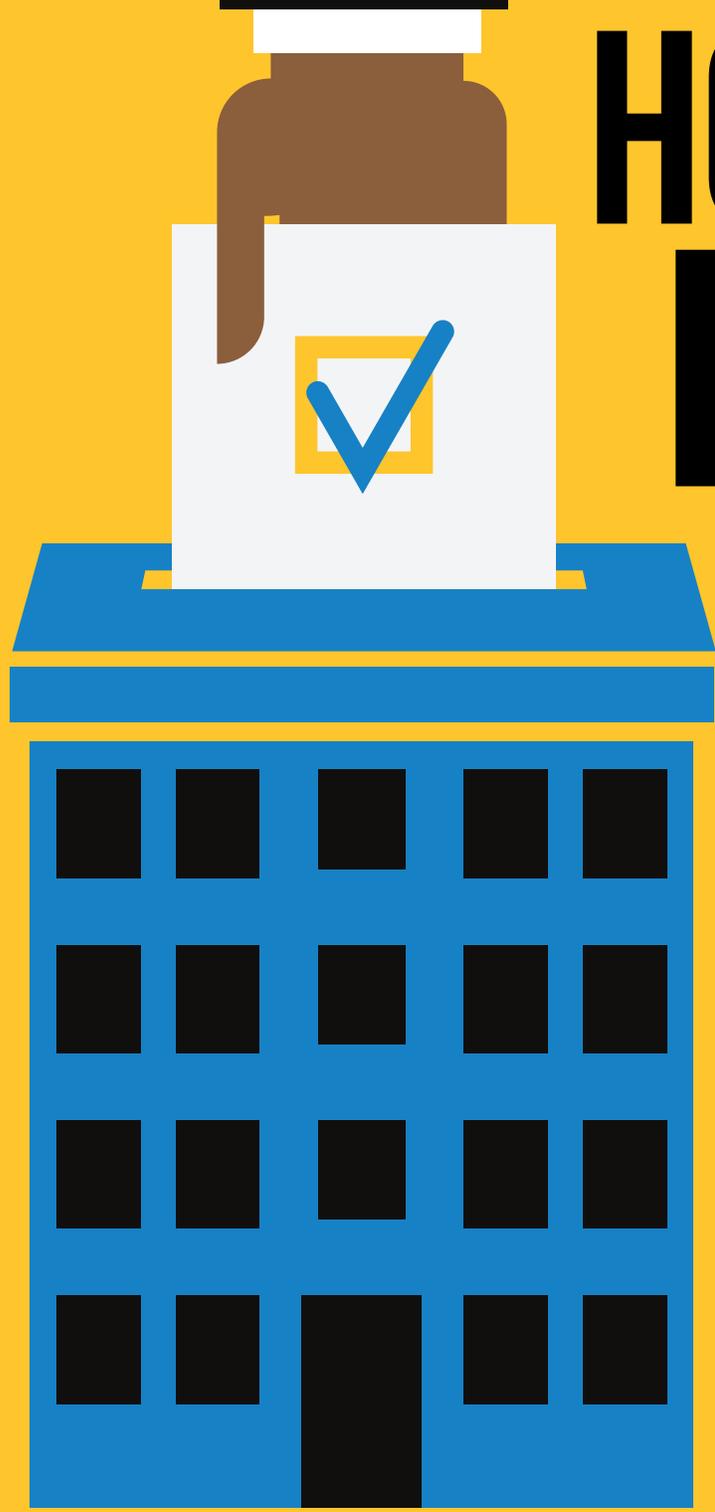


# TENANT

# TALK

WINTER 2018 | VOLUME 9, ISSUE 1



# HOUSING IS BUILT WITH BALLOTS

## ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

- HOW LOCAL HOUSING ADVOCATES ARE IMPACTING THE 2018 ELECTION
- SPOTLIGHT ON RECENT LOCAL ORGANIZING VICTORIES
- RESIDENT PERSPECTIVES
- POLICY UPDATE
- DISASTER RECOVERY EFFORTS

A NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION PUBLICATION

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## ABOUT NLIHC

The National Low Income Housing Coalition is dedicated solely to achieving socially just public policy that assures people with the lowest incomes in the United States have affordable and decent homes.

A key part of our work is through public education and engagement. NLIHC is committed to sharing resources and tools that help individuals become informed advocates. *Tenant Talk* is one of the many resources we provide to the public.

## BECOME A MEMBER

NLIHC relies heavily on the support of our members to fund our work and to guide our policy decisions. Members are our strength! Hundreds of low income residents and resident organizations have joined the NLIHC community by becoming members.

**We suggest an annual membership rate of only \$5 for a low income individual membership**, and \$15 for a low income resident organization. Please consider becoming a member of NLIHC today at [www.nlihc.org/membership](http://www.nlihc.org/membership).

**Cover and Layout:** Design by Ellen Errico, NLIHC Creative Services Manager

# Dear Readers,

As we move forward with our collective efforts for housing justice in 2018, we remember that this year marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of two very significant events. In the spring of 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis. Just one week later, Congress passed the Fair Housing Act to prevent housing discrimination.

Our next issue of *Tenant Talk* in 2018 will explore the legacy of the Fair Housing Act and challenges our communities face in achieving greater integration. For now, we focus on another aspect of Dr. King's legacy: voting rights and the importance of participation in elections. Dr. King always believed strongly that voting was the essential piece of future advancements for civil rights and equality. By electing responsive leaders with a just vision for the future, other concerns would be addressed through legislation. His vision remains a work in progress, partly because of recent court decisions to weaken the Voting Rights Act.

After a challenging year filled with effective resistance and opposition to federal leaders committed to weakening housing programs in 2017, the biggest opportunity we look to in the coming year is the November election. This year, voters will make decisions about 36 governors, 34 senators, and all of the House of Representatives. It is absolutely essential that low income renters and housing organizations have an active voice in the upcoming campaigns. Increased voter turnout among low income people will demonstrate to elected officials that we are a constituency they need to serve.

We produce this election issue of *Tenant Talk* earlier in the year than we have in the past because our hope is that the resources and spotlights provided in this document will inspire and inform your own efforts in your community. Please use NLIHC's resources and work with our field team as you develop your voter engagement plans.

Let's turn the tide in 2018 by getting out the vote!

Onward,

## Tenant Talk Editorial Board



Delorise Calhoun



Daisy Franklin



Matt Gerard



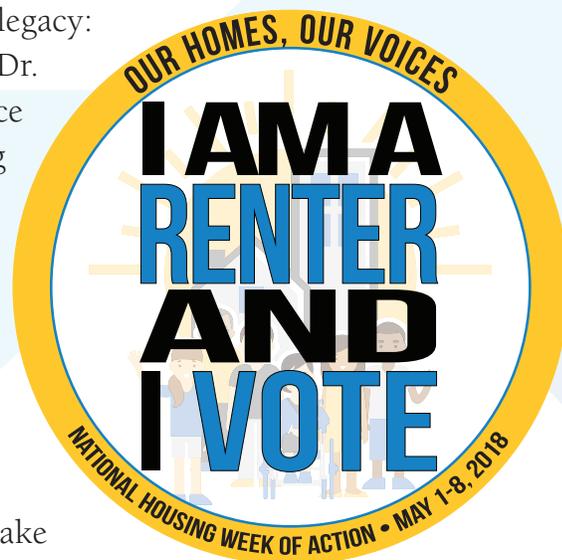
Deidre Gilmore



Michael Steele



Martha Weatherspoon



# OUR HOMES, OUR VOTES

**A**ffordable homes are built with ballots every bit as much as they are built with bricks and drywall. Advocates for expanded housing affordability need to be a significant voting block in the 2018 election. Start planning your *Our Homes, Our Votes* campaign today.

## USE NLIHC RESOURCES

For years, NLIHC has supported the work of housing organizations engaging in elections by providing a simple, fill-in-the-blanks planning form that walks through the essential process of creating a full voter engagement effort. To explain the pieces of an effective campaign, there is also an explanatory guide document. Find these important tools at [www.nlihc.org/library/voter-engagement](http://www.nlihc.org/library/voter-engagement). Over the coming months, NLIHC will provide additional resources on aspects of *Our Homes, Our Votes* such as conducting candidate surveys, organizing transportation on election day, hosting candidate forums, and maintaining an effective voter database. Check the *Our Homes, Our Votes* webspace for periodic updates.



The guide and plan documents for *Our Homes, Our Votes* divide voter engagement into three important phases:

1. **Registration**—Expanding the pool of eligible voters in low income communities and subsidized properties.
2. **Education**—Making sure voters have the information they need about candidates, and making sure candidates are engaged about housing affordability issues.
3. **Mobilization**—Getting out the vote! Putting in so much work to register and educate voters will only matter if they make it to the polls.

Voter engagement is not new to housing organizations. The following articles provide spotlights on how some groups are already working to achieve the vision of *Our Homes, Our Votes*.

# VOTER REGISTRATION

Seventy-four percent of homeowners were registered to vote in 2018, while only sixty-one percent of renters were registered. This disparity is a big reason why federal policies on housing often favor homeownership. Elected officials need to know that renters matter too, and it is essential to expand the number of eligible voters who can be mobilized on election day.

In some states, voter registration has gotten easier with expanded online registration. In other states, voters are registered automatically. To learn more about the process for registering voters in your state, visit [www.nonprofitvote.org/](http://www.nonprofitvote.org/) and click on "VOTING IN YOUR STATE," or contact NLIHC's field team at [outreach@nlihc.org](mailto:outreach@nlihc.org) for help accessing information.



## AUTOMATIC VOTER REGISTRATION: A NEW TOOL TO EXPAND VOTING

States have passed more restrictive voting laws in recent years to suppress turnout, but advocates throughout the country have worked toward innovative responses. One idea that is gaining popularity is automatic voter registration, which already exists in 9 states and the District of Columbia. An additional 15 states are considering versions of automatic voter registration in 2018.

### HOW IT WORKS

Automatic voter registration works differently depending on the state, but here is the basic idea: individuals are automatically registered as a voter when they complete documents with state government agencies. The name and address on these documents are then automatically passed along to the Secretary of State office that records or updates a registration. Unlike motor voter programs, individuals do not have to check a box or fill out an additional part of the form in order to become a registered voter. It just happens without them doing anything.

### IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE

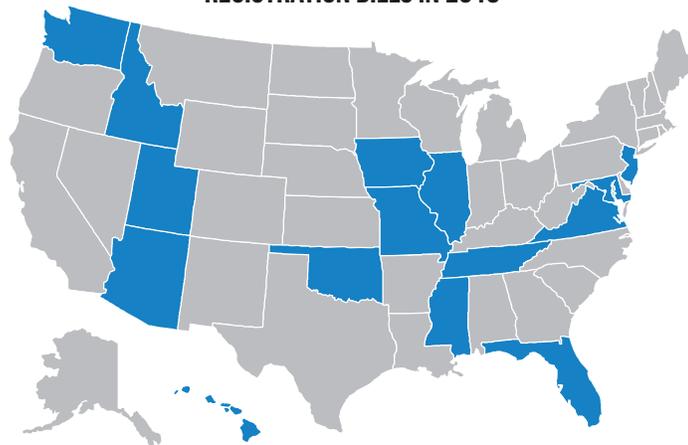
Oregon was the first state to implement automatic registration in January of 2016. During the first six months of that year, Oregon added 15,433 voters each month. In 2012 and 2014, the monthly new registrant numbers were

only 4,163 and 3,955 respectively. Each year, more states are following Oregon's lead to expand voter rolls through this new policy. Currently, automatic voter registration also exists in California, Illinois, Colorado, Alaska, Georgia, West Virginia, Vermont, and Rhode Island.

### AUTOMATIC REGISTRATION IS NOT UNIVERSAL REGISTRATION

Many people incorrectly assume that automatic voter registration means that 100% of all eligible voters are registered. Not true. In order for an automatic registration to take place, an individual must complete a state government form, most often an application for a driver's license or an ID. Many people who do not interact with government agencies might remain unregistered and will still need to be approached through conventional voter registration drives.

STATES THAT INTRODUCED AUTOMATIC  
REGISTRATION BILLS IN 2018



Source: Brennan Center for Justice

### HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED

If you live in a state that is considering adopting automatic voter registration, let your state legislators know that you support the effort. States with active efforts in support of the new policy are listed on the map on this page. For more information about automatic voter registration where you live, visit the Brennan Center for Justice's website at <http://bit.ly/1MYPkvo>.

# VOTER ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES

While planning voter engagement activities this election season, know that several free, online resources are already available to further strengthen your organizing. Some of the most significant resources are detailed below, including some with helpful state-specific information.

## BOLDER ADVOCACY, AN INITIATIVE OF THE ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE



Bolder Advocacy promotes active engagement in elections and lobbying by giving nonprofits and foundations the confidence to advocate effectively and by protecting their right to do so. They work to demystify and decode advocacy by giving organizations knowledge and tools. Bolder Advocacy makes it clear that nonprofits should not shy away from electoral activities. They lay out the differences in what organizations can and cannot do under IRS tax rules for nonprofits.

For more information, visit: <https://bolderadvocacy.org>.

## FAIR ELECTIONS LEGAL NETWORK (FELN)

The Fair Elections Legal Network (FELN) is a national, nonpartisan voting rights, legal support and election reform organization whose mission is to remove barriers to registration and voting for traditionally underrepresented constituencies. FELN works to improve overall election administration through reforms. They also provide legal and technical assistance to voter mobilization organizations. Their state-specific resources include information on voter registration deadlines, ID requirements for voting, and how to vote early or by mail in your state.

For more information, visit: <http://fairelectionsnetwork.com>.

## BRENNAN CENTER FOR JUSTICE AT NEW YORK UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW



The Brennan Center for Justice understands that voting is the foundation of our democracy. They fight to preserve and expand the right to vote for every eligible citizen. Through practical policy proposals, litigation, advocacy, and communications, the Brennan Center works to make sure that voting is free, fair, and accessible for all Americans. They track and publish analyses of voting rights policies in every state legislature across the country.

For more information, visit: <https://brennancenter.org>.

## NONPROFIT VOTE



Nonprofit VOTE partners with America's nonprofits to help the people they serve participate and vote. They are the largest source of nonpartisan resources to help nonprofits integrate voter engagement into their ongoing activities and services. Their excellent library of online resources includes a *Voter Participation Starter Kit* and a 50-state *Voting in Your State Guide*, as well as helpful guides on planning a voter engagement program, engaging candidates, and staying nonpartisan in your activities.

For more information, visit: <http://nonprofitvote.org>.

## VOTE411.ORG, A RESOURCE OF THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS



VOTE411.org is an online voter education resource of the League of Women Voters and a "one-stop-shop" for election-related information. The site provides a voter registration tool, a nationwide polling place lookup, and ballot guides for voters in every state. The website will be updated and expanded in 2018, with information on ballot questions and candidates for office. This level of information will be available for every voter in America, down to at least the statewide level, for both primary and general elections.

For more information, visit: <http://vote411.org>.

## YOU DON'T NEED A HOME TO VOTE, A CAMPAIGN OF THE NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS



The You Don't Need a Home to Vote Campaign seeks to promote voting access by specifically engaging people experiencing homelessness in the democratic process. Online resources include a 50-state breakdown of how homeless people can exercise their right to become a registered voter, how homeless service agencies can incorporate voter registration into their client intake process, and how homelessness advocates can facilitate both comfort at the polling site and familiarity in casting a ballot.

For more information, visit: <http://nationalhomeless.org/campaigns/voting>.

# VOTER EDUCATION

**A**fter building a large base of voters through an effective registration campaign, the next step is to ensure voters in your network are *informed* voters. Providing information about candidates in a non-partisan manner can be helpful as people go to the polls. Sample ballots and descriptions of any referenda up for consideration can also be useful.

To gather information from candidates that you can distribute to registered voters, consider surveying candidates about their positions on your issues, host a candidate forum event, or ask questions at town hall meetings they are hosting on the campaign trail.

Voters are not the only people who need to be educated. Very often, candidates for public office are misinformed about the nature of housing problems, and they can benefit from learning more about your work. It is acceptable for a nonprofit organization to host candidates for site visits or meetings with your membership or your residents as long as all candidates for a particular office are invited for the same opportunity. Many candidates, including current office holders, will value the opportunity to interact with a group of concerned voters. Providing information and data sheets to candidates is also helpful, again as long as the information is provided to candidates of all parties and affiliations.



## MAKING IT A CAMPAIGN ISSUE: ATLANTA VOTERS ASSEMBLE TO HEAR MAYORAL CANDIDATE PLANS ON HOUSING

**V**oters in Atlanta got to hear candidates for mayor share plans on a crucial issue: affordable housing. The City for All Housing Coalition, a broad-based group of organizations dedicated to ensuring an Atlanta with housing affordable for all, hosted a Mayoral Candidate Forum on September 6, prior to the fall 2017 election. The event was a hit. City for All Housing Coalition expanded their audience by partnering with the TransFormation Alliance, a coalition dedicated to ensuring that everyone benefits from opportunities provided by investment in transit. Ten candidates participated in the forum held at St. Luke's Episcopal Church. At the event, voters learned candidates' priorities on affordable housing issues and solutions.

Prior to the forum, City for All Housing Coalition and the TransFormation Alliance sent a survey to all mayoral and city council candidates to learn about their positions. The two organizations published the candidates' positions, which were made widely available to voters in the Atlanta area.



*Candidates for Mayor of Atlanta gathered before a crowd of voters interested to hear their solutions to provide more affordable homes.*

Affordable housing is a critical issue in Atlanta. A rebounding housing market, luxury rental development, gentrification, and the reduction of affordable homes all combine to make a difficult situation for low and moderate income people in Atlanta. The forum brought wider attention to the issue and created a space for political action and problem solving.



# QUICK TIPS

## FOR SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE FORUMS

### 1. KEEP IT NONPARTISAN

This means inviting *all* the candidates for an elected position, and not just the Democrat and the Republican. Inviting only the major parties shows partisan preference to those two groups.

### 5. MATERIALS AND FACT SHEETS

Provide information to attendees and candidates in advance so that the conversation starts from an informed perspective with the most recent data available about the housing shortage and homelessness in your community.

### 2. BUILD A COALITION

You can generate a larger audience and guarantee more candidates accept your invitation by having more groups involved in hosting the event. Caution: one issue with having too many groups involved in hosting is you might not have enough time to focus specifically on housing.

### 6. CURATE THE QUESTIONS

A fully open Q&A can often get off topic or even unruly. Ask attendees to write their questions on note cards as they arrive. Arrange for some of your volunteers to go through the cards to pick the ones that are most interesting, relevant, and timely.

### 3. BRING THE CAMERAS

Do your best to get commitments from media outlets to broadcast the event or cover it in their publications. Use live-streaming options such as Facebook or consider posting recordings to your website or your blog. Let the candidates know the media has been invited.

### 7. GIVE THE CANDIDATES TIME

The candidates for office are making time available during their very busy campaign schedule. Be sure to offer them time at both the beginning and end of the forum to discuss their vision and campaign in their own terms.

### 4. FOLLOW-UPS ARE ESSENTIAL

Be sure to have a sign-in table where you can collect contact information of attendees. This table should also have voter registration forms for people who have not yet registered.

### 8. MAKE IT EASY TO ATTEND

When organizing events where many attendees are likely to be low income, always consider barriers that can be addressed to get people in the room. Offer food or childcare services, which can often be coordinated through volunteers. If you have the capacity, organize carpools to the event to boost attendance.

# CONTRIBUTIONS AND ENDORSEMENTS: TENANTS POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE

The vast majority of organizations and coalitions working on housing affordability are 501(c)(3) nonprofit organizations, and as such are banned from endorsing candidates or making contributions to campaigns. There are a few rare housing advocacy efforts structured differently. One group determined to have a sharper political edge is the Tenants Political Action Committee (PAC) which is formed of volunteer advocates in New York City, Westchester County, and Nassau County.

Tenants PAC was formed in the late 90s as a response to the outsized influence landlord organizations have with the New York state legislature. Even though they will never be able to match the dollars that landlords are able to offer, Tenants PAC tries to provide financial support to candidates they think are aligned with expanding rent control and other tenant protections. The organization raises funds and distributes contributions to endorsed candidates.

Beyond just contributions, Tenants PAC recruits and trains volunteers to knock on doors and make phone calls for endorsed candidates. In 2018, Tenants PAC has contributed \$24,000 to six endorsed candidates. They are also mobilizing to get out the vote for a state senate special election in Westchester County.

At the beginning of each election cycle, Tenants PAC reaches out to declared candidates and invites them to share their positions on rent control and tenant protections. Endorsements are publicly announced, and candidates list the endorsement of Tenants PAC on campaign literature, websites, or campaign advertisements. The endorsement demonstrates to voters that a candidate is a friend to renters.

It is important to note that Tenants PAC has a different tax designation as a Political Action Committee, and it is not considered a tax-exempt nonprofit organization. **501(c)(3) nonprofits and foundations CANNOT endorse candidates or make contributions of any kind to campaigns.**

## VIRGINIA ADVOCATES PUSH FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING DURING 2017 CAMPAIGN SEASON

Virginia advocates launched the Campaign for Housing and Civic Engagement (CHACE) during 2017's *Our Homes, Our Voices* National Housing Week of Action. The Virginia Housing Alliance and the Virginia Poverty Law Center led the non-partisan effort, which involved 20 organizations across the state. CHACE worked to be sure affordable homes were a priority for both candidates and voters. Many candidates acknowledged the need and importance of housing affordability in the state and their districts, convincing CHACE to lead year-round voter education and elected official engagement in 2018.

Part of what made CHACE's engagement efforts in 2017 successful was the use of polling to demonstrate Virginians' support for affordable housing. CHACE found that a majority of Virginians supported expanding state resources for affordable housing and requiring utility companies to implement energy efficiency measures to help families save on utilities. CHACE persuaded candidates with the polling data and used the strong constituent support to make housing programs more urgent to voters.

CHACE provided candidates fact sheets and talking points for their consideration and to use when talking with fellow elected officials and constituents. CHACE met directly with candidates and educated them on both the need for more affordable housing in Virginia, and the voters' opinions on the issue based on polling responses. CHACE also worked with Virginians Organized for Interfaith Community Engagement (VOICE) to ensure their gubernatorial candidate forum included a discussion on affordable housing. As a candidate, Governor Ralph Northam highlighted the struggle thousands of Virginians face as housing costs rise and wages stay flat. His understanding of the issues and his support of affordable housing is proof of CHACE's impact.



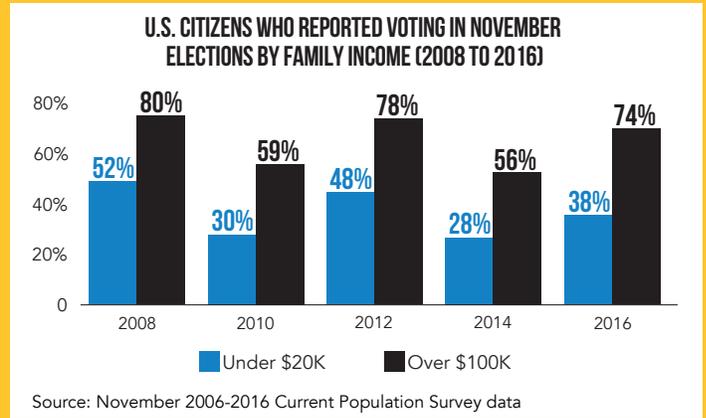
As part of CHACE's effort to engage candidates, Sim Wimbush, Molly Jacobson, and Zack Miller from the Virginia Housing Alliance meet with Delegate Jennifer Carroll Foy (D), who won her seat in November 2017.

# VOTER MOBILIZATION

The final and most important phase of voter engagement is Getting Out The Vote (GOTV).

Mobilizing voters and making sure they get to the polls is the ultimate goal of your efforts. In 2016, 74% of citizens with incomes above \$100,000 reported voting, while only 38% of citizens with incomes below \$20,000 reported voting. Wealthy people are voting at nearly *twice* the rate of low income people.

Leveling the playing field requires GOTV efforts that involve reminders about polling locations and hours, as well as coordinated transportation for aging voters or people with disabilities. Early voting periods and vote-by-mail make GOTV a weeks-long effort in most states. Thirty-seven states now include some type of early voting. Election Day isn't just one day anymore! Your voter engagement plan should consider



early voting opportunities in your community. To accommodate voters with busy work schedules, 22 states and DC include some dates of early voting on the weekend.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF VOTER LISTS

by Sharon Cornu, consultant with Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California

When you have something important to do, do you make a list? From buying groceries to running errands to planning a trip, most of us have learned the power of a good list.

A good list is also at the heart of a successful campaign. Advocacy campaigns for local ordinances rely on lists of people to attend hearings. Federal legislative campaigns rely on the NLIHC list of organizations to contact members of Congress.

In California, when we won three ballot measures in 2016, having a list of registered voters helped us win nearly \$2 billion in new funding for affordable homes.

In fact, in Santa Clara County, where our margin of victory for a \$950 million housing bond was just over 8,000 votes, **we were so lucky that more than 10,000 residents of affordable homes turned out to the polls!**

But it wasn't luck, it was organizing. We created a voter list using public data on subsidized addresses, matched to a high-powered commercial voter database. Due to campaigning with the most wonderful resident services teams on earth, residents increased their registration by 19%. Voter education materials were produced in seven different languages. It was getting these materials to low income voters that helped push Measure A across the finish line with a razor-thin margin of 1.2%. That was only possible with a good voter list.



San Jose resident services teams plan voter education and registration with NPH in support of Measure A back in June of 2016.

To many organizers, the way we used the voter list was different. We didn't dial phone numbers or bang on doors. We showed those wonderful resident services teams the number of residents registered at each of their properties. And then we let them work universal registration campaigns to update, re-register or register voters on properties. In some communities, resident councils or leaders managed the outreach; in others, registration was incorporated into ice cream socials, bingo, and aerobics.

Using the list this way landed us in a sweet spot with both accountability and privacy protection. It helped staff target the properties most in need. In 2018, the Residents United Network is taking the project statewide. They have identified more than 200,000 resident voters and will be building the list to pass a \$4 billion statewide housing bond.

# 2018 MIDTERM PRIMARY AND GENERAL ELECTIONS

STATES ALL HAVE SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT RULES FOR VOTING. KNOW HOW TO VOTE IN YOUR STATE!

STATE	PRIMARY ELECTION DATE	REGISTRATION DEADLINE	SAME DAY REGISTRATION	EARLY VOTING	NO EXCUSE ABSENTEE VOTING	ALL MAIL VOTING
Alabama	Tuesday, Jun 5, 2018	Monday, October 22, 2018				
Alaska	Tuesday, Aug 21, 2018	Sunday, October 7, 2018		Yes	Yes	
Arizona	Tuesday, Aug 28, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018		Yes	Yes	
Arkansas	Tuesday, May 22, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018		Yes	Yes	
California	Tuesday, Jun 5, 2018	Monday, October 22, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Colorado	Tuesday, Jun 26, 2018	Monday, October 29, 2018	Yes			Yes
Connecticut	Tuesday, Aug 14, 2018	Tuesday, October 30, 2018	Yes			
Delaware	Thursday, Sep 6, 2018	Saturday, October 13, 2018				
District of Columbia	Tuesday, Jun 19, 2018	Tuesday, October 16, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Florida	Tuesday, Aug 28, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018		Yes	Yes	
Georgia	Tuesday, May 22, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018		Yes	Yes	
Hawaii	Saturday, Aug 11, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018		Yes	Yes	
Idaho	Tuesday, May 15, 2018	Friday, October 12, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Illinois	Tuesday, Mar 20, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Indiana	Tuesday, May 8, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018		Yes		
Iowa	Tuesday, Jun 5, 2018	Saturday, October 27, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Kansas	Tuesday, Aug 7, 2018	Tuesday, October 16, 2018		Yes	Yes	
Kentucky	Tuesday, May 22, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018				
Louisiana	Tuesday, Nov 6, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018		Yes		
Maine	Tuesday, Jun 12, 2018	Tuesday, October 16, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Maryland	Tuesday, Jun 26, 2018	Tuesday, October 16, 2018		Yes	Yes	
Massachusetts	Tuesday, Sep 4, 2018	Wednesday, October 17, 2018		Yes		
Michigan	Tuesday, Aug 7, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018				
Minnesota	Tuesday, Aug 14, 2018	Tuesday, October 16, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Mississippi	Tuesday, Jun 5, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018				
Missouri	Tuesday, Aug 7, 2018	Wednesday, October 10, 2018				
Montana	Tuesday, Jun 5, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Nebraska	Tuesday, May 15, 2018	Friday, October 26, 2018		Yes	Yes	
Nevada	Tuesday, Jun 12, 2018	Sunday, October 7, 2018		Yes	Yes	
New Hampshire	Tuesday, Sep 11, 2018	Tuesday, November 6, 2018	Yes			
New Jersey	Tuesday, Jun 5, 2018	Tuesday, October 16, 2018		Yes	Yes	
New Mexico	Tuesday, Jun 5, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018		Yes	Yes	
New York	Tuesday, Jun 26, 2018	Wednesday, October 17, 2018				
North Carolina	Tuesday, May 8, 2018	Friday, October 12, 2018		Yes	Yes	
North Dakota	Tuesday, Jun 12, 2018	Registration Not Required		Yes	Yes	
Ohio	Tuesday, May 8, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018		Yes	Yes	
Oklahoma	Tuesday, Jun 26, 2018	Friday, October 12, 2018		Yes	Yes	
Oregon	Tuesday, May 15, 2018	Tuesday, October 16, 2018				Yes
Pennsylvania	Tuesday, May 15, 2018	Saturday, October 6, 2018				
Rhode Island	Wednesday, Sep 12, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018				
South Carolina	Tuesday, Jun 12, 2018	Sunday, October 7, 2018				
South Dakota	Tuesday, Jun 5, 2018	Monday, October 22, 2018		Yes	Yes	
Tennessee	Thursday, Aug 2, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018		Yes		
Texas	Tuesday, Mar 6, 2018	Tuesday, October 9, 2018		Yes		
Utah	Tuesday, Jun 26, 2018	Thursday, November 1, 2018		Yes	Yes	
Vermont	Tuesday, Aug 14, 2018	Tuesday, November 6, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Virginia	Tuesday, Jun 12, 2018	Monday, October 15, 2018			Yes	
Washington	Tuesday, Aug 7, 2018	Monday, October 29, 2018			Yes	Yes
West Virginia	Tuesday, May 8, 2018	Tuesday, October 16, 2018		Yes		
Wisconsin	Tuesday, Aug 14, 2018	Wednesday, October 17, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Wyoming	Tuesday, Aug 21, 2018	Monday, October 22, 2018	Yes	Yes	Yes	

THE 2018 U.S. GENERAL ELECTION IS TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 6.



# SPOTLIGHT ON...

## Recent Local Organizing Victories

### Boston Housing Activists Secure Passage of Just Cause Eviction Law

JIM BROOKS COMMUNITY STABILIZATION ACT PASSES CITY COUNCIL, NOW MUST HEAD TO STATE LEGISLATURE

Like many cities across America, the Boston metro area for decades has faced waves of redevelopment and gentrification that can lead to renters being evicted from their homes and displaced from their communities. Too often, the twin problems of eviction and displacement hit hardest on the lowest income people and on the people who have lived in their communities for sometimes multiple generations.

Some jurisdictions turn to rent control as a tool for protecting renters who might otherwise face unaffordable increases in their monthly rent. Unlimited rent increases often lead to a higher likelihood that renters experience eviction and displacement. A 1994



Photo: Right to the City Boston, [www.justcauseboston.org](http://www.justcauseboston.org)

**"THE JIM BROOKS ACT IS A BASIC YET CRUCIAL PIECE OF LEGISLATION. IT WILL FIX THE CITY'S BLINDSPOT ON EVICTION DATA, ENSURE TENANTS KNOW THE RIGHTS AND RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO THEM, AND PROTECT HOMEOWNERS FROM EVICTION. IT'S ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY IN STOPPING BOSTON'S DISPLACEMENT CRISIS AND KEEPING LOW INCOME NEIGHBORHOODS OF COLOR INTACT."**

*—Helen Matthews, communications coordinator for City Life/Vida Urbana.*

Massachusetts statewide referendum, however, struck down rent control. As an alternative measure, Boston housing activists and advocates have organized around the issue of just-cause eviction, which means legally defining limits on the specific instances when a tenant can be evicted.

Led by City Life/Vida Urbana (CLVU) and Right to the City Boston, renters successfully organized to pass a just-cause eviction ordinance in October 2017. The ordinance is known as the Jim Brooks Community Stabilization Act, named in memory of a recently departed CLVU organizer who was a well-known, lifelong activist for disability rights, tenants' rights, and other causes. The law defines nine cases in which a tenant may be evicted from their home, including non-payment of rent, violation of a tenancy agreement, and refusal to sign a lease. The measure requires that landlords inform the city's Office of Housing Stability (OHS) of intent to evict

a tenant at the same time the landlord informs the tenant OHS then informs the tenant of their rights and shares community resources that may be able to help keep them in their homes. Failure to notify OHS of intent to evict a tenant would void that landlord's right to proceed with the eviction. The measure was introduced in the City Council by Mayor Marty Walsh in December 2016, and it passed the council by a 10-3 vote ten months later.

Passage of the Jim Brooks Act comes after 3 years of organizing activity. Organizing strategies included door-knocking in communities across Boston, allying with grassroots organizations in other issue areas, holding public rallies, contacting elected officials, and delivering testimony at City Council hearings. Due to Massachusetts's statewide preemption of landlord-tenant law, the Jim Brooks Act must be approved by the full state legislature before it can be implemented at the city level. CLVU has continued its advocacy



*Lisa Owens, CLVU Executive Director, testifying at the Massachusetts Legislature Joint Committee on the Judiciary hearing in support of the Jim Brooks Act, January 30, 2018.*

on this issue in 2018 by mobilizing its field of renters and allies to contact their state legislators and attend committee hearings on the Jim Brooks Act. As this issue of *Tenant Talk* goes to print, CLVU is seeking swift approval of the Act in the Massachusetts Statehouse.

## Renter Protections for Immigrants: California Establishes a New Standard

In a time when the rights of immigrants seem to be constantly threatened, one state has taken decisive action to protect non-citizens who are renters. The California legislature passed the Immigrant Tenant Protection Act in September of 2017. This new law expands protections for immigrant renter households from being harassed, discriminated against, or illegally evicted.

Introduced by Assemblymember David Chiu (D), the Immigrant Tenant Protection Act addresses concerns that landlords are threatening to expose renters who have undocumented immigration status by reporting them to law enforcement or Immigration and Customs Enforcement. Landlords often have used immigration status questions to intimidate renters and prevent them from seeking to enforce their rights by contacting building inspectors about habitability concerns or by contesting eviction and other disputes in court.

Landlords have unique access to a large amount of personal information about renters, like financial backgrounds, Social Security numbers, and employment status. Landlords also know what languages their tenants speak and sometimes even have information about a tenant's schedule,



*Advocates join Assemblymember David Chiu to announce the introduction of the Immigrant Tenant Protection Act.*

knowing when they are most often found at home. This information can be valuable to immigration enforcement officials, making the landlord relationship a vulnerability for the renter. The Immigrant Tenant Protection Act bans landlords from ever reporting this personal information.

The new law also prevents attorneys from asking about immigration status when a renter appears before the court for any matters related to housing situations. This protection prevents lawyers from intimidating renters away from suing landlords to enforce their rights.

# RESIDENT PERSPECTIVES

Decisions are shaped by those who show up!

**A resident perspective by Adrianna O'Neill,  
Resident Advisory Board Member, Public Housing Authority of Truth  
or Consequences, New Mexico**

Last year the public housing authority (PHA) where I live began a series of meetings to inform residents of the new HUD Smoke-Free Housing policy that becomes effective on July 31, 2018. I attended the first of these meetings along with many of my neighbors and fellow residents—including both smokers and non-smokers alike. Many of the smokers in attendance were upset at the idea that soon they might have to leave their homes and be at least 25 feet away from any of the buildings on our property to smoke. The PHA offered assistance for smoking residents in the form of classes and information to reduce or stop smoking, but many of us wanted more from the PHA.



Personally, I felt conflicted in thinking about this new policy. I want a healthier living environment for myself and my neighbors—one that limits our exposure to secondhand smoke. At the same time, though, I know that smoking is a very challenging addiction to beat, and I want to make sure that we care for our neighbors who smoke as we implement this new policy. I volunteered to join the Resident Advisory Board (RAB) to assist in this transition to smoke-free housing. Our RAB brought together a diversity of residents—adults, children, elders, people with physical and intellectual disabilities, long-time residents, and newcomers to our community. We shared many hours together discussing ideas, reading research on the topic, and interviewing experts. All our time together was dedicated to working with the PHA to assist in improving the health and wellbeing of all residents in our community.

Our final requests to the PHA consisted of three important points that we wanted to guarantee. We asked that the PHA establish safe Designated Smoking Areas for smokers in our community that shelter us from the outdoor elements, especially the overnight winter cold, harsh winds, monsoon rains, and intense summer heat that are a common feature of life in the New Mexico desert lands. We requested that the PHA assist residents who smoke, and who would like to quit or cut back on their smoking, in obtaining educational resources and smoking cessation products, such as nicotine lozenges, patches, and gum.

Based on our research, we now know much more about the dangers of secondhand smoke. We determined that there really were no advantages to delaying implementation of our PHA's smoke-free housing policy, so we asked that the PHA fully implement its new policy as soon as legally possible. We also supplied the PHA with a report that outlined where the Designated Smoking Areas should be located, to be convenient for smokers in our community, and still serve the intentions of smoke-free housing.

I don't know what my PHA's implementation of smoke-free housing would look like if none of us residents decided to get involved, but I'm glad I joined the Resident Advisory Board to participate in this effort. This was beneficial to all of us who participated—residents, RAB members, and staff of the PHA. The Resident Advisory Board will remain together and continue meeting until the smoke-free policy has been fully implemented. We look forward to a fair transition and making a positive impact in our community.

Yours In Advocacy,  
Adrianna

# NYCHA Residents Take A Stand

**A resident perspective by Danny Barber, Chairperson for the City-wide Council of Presidents, New York**

**O**n Tuesday February 27th, the duly elected representatives of New York City Housing Authority's (NYCHA's) residents, best known as The City-wide Council of Presidents (CCOP), filed a historic lawsuit as co-plaintiffs against NYCHA.



CCOP, along with At-Risk Community Services, a not-for-profit which provides legal and accounting services to CCOP, filed an Article 78 suit against the Authority for a host of issues. It marked the first time in history the residents of NYCHA have filed such a suit.

The issues in the suit included NYCHA's failures regarding lead paint, Section 3 and Section 964. The residents have asserted that their living conditions have become intolerable due to NYCHA's mismanagement. The suit was announced by the plaintiff's attorneys at a fierce rally on the steps of City Hall. As the Chairperson of CCOP, I used the announcement as a chance to passionately describe the challenging state of affairs at NYCHA, including children with high levels of lead poisoning in their blood and many other examples of poor living conditions.

Our lawsuit has several objectives. First and foremost, the suit is meant to have the courts impose monitors on NYCHA to make sure that they comply with the law. It has become clear that NYCHA is incapable of policing itself.

A second purpose of our suit is to fire a warning shot at the politicians, including a seemingly powerless city council, as well as Mayor Bill de Blasio. The residents are no longer going to rely on the politicians for help. We are going to drive our own fate.

I am hoping the lawsuit is also a call to action. One purpose of this action is to galvanize the resident leadership to finally stand together. NYCHA has over four hundred thousand residents. Together, we make up a gigantic voting block in New York City. It is our job to come together and to make our voices heard. I am currently working with At-Risk to develop their "Get registered – Get out to vote" campaign which will attempt to register every eligible NYCHA resident and work toward electing public officials who want to help the residents.

In solidarity,  
Danny Barber

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Submit your feedback about this edition of *Tenant Talk*, stories about events in your community, or reflections on federal policy to [outreach@nlihc.org](mailto:outreach@nlihc.org), and you could be featured in future editions of *Tenant Talk*!

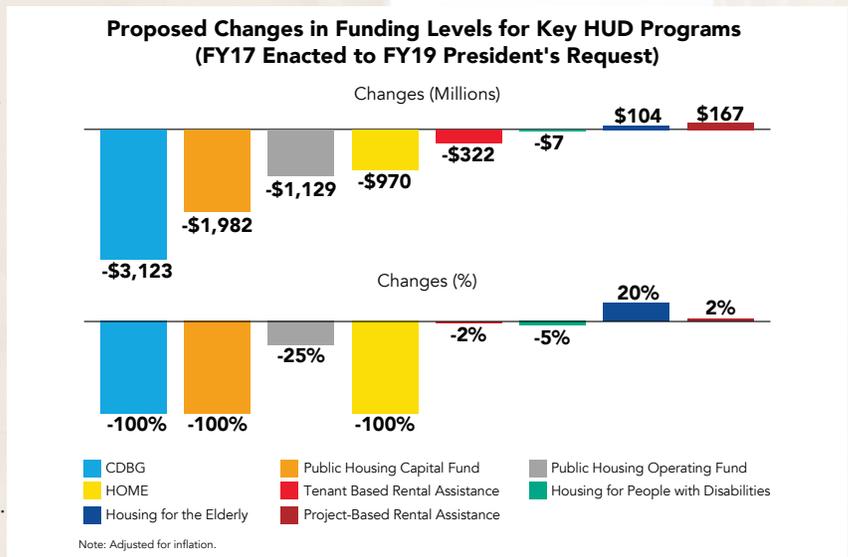
# FEDERAL BUDGET UPDATE: President Trump Tries Again to Eliminate and Reduce Housing Programs

President Donald Trump's Fiscal Year 2019 budget request proposes deep cuts to housing benefits that help millions of people afford their homes, including low income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, veterans, and other vulnerable households.

The proposal — unveiled less than two months after the president signed into law \$1.5 trillion in tax cuts for wealthy individuals and corporations — would take away housing benefits from the lowest income people by slashing federal investments in affordable homes, increasing rents, and imposing harmful work requirements on America's struggling families. If enacted, it could leave even more low income people without an affordable home, undermining family stability, increasing evictions, and leading to more homelessness.

Overall, the administration cuts the budget for the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) by \$6.8 billion. The cuts include eliminating several programs that increase access to affordable housing and prevent homelessness.

Mr. Trump's budget request shows a lack of understanding for the critical need for affordable housing options. Congress will make the final call on funding levels, and NLIHC urges them to not only reject the White House's proposal, but to increase investments in programs that help families and communities thrive.



## Program Funding

At a time when the affordable housing crisis has reached new heights, and homelessness is increasing in some communities, the president proposes to **fully eliminate** essential housing and community development programs, like the national Housing Trust Fund, Community Development Block Grants, the HOME Investments Partnership Program, and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness. The backlog of public housing capital repair needs is upwards of \$40 billion, but the Administration proposes to entirely eliminate federal funding for capital repairs and slash funding to operate public housing.

In addition to ending crucial housing programs, the budget does not provide sufficient funding for the Housing Choice Voucher program. NLIHC estimates that the proposed cuts would lead to a loss of 200,000 vouchers. The administration also reduces funding for vouchers for people with disabilities by \$13 million and provides no funding for new HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH)

vouchers, other than a small amount targeted to Native Americans.

The administration would increase funding for the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD), which converts public housing into vouchers and project-based rental assistance. For RAD to be successful, however, both housing vouchers and project-based rental assistance need to be fully funded, which they are not.

## Rent Increases and Work Requirements

The budget also supports cutting housing benefits for some of America's lowest income people by increasing rents and imposing work requirements on current and future tenants. While HUD plans to send its proposal to cut housing benefits to Congress in March, we expect it will be substantially similar to draft legislation that was leaked in recent weeks.

The proposed changes would hurt tenants already scraping to get by and would make it more difficult for them to achieve financial stability and live with dignity. The draft legislation proposes to increase rents on most non-elderly, non-disabled families by requiring that they pay 35% of their gross income, compared

to 30% of their adjusted income currently. The very poorest elderly and disabled families would also see their rent increase to 30% of their gross income or \$50, whichever is higher. This proposal would eliminate income deductions for medical or childcare expenses for all households, primarily impacting seniors, people with disabilities, and families with children. It sets a new mandatory minimum rent for households assumed to be able to work at more than \$150 – or three times more than its current rate.

The budget proposal also allows housing providers to broadly impose work requirements, without any resources to help people gain the skills they need for well-paying jobs. Despite research proving that work requirements are ineffective and harmful, households could be required to work up to 32 hours per week per adult, even if an adult is a primary caregiver of a young child or adult relative who requires assistance. The draft bill limits “work” to employment, vocational training, or education—but only schooling that leads to a degree or certificate. This excludes volunteer work or training and apprenticeships that do not lead to a certificate. It may also exclude time spent searching for a job or receiving addiction or mental health treatment.

## TAX REFORM UPDATE

President Trump signed the “Tax Cuts and Jobs Act,” this past December. While the bill does provide tax cuts, the majority of the benefits go to the wealthiest 1% of taxpayers. By reducing the amount of taxes high earners and corporations pay in to the government, this bill will increase the country's debt by over \$1.5 trillion over the next decade. Higher national debt

puts important housing and social programs at risk of spending cuts; lawmakers may attempt to reduce the debt by cutting funding for programs like Medicaid, Medicare, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance

Program (SNAP or food stamps), and affordable housing and homelessness prevention programs.

The bill does keep important tax credits, such as the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (Housing Credit), that encourage private companies to build

*Continued on the next page*

**THE FINAL GOP TAX BILL GIVES THE TOP 0.1% OF HOUSEHOLDS AN AVERAGE TAX CUT OF \$148K IN 2027.**

**THAT YEAR, \$148K COULD PAY FOR:**



Child care for **19 children**; or



Job training for **27 workers**; or



Pell grants for **38 students**; or



Providing substance use disorder treatment for **21 people**; or



Health coverage through CHIP for **46 children**

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*Continued from the previous page*

affordable housing. It does not, however, include any improvements to the credits. In fact, because the bill lowers the tax rate for corporations, the Housing Credits are less valuable to investors. Although Republican lawmakers who drafted the bill included several changes that would save the government money, these savings are only used to counterbalance the tax cuts to billionaires and corporations.

Changes to the corporate tax rate also put funding for the national Housing Trust Fund at risk. The national Housing Trust Fund is a program that helps build

and preserve affordable rental homes. Fortunately, the Federal Housing Finance Agency, which oversees the Housing Trust Fund, protected the funding. The national Housing Trust Fund totals nearly \$269 million for 2018.

The budget President Trump proposed in February already shows the impact of the tax bill. He included massive spending cuts to important programs that help reduce poverty. His officials explained that the tax bill would help families so much that these programs would no longer be necessary. This explanation ignores both the evidence and the realities families face every day.

## DISASTER RECOVERY: A New Coalition Calls for Proven Solutions

Disaster recovery creates an opportunity for a community to *rebuild better* with the use of federal Community Development Block Grants—Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds to address long-time housing challenges. Doing this requires the direct engagement of community leaders in the process of getting those resources and using them where they are needed most. Soon after Hurricane Harvey hit Texas and Hurricanes Irma and Maria both struck Florida and Puerto Rico, the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) mobilized to establish and coordinate the Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC).

The DHRC is a group of more than 700 local, state, and national nonprofits and government agencies.

The goal of the DHRC is to work collectively to ensure federal disaster recovery resources for housing reach impacted households with the lowest incomes. NLIHC convenes national conference calls for the rapid exchange of information between community leaders and advocates in Washington. Together, advocates participating in the DHRC have monitored

and weighed in with Congress about first-hand experiences in the disaster zones and resources needed to get our communities back on their feet. Over 50 organizations from Texas, Florida, Puerto Rico, and California are represented in the coalition and provide updates on the regular calls. Email updates on the actions of FEMA, HUD, USDA, IRS and other federal agencies go out several times each week to all DHRC Members.

NLIHC recently brought a select group of leaders from our partner organizations in the multiple disaster areas to Washington for two congressional staff briefings at the Capitol. Each leader shared the conditions

back home and addressed questions around their respective recovery efforts. While in DC, they also had direct meetings with key congressional offices and HUD Deputy Secretary Pam Patenaude. These visits also introduced the state and local leaders to national media and congressional staff for continued communication upon their return home.

A key policy priority of the DHRC is the urgent need for the Disaster Housing Assistance Program



*Advocates from Florida and Texas join national leaders to brief Congressional staffers on housing needs after the damaging hurricanes of 2017*

(DHAP), which has successfully provided housing solutions after previous hurricanes. The DHRC has called on FEMA, HUD, and Congress to launch DHAP. The coalition also sent sign-on letters to the governors of Texas, Florida, and Puerto Rico encouraging them to request DHAP housing assistance. Local advocates from the DHRC joined with NLIHC on recent op-ed pieces in the Orlando Sentinel and Austin American-Statesmen.

Congress has now passed three disaster recovery bills to funnel billions of public funds into the disaster-hit communities, so the focus of DHRC efforts is turning to community leaders taking an active role in the state plans required to invest those funds. Texas leaders were the first in putting together a detailed response to its state action plan. The DHRC provided an opportunity for its 700 organizations to sign on to the document that outlines Texas Housers' civil rights concerns in the state plan. NLIHC helped to secure a meeting for its Texas partners with George P. Bush, the General

Land Office commissioner, to raise these concerns directly. Working together, organized efforts in Florida and Puerto Rico can use Texas's response as a starting point for monitoring and responding to the action plans unfolding in their own communities.

The absence of publicly available data from FEMA has proven to be one of the greatest challenges to ensuring low income households are equitably provided federal disaster assistance for both temporary and long-term housing recovery. This obstacle had been raised by all three working groups recently formed by the DHRC: Data Transparency, Puerto Rico recovery, and Homelessness.

In the end, 2017 delivered an unprecedented number of natural disasters in a very short period of time. By working collaboratively, the DHRC is engaging and mobilizing partner organizations across three states and Puerto Rico to play a pivotal role in bringing housing recovery issues for low income households to the forefront of the federal response.

# BE A PART OF THE MOVEMENT!

## OUR HOMES, OUR VOICES NATIONAL HOUSING WEEK OF ACTION

# MAY 1 TO MAY 8



**OUR HOMES, OUR VOICES**

Advocates in more than 60 communities throughout the country hosted local events last July in the inaugural *Our Homes, Our Voices* National Housing Week of Action. After so much enthusiasm during 2017's events, NLIHC is joining with partners in the Campaign for Housing and Community Development once again to support a full week of local actions.

**SEND THE MESSAGE LOUD AND CLEAR:  
PROTECT AND EXPAND AFFORDABLE HOUSING!**

Find out what's happening in your community by visiting [www.ourhomes-ourvoices.org/local-events](http://www.ourhomes-ourvoices.org/local-events). If there is no event planned in your community, contact NLIHC about putting one together.

**“Give us the ballot, and we will transform the salient misdeeds of bloodthirsty mobs into the calculated good deeds of orderly citizens.”**

*—Dr. Martin Luther King  
Prayer Pilgrimage for Freedom, 1957*



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HOUSING COALITION**

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