



# ADVOCACY TOOLKIT #CUTSHURT

**TELL CONGRESS TO PROTECT  
HOUSING BENEFITS FOR LOW  
INCOME PEOPLE**

April 25, 2018

# Dear Friends,

**P**resident Donald Trump and conservative members of Congress are proposing to cut housing benefits that help America's poorest seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and other people afford to keep a roof over their heads.

Cutting housing benefits will not create jobs that pay decent wages and other opportunities that are needed to lift low income families out of poverty and help them achieve financial independence. Rent increases, arbitrary work requirements, and other measures being discussed will only leave more people without a stable home. This will make it harder – not easier – for low income families to climb the economic ladder and live with dignity.

On **Wednesday, April 25** – during the House Financial Services Committee hearing on proposals to cut housing benefits – we are asking all advocates to voice their opposition by:

- **Participating in the National Twitterstorm at 2pm**
- **Calling your Representatives and Senators**

If lawmakers are serious about increasing self-sufficiency, they should start by expanding – not slashing – housing benefits to families in need. We need your help to declare that housing is a human right. When we invest in affordable homes, we invest in people, in communities, and America as a whole.

In this toolkit you will find several resources to help you craft talking points, call-in scripts, and tweets on April 25.

For more information, please contact Vice President of Public Policy Sarah Saadian ([ssaadian@nlihc.org](mailto:ssaadian@nlihc.org)) at the National Low Income Housing Coalition.



# THE ISSUE

Cutting housing benefits will not create jobs that pay decent wages and other opportunities that are needed to lift low income families out of poverty and help them achieve financial independence. Rent increases, arbitrary work requirements, and other measures being discussed will only leave more people without a stable home. This will make it harder – not easier – for low income families to climb the economic ladder and live with dignity.

When people have safe, decent, and accessible homes that they can afford, they are better able to find and maintain employment, achieve economic mobility, and stay in good health. A stable place to call home gives kids more opportunities to succeed in school and life, and it offers seniors an opportunity to live and grow with independence and dignity. Towns, neighborhoods, and schools benefit from the increased sense of community that comes with residents having a stable and affordable home. Increasing and preserving affordable homes in areas of opportunity helps people climb the economic ladder, leading to stronger communities and bolstering economic productivity and job creation.



Despite the positive impacts of living in an affordable home, far too many low income families are struggling to keep a roof over their heads. Nationwide, more people are choosing to rent their homes than ever before. But our investments in affordable housing have not kept pace. As a result, millions of people do not have an affordable place to call home. Half a million people are living on the street, in shelters, or in their cars on any given night. In fact, only one out of every four families in need receive housing assistance. Every state and congressional district is impacted.

Instead of expanding housing benefits to more families in need, President Trump and some conservative members of Congress are proposing to cut housing benefits - a move that could increase homelessness and housing poverty in our communities.

# Cutting Housing Benefits Would Increase Homelessness and Housing Poverty

One of the biggest barriers to economic prosperity for America's lowest income families is the lack of decent, accessible, and affordable homes. Research shows that when people have a stable, decent, and accessible home that they can afford, they are better able to find employment, achieve economic mobility, age in place, perform better in school, and maintain improved health.<sup>1</sup>

Proposals to slash federal housing benefits would leave even more low income people without a stable home, making it harder for them to climb the economic ladder and live with dignity. Congress should reject proposals to take away housing benefits and instead enact proven solutions to help struggling families earn more and get ahead. This starts with expanding—not slashing—investments in affordable homes, job training, education, childcare, and other policies to help families thrive.

## WITHOUT HOUSING BENEFITS, IT WILL BE EVEN HARDER FOR STRUGGLING FAMILIES TO GET AHEAD AND LIVE WITH DIGNITY.

- If Congress cuts housing benefits, even more families would be homeless, living in substandard or overcrowded conditions, or struggling to meet other basic needs because too much of their limited income would go to paying rent. When families cannot afford rent, they are forced to cut back on investments in their future, including education, training, retirement savings, and healthcare.
- Increasing access to affordable housing is the most cost-effective strategy for reducing childhood poverty and increasing economic mobility.<sup>2</sup>
- Investing in affordable homes generates long-term savings to federal, state, and local governments. Numerous studies have demonstrated that access to affordable housing and service coordination reduces healthcare costs and other expensive interventions for older adults, people with disabilities, and people experiencing homelessness.



## CUTTING HOUSING BENEFITS WILL NOT CREATE THE WELL-PAYING JOBS AND OPPORTUNITIES NEEDED TO LIFT FAMILIES OUT OF POVERTY.

- **Work requirements will only make it more difficult for families to get and keep their jobs.** Research shows that for most families, work requirements do not lead to stable employment or a path out of poverty. In fact, work requirements are counter-productive and actually prevent people from working. Work requirements will have the greatest impact on people with disabilities, who need affordable homes, as well as supportive services offered by housing providers – in order to maintain employment. Without housing assistance, low income people face a greater risk of eviction and homelessness – circumstances that make it incredibly difficult to maintain a job. Affordable housing and housing assistance are fundamental to employment and economic security.<sup>3</sup>

1 Weiss, E. (2017). *A Place to Call Home*. The Campaign for Housing and Community Development Funding.

2 Newman, S. J. & Holupka C. S. (2014). Housing Affordability and Investments in Children. *Journal of Housing Economics*; Fischer, W. (2015). Research Shows Housing Vouchers Reduce Hardship and Provide Platform for Long Term Gains Among Children. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities; Giannarelli, L., Lippold, K. et al. (2015). Reducing Child Poverty in the US: Costs and Impacts of Policies Proposed by the Children's Defense Fund. Urban Institute.

3 Desmond, M. and Gershenson, M. (2016). Housing and Employment Insecurity among the Working Poor. *Social Problems* 63: 46-67.

- **It is misguided to increase rent on struggling families who are already paying their fair share.** Families with rental assistance are already required to pay what they can afford in rent, based on their income. Charging higher rents would force them to divert money away from basic needs like medicine or clothing, or would put them at risk of eviction and homelessness. Rent increases, such as higher minimum rents or cuts to utility payments, target the very poorest people, including seniors and people with disabilities, who are already at great risk of homelessness.<sup>4</sup>
- **Time limits do not reflect the reality of low wage jobs.** Imposing arbitrary time limits will only cut people off from the very housing benefits that make it possible for them to find and maintain jobs. Arbitrary time limits are especially harmful in high-cost areas and rural communities, where rents are well above what a low-income worker can afford and where there is a severe shortage of affordable homes. Time limits will not address this structural problem; only investments in affordable homes and job creation will.
- **These proposals undermine public-private partnerships, making it more expensive for the private sector to build, preserve, and maintain affordable rental homes.** Imposing work requirements, time limits, and rent increases creates new administrative costs for housing providers, without providing significant benefits to residents or the public. Housing providers will be forced to divert resources away from property maintenance and the employment-related resident services they already provide to pay for additional staff and regulatory compliance.

## CONGRESS SHOULD INSTEAD ENACT PROVEN SOLUTIONS TO POVERTY.

Instead of taking away housing benefits, Congress should enact proven solutions to help struggling families earn more and get ahead. This starts with expanding—not slashing—investments in affordable homes, job training, education, childcare, and other policies to help families thrive. Congress and the administration should:

- **Expand voluntary programs** – like Jobs Plus and Family Self-Sufficiency – that provide services and financial incentives to help families increase their earnings without the risks and added costs.
- **Evaluate existing demonstration programs** – like Moving to Work – to determine the impact on tenants and outcomes before imposing across-the-board changes.
- **Use HUD’s Section 3 regulation**, which provides an opportunity to promote job training and hiring among people receiving housing benefits.
- **Implement bipartisan changes** recently enacted by Congress in the *Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act* that encourage work among housing beneficiaries.

<sup>4</sup> Fischer, W. et al. (2017). Trump Budget’s Housing Proposals Would Raise Rents on Struggling Families, Seniors, and People with Disabilities. Washington, DC: Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.

# SAMPLE CALL-IN SCRIPT

## CALL CONGRESS AND ASK THEM TO OPPOSE CUTS TO HOUSING BENEFITS

Hello, can I speak with the person in your office who handles housing issues?

My name is **[NAME]** and I am calling from **[Organization]** in **[City, State, Zipcode]**. I would like to urge Senator/Representative **[Name]** to oppose measures to cut housing benefits that help America's lowest income families keep a roof over their heads.

Cutting housing benefits will not help lift families out of poverty: it won't help create jobs that pay decent wages or create other opportunities. Instead, cuts to housing benefits will only make it harder for low income families to climb the economic ladder and live with dignity.

If Congress is serious about economic mobility, I urge you to expand housing benefits to more families in need. Housing is a human right, and when we invest in affordable homes, we invest in people, in communities, and America as a whole.

Thank you.

# **SAMPLE TWEETS**

## **NATIONAL TWITTERSTORM ON APRIL 25 AT 2PM EST**

Use the hashtag [#CutsHurt](#), [#HandsOff](#)

America is stronger and prosperous when we have decent, affordable homes & stable communities. Tell Congress [#HandsOff](#) housing benefits for America's poorest seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and others. [#CutsHurt](#)

In the richest country on earth, we should not cut housing benefits for millions of families struggling to keep a roof over their head. [#CutsHurt](#) [#HandsOff](#)

Housing is a right, not a privilege. Everyone deserves a place to call home and a roof over their head. [#HandsOff](#) housing benefits. [#CutsHurt](#)

MILLIONS of people do not have an affordable roof over their head! Instead of cutting housing benefits, we should expand this assistance to more families in need. [#CutsHurt](#) [#HandsOff](#)

Having to decide between paying rent & buying food is unacceptable. I'm pledging to help right this wrong by opposing efforts to cut housing benefits. [#CutsHurt](#) [#HandsOff](#)

Affordable homes are critical to climbing the economic ladder. We must invest in [#affordablehomes](#) to increase opportunity, not slash housing benefits. [#CutsHurt](#) [#HandsOff](#)

When the rent eats first, kids lose out. Cuts to housing benefits will prevent kids from reaching their full potential. We must stand up for kids because [#CutsHurt](#). [#HandsOff](#)

Stable, affordable homes improve all areas of life for low income families, seniors, & people with disabilities. [#HandsOff](#) housing benefits! [#CutsHurt](#)

No one should have to skimp on food and healthcare just to make rent. We are healthier when we have an affordable home. [#HandsOff](#) housing benefits! [#CutsHurt](#)

Weeks after giving tax breaks to the wealthy, President Trump and some Congressmembers want to cut housing benefits for families struggling to pay rent. This is wrong, plain & simple. [#CutsHurt](#) [#HandsOff](#)

Congress should reject proposals to cut housing benefits and instead expand [#affordablehousing](#) investments to help more struggling families in need. We have more work to do! [#CutsHurt](#) [#HandsOff](#)

Families thrive because of housing benefits that help them keep a roof over their head. Now is the time to expand housing benefits, not cut them. [#CutsHurt](#) [#HandsOff](#)

The Trump administration should focus on implementing bipartisan solutions passed in 2016 to encourage earnings and scaling up solutions that work, like HUD Family Self Sufficiency – not cutting housing benefits. [#CutsHurt](#) [#HandsOff](#).

Congress passed in 2016 bipartisan changes help increase earnings for low income people who rely on housing benefits, but the Trump administration hasn't put them into practice. That's a simple way to move things forward without cutting housing benefits. [#CutsHurt](#) [#HandsOff](#)

Did you know that HUD's Family Self Sufficiency program works to help low income families earn more? Let's scale up FSS to serve more families, instead of cutting their housing benefits. [#CutsHurt](#) [#HandsOff](#)