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NLIHC 2018 Housing Policy Forum

Hundreds Convene to Build the Affordable Homes Movement in Washington, DC, March 19-21

More than 450 affordable housing advocates and providers, resident leaders, researchers, and policy makers attended the NLIHC 2018 Housing Policy Forum: Building the Movement, which took place in Washington, DC on March 19-21. A broad cross-section of NLIHC members and partners engaged with policy makers, experts, and one another, participated in more than a dozen sessions and workshops on building the national affordable homes movement, and met with lawmakers on Capitol Hill to urge them to take action to address homelessness and housing poverty in America. Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) provided two of the keynote addresses during the Forum.

NLIHC kicked off the 2018 Policy Forum by welcoming more than 90 resident leaders to a special “**Resident Session: Movement Building and You.**” Dr. J Otis Smith, principal of Stand By Systems II, Inc. led an interactive and inspiring session urging residents to tap into their leadership potential and to be deliberate about building teams that make positive social impact and transformative change. Parisa Norouzi, Empower DC executive director, and Nicole Vazquez, Empower DC fellow, shared how they have used leadership development and storytelling to enhance, improve, and promote the self-advocacy of low income residents in Washington, DC. Willie “J.R.” Fleming, executive director of the Chicago Anti-Eviction Campaign, and Joy Johnson, board member of the Public Housing Association of Residents (PHAR) of Charlottesville, VA, shared how, through collective action, they were able to create a Section 3 exchange program between public housing residents, resident leaders, and Housing Authority leaders from Chicago and Charlottesville. Following on the theme of resident empowerment, Danny Barber, chairperson for the Citywide Council of Presidents in New York City, shared some of the challenges residents are facing in his community and showed what is possible when residents mobilize to demand their voices are heard.

NLIHC President and CEO Diane Yentel initiated the broader Forum with an address about building the affordable housing movement in 2018 and beyond. She highlighted some of the successes achieved by advocates in the past year (e.g., thwarting the president’s proposals to massively cut affordable housing programs at HUD and USDA, achieving an increase in non-defense discretionary funding levels for FY18-19, and protecting the national Housing Trust Fund and the Low Income Housing Tax Credit), as well as some setbacks related to the 2017 tax bill and new threats related to fair housing and benefits cuts, among others. She lauded the many outstanding state and local successes achieved by advocates - often led by NLIHC state partners - over the past year in California, New York, Illinois, Texas, Florida, Wisconsin, Alaska, Massachusetts, Oregon, Vermont, Maine, Washington, and beyond. “Our power is growing,” she said, “through increased activism and willingness to engage, and through tremendous local success that, along the way builds new allies, new momentum and new successes.” She reminded advocates that a key trigger for most successful movements is a precipitating event – a moment that takes the energy of years of sustained activism and thrusts it into public consciousness. Through dogged persistence, a “slow burn” driven by dedicated advocates leads to a “sudden spark” that crystalizes the moment and compels action. “What we do next,” she said, “how we harness the energy . . . and build on this moment of extraordinary challenge and exhilarating possibility - with so much at stake - can have a tremendous impact...When the spark is lit, we’ll be ready.”

The first panel of the Forum discussed the **State of Fair Housing on the 50th Anniversary of the Fair Housing Act.** Richard Rothstein, author of *The Color of Law*, described the history of explicit federal, state, and local government policies that resulted in housing segregation – which still persists today. He told the audience to challenge how the history of segregation is mis-taught or not taught in our schools. He also suggested that an analysis of fair housing history should be required in jurisdictions’ Analyses of Impediments to fair housing. Mr. Rothstein was joined by three panelists. Lisa Rice, who will succeed Shana Smith as president and CEO of the National Fair Housing Alliance, shared a graphic, “[Where You Live Matters.](#)” showing how someone’s ZIP Code affects so many facets of life, like health, education, and income. “We need

to help create a fair housing vision and push it forward to HUD,” Ms. Rice said. “The Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule is a great opportunity to move forward.” James Cadogan, director of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund’s Thurgood Marshall Institute, encouraged “recapturing the public narrative” by explaining that the effects of historic government-sponsored segregation continue as “a pernicious and pervasive harm today – it is current affairs.” Don Chen, director of Equitable Development at the Ford Foundation, urged housers with differing priorities to come together toward a common set of fair housing goals. He suggested correcting the “fake history” around segregation by engaging children in learning about the fair housing history in their communities.

In a workshop on “**Making Housing an Issue with the Media,**” Kriston Capps, staff writer from *CityLab*, Laura Kusisto, reporter from the *Wall Street Journal*, Joseph Lawler, reporter from the *Washington Examiner*, and Christina Rosales, communications director from NLIHC state partner Texas Housers, addressed a packed room of over 100 attendees. The experts addressed a series of questions from the audience including how to spark engagement around housing poverty and homelessness, how to increase coverage around local events, and how to break through the noise of false information and the sense of hopelessness. Christina Rosales shared the tip of pitching stories to the photo desk at a news outlet. “A reporter may not be interested or have the time to cover a story but the photo desk is always looking for good photos,” she said. When asked how to foster relationships with reporters and become a resource, Laura Kusisto reminded the audience that reporters are human and would like to develop reciprocal relationships. “Reach out to a reporter and share information on a potential story as soon as it becomes available,” said Ms. Kusisto. The panel agreed that persistence and passion in a story is the best way to earn media hits. They suggested not giving up on the first “no” from a reporter and urged advocates to produce multiple resources on the issue that can be circulated through different platforms numerous times.

A workshop titled “**Queering the Housing Movement: Breaking Down the LGBTQ and Housing Justice Intersection**” featured Gregory Lewis and Kahlib Barton from True Colors Fund; Kelly Kent from Sage USA, and Taissa Morimoto from National LGBTQ Task Force. The session emphasized that despite growing public visibility of and acceptance toward LGBTQ people in America, disproportionate rates of youth homelessness, displacement, housing discrimination, and a lack of cultural competency by service providers continue to frame everyday life for many LGBTQ people. Mr. Lewis and Mr. Barton shared True Colors Fund research that LGBTQ youth are 120% more likely than non-LGBTQ youth to experience homelessness. Mr. Lewis noted that for the many LGBTQ people who are also low income people of color, discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity may exacerbate the racism and classism they experience. When speaking of homeless service providers who have room for growth in their acceptance of LGBTQ clients, Mr. Lewis said advocates “must meet people where they’re at, not where we’d like them to be.” Ms. Morimoto shared that erasure of data in Point-In-Time counts and other surveys can lead to advocates and policymakers lacking a full understanding of the extent of LGBTQ youth homelessness. Mr. Kent emphasized the unique housing needs of LGBTQ elders, who may grow old without access to traditional networks of care through extended family members if they have been displaced or estranged from their families of origin at some point in their lives.

A workshop titled “**Team Approach: How Housing Providers Can Support Resident Organizing**” featured the work of Community Housing Partnership (CHP) in San Francisco, which has long been at the forefront of effectively supporting the organizing efforts of their residents. Avni Desai, CHP’s public policy manager, presented on how CHP’s successful organizing model can be used by other housing organizations. Ms. Desai described how CHP’s Community Organizing and Resident Engagement effort builds inclusion and provides a means for residents to participate in policy discussions at the state, local, and federal levels. Ms. Desai showcased the role of residents in a recent victory to ban questions about criminal records on housing applications in San Francisco and in the ongoing Debt Free San Francisco campaign to eliminate court debt for low income people.

The second day of the Forum began with a discussion on **“The Fate of Public Housing”** by Ben Austen, the author of the riveting book *High-Risers: Cabrini Green and the Fate of American Public Housing*. Mr. Austen shared his reflections about residents of the Cabrini Green public housing complex in Chicago who struggled to make a home for their families as fortunes changed and the “towers” were eventually demolished. He described how public housing became to be erroneously presented widely as a “monstrous threat,” and how the “nightmare image” led to bad policy decisions. “There is love here,” Delores Wilson, one of the residents featured in *High Risers* said in referring to her public housing community. Mr. Austen talked about how displaced public housing residents have often been blamed for violence, which studies have shown is not true. “Housing saves lives,” Mr. Austen said, calling for a much greater national commitment to affordable housing. He quoted President Franklin Roosevelt: “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have little.”

Nonprofit VOTE’s Brian Miller moderated a panel of housing advocates who have recently been effectively engaging on elections in a workshop titled **“Housing Is Built with Ballots: Non-Partisan Voter Engagement Leading up to the 2018 Elections.”** Sim Wimbush from the Virginia Housing Alliance provided an overview of the Alliance’s recent Campaign for Housing and Civic Engagement that produced strong results in Virginia’s 2017 state legislative elections. Eric Hufnagel from the Michigan Coalition Against Homelessness provided tips on conducting candidate position surveys on housing and homelessness. Barb Harris from Minneapolis Highrise Representative Council shared thoughts on how voter registration and voter mobilization can be done effectively within public housing buildings. To close, Rachel Robinson from Neighbors United for Progress in Austin, TX, discussed how voter engagement does not need to be an expansive effort, but rather can be a complementary feature of regular organizing activities. The workshop was a part of NLIHC’s ongoing efforts to encourage housing organizations to engage in elections through the [Our Homes, Our Votes](#) campaign.

NLIHC Senior Policy Director Sarah Mickelson moderated a workshop, **“Hill Insider Panel,”** with former Congressional staffers from both sides of the aisle. The panelists shared their candid perspectives on President Trump’s first year in office and their predictions for the coming year and what they may mean for federal affordable housing policies and investments. Jennifer Fogel-Bublick, partner with Capitol Counsel and former staffer for the Senate Banking Committee, spoke about the Trump administration’s proposal to cut housing benefits by increasing rents on low income families and imposing work requirements. Artie Mandel, state affairs manager for Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti and former advisor to Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA), discussed the passage of the recent Republican-supported tax cuts and opportunities to expand the Low Income Housing Tax Credit in the coming year. Jennifer Debes Bang, principal with Capitol Counsel and former House Appropriations Committee staffer, explained how changes on Committee leadership and midterm elections could impact future spending bills.

After a presentation of the NLIHC 2018 Organizing Awards (see separate article in this week’s *Memo*), two representatives from the winning organizations joined a panel of previous winners in a session on **“Successful Local Organizing and the 2018 Housing Week of Action.”** Randy Dillard from Community Action for Safe Apartments in New York City told a personal story about successfully fighting his own eviction with an attorney. His story elevated the impact of Right to Counsel NYC Coalition’s victory to ensure an attorney is available for low income renters facing eviction in New York City, the first ordinance of its kind in the U.S. Kalila Jackson from the Metropolitan St. Louis Equal Housing Opportunity Council shared her perspectives on launching a significant policy campaign without having previously worked as an organizer or campaigner. Ms. Jackson and other legal services advocates joined with Empower Missouri to develop a groundswell of support for an ordinance to criminalize lockout evictions in the city. Steve Glaude from Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development (CNHED) spoke about CNHED’s “Housing for All” campaign that secured \$100 million in the District of Columbia’s Housing Production Trust Fund in five of the past six years. Sharon Cornu spoke about her work with the Non-Profit Housing Association of Northern California who, along with East Bay Housing Organizations and others, won more than \$2 billion in new affordable housing funding at the ballot box in November, 2016. Ms. Cornu discussed the power of residents who turned out for the vote and

provided the deciding margin. The session then transitioned to discuss the [“Our Homes, Our Voices” National Housing Week of Action](#) taking place May 1-8. The session moderator, Rachael Myers of the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance, turned to Ms. Cornu and Mr. Glaude to highlight their experiences and lessons learned from participating in Week of Action in 2017.

Mark Horvath, founder of Invisible People, was the guest speaker for a breakout session on **“Harnessing the Power of Storytelling for Advocacy.”** In this session, advocates explored how stories can help shape the housing policy conversation in meaningful ways. Mr. Horvath shared how advocates can use video and social media to change misperceptions about homelessness. He cited a study from the London School of Business showing that statistics alone have a 5-10% rate of retention; statistics with a photo have a 25% rate of retention; and statistics with a story have a 65-70% rate of retention. Effective story telling combined with visually compelling info-graphics are essential to effective advocacy.

Charlie Cook, editor and publisher of the *Cook Political Report* and columnist for the *National Journal*, spoke about **“The 2018 Political and Legislative Landscape.”** Mr. Cook said that there is a clear Democratic “wave” that has been demonstrated in state and national elections since the fall of 2016, and the question is whether the Republican “sea wall” will be able to withstand that wave in the 2018 mid-terms. After providing a detailed analysis of the political landscape and recent polling, Mr. Cook said he believed there was a 60-65% chance the Democrats will regain control of the U.S. House of Representatives and a similar percentage chance the Republicans will maintain control of the U.S. Senate.

The Forum featured the official launch of a new national **“Opportunity Starts at Home”** campaign, which seeks to mobilize powerful new constituencies beyond housing to ensure that people with the lowest incomes have access to safe, decent, affordable housing in neighborhoods where everyone has equitable opportunities to thrive. With financial support from the [Fundors for Housing and Opportunity](#), NLIHC initiated this new effort together with the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Children’s HealthWatch, Make Room, and the National Alliance to End Homelessness, and with a steering committee that includes Catholic Charities USA, Children’s Defense Fund, Community Catalyst, Food Research and Action Center, NAACP, National Alliance on Mental Illness, National Association of Community Health Centers, National Education Association, and UnidosUS. Senior leaders from each steering committee organization were present at the launch event, along with the campaign’s seven state partners. Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) helped kick off the launch event and spoke about the intersections of affordable housing and many other sectors. (See more on Mr. Brown’s remarks below.) The session unveiled a short video about the campaign and a new campaign website (www.opportunityhome.org). Participants were urged to follow the campaign’s Twitter handle: @OppStartsAtHome

In a workshop titled **“New Directions in Housing Research,”** Edward Goetz, director of the University of Minnesota’s Center for Urban and Regional Affairs, discussed capturing a portion of property taxes on rising property values (i.e., value capture) as a stream of funding for affordable housing, the under-studied topic of racially segregated and concentrated areas of affluence, and the need to better understand the differences between communities that reach and do not reach their fair-share of affordable housing. Vincent Reina, assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania, discussed the number of subsidized rental homes at risk of losing their affordability and our limited resources to both preserve their affordability and subsidize new housing at the same time. He also described the incremental success of Small Area Fair Market Rents (FMRs) at helping voucher holders access higher-cost neighborhoods, highlighting the need to consider local impacts rather than the national average impact of Small Area FMRs. Shannon Van Zandt, fellow at Texas A & M’s Center for Housing and Urban Development, discussed the challenges that poor and minority households disproportionately face during and after natural disasters and the need for more research regarding the long-term recovery of affordable rental housing after disaster. Allison Bovell-Ammon, deputy director for policy strategy at Children’s HealthWatch, discussed the positive impact of decent, stable housing on children’s health outcomes and a new project that includes housing as a prescription for improved children’s health.

During the workshop focused on “**Addressing Housing Barriers for People with Criminal Records,**” local advocates shared how they worked with various stakeholders to enact change in their communities, the challenges they faced, and what work they are doing now to ensure housing providers comply with these new policies. People with criminal records face significant barriers to finding decent affordable homes, with many experiencing homelessness or recidivating as a result. To address this problem, advocates in Seattle and New Orleans successfully campaigned to reform local policies impacting people with criminal records. Panelists Alex Bergstrom of the Institutions Project at Columbia Legal Services and Susan Mason of What’s Next Washington spoke about their successful efforts to prevent landlords from refusing to accept those with criminal backgrounds during the rental application process. Latoya Lewis of STAND with Dignity and Bruce Reilly of Voice of the Experienced discussed their work in reforming the Housing Authority of New Orleans’s screening policy to ensure people with criminal records have access to an affordable home.

A final breakout session, “**Running for Political Office,**” took inspiration from the thousands of first-time candidates who ran for public office in 2017 in the wake of the 2016 presidential election and the important perspectives resident leaders, housing developers, organizers, and researchers have to offer as potential elected officials. NLIHC Board Secretary and Member of the Lincoln Resident Council Martha Washington moderated an intimate discussion with three recent candidates for office. Sheila Crowley, former NLIHC president and CEO, spoke about the lessons learned from her 2017 campaign for Virginia state delegate. Anne Mavity, executive director of the Minnesota Housing Partnership and St. Louis Park council member, and Washington State Representative Nicole Macri spoke about strategies for advancing affordable housing policies while in office.

Senator Cory Booker Inspires Forum Attendees on “the Urgency of this Moment”

U.S Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) provided an inspiring address to the Forum attendees about following the example of “ordinary people doing extraordinary things” to achieve social justice. Mr. Booker spoke movingly of his experiences with strong community leaders like Virginia Jones and Frank Hutchins from the Brick Towers community in Camden, NJ, and the lessons they taught him about resilience, hope, leadership, and action. “I’m standing here,” he said, “only because of community activists” like Ms. Jones and Mr. Hutchins. They taught Mr. Booker, he said, the importance of two powerful phrases: “I see you. I love you.”

Mr. Booker spoke passionately of the “urgency of this moment” when so many people struggle to afford a place to call home. “Hope,” he said, “is the active conviction that despair will never have the last word.” He said history has shown us that every right and privilege we have in this country came from activists demanding them, fighting for them, not from political leaders. “We’ve got to force this country to look in the mirror,” he continued. “It falls on us to wake this country up!”

The senator said that people with means do not understand “how expensive it is to be poor” in America, the cost of an eviction, of healthcare for the uninsured, of losing a job when one cannot get to work when the car breaks down. And an affordable home is essential. We can and must provide affordable homes for those “who have done nothing wrong but are homeless,” he said. And he emphatically argued that our country *has* the resources to address the affordable housing challenge. He reflected on what America spends on “one bomb, one [military] jet” and the recent “tax breaks [given] to the wealthiest among us.” What we have is “a poverty of compassion, of empathy.” But beyond compassion and empathy, he said, “it is not economically sensible” to disinvest in our lowest income people and communities because such investments benefit everyone and make America and our communities stronger. He cited as an example Matthew Desmond’s research showing that investments in eviction services save money, and he noted that our prisons are a grossly inefficient and “a most expensive housing program.”

Mr. Booker urged the crowd to speak out, take action, and demand change. “The power of the people is always greater than the people in power,” he exhorted.

Senator Sherrod Brown Speaks at “Opportunity Starts at Home” Campaign Launch

Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH) spoke in support of the new “Opportunity Starts at Home” campaign launched at the Forum, speaking about the critical intersections between affordable housing and many other sectors and about the centrality of affordable housing to personal well-being.

Mr. Brown spoke of the importance of NLIHC’s dedication to housing for low income renters. He pledged that as the ranking member of the Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs Committee he would fight the cuts to federal affordable housing programs proposed by the current administration and would champion legislation that helps people keep roofs over their heads. Mr. Brown noted that the committee on which he is ranking member is referred to as merely the “Banking Committee;” he said that if he is fortunate enough become the chair of the committee (if and when Democrats regain the Senate), he will reinstate “Housing and Urban Affairs” in its name.

Mr. Brown stated that “home equals life,” an idea inspired by his reading of Matthew Desmond’s acclaimed book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, and stressed that when someone is evicted, the negative consequences spill over into many other areas of their lives - their health, employment, education, and more - and affects their ability to thrive and get ahead. Referring to the centrality of affordable housing to people’s lives, Mr. Brown again referred to Dr. Desmond: “The rent eats first.”

The senator urged the audience to tell their personal stories when meeting with members of Congress to demonstrate how housing impacts families and communities broadly. Mr. Brown went on to discuss the persistence of racial and wealth inequities inequalities in America, and the harsh and inaccurate stereotypes placed on the poor, which often disproportionately impact people of color.

He commended the resilience and the entrepreneurial spirit of the advocates at the Forum and others who persistently push for protecting and expanding affordable housing for low income people. He urged advocates to continue to speak up and take action.

NLIHC Honors Advocates from New York City and St. Louis with 2018 Organizing Awards

NLIHC presented its annual Organizing Awards on March 20 at its 2018 Housing Policy Forum: Building the Movement. This year’s awardees were the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition (RTC NYC) for its organizing to achieve the right to counsel for low income residents facing eviction and the Metropolitan St. Louis Equal Housing and Opportunity Council (EHOC) and Empower Missouri for their mobilization to protect tenants against forced evictions.

RTC NYC received the 2018 Trailblazer Award for its groundbreaking work in building tenant power and advocacy to win the civil right to an attorney for low income renters facing eviction in New York City. This accomplishment marked the culmination of a 3-year campaign to pass what is known locally as Intro 214-B. The law represents the first such tenant protection in any jurisdiction in the nation. When fully implemented, the law is anticipated to benefit an estimated 400,000 tenants, prevent 5,000 families per year from experiencing homelessness, and save New York City \$300 million annually.

“This is a huge victory for fundamental human and civil rights at a time when those rights are under attack,” said Randy Dillard, a tenant leader at Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA) and steering committee member of RTC NYC. “For low income families, keeping their home is as consequential as it gets. For the first time, New York City's low-income tenants facing eviction will be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve and will have a fighting chance to stay in their homes and communities. We are honored to receive the Trailblazer Award from NLIHC in recognition of our hard work and persistence.”

The Metropolitan St. Louis EHOC and Empower Missouri received the Renter Advocacy Award for their work in protecting tenants against “self-help” or “lock-out” eviction tactics. EHOC and Empower Missouri successfully advocated for the passage of a citywide ordinance—Board Bill 87—criminalizing lock-out evictions in the City of St. Louis, which had already been illegal under Missouri state civil code. The ordinance defines conditions that qualify as an illegal eviction tactic, institutes penalties for landlords who illegally evict a tenant, and updates law enforcement procedures accordingly.

“EHOC and Empower Missouri are honored to receive the Renter Advocacy Award from NLIHC in recognition of our work on Board Bill 87,” said Jeanette Mott Oxford, executive director of Empower Missouri. “To be acknowledged is not a victory for us alone but it is also a victory for all of the tenants who didn’t feel like they had a voice against intimidating landlords, especially low-income renters often living in sub-standard housing due to affordable housing shortages in St. Louis City. Renters in St. Louis City may now feel empowered to rise together to influence change and fight back against owner-landlords seeking to take advantage of their vulnerabilities. Board Bill 87 is just the beginning of tenant rights advocacy in the state of Missouri.”

Presented each year at NLIHC’s annual Policy Forum, the Organizing Awards recognize outstanding achievement in statewide, local, and resident/tenant organizing that furthers NLIHC’s mission of achieving socially just public policy that ensures people with the lowest incomes in the U.S. have affordable and decent homes.

Read NLIHC’s press release on the 2018 Organizing Awards at: <https://bit.ly/2HX9Ygb>

NLIHC Members from Across the Country Tell Congress to Fund Affordable Housing

Dozens of affordable housing and homelessness advocates attending NLIHC’s 2018 Housing Policy Forum: Building the Movement braved the DC snow storm and descended on Congress on March 21. The core messages of the 2018 NLIHC Lobby Day advocates were the importance of protecting and expanding investments in affordable housing programs for households with the lowest incomes, defeating proposals to cut housing benefits to those most in need, and ensuring equitable access to housing for all. Advocates emphasized the need to fully fund programs like Section 8 Housing Assistance, public housing, the national Housing Trust Fund, Housing Choice Vouchers, and the HOME Investments and Partnerships program. They shared experiences, like low income tenants living in public housing with deteriorated plumbing systems and warped exterior structures, to emphasize the need for increased resources for affordable housing. Advocates also addressed the harmful impacts that minimum rents and administratively burdensome and inefficient work requirements would have on the most vulnerable populations, most of whom already work or cannot work because of physical limitations. Advocates also called for full and immediate implementation of HUD’s Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule. The snow did not deter more than 75 advocates from visiting their House and Senate offices, armed with [NLIHC data on every state and congressional district in the country](#) and copies of recent NLIHC publications, like [The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes](#) report.

Our Homes, Our Voices

Policy Forum Attendees Begin Preparing for “Our Homes, Our Voices” National Housing Week of Action, May 1-8

Attendees at NLIHC’s 2018 Policy Forum: Building the Movement learned how their organizations and communities can take action May 1-8 as part of the “Our Homes, Our Voices” National Housing Week of Action. Advocates viewed a video recap of highlights from the 2017 Our Homes, Our Voices campaign, which included more than 60 events in communities across the country July 22-29, 2017. Thirteen community leaders shared plans for their 2018 Week of Action events at the Forum. Activities planned for the week include writing letter campaigns to elected officials, meal- and story-sharing events, in-home community discussions, subsidized housing site visits, press events, rallies, meetings with elected officials, nonpartisan voter registration drives, and a special feature on public-access television. New events come from communities across the country, including Allentown, PA; Cambridge, MA; Charlottesville, VA; Cleveland, OH; Dayton, OH; Detroit, MI; Dover, DE; Eaton, OH; Miami, FL; Newton, MA; Palm Springs, CA; Philadelphia, PA; and Salt Lake City, UT. Additional Week of Action statewide events are in the early stages of planning in Alabama, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Utah, Virginia, and Washington state.

For more information on the “Our Homes, Our Voices” campaign, including the 2017 video recap, fact sheets, guides on how to get involved, a list of confirmed local events, downloadable posters and other resources, advocates can visit: <https://www.ourhomes-ourvoices.org/>

Follow “Our Homes, Our Voices” campaign on Twitter at: <https://twitter.com/OurHomesVoices>

Follow “Our Homes, Our Voices” campaign on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/OurHomesOurVoices/>

Budget and Appropriations

Advocates and Congressional Champions Secure Increased Funding for Affordable Housing in 2018

Congress passed a final FY18 [spending bill](#) that includes a significant increase in funding for affordable housing and community development programs at HUD and USDA, along with an increase in Low Income Housing Tax Credits and an important reform to the tax program. This successful outcome is due to the hard work of advocates across the nation and strong Congressional champions, including Senators Susan Collins (R-ME) and Jack Reed (D-RI) and Representatives Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL) and David Price (D-NC) – the chairs and ranking members of the House and Senate Transportation-HUD Appropriations Subcommittees – as well as Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and others. The House passed the bill by a 256-167 vote, and the Senate approved it by a vote of 65-32. After threatening to veto the bill, President Trump signed it into law on March 23, hours before government funding was set to expire.

The bill provides HUD programs with \$4.6 billion in additional funding overall compared to FY17, more than \$12 billion above the president’s FY18 request. With a 10% one-year increase to HUD, many programs were funded at levels significantly above what was proposed in either the House or Senate draft bills. The spending bill renews all Housing Choice Vouchers and provides new vouchers to veterans and people with disabilities, allocates nearly \$1 billion in additional funding to repair and operate public housing, and boosts funding for the HOME Investment Partnerships program (HOME) to the highest level in seven years. Moreover, the final bill

includes none of rent increases proposed by the president in his budget request. See NLIHC's [updated budget chart](#) for more details.

The final FY18 spending bill is a clear repudiation of the president's budget request, which would have cut funding for HUD by nearly 15%, or \$7.4 billion, compared to FY17 levels, provided the HUD secretary with the authority to increase the financial burden on current and future tenants, eliminated 250,000 Housing Choice Vouchers, and slashed or zeroed out funding for public housing, the national Housing Trust Fund, HOME, and Community Development Block Grants.

Now that the bill has become law, NLIHC and our partners in the Campaign for Housing and Community Development will turn our full attention to defeating the president's FY19 budget request, securing the highest allocation possible for affordable housing and community development programs, and defeating harmful benefit cuts. For more details, see NLIHC's [analysis](#) of the president's FY19 budget request and a [factsheet](#) on why cutting housing benefits would lead to increased homelessness and housing poverty.

NLIHC responded to the signing of the spending bill with a [statement](#).

For an overview of the bill's impact on affordable housing programs see: <https://bit.ly/2IKpk91>

Secretary Carson Defends Proposed FY19 HUD Budget before House Appropriations Subcommittee

HUD Secretary Ben Carson testified on March 20 at a House Committee on Appropriations Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies (THUD) Subcommittee hearing. Members of the subcommittee questioned the proposed HUD budget as well as recent reports of Dr. Carson's misuse of funds. Members from both parties expressed concerns regarding the president's proposed elimination of important programs like Community Development Block Grants (CDBG), the HOME Investment Partnership program (HOME), the national Housing Trust Fund (HTF), and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA). Dr. Carson defended the budget cuts as part of the administration's attempt to decrease the national debt.

Dr. Carson discussed several new HUD proposals, including a major shift in public housing. In his opening remarks, the secretary stated, "HUD is proposing to pivot from the current financially unsustainable public housing model and, working with public housing authorities, seek a new way to produce and preserve the affordable housing that so many families need." The president proposes cutting funding from the public housing capital repairs fund and investing more in public-private partnerships, like the Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) program. Ranking Member David Price (D-NC) questioned this course of action, particularly because the proposed budget does not increase funding for Housing Choice Vouchers, which would be necessary to effectively expand RAD. Dr. Carson also defended the decision to eliminate funding for CDBG, stating that Treasury's new Opportunity Zones program would produce \$2.2 trillion of investments in local communities. Committee members did not ask Dr. Carson about proposed rent increases and work requirements, because the issues are outside of the appropriations subcommittee's jurisdiction but Mr. Price stated that the proposed changes would shift the agency's costs onto residents.

Dr. Carson answered questions regarding safe housing for human trafficking victims, the elimination of training materials for inclusion of LGBTQ communities, funding for blighted housing, reduced funding for the HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (VASH) program, affordable housing in rural communities, and disaster housing recovery. In response to many questions regarding budget request amounts, Dr. Carson reminded the committee that the proposal was only a suggestion and promised to use any funding appropriated as effectively as possible. He also encouraged deregulation for manufactured housing as a solution to a lack of housing in

rural areas. Representative John Culberson (R-TX) asked Dr. Carson to give his “urgent attention” to a request from his office regarding Community Development Block-Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funds. Mr. Culberson requested the secretary waive the current CDBG-DR requirement that 70% of funds go to low or moderate income households, proposing a 50% requirement instead. Dr. Carson made no indication that he would grant the waiver but promised to consider the request.

Members of the committee also asked Dr. Carson about a recent \$31,000 purchase of a dining set for his offices. Dr. Carson assured the committee he had cancelled the order once he learned of the price. Because he had few assistant secretaries at the time, Dr. Carson said, he had left the decision to his wife, but is now using the incident as an opportunity to review internal spending practices.

Secretary Carson Testifies Before Senate Banking Committee

HUD Secretary Ben Carson testified on March 22 at a Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs. Senators from both parties questioned the Trump administration’s proposals to increase rents, decrease funding, and stall fair housing laws. Dr. Carson defended his budget and rent reform proposals, arguing families would not lose assistance. He also maintained his commitment to fair housing, but did not provide concrete examples of this commitment.

During his opening remarks Ranking Member Sherrod Brown (D-OH) criticized the proposal to reduce HUD’s budget and impose rent increases. He questioned the logic in cutting affordable housing programs at a time when one out of four renters pay more than 50% of their income on housing expenses. During questioning, Dr. Carson acknowledged that the families who would be affected by rent increases are those already living on the edge, making less than \$10,000 annually.

Other senators questioned the proposed budget cuts, especially for specific programs. Senator Thom Tillis (R-NC) called the funding reductions “premature,” saying that the agency needed level or perhaps increased funding, and encouraged Dr. Carson to make additional efforts to assess the effectiveness of programs before cutting them. Both Senators Brown and Jack Reed (D-RI) expressed concern that the HUD budget did not include additional funding for the HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program despite its success in decreasing veteran homelessness. Dr. Carson asserted that the agency has the appropriate number of vouchers, but needs authority from Congress to move vouchers between jurisdictions. Senators Doug Jones (D-AL) and Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) shared their frustrations and confusion regarding the president’s proposal to eliminate Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds.

Committee members also asked Dr. Carson to explain HUD’s recent actions concerning fair housing. In response to a question from Senator Bob Menendez (D-NJ), Dr. Carson defended his decision earlier this year to suspend the 2015 Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule. He said the decision came after municipalities complained about compliance costs. He also rejected assertions that proposed changes to HUD’s mission statement deleting language related to creating “inclusive and sustainable communities free from discrimination” suggested an intent to ignore the agency’s statutory fair housing obligations. He said the draft that removed the anti-discrimination language would be changed after receiving feedback from HUD employees. The secretary had little to share, however, when Senator Elizabeth Warren (D-MA) asked him to describe specific actions he had taken over the past year to decrease housing discrimination.

Watch the archived webcast of the hearing at: <https://bit.ly/2FM0Gml>

Congress

Representatives Waters and Ellison Call for Fair Housing Hearing

Ranking Member of the House Financial Services Committee Maxine Waters (D-CA) and Representative Keith Ellison (D-MN) sent a [letter](#) to Committee Chair Jeb Hensarling on March 16 calling for HUD Secretary Ben Carson to appear before the committee for a hearing on housing discrimination. The request is in part a response to a March 5 [Memo](#) regarding Dr. Carson's consideration of removing from HUD's mission statement references to creating "inclusive and sustainable communities free from discrimination." The Financial Services Committee has oversight jurisdiction over HUD, including the responsibility to ensure the agency and federal government are enforcing the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Ms. Waters and Mr. Ellison's letter states that "the Committee should also assess whether Secretary Carson disagrees with the HUD Secretary's statutory obligations under the Fair Housing Act." The letter also cites a recent study from the Center for Investigative Reporting that shows African American and Latino borrowers are denied mortgage loans at higher rates than white borrowers.

Following the March 5 memo, the Fair Housing Task Force (FHTF), of which NLIHC is a member, submitted a [letter to Dr. Carson](#) signed by 573 organizations and individuals – 164 national organizations and 409 state and local groups and individuals – condemning HUD's proposal to drop the anti-discrimination language. The letter states in part: "We urge you in the strongest possible terms to reverse course and retain language in your agency's mission statement that reflects one of HUD's most important responsibilities: enforcement and promotion of the Fair Housing Act. Many of our organizations worked diligently with HUD to ensure that this language would be included in HUD's mission statement as a public acknowledgement that this part of HUD's responsibilities is every bit as important as its role in providing resources for housing and community development."

Read Representatives Waters and Ellison's letter at: <https://bit.ly/2GQqxL6>

Read the Fair Housing Task Force letter at: <http://bit.ly/2Df19eA>

Senate Passes Bill that Would Undermine Health and Safety of Many Public Housing Residents

The Senate passed the "[Economic Growth, Regulatory Relief and Consumer Protection Act](#)" (S. 2155) by a vote of 67-31 on March 14. The bill includes provisions that would undermine the physical integrity of many public housing developments, putting the health and safety of public housing residents at risk and destabilizing communities. The bill also incorporates the "Protect Tenants at Foreclosure Act" and the "Family Self-Sufficiency Act," which provide important protections and opportunities for low income renters. The bill now heads to the House for consideration.

Currently HUD rules provide a concrete, quantitative measure to evaluate the performance of small public housing authorities (PHAs). S. 2155 eliminates that measure and gives HUD discretion for labeling a small PHA as "troubled." The bill states that a small PHA may be designated as troubled if HUD determines the PHA has failed to maintain its properties "in a satisfactory physical condition," but does not define what that entails. Such an unclear and subjective standard could lead to poor outcomes in enforcement and oversight, putting tenants' health and safety at risk.

Additionally, the bill postpones physical inspections for public housing for three years, unless the small PHA has been deemed troubled under the new, vague definition. Current HUD rules allow only the highest performing small PHAs to receive physical inspection every three years. Those PHAs categorized as standard or

substandard are inspected every two years, and those rated as troubled are inspected every year. S. 2155 would also apply a less rigorous standard for evaluating the physical condition of a small PHA's properties.

NLIHC sent a letter to Senators Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) on December 7 sharing its concerns with the legislation. Read this letter at: <http://bit.ly/2BA3NiD>

USDA Proposes Changes to Rural Housing Eligibility

The USDA published on March 16 proposed changes to eligibility under its rural housing programs. The proposed changes stem from the determination made by each state's USDA Rural Development Office that some communities that were previously eligible for rural housing programs are no longer "rural in character," as required by federal law. The proposed changes go into effect on June 4, 2018.

In making its determination, states were permitted to take into consideration several factors. For example, states were permitted to discount population numbers that stem from college students or prisons located nearby and to assess the economic vitality of the area.

Maps reflecting the proposed ineligible areas are available online at: <https://eligibility.sc.egov.usda.gov>

Disaster Housing Recovery

Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition Releases Policy Recommendations for State Action Plans

The NLIHC-led Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC) of more than 700 organizations provided a [comprehensive set of policy recommendations](#) that advocates can use with state governors to ensure that Community Development Block Grant–Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Action Plans provide a fair and equitable recovery. The recommendations emphasize recovery funding to ensure all households receive the housing assistance they need to get back on their feet, investments in public infrastructure and environmental remediation to meet the needs of low income people and communities, and adoption of transparent data and reporting standards.

Read the DHRC state disaster recovery recommendations at: <http://bit.ly/2IhQoMs>

House Homeland Security Committee Holds Hearing on Preparedness, Response, and Rebuilding

FEMA Administrator Brock Long and other federal and state officials reported to the House Homeland Security Committee at a hearing on March 15 about the lessons learned about preparedness, response and rebuilding related to the 2017 disasters. Mr. Long reported that 47 million (or nearly 16% of Americans) were affected by last year's multiple disasters. FEMA processed 4.7 million applications through the Individual Assistance Program—more than Katrina, Sandy, Rita, and Wilma combined - in a period of a few months. Mr. Long called for streamlining the federal government-fragmented recovery processes involving 17 different agencies. "I'm going to ask you for more support to help me fix housing and give more granting authority to governors to give them more control," he said.

Mr. Long called for money up-front rather than on the back-end for pre-disaster mitigation. Citing FEMA's 2.3 million home inspections, he proposed FEMA do away with the majority of such inspections given how they slow the recovery process and urged instead the use of technology and trust in disaster survivors. He stated that the current, laborious risk-adverse system is set up solely to protect against fraud. As for housing recovery, Mr. Long said, "Regardless of the tools we are able to provide . . . permanent housing solutions are best addressed by insurance."

Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) complained about the inordinate number of FEMA Individual Assistance request denials in the Houston area. "The numbers of denials in our community were enormous," she said. "They particularly hit minority communities."

Full transcripts of the testimonies can be at: [FEMA Administrator Brock Long](#); [State of Texas COO Reed Clay](#); [Director of Florida Division of Emergency Management Wesley Maul](#); [Vice-Chairman of Puerto Rico Committee on Federal and International Relations Jose Melendez-Ortiz](#).

A recording of the full hearing can be found [here](#).

Additional Updates on Disaster Housing Recovery – March 26

The following is a review of additional housing recovery developments related to Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, and the California wildfires since the last update in *Memo to Members and Partner* (see *Memo*, [3/12](#)). NLIHC also posts this information at our [On the Home Front](#) blog.

General Updates

HUD is holding free [webinars](#) to provide an overview of the new loss-mitigation policies that address disaster-affected borrowers. The webinar is open to all FHA-approved servicers and housing counselors. The next date is April 3, 11:00 am ET.

California Wildfires

Local Perspectives

A new [study](#) finds that new housing developments are increasing fastest in areas most vulnerable to wildfires. The problem is particularly pronounced in southern California with hundreds of thousands of homes built in high fire-risk areas between 1990 and 2010.

Hurricane Maria

FEMA

The Transitional Shelter Assistance (TSA) program has been extended until May 14 for Puerto Rican families displaced by Hurricane Maria. The TSA, which provides hotel vouchers for survivors, was scheduled to end on March 20. The [extension](#) will be granted only to families who are already benefiting from the program and to those who qualify under new requirements established by Puerto Rico Governor Ricardo Rosselló.

Survivors of Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico now have until [June 18](#) to register with FEMA for individual assistance.

By law, FEMA must require proof of ownership and occupancy from disaster survivors who apply for federal assistance to help with repairs to their damaged homes. When all forms of verification are destroyed or do not

exist, [FEMA may accept a signed self-declaration](#). If homeownership or occupancy cannot be proved, some individuals or families may still qualify for other disaster assistance to cover damaged or destroyed personal property. Applicants who need legal assistance regarding home ownership documentation and cannot afford an attorney may call the free Disaster Legal Services hotline at 800-310-7029.

FEMA Public Assistance provides grants to eligible governmental organizations and private nonprofit organizations for debris removal, life-saving emergency protective measures, and the repair, replacement, or restoration of disaster-damaged facilities. The program also encourages protection of damaged facilities from future events with hazard mitigation measures during the recovery process. The [application deadline](#) for private nonprofit organizations in Puerto Rico has been extended through April 3.

FEMA will continue to cover for an additional 60 days [100% of eligible costs](#) for debris removal and emergency protective measures in the U.S. Virgin Islands. This federal reimbursement for Public Assistance (PA) work will now continue through May 5 for Hurricane Irma and May 14 for Hurricane Maria.

A FEMA program that provides prescription assistance for uninsured disaster survivors has been extended through [April 15](#) for residents of the U.S. Virgin Islands. The program provides free 30-day replacements of certain drugs and medical supplies for eligible survivors.

HUD

The NLIHC-led Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition of more than 700 organizations submitted a set of [recommendations](#) to HUD in response to a week-long series of public information sessions held in Puerto Rico. These recommendations highlight the unique challenges on the island, including the large number of homeowners without clear titles to their homes, the need for alternative methods to provide public input, and the widespread and high rates of poverty, particularly in rural and mountainous regions.

Local Perspectives

Six months after Hurricane Maria made landfall, residents are still struggling to rebuild their homes and their lives. In a recent *New York Times* article, a [student from Comerio](#) shares her story of helping to rebuild her town and about the continuing struggles faced by thousands of families on the island. Community members have put the rest of their lives on hold as they raise money to rebuild the nearly 4,000 damaged homes in Comerio.

FEMA is denying assistance to many Puerto Ricans because they [lack deeds](#) to their homes. About 60% of applicants are denied Individual Assistance (IA), mostly because they cannot prove ownership of their homes. While FEMA has tried to ease documentation requirements, many Puerto Ricans are still being denied for inconsistent reasons. While Puerto Rican government officials have suggested using disaster relief money to grant deeds to families, this action will not address the immediate needs on the island.

Hurricane Irma

FEMA

Twenty-six [Long Term Recovery Groups](#) (LTRGs) across Florida - supported by a variety of nonprofits and FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaisons - are helping Irma survivors connect with resources. The nonprofits work to assist unmet disaster-related needs of people who may need more time and resources to recover. Specialists from several federal agencies also offer support by working with local groups to help build communities better prepared to face future disasters.

Hurricane Harvey

Local Perspective

A *Houston Chronicle* [article](#) outlines how FEMA's experiment of pushing responsibility on Texas for short-term disaster housing – as opposed to relying on the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP) and other federal programs – has left thousands of survivors without the help they need. The story describes unnecessary delays, mismanagement, lack of capacity, and communication breakdowns, all of which leave families struggling to make ends meet. The piece underscores the need for congressional action on DHAP and other solutions.

Research from NLIHC state partner Texas Housers [reveals more inequitable treatment](#) of renters during recovery. An apartment complex receiving HUD project-based rental assistance, Arbor Court, is next to Greens Bayou, which regularly floods during major weather events. During Hurricane Harvey, many residents needed to be rescued. Maps of the area surrounding the complex show that many empty lots border Greens Bayou, a result of a buyout program. While Harris County offered buyouts for homeowners, HUD has not offered alternatives for Arbor Court tenants. Residents argue that more Section 8 vouchers and new affordable homes in safer locations would be a just solution.

National Housing Trust Fund

NLIHC Joins Civil Rights and Other Stakeholder Groups on GSE Reform

As Congress begins to turn its attention to housing finance reform legislation, NLIHC has joined a coalition of national civil rights and fair housing organizations in support of comprehensive legislation that promotes access and affordability in the housing market.

This new coalition agrees that any reforms of Freddie Mac and Fannie Mae must preserve and enhance fair housing and anti-discrimination protections; provide broad access for borrowers, institutions, and regions; protect taxpayers from future bailouts; and preserve the entities' affordable housing mission and the availability of inclusive loan products and services, including a significant expansion of the national Housing Trust Fund.

Although legislation has not been formally introduced, a draft bill crafted by Senators Bob Corker (R-TN) and Mark Warner (D-VA) would have capped funding for the national Housing Trust Fund to as low as \$440 million – far less than the \$3.5 billion proposed in legislation approved by the Senate Banking Committee in 2014. The draft bill would divert funding away from extremely low income households through the Housing Trust Fund into a Market Access Fund to support homeownership activities for households with relatively higher incomes. The draft bill would also eliminate Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac's affordable housing goals and Duty to Serve obligations. If Senators Corker and Warner introduce legislation that is similar to the draft version, NLIHC will strongly oppose the bill.

HUD

Texas Housers Sues HUD over Fair Housing Agreement with Houston

The Texas Low Income Housing Information Service (Texas Housers), an NLIHC state partner, filed a lawsuit challenging HUD for its failure to require the City of Houston to comply with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the obligation to affirmatively further fair housing (AFFH) under Title VIII of the Civil Rights Act

of 1968 (Fair Housing Act). Texas Housers provides two categories of Houston's failures: failure to permit affordable multifamily housing in predominantly white neighborhoods and failure to address water drainage needs in most of Houston's racially and ethnically segregated neighborhoods, resulting in repeated and prolonged flooding in the wake of hurricanes.

Texas Housers is bringing this legal complaint under the Administrative Procedure Act (APA) to compel HUD to enforce federal civil rights laws. Texas Housers argues that HUD violates the APA because it does not sanction Houston for inaccurately certifying that it complies with Title VI and AFFH, and because HUD has not withheld federal funding for failure to comply with those civil rights obligations.

Houston's Failure to Permit Affordable Multifamily Housing in Predominantly White Neighborhoods

On January 11, 2017, HUD sent a [letter](#) to Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner stating that it found the city in noncompliance with Title VI, which prohibits racial discrimination in federally financed programs. HUD asserted that racial motivations led Houston to refuse a "Resolution of No Objection" for Fountain View, a mixed-income, 233-unit apartment building. HUD also concluded that Houston's procedure for approving projects through the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program was influenced by racially motivated opposition to affordable housing in predominantly white neighborhoods (see *Memo*, [1/30/17](#)).

HUD's January 11, 2017 letter stated that if Houston did not arrive at a Voluntary Compliance Agreement (VCA), HUD would begin administrative proceedings or refer the issue to the Department of Justice for judicial enforcement. Texas Housers wrote a letter to HUD on October 31, 2017, demanding HUD take immediate action to deliver a VCA that outlined a path for Houston to correct housing discrimination described in the January 11, 2017 HUD letter (see *Memo*, [11/13/17](#)). HUD finally signed a [VCA](#) with Houston on March 2, 2018.

Texas Housers asserts that, with this VCA, HUD is effectively ending enforcement of civil rights laws in Houston. Acknowledging that Houston disputes facts in HUD's January 11, 2017 letter, the VCA surrenders HUD's responsibilities by stating that "resolution of the disputes would be time-consuming," and "in order to expedite just resolution of these matters and to avoid further administrative procedures or litigation," HUD and Houston have entered into the VCA. In essence, HUD decided that expediency trumps equity.

The January 11, 2017 letter outlined eight remedies the City of Houston was required to address. The VCA has only four provisions directly relating to the four of the eight required remedies (the first, second, fourth and fifth).

The first remedy in the HUD letter required Houston to provide the Houston Housing Authority (HHA) funding needed to supplement HHA's allocation of Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) to cover the cost of constructing Fountain View or another new construction project in low-minority and high-opportunity census tracts. Under the VCA, however, the City of Houston agrees to provide HHA an additional \$2 million from the Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA) to assist households made homeless due to flooding after Hurricane Harvey. This VCA provision does not directly address and is not a remedy for the failure HUD identified in its January 11, 2017 letter calling for the development of a project similar to Fountain View in a low-minority and high-opportunity area. Assisting households left homeless by disasters should be a natural, primary use of Houston's FEMA funds. Under the VCA, Houston also agrees to provide HHA \$2.4 million in HOME and CDBG funds to house 250 chronically homeless individuals. This VCA provision also does not directly address the civil rights failures HUD identified in 2017. Assisting chronically homeless households should be a natural, primary use of Houston's HOME and CDBG funds.

The second remedy in the HUD letter required Houston to develop a strategy for encouraging the development of affordable homes in areas that do not perpetuate segregation and that do not have a high concentration of poverty. Under the VCA, Houston agrees to apply to HUD for technical assistance.

The fourth remedy in the HUD letter required Houston to work with HHA to provide private owners incentives to accept vouchers. Under the VCA, Houston agrees to continue an existing Voucher Mobility Pilot program designed to serve 350 voucher households. Working with nonprofits and housing authorities, the pilot program encourages landlords in areas with high-performing schools to rent to households regardless of the source of their income.

The fifth remedy in the HUD letter required Houston to implement a site-selection policy for vetting and reviewing requests for Resolutions of Support or No Objection or Resolutions of No Support for LIHTC projects. Under the VCA, Houston agrees that during the two years of the VCA it will adopt a policy for objectively evaluating such Resolutions that will not permit veto or special points for any particular member of the City Council.

In its legal complaint, Texas Housers states that the VCA does not contain any of the provisions that HUD's January 11, 2017 letter required to remedy Houston's noncompliance. Texas Housers argues that the VCA does not prohibit the mayor from withholding future Resolutions from City Council consideration, nor does it require new procedures to prevent racially motivated opposition to affordable housing.

Houston's Failure to Address Water Drainage Needs in Most of Houston's Racially and Ethnically Segregated Neighborhoods

Texas Housers sent a [letter](#) to Anna Maria Farias, assistant secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at HUD, on October 31, 2017, asking HUD to immediately investigate Houston's failure to provide essential water control infrastructure and flood plain protections for neighborhoods that are predominantly occupied by minority populations and that contain significant concentrations of affordable housing (see *Memo*, [11/20/17](#)).

The legal complaint filed by Texas Housers alleges that Houston regularly receives federal funding through CDBG and CDBG-DR, while maintaining entirely different and markedly inferior drainage systems in predominantly minority neighborhoods, which exposes residents of those neighborhoods to increased risk from storms. Eighty-eight percent of Houston's "open ditch" drainage, which fails to protect homes from flooding, is located in African American neighborhoods, while predominantly white neighborhoods have superior underground drainage and storm drains.

Texas Housers describes the situation in two blogs:

- Part 1: [Inclusive and desegregated communities are the only way to promote opportunity for all. We ask the courts to order HUD to do its job](#)
- Part 2: [In a segregated Houston unequal neighborhoods mean unequal flood protection](#)

HUD Posts Guidance for Implementing Small Area Fair Market Rents

HUD has [posted material](#) to assist public housing agencies (PHAs) implement Small Area Fair Market Rents (Small Area FMRs or SAFMRs). The new guidance includes a 69-page *Implementation Guidebook*, a set of frequently asked questions, and sample implementation documents. PHAs in 24 metropolitan areas are required to start using Small Area FMRs instead of metropolitan-wide FMRs by April 1, 2018. Other PHAs may voluntarily implement SAFMRs. This informal guidance complements formal guidance issued as Notice PIH 2018-1 (see *Memo*, [1/22](#)).

Small Area FMRs reflect rents for U.S. Postal ZIP codes, while traditional FMRs reflect a single rent standard for an entire metropolitan region. The intent of SAFMRs is to provide voucher payment standards that are better aligned with neighborhood-scale rental markets, resulting in relatively higher subsidies in neighborhoods that

have higher rents but greater opportunities, and relatively lower subsidies in neighborhoods that have lower rents and higher concentrations of voucher households. The primary goal of Small Area FMRs is to help households use vouchers in areas of higher opportunity and lower poverty, thus reducing voucher concentrations high-poverty areas.

Although the guidance is written for PHAs, residents and advocates might benefit from the materials. For instance, the *Implementation Guidebook* explains SAFMRs; discusses communicating with residents, owners, and other stakeholders; and offers options regarding establishing PHA policies when the switch to Small Area FMRs results in a decrease in voucher payment standards. Resident leaders and advocates will want to convince their PHA to not lower the payment standard of residents who already have a voucher if a new SAFMR is less than the previous FMR and owners do not lower the rent. Among the 13 sample implementation documents are “Tenant Notification of Potential Payment Standard Reduction” and “New Tenant Frequently Asked Questions.”

HUD’s [SAFMR material](#) is only on the [Public Housing and Voucher Programs page](#) of the HUD Exchange website, not the [basic Public and Indian Housing website](#). Actual [Small Area FMRs for all jurisdictions](#) are on yet another website, the HUD User website of HUD’s Office of Policy Development and Research.

The final SAFMR rule was published on November 16, 2016 (see *Memo*, [11/21/16](#)) after a year-and-a-half rulemaking process that included multiple rounds of comments (see *Memo*, [6/8/15](#), [7/6/15](#), [6/20/16](#) and [8/22/16](#)). Without public notice, however, HUD abruptly suspended the Small Area FMR rule for two years on August 10, 2017. Five civil rights organizations representing three [plaintiffs sued HUD](#) over the suspension (see *Memo*, [10/30/17](#)). On December 23, 2017, the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia granted a [preliminary injunction](#) against HUD, finding that HUD had neither the authority nor compelling reasons to suspend implementation of the use of SAFMRs.

HUD Video Explains the Uniform Relocation Act

HUD offers a brief animated video that provides an overview of the Uniform Relocation Assistance and Real Property Acquisition Policies Act (URA). The URA provides important protections and assistance for people affected by the acquisition, rehabilitation, or demolition of real estate property for federal or federally funded projects. The URA was enacted by Congress to ensure that people whose property is acquired, or who have to move as a direct result of projects receiving federal funds, are treated fairly and receive moving assistance.

Advocates should also be aware that there is a non-URA provision that can often be more beneficial to tenants displaced by CDBG or HOME activities. The provision is called “Section 104(d),” often referred to as the “Barney Frank Amendment” because former U.S. Representative Barney Frank (D-MA) secured its passage to minimize displacement and better compensate residents displaced by CDBG and HOME activities. Jurisdictions, and even HUD, often seem to dismiss Section 104(d) because it may result in an increased expense related to more adequately compensating residents for displacement.

The video is at: <https://tinyurl.com/y8o6ebcc>

Additional URA information and resources are at: [HUD's Real Estate Acquisition and Relocation website](#).

HUD Reports Show HOME Units by State and Congressional District, and in LIHTC Projects

HUD's Office of Affordable Housing Programs has released three "Ad Hoc HOME Reports." One report shows the number of completed HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME) units by state between the beginnings of the program in 1992 through 2016. The report provides a breakdown by rental units, homebuyer units, homeowner rehabilitation units, and tenant-based rental assistance. A second report shows HOME units completed by congressional district, and a third shows the number of HOME units in Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) properties, along with HOME funds disbursed in LIHTC properties. The LIHTC report covers the period 2010 through 2017.

These ad hoc reports are in addition to the regular HOME reports, which are on the right column of the [HOME page on HUD Exchange](#). The new [ad hoc reports](#) are at the end of the list of regular HOME reports.

More information about HOME is available on page 5-10 of NLIHC's [2017 Advocates' Guide](#). The *2018 Advocates' Guide* is available at: <http://nlihc.org/library/guides>

Research

Airbnb Drives Up Rents in New York City

A report by the Urban Politics and Governance research group from the School of Urban Planning at McGill University, [The High Cost of Short-Term Rentals in New York City](#), examines the impacts of Airbnb on the rental market in New York City and the surrounding region over the past three years. The report finds that Airbnb activity takes rental housing off the long-term rental market, driving up annual median rent by \$384 in New York City and contributing to racialized gentrification.

Airbnb markets itself as a home-sharing platform where individuals can earn additional income by renting out a spare room or their home for a few days when they are on vacation. The report challenges the notion that Airbnb is simply for home-sharing. Entire-home or entire-apartment listings accounted for 75% of Airbnb's total revenue and 51% of total listings in New York City. In addition, the top 10% of Airbnb hosts earned 48% of Airbnb's total revenue.

Under New York State's Multiple Dwelling Law, an entire-apartment rental of fewer than 30 days is illegal in buildings with three or more rental units, unless the owner is present. The report estimates that 45% of all reservations since 2016, accounting for 66% of Airbnb revenue in New York City, have likely been illegal under the Multiple Dwelling Law.

The report finds that Airbnb caused the removal of up to 13,500 housing units from New York City's long-term rental market. These units are used for short-term rentals through Airbnb but would have otherwise been available to tenants as long-term rental. Last year, Airbnb hosts earned 55% more from Airbnb than the median long-term rent of their neighborhoods, making operating Airbnb more profitable than long-term rentals. The removal of these units has driven up the median long-term rent in New York City by 1.4% over the past three years. The average renter looking for an apartment can expect to pay \$384 more per year due to Airbnb's recent growth. In some neighborhoods in Manhattan, the annual increase is more than \$700.

According to the report, Airbnb listings in predominantly white neighborhoods earned more revenue than those located in predominantly African American neighborhoods. Neighborhoods with the fastest growing Airbnb presence, however, were disproportionately African American. The report considers these neighborhoods to be at high risk of Airbnb-induced gentrification. In these neighborhoods, the Airbnb host population is 74% white, while the resident population is only 14% white. The report suggests that Airbnb's presence in New York City

is increasing gentrification as it removes long-term rentals from the market in predominantly African American neighborhoods.

The report utilized Airbnb data collected by AirDNA, a private consulting firm that “scrapes” data from Airbnb’s public website, and demographic and housing market data from the 2015 American Community Survey’s five-year estimates at the census-tract level.

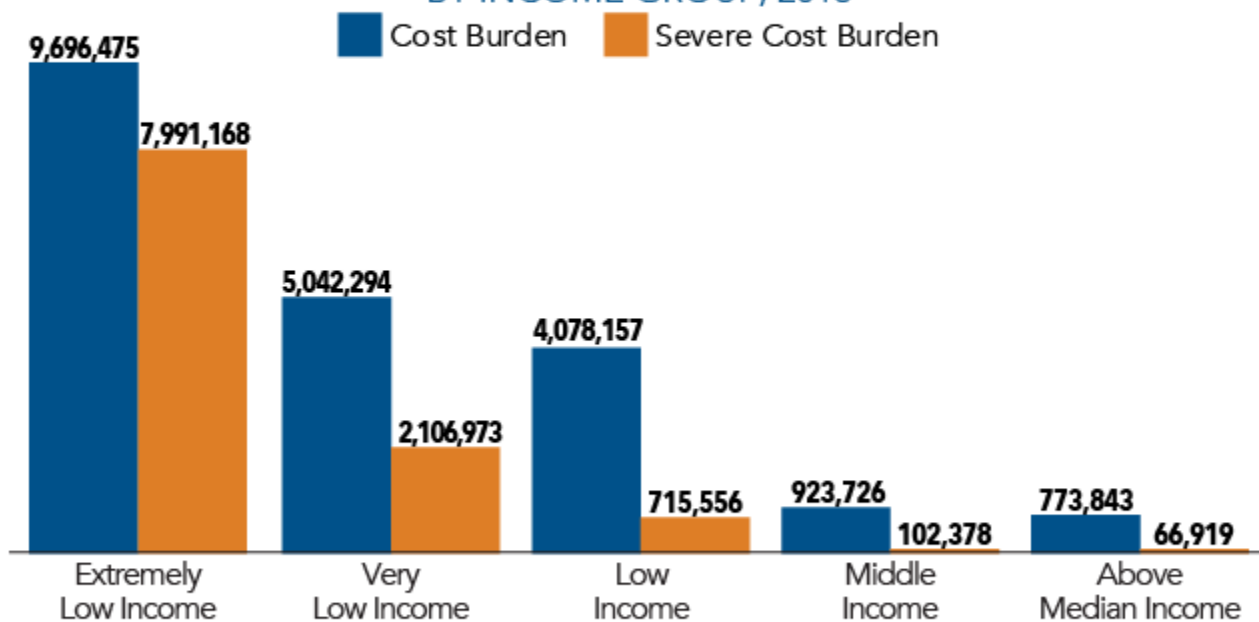
The High Cost of Short-Term Rentals in New York City is available at: <http://bit.ly/2Gb4qyS>

Fact of the Week

Eight Million of Lowest Income Households in the U.S. Are Severely Housing Cost Burdened

THE GAP

FIGURE 4: RENTER HOUSEHOLDS WITH COST BURDEN BY INCOME GROUP, 2016



Source: NLIHC tabulations of 2016 ACS PUMS data.
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Cost Burden = households spending more than 30% of their income on housing. Severely Cost Burden = households spending more than 50% of their income on housing.

Source: NLIHC’s *The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes*, 2018 at: <http://nlihc.org/gap>

NLIHC in the News

NLIHC in the News for the Week of March 18

The following are some of the news stories that NLIHC contributed to during the week of March 18:

- “HUD, affordable housing programs get a boost in latest congressional spending bill,” *Curbed*, March 22 at: <https://bit.ly/2pzRviS>
- “Suburban Housing Costs Are Stretching Families to the Brink,” *Slate*, March 21 at: <https://slate.me/2GgsOl4>
- “NAACP Joins Campaign to Increase Affordable Housing across America,” *Houston Style Magazine*, March 20 at: <https://bit.ly/2pByCLp>
- “There Are Simply Not Enough Places For Low-Income Americans To Live,” *Fast Company*, March 19 at: <https://bit.ly/2pvZA7j>
- “Coalition: Nevada rental housing is least affordable in US,” *Chron.com*, March 17 at: <https://bit.ly/2DQqTye>

NLIHC News

NLIHC Honors Senator Susan Collins, Dr. Matt Desmond and Lisa Hasegawa

NLIHC held its 36th Annual Leadership Awards Reception on March 20 in Washington, DC, honoring Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) with the Edward W. Brooke Housing Leadership Award, Dr. Matthew Desmond with the inaugural Sheila Crowley Housing Justice Award, and Lisa Hasegawa with the Cushing Niles Dolbear Lifetime Service Award.

The Edward W. Brooke Housing Leadership Award, named for the late Senator Brooke (R-MA) who championed low income housing as a U.S. senator and as chair of the NLIHC board of directors after he left the Senate, goes to an exemplary housing leader with a record of fighting for affordable housing on the national level. NLIHC honored Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) with the 2018 Brooke Award for her commitment to addressing the housing needs of the lowest income people in the U.S. and her steadfast support for federal affordable housing and homelessness programs.

Greg Payne, executive director of the Maine Affordable Housing Coalition and NLIHC board chair introduced Senator Collins and spoke about her tireless leadership in the Senate in support of programs that ensure low income households have decent, safe, affordable housing. After accepting the award, Senator Collins spoke about the need to ensure every American, including veterans, has a decent, safe and affordable place to call home. Senators Collins cited NLIHC’s [The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes](#) report about the shortage of affordable housing in America and emphasized that an affordable and stable home was foundational to family wellbeing and the success of children.

The Sheila Crowley Housing Justice Award is named for former NLIHC President & CEO Sheila Crowley. The Crowley award goes to an outstanding leader who has elevated the conversation around affordable housing for the lowest income people in America. NLIHC presented the inaugural Crowley award to Dr. Matthew Desmond, MacArthur Genius Awardee and author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*. Dr. Desmond was provided the award for his groundbreaking book and other work

to raise public and policy-maker awareness about the affordable housing crisis in the U.S. and for calling for bold solutions.

Daisy Franklin, vice president of the Public Housing Resident Network of Connecticut and NLIHC board member, honored Dr. Desmond with words about his outstanding research, authorship, and other awareness-raising efforts about the causes and effects of evictions and housing poverty.

In his acceptance video, Dr. Desmond spoke about Dr. Crowley's lifetime of work fighting to ensure the poorest households in the U.S. have access to affordable homes and serving domestic violence survivors and the homeless. He expressed deep gratitude to NLIHC for bestowing him the first-ever Crowley Award. Dr. Desmond spoke about the centrality of affordable housing to every aspect of a family's life, his work at the [Eviction Lab](#) at Princeton University, and his hope that his efforts will help bring about policy solutions.

The Cushing Niles Dolbeare Lifetime Service Award, named after NLIHC's late founder, goes to an individual who has demonstrated an unyielding commitment to achieving safe, decent, and affordable homes for low income people. NLIHC presented the 2018 Dolbeare award to Lisa Hasegawa, former executive director of the National Coalition for Asian and Pacific American Community Development and former NLIHC board member. Ms. Hasegawa received the honor for her years of dedication to affordable housing on behalf of Asian American and Pacific Islanders (AAPIs) and all low income households.

Moises Loza, former executive director of the Housing Assistance Council and NLIHC board member, introduced Ms. Hasegawa and remarked that her leadership was the embodiment of Cushing Dolbeare's legacy. Upon receiving the award, Ms. Hasegawa spoke about the importance of addressing the affordable housing needs of low income AAPIs and emphasized the need to continue striving for racial justice in America, including for AAPIs.

NLIHC is grateful to all of this year's Leadership Award Reception donors. A full list can be found at: <http://nlihc.org/events/leadership>

NLIHC Offers New Tools for Residents and Advocates

NLIHC released the week of March 19 two new resources: [Tenant Talk: Housing is Built with Ballots](#), a publication for low income residents, and [Advocates' Guide 2018: A Primer on Federal Affordable Housing & Community Development Programs](#), a comprehensive guide for advocates and others involved virtually any aspect of affordable housing and community development.

The winter edition of *Tenant Talk* addresses voting rights; the importance of participation, particularly by low income renters, in local, state, and national elections; and how tenants can engage is non-partisan voter registration, education, and mobilization. This *Tenant Talk* includes articles on recent organizing victories in which residents played a key role, policy updates on issues of interest to residents, updates on disaster housing recovery efforts, and on resident perspectives on a host of issues. It also provides information on how to get involved in this year's ["Our Homes, Our Votes" National Housing Week of Action](#), May 1-8.

The *Tenant Talk* authors and editorial board make it clear that the biggest opportunity to effect change after a challenging year of threats to affordable housing programs is by voting in the upcoming primary and mid-term elections. In 2018, voters will make decisions about 36 governors, 34 senators, and all the U.S. House of Representatives. This edition of *Tenant Talk* stresses the importance of voter turnout especially from low income residents; voting is the best way for low income renters to augment their power as a valuable constituency.

You can download [Tenant Talk](#) online or [sign up to have it delivered to your door for free](#) if you are an NLIHC member. Become a member today at: www.nlihc.org/membership

Advocates' Guide 2018: A Primer on Federal Affordable Housing & Community Development Programs is this year's edition of NLIHC's comprehensive resource about virtually every affordable housing program and policy. The *Guide*, written by NLIHC staff and other leading experts in the field, contains synopses of housing and community development programs, laws, and regulations, as well as tools and information to guide advocates' communications with legislative and executive branches of government and to mobilize advocacy campaigns. The *Advocates' Guide* is an invaluable resource for anyone involved in or concerned about affordable housing and community development – to refresh your familiarity with housing programs, statutes, and regulations or to educate new employees working at affordable housing and community development agencies and organizations.

Advocates' Guide 2018 was made available first in print to attendees of the NLIHC 2018 Housing Policy Forum: Building the Movement, March 19-21. It is now available [online](#) to the public.

Tenant Talk: Housing is Built with Ballots is available at: <https://bit.ly/2IMgRIB>

The *Advocates' Guide 2018: A Primer on Federal Affordable Housing & Community Development Programs* is available at: <http://nlihc.org/library/guides>

NLIHC Releases *Gap Report*, Calls for Greater Investments to Address Massive Shortage of Affordable and Available Homes for the Lowest Income Households

NLIHC released [The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes 2018](#) report on March 13. The report finds a shortage of 7.2 million affordable and available rental homes for extremely low income renter households whose incomes are less than either the poverty guideline or 30% of their area median income (AMI), whichever is higher. Seventy-one percent of extremely low income renter households are severely housing cost-burdened, spending more than half of their income on housing. They account for nearly three-quarters of all severely cost-burdened renters in the U.S. Eighty-four percent of extremely low income renter households who are severely cost-burdened are seniors or people with disabilities, or they are in the labor force. NLIHC released a new interactive online map with this year's report.

Extremely low income households continue to face by far the largest shortage of affordable and available rental housing of any income group. Nationwide, thirty-five affordable and available rental homes exist for every 100 extremely low income renter households. As a result, eight million extremely low income renter households are severely housing cost-burdened. By comparison, 2.1 million very low income renter households (incomes between 31% and 50% of AMI) and 700,000 low income renters (incomes between 51% and 80% of AMI) are severely cost-burdened. Fewer than 200,000 renter households with incomes above 80% of AMI are severely cost-burdened.

Extremely low income renter households face a shortage of affordable and available rental homes in every state and major metropolitan area. The supply ranges from only 15 affordable and available rental homes for every 100 extremely low income renter households in Nevada to 59 in Maine. Among the 50 largest metropolitan areas, the supply ranges from 10 affordable and available rental homes for every 100 extremely low income renter households in Las Vegas, NV, to 47 in Providence, RI.

Extremely low income households are more likely to be seniors, people with disabilities, or include children than other renter households. Forty-six percent of extremely low income renter households are seniors or people

with disabilities, compared to 26% of other renters. Thirty-six percent of extremely low income renter households include children under the age of 18, compared to 31% of other renter households.

NLIHC calls for greater federal investments in housing programs targeted to the nation's lowest income renters. These programs include the national Housing Trust Fund (HTF), the Housing Choice Voucher program, and public housing operating and capital funds. Finance reform of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac provides an opportunity to significantly increase resources for the HTF. The HTF allocates money to states to distribute for the development or rehabilitation of housing affordable to extremely low income households. Previous housing finance reform proposals included \$3.5 billion annually for the national HTF, which should be the starting point in any future reform proposals.

The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes 2018 is available at: <http://nlihc.org/gap>

Where to Find Us – March 26

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

- [Make Room Journalism Study Tour](#), Houston, TX on March 27
 - Annual Fair Housing Conference, Little Rock, AK on April 5
 - [Housing First Partners Conference 2018](#), Denver, CO, April 10 -12
 - [PolicyLink 2018 Equity Summit](#), Chicago, IL on April 13
 - [South Carolina Housing Conference](#), Columbia, SC on April 17-18
 - Annual Summit for Fair Housing, Mobile, AL on April 19
 - [2018 Building Michigan Communities Conference](#), Lansing, MI, April 30 to May 2
 - Provider Alliance to End Homelessness, Los Angeles, CA on May 17
 - [2018 Denver Housing Summit](#), Denver, CO on May 24
 - Virginia Housing Alliance Annual Luncheon, Richmond, VA on June 14
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