

RESPONDING TO CORONAVIRUS: ENSURING HOUSING STABILITY DURING A CRISIS



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Congressional leaders enacted the “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act),” to respond to the coronavirus pandemic. This response package included [\\$12 billion in housing and homelessness resources](#) to help prevent an outbreak of the virus among people experiencing homelessness, as well as needed resources and protections for America’s lowest-income renters. This spending bill was an important first step, but Congress must provide far more resources – and the [administration should take immediate regulatory action](#) – to meet the dire and urgent needs of people who are experiencing homelessness or those individuals who are right on the brink.

MOST URGENT NEEDS

The next Coronavirus spending package must include:

- **Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG): At least \$11.5 billion.** Congress provided \$4 billion in ESG funds in the CARES Act; [additional funds are needed to respond to coronavirus](#) among people experiencing homelessness. People who are homeless and contract coronavirus are twice as likely to be hospitalized, two to four times as likely to require critical care, and two to three times as likely to die than others in the general public. If unchecked, as many as 20,000 people who are homeless could require hospitalization and nearly 3,500 could die. This has enormous implications for individuals, their communities, and our already overstretched hospital systems. Funds are needed to minimize the number of people living in homeless encampments and congregate shelters and identify alternative space, including hotels, for isolation and self-quarantine, as well as funding for short-term rental assistance and housing stabilization services. ESG funds should also be used to provide medical respite care, outreach, and street medicine for people experiencing homelessness.
- **A national, uniform moratorium on evictions and foreclosures.** In the CARES Act, Congress instituted a temporary moratorium on new filings for foreclosures and evictions due to nonpayment for renters and homeowners in all federally subsidized housing, including the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC), and people living in properties covered by Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Federal Housing Administration (FHA). Several [states and localities have instituted eviction and foreclosure moratoriums](#). This patchwork of responses provides relief to only some and creates confusion for all. Congress should implement a uniform policy that assures each of us that renters will not lose their homes during a pandemic where our collective health depends on each of us staying home. Although tenants will be responsible for paying back unpaid rent, the law should prohibit rent arrears accumulated during the period covered by the moratorium, from forming the basis of an eviction.
- **Emergency rental assistance and eviction prevention: \$50 billion to \$90 billion.** A moratorium on evictions, on its own, is not enough. Congress must also provide tens of billions of dollars in rental assistance to avoid creating a financial cliff for renters will fall off of when eviction moratoria are lifted and back-rent is owed, and to ensure the continued viability of our country’s essential affordable housing infrastructure. This assistance can be provided through a combination of Emergency Solutions Grants, Housing Choice Vouchers, Section 521 Rural Rental Assistance, or the Disaster Housing Assistance Program (DHAP), which was used by past Republican and Democratic administrations to address short-term rental assistance needs after previous disasters.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND NEEDED POLICIES

Congress should provide additional housing and homelessness resources in the next coronavirus spending package, including:

- **Moratorium on sweeps of homeless encampments.** The [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) advise

localities to not sweep homeless encampments or force people to relocate during the pandemic if there are no alternative housing options available to them. Federal resources should be tied to a requirement that states and local communities institute a moratorium on homeless encampment sweeps.

- **Emergency funds for public housing and other HUD housing providers.** In the CARES Act, Congress provided some resources to help public housing agencies, HUD housing providers, and tribal housing authorities have the resources to keep residents safe and healthy during this crisis, but no funds were included for USDA rural housing providers. Additional funds are likely needed for federally assisted providers.
- **Access to legal services and housing counseling.** Resources for legal services are needed to protect tenants from unlawful evictions that may occur after any moratoriums are lifted, or if moratoriums are not put into effect. Housing counseling can help renters and homeowners remain stably housed during and after a Coronavirus outbreak.

PRIORITIES FOR ECONOMIC STIMULUS

Congress should include resources to address the underlying causes of homelessness that also increase the risks for future outbreaks: the severe shortage of rental homes affordable and available to America's lowest-income households - the only segment of the population for which there is an absolute shortage of affordable and available homes. Doing so creates a significant stimulus effect on our economy. Congress should:

- **Increase investments in the national Housing Trust Fund.** An estimated \$45 billion in funding for the [national Housing Trust Fund](#) can help address the market failure which has resulted in the severe shortage of rental homes affordable to people with the lowest incomes, including people experiencing homelessness. An [independent analysis](#) estimates that investment of \$45 billion in the HTF would create more than 231,000 rental homes targeted to people with the greatest needs, creating 928,000 jobs in the process. Funding for the HTF is also a priority in the "Housing is Infrastructure Act," introduced by House Financial Service Committee Chair Maxine Waters (D-CA).
- **Public housing capital funds.** Congress has underfunded public housing for decades, resulting in a backlog of capital repair needs of as much as \$70 billion. Communities can quickly deploy these funds to make critical infrastructure repairs, such as fixing leaky roofs, replacing outdated heating systems, and remediating mold to improve the health and living conditions for millions of residents, and protect a key piece of America's affordable rental housing stock. Rep. Waters included \$70 billion for public housing repairs in the "Housing is Infrastructure Act."
- **Expand rental assistance.** Despite the growing gap between wages and housing costs, only one in four families gets the housing assistance it needs because of chronic underfunding. A major expansion of Housing Choice Vouchers and/or the creation of a targeted [renters' tax credit](#) is needed help families keep more of their incomes for other essentials like food, medicine, education, and transportation.
- **Prevent evictions by creating a new emergency assistance fund.** To help prevent evictions in the future, Congress should enact legislation to create an [emergency assistance fund](#), like the one proposed by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Rob Portman (R-OH) in the bipartisan [Eviction Crisis Act](#), to provide short-term financial assistance and housing stabilization services. Providing short-term assistance to stabilize individuals is far cheaper than allowing households to become homeless.
- **Expand and reform the Low Income Housing Tax Credit.** An expansion of the Low Income Housing Tax Credit should be paired with [reforms](#) to allow the program to better reach people with the greatest needs.

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