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Homelessness and Housing First

Advocates Participate in National Week of Action to Oppose the Criminalization of Homelessness

Advocates across the nation participated in a National Week of Action starting on April 22 to oppose counterproductive and inhumane efforts to punish and arrest people experiencing homelessness and advocate for the only real solution to the homelessness crisis: safe, stable, affordable housing.

The National Week of Action, hosted by NLIHC, the National Homelessness Law Center (NHLC), National Coalition for the Homeless (NCH), and National Alliance to End Homelessness (NAEH), began on the same day the Supreme Court of the United States heard oral arguments in the case of *City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Johnson*, the most significant court case about the rights of people experiencing homelessness in decades. The court will decide whether communities that have failed to address the need for affordable housing and shelter can punish unhoused people for sleeping outside with tickets, fines, and arrests, even when there are no other safe or adequate housing or shelter options available.

Advocates across more than 20 states joined in over 50 state and local activations during the National Week of Action to make clear to their elected officials that they want to end homelessness by adopting real solutions. Actions included rallies, camp outs, marches, community discussions, press events, cookouts, film screenings, oral argument listening sessions, social media activations, and traditional media engagement, such as the publication of op-eds. For example, the Texas Homeless Network, an NLIHC state partner, submitted an [op-ed](#) that was published in the *Austin American-Statesman*.

Hundreds of advocates gathered outside the Supreme Court on April 22 for a “Housing Not Handcuffs” rally to oppose harmful efforts to arrest, fine, and ticket unhoused people and advance evidence-based solutions to homelessness. Hundreds more tuned in to a livestream of the event. NLIHC President and CEO Diane Yentel spoke at the [Housing Not Handcuffs rally](#), which was organized by NHLC and NCH. Diane emphasized the underlying causes of homelessness – the severe shortage of affordable, accessible housing available to people with the lowest incomes and the growing gap between income and housing costs – and called on Congress to fund proven solutions at the scale needed.

“Homelessness is caused, not by individual fault, but by systemic failures to make homes affordable to all,” said Diane. “Renters in Grants Pass and in every community across the country are struggling with high rents and wages that cannot keep up. But despite this crisis, Congress refuses to fix a broken housing system where 75% of people in need of housing assistance receive nothing, and as a result, far too many people face eviction and become homeless. It doesn’t have to be this way. Homelessness is solvable when we take action to make homes affordable for everyone, starting with the lowest-income people.”

Other speakers at the rally included Reverend Dr. William Barber II, co-chair of the Poor People’s Campaign; Helen Cruz, a resident of Grants Pass; the heads of national organizations such as NHLC, NCH, NAEH, Funders Together to End Homelessness, National Coalition for

Homeless Veterans, National Health Care for the Homeless Council, National Network to End Domestic Violence, A Way Home America, and the Southern Poverty Law Center, among others; local organizations, including Miriam’s Kitchen in Washington, D.C., the Miami Coalition to Advance Racial Equity, and Open Table Nashville; and others. NCH coordinated travel by bus from communities in Delaware, Pennsylvania, Maryland, and other states to help advocates and people with lived experience attend the rally in D.C.





Watch a recording of the rally at: <https://tinyurl.com/3sm97xej>

Learn more about *Grants Pass v. Johnson* at: <https://johnsonvgrantspass.com/>

Read a joint statement from NLIHC, NAEH, and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities on the Supreme Court case and the need for leaders to address homelessness with humane, proven strategies at: <https://tinyurl.com/2tjxt8nz>

HoUSed Campaign for Universal, Stable, Affordable Homes

Join Today's (4/29) Webinar on HUD's Proposal to Update Tenant Screening, Eviction, and Termination Decisions for People Impacted by the Criminal-Legal System

NLIHC, in partnership with the Vera Institute for Justice, Formerly Incarcerated and Convicted People and Families Movement (FICPFM), Shriver Center on Poverty Law, and National Housing Law Project (NHLP), will host a [webinar today \(April 29\)](#) addressing HUD's proposed

updates to tenant screening, eviction, and termination decisions for people impacted by the criminal-legal system. Register for the webinar [here](#).

The webinar will provide an overview of the proposal, its implications for people with conviction histories, and tips for writing and submitting comments on the proposed changes. The proposed rule is [open to public comments](#) until June 10, and advocates can use the Vera Institute's [comment portal](#) to post their own comment or show support for the rule using Vera's template.

Background

HUD released on April 10 a [proposal to update existing screening regulations](#) for applicants to HUD-assisted housing with conviction histories or a history of involvement with the criminal-legal system.

Under current policy, public housing authorities (PHAs) and landlords of HUD-assisted housing have broad discretion in evaluating current and prospective tenants. As a result, some PHAs and landlords have created additional barriers for people with conviction and arrest records in need of stable housing. These barriers can make it exceedingly difficult – and, for some with conviction histories, impossible – to obtain housing.

Among other changes, the proposal would:

- **Clarify the types of “relevant criminal activity” for which PHAs and owners can screen.** The rule would reign-in some discretion PHAs and owners/operators have in conducting background screenings by specifying that only drug-related criminal activity, violent criminal activity, and other criminal activity “that would threaten the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment” of the premises by others may be included in background screenings. The rule does not define “drug-related criminal activity,” “violent criminal activity,” or what constitutes criminal activity “that would threaten the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment” of others.
- **Limit lookback periods in admissions decisions to no more than three years prior to an application.** The NPRM states that PHAs and HUD-assisted owners/operators should use a lookback period of “no more than three years” for most convictions, and notes that three years may not be the right lookback period for all convictions, any lookback period longer than three years would be considered “presumptively unreasonable.” PHAs and HUD-assisted owners/operators would be allowed to extend this lookback period for certain convictions if empirical evidence exists justifying the extension.
- **Mandate an individualized assessment of rental applicants with a conviction history in admissions and eviction/termination decisions.** Any time criminal history is used in an admission, eviction, or termination decision, the PHA would be required conduct an individualized assessment of the tenant that considers mitigating factors and other circumstances. However, an individualized assessment need not be performed if an individual's record includes cases where statute requires denial of admissions based on criminal history.
- **Restrict the use of arrest records and ban the use of arrest records as the sole basis for housing denial or eviction.** The proposed rule clarifies that an arrest record alone

may not be used as the basis for denying someone admission to HUD housing. However, an arrest record may be used in conjunction with other evidence of conduct to assess an applicant's potential success as a tenant. Similarly, an arrest record could not be used as the sole basis to evict a current tenant from HUD-assisted housing but can be used along with other evidence to determine whether criminal conduct necessitating eviction occurred.

- **Increase the standard of proof for eviction and termination decisions based on criminal activity.** For evictions based on alleged criminal activity, HUD proposes increasing the standard of proof from a “reasonable cause” standard to a “preponderance of the evidence” standard, meaning that based on the information available, it is more likely than not that the conduct in question occurred.
- **Better regulate third-party screening services and companies.** The rule clarifies that tenants should be provided with a detailed copy of their screening report, including when information is pulled by a third-party screening company, and notes that third-party screening companies are expected to abide by the provisions of the Fair Housing Act.

View the proposed rule and submit a public comment [here](#).

Register for the webinar [here](#).

Senator Casey Introduces Bill to Boost Low-Income Housing Tax Credits for Accessible Housing

Senator Bob Casey (D-PA), the chairman of the U.S. Senate's Special Committee on Aging, introduced the “Boosting Tax Credits for Accessible Housing Act” ([S.3925](#)) in the U.S. Senate. The bill is a stand-alone provision taken from Senator Casey's “Visitable Inclusive Tax Credits for Accessible Living (VITAL) Act” ([S.1377](#)), which was introduced in the Senate last year (see [Memo 5/1/2023](#)). NLIHC has endorsed the new bill.

The Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is the largest source of federal funding for the creation of affordable housing. However, people with disabilities continue to face housing accessibility issues. A HUD [study](#) in 2011 found that fewer than 1% of housing units in the U.S. are accessible to wheelchair users and fewer than 5% of units are accessible to people with mobility difficulties. The “Boosting Tax Credits for Accessible Housing Act” would address the shortage of accessible housing by providing a basis boost of 150% to LIHTC projects that meet certain standards to serve people with disabilities. Projects that receive the basis boost would be required to meet design standards as defined in the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS).

Read the “Boosting Tax Credits for Accessible Housing Act” [here](#).

Learn more about the variation in accessible housing standards across the U.S., as well as disability-forward LIHTC reforms, in a [fact sheet](#) by The Kelsey.

Budget and Appropriations

Republican House Appropriators Block Nonprofits from Receiving Grants from HUD's Economic Development Initiatives Program

Republicans on the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Appropriations [announced](#) new guidance banning nonprofit organizations from receiving funding (commonly referred to as “earmarks”) from HUD's Economic Development Initiative (EDI) program in fiscal year (FY) 2025.

The change came after Republicans objected to earmarks included in the FY24 spending bill that provided funding for nonprofit organizations serving members of the LGBTQ+ community. The U.S. Senate's Committee on Appropriations continues to allow nonprofits to receive EDI funding through the Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD) bill.

House Appropriations Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) [objected](#) to the move, highlighting the impact the change will have not only on community services for LGBTQ+ people but on other critically important community programs, including those run by religious organizations and those serving seniors, veterans, and survivors of intimate partner violence.

The decision foreshadows trouble ahead for the FY25 appropriations process. Any differences between the House and Senate appropriations bills – including differences in earmarked funding – must be resolved before a final bill can be passed. Appropriators will also need to draft their FY25 spending bills according to the limitations of the “Fiscal Responsibility Act,” the 2023 agreement to raise the federal debt ceiling for two years in exchange for capping FY24 spending at roughly FY23 levels and allowing for an only 1% spending increase in FY25. Because the cost of housing and homelessness programs rises every year, increased funding is necessary simply to maintain the number of households and communities served by these vital programs.

Take Action: Tell Congress to Provide Significant Funding Increases for HUD in FY25

Your advocacy makes a difference! It is thanks to the hard work of advocates that in FY24 – at a time when [programs faced cuts of up 25%](#) – HUD received increased funding in the final spending bill.

Congress needs to keep hearing from you about the importance of affordable housing and homelessness programs! **NLIHC is calling on Congress to provide the highest possible funding for HUD's affordable housing and homelessness programs in FY25, including significant funding for NLIHC's top priorities:**

- Full funding to renew all existing contracts for the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program and expand assistance to 20,000 more households.
- \$6.2 billion for public housing operations and \$5.135 billion for public housing capital needs.
- \$4.7 billion for HUD's Homeless Assistance Grants (HAG) program.
- \$100 million for the Eviction Prevention Grant Program.
- At least \$1.3 billion for Tribal housing programs, plus \$150 million for competitive funds targeted to tribes with the greatest needs.

Advocates can continue to engage their members of Congress by:

- **Emailing or calling members' offices** to tell them about the importance of affordable housing, homelessness, and community development resources to you, your family, your community, or your work. You can [use NLIHC's Take Action page](#) to look up your member offices or call/send an email directly!
- **Using social media to amplify messages** about the country's affordable housing and homelessness crisis, and the continued need for long-term solutions.
- **Sharing stories** of those directly impacted by homelessness and housing instability. Storytelling adds emotional weight to your message and can help lawmakers see how their policy decisions impact actual people. Learn about [how to tell compelling stories with this resource](#).

National, state, local, tribal, and territorial organizations can [also join over 2,200 organizations on CHCDF's national letter](#) calling on Congress to support the highest level of funding possible for affordable housing, homelessness, and community development resources in FY25.

House and Senate Subcommittees Announce Hearings on HUD's FY25 Budget Request

The U.S. Senate's Committee on Appropriations' Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development (THUD) will hold a [hearing](#) at 2:30 pm ET on April 30 to discuss President Biden's budget request for the fiscal year (FY) 2025 HUD budget. HUD Acting Secretary Adrienne Todman will be the sole witness. Watch the hearing live at: <https://tinyurl.com/yvzrw5za>

The U.S. House of Representative's Committee on Appropriations' THUD Subcommittee will hold a [hearing](#) to discuss the president's FY25 HUD budget request at 10 am ET on May 1. HUD Acting Secretary Adrienne Todman will be the sole witness. Watch the hearing live at: <https://tinyurl.com/3s9ktp8p>

Learn more about President Biden's FY25 HUD budget request at: <https://tinyurl.com/yhhsvnba>

Disaster Housing Recovery

Representatives Fletcher and Williams Introduce Bills to Make Disaster Aid Accessible to Heirs' Property Owners

Representatives Lizzie Fletcher (D-TX) and Nikema Williams (D-GA) introduced the "Heirs Empowerment and Inheritance Rights (HEIR) Act" and the "Heirs' Estate Inheritance Resolution and Succession (HEIRS) Act" in a single legislative package in the U.S. House of Representatives on April 24. The two bills would make disaster aid accessible to heirs' property owners. "Heirs' property" is family land inherited without a will or traditional documentation of

ownership. NLIHC's Disaster Housing Recovery Coalition (DHRC) helped draft language in the bills and has endorsed both pieces of legislation.

Federal agencies' refusal to accept alternative forms of documentation for heirs' property has been a major barrier for many marginalized groups attempting to access the disaster recovery aid they need. HUD administers the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) program, which provides long-term housing assistance to disaster-impacted households. Currently, many states administering these programs require title documentation from homeowners interested in enrolling in a program, preventing individuals who own their home via heirs' property from receiving assistance.

Representative Fletcher's "[HEIR Act](#)" would allow homeowners and landlords to use a variety of documentation, instead of only a traditional title, to prove to HUD that they own their property and thus should have access to recovery money. The legislation also directs HUD to create a standardized affidavit of ownership form that will be accepted as ownership documentation and be available in a variety of languages.

"These bills are meaningful steps toward increasing resources and access to justice for heirs' property owners," said Congresswoman Fletcher. "We have seen the devastating consequences heirs' property owners have faced following natural disasters and forced sales of property over many years."

Representatives Williams's "[HEIRS Act](#)" would create two grant programs for states that adopt the "Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act." If enacted, the grant programs would fund educational outreach, housing counseling, and legal assistance for heirs' property owners.

"We have seen the devastating impact on families who can't get assistance to repair and rebuild their homes after a disaster because they don't have traditional proof of ownership," said Madison Sloan, director of disaster recovery and fair housing at Texas Appleseed. "These bills will provide critical help to families across the country so they can stay in their homes, build financial security, and be less vulnerable to the next disaster."

DHRC Member Legal Aid of North Carolina Wins Settlement for Heirs' Property Owners Excluded from Disaster Recovery Assistance Program

Disaster Recovery Housing Coalition (DHRC) member [Legal Aid of North Carolina](#) won a major victory for heirs' property owners on April 24 when the group reached a successful [settlement](#) in a housing discrimination complaint that will reduce barriers preventing heirs' property owners from accessing critical disaster recovery aid.

"Heirs' property" is family land inherited without a will or traditional documentation of ownership. Black, Latino, and Indigenous households, as well as low-income people and members of other marginalized groups, are disproportionately heirs' property owners. The complaint was made against the North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR) after a disaster survivor's application to the ReBuild NC Homeowner Recovery Program was

rejected due to lack of proof of ownership. Legal Aid NC filed the complaint with HUD in February 2023, arguing that when applied to owners of heirs' properties, NCORR's proof of ownership requirements resulted in the denial of equal housing opportunities to Black/African American homeowners seeking disaster recovery assistance funds in violation of the federal "Fair Housing Act."

As a result of the settlement, NCORR has agreed to three major changes. First, NCORR will adopt a new proof of ownership policy in which owners of heirs' property will need only to agree that they have or will notify any party that may have an ownership interest in the property about their participation in the ReBuild program. Second, it will provide written notice of the new policy to the approximately 74 applicants previously rejected from the ReBuild program due to previous proof of ownership requirements and allow them to submit appeals for reentry into the program. Finally, it has committed to training all NCORR staff on the requirements of the new policy.

"Legal Aid of North Carolina is proud to announce this resolution, which reduces unnecessary barriers for owners in heirs' properties to access crucial disaster relief funding, while also preserving the existing homeownership structure and keeping these properties in the family," said A.D. Skaff, supervising attorney with Legal Aid of North Carolina's Fair Housing Project. "We hope that these revised policies can serve as a model for other disaster relief programs in North Carolina and CDBG-DR funded programs across the country."

Read the settlement [here](#).

HUD Publishes Final FFRMS Rule, Expanding Floodplain and Increasing Elevation Requirements

HUD published a [final rule](#) in the *Federal Register* on April 22 expanding what the agency considers a floodplain by establishing a new "Federal Flood Risk Management Standard (FFRMS) Floodplain" and raising mitigation standards for buildings constructed and repaired using agency funds. The rule amends HUD's current floodplain regulations to comply with [Executive Order \(E.O.\) 13690](#), "Establishing a Federal Flood Risk Management Standard and a Process for Further Soliciting and Considering Stakeholder Input," and [Executive Order \(E.O.\) 14030](#), "Climate Related Financial Risk."

The rule changes regulations in four major areas. First, the rule redefines and expands the existing 100-year Floodplain to the new FFRMS Floodplain, which takes into account future risk of flooding. HUD hopes that in accounting for increased flood risk over time, the agency will protect more residents and conserve more housing resources.

Second, the rule increases the required elevation for new construction across all HUD programs and substantially improved structures, across all grant programs and FHA-insured projects. This part of the rule is intended by HUD to lower flood insurance premiums for those who end up raising their house.

Third, the rule strengthens requirements around when flood risk must be disclosed to potential buyers and tenants and recommends that those in the FFRMs acquire flood insurance. At the same time, the new rule does not require those in the FFRMS area to purchase flood insurance, which can be prohibitively expensive for lower-income households.

Finally, the rule allows for more flexibility in using HUD assistance for specific properties in floodways.

HUD plans to create an *FFRMS Guidebook*, hold peer-to-peer trainings, and facilitate a two-part webinar in May and June of this year to explain what the changes mean in practice.

Read the final rule containing the HUD provisions [here](#).

Lack of Clarity about Deadlines Creates Confusion for East Kentucky Flood Survivors

An [article](#) by WKU Public Radio highlights confusion caused by FEMA regarding appeals deadlines for East Kentucky flood survivors. In particular, the article addresses FEMA's lack of communication about an 18-month deadline for disaster survivors to appeal decisions made by the agency regarding assistance awards. Indeed, FEMA officials appear to be unclear about whether or not a deadline even exists, while disaster survivors have received different explanations from FEMA as to why their cases have been closed.

When a disaster relief lawyer published an op-ed to notify flood survivors of the upcoming deadline, a local FEMA official tried to retract the information, claiming there is no deadline. Meanwhile, when reporters asked federal officials whether there is an appeals deadline, they were told by one official that "I don't think you can put it simply." The disaster relief lawyer says she is working with more than 300 clients who are still waiting for aid. Dozens had their appeals rejected around the same time.

The problem is not unique to Kentucky. Saint Bernard's Project (SBP), a nonprofit working to help disaster survivors around the country recover, has also been affected by the issue. Claire Balsley of SBP said, that FEMA should "Be more transparent, or more vocal. [FEMA should say] you can appeal as many times as you feel like you need to appeal to receive your maximum eligible amount of funding from FEMA *up to that 18-month mark*."

For now, flood survivors in Kentucky have been left behind. One such survivor, Susan Hall, says that at this point her house does not meet FEMA's three basic requirements for houses: being safe, sanitary, and functional. "This house is none of them – I'm telling you," Hall said.

Read NLIHC's Disaster Recovery Housing Coalition's recommendations to improve FEMA [here](#).

Read the article [here](#).

Disaster Housing Recovery Updates – April 29, 2024

Congressional and National Updates

The Brookings Institution [wrapped up](#) a six-part series on federal disaster policy reforms with an epilogue calling for legislative action on disaster recovery – including passage of the NLIHC-endorsed “Reforming Disaster Recovery Act,” which would permanently authorize HUD’s long-term disaster recovery programs and ensure that long-term recovery assistance can more quickly reach those most in need of assistance after disasters.

HUD released a [fact sheet](#) on recent efforts to increase access to climate resiliency tools, energy efficiency measures, and green home and community development.

ProPublica published an [excerpt](#) from the book *On The Move: The Overheating Earth and the Uprooting of America* about climate migration in the U.S. The excerpt discusses how climate change-induced migration is reshaping American communities, particularly in vulnerable coastal areas like Louisiana. The story focuses on Slidell, which has become a refuge for climate evacuees from more vulnerable areas, leading to population growth and gentrification. However, even Slidell is not immune to the effects of climate change, as rising sea levels threaten the region's future viability.

State and Local Updates

Arkansas

The town of Wynne, Arkansas, is still [recovering](#) from a tornado that touched down in the East Arkansas town one year ago. When asked about the biggest challenge to recovery facing Wynne, a disaster case manager answered “[f]unding and housing. We have a lot of clients that are still homeless, that are living in FEMA trailers. They didn’t have insurance, they don’t have the funds, they were lower-income to begin with and now trying to find them housing is the hardest part, because there’s no housing available in Wynne. They’re at capacity. FEMA allows [Wynne residents living in FEMA trailers] a certain period of time [before moving out]. That time is ticking.” The case manager added that “[s]ome of them may have less than five months to stay in that trailer, either to purchase it or to move out of it. Some may have another month, some may have another five months, but time is ticking on those.”

Florida

The deadline for submitting [LeeCares](#) Hurricane Ian Housing Recovery Program applications is May 15. The LeeCares program is funded through HUD long-term recovery funds and is open to households in Lee County impacted by Hurricane. The program includes housing rehab, reconstruction, and elevation programs and offers home purchase assistance for households living in flood zones who are seeking to relocate.

Hawaii

Maui wildfire survivor group Lahaina Strong achieved a [significant victory](#) in its efforts to let counties phase out short-term rentals when a Senate bill allowing just that passed a joint Senate-

House conference committee in the Hawaii state legislature. The group has spent five months pushing for the conversion of short-term rentals into long-term rental units that could more easily house families displaced by the Maui wildfires.

Representative Ed Case (D-HI) of the U.S. House of Representatives [called](#) on FEMA to broaden transitional housing support for the thousands displaced by the Lahaina wildfires in August 2023. During a subcommittee hearing on the fiscal year 2025 Department of Homeland Security (DHS) budget, which includes funding for FEMA, Rep. Case urged DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to build transitional houses instead of relying on relocating victims from hotels and other post-emergency dwellings to existing homes or apartments.

New Mexico

FEMA has [tapped](#) former New Mexico disaster agency director M Jay Mitchell to run its efforts to provide \$4 billion in compensation to survivors of the Hermits Peak-Calf Canyon Fire, the largest blaze in state history. The fire was started by federal employees conducting an approved prescribed burn that subsequently spread out of control. Mitchell, who led the New Mexico Department of Homeland Security in 2014, was selected after a controversially short application window, which some criticized for narrowing the potential pool of applicants. Mitchell is a fifth-generation New Mexican, a former Air Force colonel, and a senior advisor at a global security consulting firm.

North Carolina

The North Carolina Office of Recovery and Resiliency (NCORR) [announced](#) the launch of its Homeownership Assistance Program in Haywood County. The program will provide assistance to homeowners impacted by Tropical Storm Fred.

Oklahoma

On April 8, two firefighters sustained injuries while combating a wildfire that consumed more than 5,000 acres (2,023 hectares) in Woodward County, Oklahoma. Over 1,000 individuals were subject to mandatory evacuation orders, with more than 1,200 residences at risk. As of April 12, the fires have been completely [contained](#).

Texas

HUD and the City of Houston successfully worked [together](#) to extend by two years the spending deadline for HUD long-term recovery funds provided to the city. In addition to the deadline extension, the Texas General Land Office announced that it was creating a program to provide 900 households that were erroneously denied relocation assistance with financial help after they were displaced from four repeatedly flooded rental properties that received buyouts with federal disaster recovery funding.

Resiliency & Mitigation Corner

The *Journal of Risk and Insurance* published a [research article](#) examining the role insurance plays in improving disaster recovery for families and communities. Research finds that families

with insurance – whether homeowner’s, renter’s, or flood insurance – are less likely to face financial hardships in both the short and long terms. Moreover, financial benefits from insurance at the household level extend to the community. Now that extreme weather and disasters are becoming more common, the importance of this research cannot be understated. Unfortunately, the research also finds that although there are many benefits to insurance, many households cannot access insurance plans because premiums are unaffordable. Lack of access is a particular problem for low-income households – the very households who would most benefit from it.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) [Rural Disaster Home Repair Grants Program](#) is open and accepting applications. The USDA launched the program last year to help people with low incomes repair or relocate their homes damaged by Calendar Year 2022 presidentially declared disasters. Grant money can be used on disaster-related home repair expenses (including costs incurred prior to application), site preparation, and to cover the cost of transferring a manufactured home. Applicants may access up to \$42,920 in grant funds.

The Urban Institute held a panel discussion focused on its report [“Housing Resilience in Greater New Orleans.”](#) The report examined the state of mitigation and resilience for 10 years following Hurricane Katrina. Researchers found that despite the growing number of home retrofit services, service providers, and financial incentives, overall, households were not helped by mitigation efforts due to lack of affordability. Similarly, although insurance provides major benefits post-disaster, many households remain uninsured because they cannot afford the premiums. The research also found that receiving information about previous flooding (i.e., through flood disclosure laws) on a property did not necessarily affect household’s choices about where to live, suggesting that some families, particularly those with low incomes, have no choice other than to rent or buy what is affordable despite the risk.

HUD’s [Green and Resilient Retrofit Program \(GRRP\)](#) is accepting applications. The GRRP program aims to assist multifamily properties participating in HUD project-based rental assistance programs become more resilient and energy efficient. The GRRP is HUD’s first program to invest in climate resilience and energy efficiency in HUD-assisted multifamily housing. Following the [Justice40 Initiative](#), GRRP funding will be used in affordable housing communities serving low-income families. The GRRP has three pots of money: Elements, Leading Edge, and Comprehensive. [Elements](#) provides grants to projects with climate resilience and utility efficiency measures that are already in the process of being recapitalized. [Leading Edge](#) funds owners with plans for retrofit activities to achieve zero energy retrofits and an advanced green certification. Finally, [Comprehensive](#) funds properties with the highest need for climate resilience and utility efficiency upgrades, regardless of prior development or environmental retrofit experience.

HUD

HUD PIH Posts HOTMA Fact Sheets Tailored to Residents

HUD’s Office of Public and Indian Housing (PIH) [posted](#) fact sheets tailored to public housing residents and Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) households addressing new asset limits and

income calculations, including income deductions for certain health, medical, and childcare costs. The changes addressed in the fact sheets resulted from the passage of the “Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act of 2016” (HOTMA). Separate worksheets have been made available to help residents calculate whether they exceed the asset and income limits and to explain how to take into account student financial aid. PIH also released two video trainings, one on income calculations and reviews and the other on asset limits. The materials are available in English and Spanish.

The fact sheet addressing income calculation provides examples of “earned income” (e.g. wages) and “unearned income” (e.g. Supplemental Security Income (SSI)) and lists common sources of income that are not included when calculating a household’s adjusted income. If a household’s income declines by 10% or more before a regular annual income recertification, then the public housing agency (PHA) must conduct an interim income “review” (sometimes called a “recertification” or “reexamination”). The separate worksheet can help a household figure out whether an interim income review is appropriate. The fact sheet and worksheet also discuss cases in which a household’s income (either earned or unearned) increases by more than 10%. PIH urges residents to report a decrease in income as soon as it happens in order that they may pay less rent the next time rent is due. The fact sheet does not mention that a PHA must retroactively lower rents – that is, to return the rate to the rate in the month a decrease in income was first experienced rather than wait for the first month after the PHA has conducted an income review – if a household did not immediately report the income reduction yet reported the decrease within the timeframe established in a PHA’s written policies.

The fact sheet addressing asset and real property limits explains that residents may not have assets of more than \$100,000 or own a home that they could live in (see *Memo*, [2/12](#)). However, there are many exceptions regarding assets and real property ownership. The most common exceptions are listed in the fact sheet. For example, a car that is necessary for getting or conducting a job does not count as an asset, nor does money in a retirement plan. PIH states that most households will not be impacted. The asset and real property limits apply to all households applying for public housing or HCVs. For households already living in public housing or using an HCV, PHAs have several options when an annual or interim review determines that a household exceeds the asset limits, including not enforcing the limits or providing a household with time to comply – for example, by transferring money into a retirement account.

Find PIH’s HOTMA Income and Assets webpage on the HUD Exchange at:
<https://tinyurl.com/p8jaz9ba>

Explore other PIH HOTMA resources at: <https://tinyurl.com/mtv9nnk8>

NLIHC’s entries in the [2024 Advocates’ Guide](#) for [public housing](#) and [Housing Choice Vouchers](#) include information about HOTMA provisions.

Fair Housing

Join NLIHC in Fair Housing Month Tweetstorm on April 30!

Join NLIHC and our partners around the country in a tweetstorm on April 30 calling on the Biden administration to release the final “Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing” (AFFH) rule immediately! Released in January 2023, the proposed AFFH rule would help communities meet a more than five-decade-old requirement to actively address systemic racism and segregation, which have often resulted from federal policies.

Between 1 and 2 pm ET on April 30, advocates are encouraged to tweet their support for the release of the rule using the following sample tweets. (Sample images are also available at: <https://tinyurl.com/4mzctvtv>)

- Dear @POTUS, releasing the AFFH rule is crucial to advancing equity and ensuring fair housing opportunities for all Americans. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- We join organizations nationwide in urging the @WhiteHouse and @HUDgov to release the AFFH rule promptly. It's time for equitable housing opportunities for everyone. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- President Biden, your commitment to equity requires releasing the AFFH rule. Let's build stronger communities with fair housing for all. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- The AFFH rule is a vital tool to address housing challenges and promote economic mobility. @POTUS, please release it now! #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- The AFFH mandate can boost the American economy by increasing economic opportunities and improving outcomes for millions. @WhiteHouse, it's time to release the AFFH rule to ensure a fair and equitable housing market. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- Affordable, accessible housing is a cornerstone of thriving communities. @WhiteHouse, the time is now to release the AFFH rule. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- Communities need the AFFH rule to shape cost-effective strategies for fair housing. @WhiteHouse, please release the AFFH rule to empower communities and advance racial justice. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- The AFFH mandate can transform neighborhoods into communities of opportunity. @POTUS, please release the final AFFH rule for a fair and inclusive housing market. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- We stand with @NLIHC and others in urging @POTUS to release the AFFH rule. Let's create housing opportunities that empower every American. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- Releasing the AFFH rule is a step towards dismantling discriminatory housing practices. @WhiteHouse, we urge you to act swiftly. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- Addressing housing disparities starts with releasing the AFFH rule. @POTUS, please make fair housing a reality for all communities. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- Every American deserves fair and equitable housing opportunities. @WhiteHouse, it's time to release the AFFH rule and make this a reality. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- The AFFH rule is a critical tool for promoting housing justice and economic opportunity. @POTUS, let's make it a priority. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- The Fair Housing Act's AFFH mandate is crucial for addressing today's housing challenges. @POTUS, please release the final AFFH rule to affirmatively further fair housing and bridge racial wealth gaps. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth

- Failure to release the AFFH rule undermines federal infrastructure funding goals and worsens racial wealth gaps. @POTUS, we urge you to support fair housing by releasing the final AFFH rule now. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- As we mark the 55th anniversary of the Fair Housing Act, it's clear that a fair housing market requires a strong AFFH rule. @POTUS, release the final AFFH rule! #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- HUD's proposed AFFH rule is a step towards fair and accessible housing for all. @WhiteHouse, release the final AFFH rule to empower communities and promote housing justice. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth
- Investing in fair housing interventions is investing in the American people. @WhiteHouse, release the AFFH rule to ensure everyone has access to affordable housing. #HoUSed #FairHousingMonth

In addition to taking part in the tweetstorm, be sure to register for “Fair Housing Futures: Fulfilling the Fair Housing Act’s Promise through the AFFH Rule,” a fair housing webinar being hosted by several national housing organizations, to learn what actions can be taken to help ensure that the proposed AFFH rule is released and implemented. Register [here](#).

House Financial Services Committee Ranking Member Waters Sends Letter Urging President Biden to Release Final Fair Housing Rule

Representative Maxine Waters (D-CA), the ranking member of the U.S. House of Representatives’ Committee on Financial Services, [sent](#) a letter to President Biden urging the immediate release and implementation of the final “Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing” (AFFH) rule in order to “fulfil the Democratic commitment to fair housing for all and prevent exacerbating our nation’s worsening affordable housing and homelessness crisis.”

In the letter, Ranking Member Waters cites the President’s commitment and previous actions to support fair housing and racial equity, as well as her request in 2020 to then-President Elect Biden. The [letter](#) states that “AFFH has gone largely unenforced since the passage of the FHAct [Fair Housing Act]. The Obama administration sought to turn that tide in 2015 by finalizing a historic rule. Unfortunately, the timing of the implementation of the 2015 rule was left to the Trump Administration, which later overturned the final rule, a decision that was widely criticized and litigated by civil rights and affordable housing advocates. It is critical to avoid similar threats to HUD’s final AFFH rule by publishing and implementing the regulation as soon as possible.”

The proposed AFFH rule was announced in January 2023, and advocates largely supported the rule. Ranking Member Waters’s call comes after nearly 300 organizations sent a similar letter to the White House imploring the administration to “follow through on its commitments and release the final AFFH rule as soon as possible so that more communities can have affordable and accessible housing options” that impact all areas of their lives (see *Memo* [4/22](#)).

Read the press statement and the letter [here](#).

Our Homes, Our Votes

Register for Today's (4/29) *Our Homes, Our Votes* Webinar: Laying the Groundwork for Your Campaign

The [Our Homes, Our Votes: 2024 webinar series](#) provides resources, guidance, and inspiration for organizations and individuals seeking to launch or strengthen their own nonpartisan voter and candidate engagement initiatives. The next webinar in the series, "Laying the Groundwork for Your Campaign," will take place today (April 29), at 2:30 pm ET. Register for the webinar [here](#).

With the November 2024 elections just six months away, now is the time for housing organizations to launch their nonpartisan election initiatives. This webinar will walk through key considerations for planning a strong voter and candidate engagement campaign. Courtney Cooperman, project manager of *Our Homes, Our Votes*, will discuss the essentials of keeping your campaign nonpartisan. Morgan Murray, voter engagement programs manager for the League of Women Voters, will share tips for launching a successful initiative that encompasses voter registration, education, and mobilization. Eddy Zerbe, deputy director of Students Learn Students Vote, will present on the nonpartisan Civic Holidays as an organizing tool for election season.

The webinar dates and topics are listed below. All webinars will be held from 2:30 to 3:30 pm ET. For full descriptions of each session, visit: www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org/webinars-2024

- Laying the Groundwork for Your Campaign (Monday, April 29)
- Voter Registration 101 (Monday, May 20)
- Forming Partnerships in Your Community (Monday, June 3)
- Tenant Organizing and Elections: Getting Out the Renter Vote (Monday, June 17)
- Voting While Experiencing Homelessness (Monday, July 1)
- Transportation to the Polls (Monday, July 15)
- Housing Providers and Voter Engagement (Monday, July 29)
- Getting Candidates on the Record about Housing and Homelessness (Monday, August 19)
- Celebrating the Civic Holidays (Tuesday, September 3)
- Voter Education: The Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How (Monday, September 16)
- Voter Education: Combating Misinformation and Disinformation (Monday, September 30)
- Overcoming Voter Suppression (Monday, October 7)
- Countdown to Election Day: Getting Out the Vote! (Monday, October 21)
- Knowing Your Rights: Voter Protection on Election Day (Monday, November 4)
- A Look Ahead: Next Steps for Civic Engagement and Housing Justice (Monday, November 18)

For more information about the *Our Homes, Our Votes* campaign, visit: <https://www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org/>

***Our Homes, Our Votes* Updates – Week of April 29, 2024**

The *Our Homes, Our Votes* campaign is NLIHC’s nonpartisan initiative to boost voter turnout among low-income renters and elevate housing as an election issue. This biweekly article in *Memo* provides news, resources, and other updates at the intersection of housing justice and nonpartisan civic engagement. To learn more about *Our Homes, Our Votes*, visit www.ourhomes-ourvotes.org.

Department of Justice Updates Voting Rights Resources

The Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) published two new informational voting rights guides for voters and election officials on www.justice.gov/voting. One new guide, “[Voter Intimidation Under Federal Law](#),” explains the federal prohibitions on threats, obstruction, and deliberately false information about elections that prevent people from participating in the electoral process. The second resource, “[Voting Protections for Language Minority Citizens under Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act](#),” describes the federal mandate for language assistance to make the electoral process accessible to voters with limited English proficiency. The DOJ also updated five existing voting rights guides, including a [guide](#) on the “Americans with Disabilities Act” (ADA) and other legal protections that safeguard equal access to electoral participation for voters with disabilities.

For more information, visit: www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-launches-updated-voting-rights-and-elections-website

New Research Illustrates Experiences of Voters with Disabilities over Time

A new [report](#) to the Election Assistance Commission (EAC) from researchers at Rutgers University’s Program for Disability Research highlights the perspectives of voters with disabilities since the passage of the “Help America Vote Act” (HAVA) in 2002. The report draws on national survey research and the experiences that 44 voters with disabilities shared in a series of focus groups. The report finds that the voter turnout gap between people with disabilities and people without disabilities shrank by 5.5 percentage points between 2000 and 2002, in large part because of accessibility improvements in polling places and the expansion of mail-in voting options. Despite these gains, voters with disabilities were more than three times likelier than voters without disabilities to face voting difficulties in the 2022 elections. The report concludes with recommendations for election officials to improve the implementation of HAVA and pursue further reforms to make voting more accessible.

To read the full report, visit: www.eac.gov/sites/default/files/2024-04/EAC_2024_Rutgers_Report_PDF.pdf

All Voting is Local Highlights the High Cost of Voter Suppression

All Voting is Local, a nonpartisan organization that exposes and challenges discriminatory barriers to voting, released a [report](#) on the cost of voter suppression laws that target voters of color, voters with disabilities, and older and younger voters. The report finds that the average

cost of voting is \$105.53 for a first-time voter, resulting from a combination of the fees and lost wages that it takes to register to vote or update a voter registration, travel and spend time at a licensing office, pay for an ID card, and cast a ballot. More than half of eligible adult citizens have faced obstacles to voting due to a missed voter registration deadline, inability to find their polling location, undelivered or lost election mail, or being turned away from their polling place. The report found that these issues affect 63% of eligible voters with disabilities, 59% of limited English speakers, 69% of eligible Hispanic voters, 65% of eligible Black voters, and 71% of young voters (ages 18-29).

To read the full report, visit: allvotingislocal.org/wp-content/uploads/All-Voting-Report_-_The-Cost-of-Voter-Suppression-APRIL-2024.pdf

Join Protecting Immigrant Families (PIF) Webinar on Nonpartisan Advocacy during Election Season

The Protecting Immigrant Families (PIF) coalition, of which NLIHC is a member, will host a [webinar](#), “Nonpartisan Advocacy: How 501(c)(3)s Can Educate and Advocate During Election Season,” on Friday, May 17, from 1 to 2:30 pm ET. Experts from the Alliance for Justice’s Bolder Advocacy campaign will discuss how nonprofits can safely engage in nonpartisan advocacy during an election year. The webinar will address how to advocate for your issues throughout election season, educate the public through nonpartisan candidate forums and questionnaires, objectively respond to candidate statements, ensure that voter registration and get-out-the-vote efforts remain nonpartisan, safely support or oppose ballot measures, and other related topics. Register for the webinar [here](#).

To learn more about Bolder Advocacy, visit: <https://bolderadvocacy.org/>

To learn more about PIF, visit: <https://pifcoalition.org/>

Become a National Voter Registration Day Community Partner!

National Voter Registration Day (NVRD) is a nonpartisan civic holiday that activates nonprofits, campuses, businesses, and other organizations to register voters in their communities. The holiday reaches tens of thousands of voters each year and has registered more than 5 million voters to date since its launch in 2012. NVRD will take place this year on Tuesday, September 17. [Sign up to become an NVRD Community Partner](#) to receive complimentary posters and stickers, digital assets, and updates about NVRD events and grant opportunities.

Community partners agree to remain nonpartisan in all promotion of the event and voter registration activities. [Click here](#) for the community partner signup form.

Opportunity Starts at Home

OSAH Joins Panel on Housing and Food Security at Feeding America Annual Conference

Chantelle Wilkinson, director of NLIHC’s Opportunity Starts at Home (OSAH) campaign, participated in a panel discussion, “Integrating Strategies for Housing and Food Security: A Multidimensional Approach to Eviction Prevention and Nutritional Access,” at a conference hosted by Feeding America. The panel focused on the connections between stable and affordable housing, nutritional security, and health. Other panelists included Dr. Carl Gershenson, lab director at Eviction Lab; Ryan Luckie, director at Freestore Foodbank; and Adam Meyer, senior director at Food Finders Food Bank. The panel was moderated by Kurt Reiber, president and CEO of Freestore Food Bank.

Panelists highlighted the importance of food banks in preventing evictions and as essential components of safety net programs. Dr. Gershenson presented his findings regarding the impact of eviction on food security and the racial disparities in eviction rates. Chantelle shared the ways housing and food security advocates are collaborating through the OSAH campaign to advance housing solutions.

When it comes to the relationship between food security and affordable housing, it is often said that the “rent eats first.” Indeed, NLIHC’s [Gap](#) report shows that 87% of extremely low-income renters spend such high portions of their income on rent that they are forced to spend significantly less on food.

Learn more about the connections between food security and affordable housing by reading an OSAH fact sheet [here](#).



Research

Local Vacancy and Crowding Rates Can Better Inform Policies to Address Homelessness among Unaccompanied Youth, Single Adults, and Families

A study published in the *Journal of Urban Affairs*, “[Local rental market dynamics and homelessness rates among unaccompanied youths, single adults, and people in families](#),” examines the impact of local vacancy rates, overcrowding rates, and median rents on

community-level rates of homelessness for three subgroups: unaccompanied youths (age 18-24), single adults (age 25 and older), and people in families. The author, Vijaya Tamla Rai, finds that higher vacancy rates were associated with lower homelessness rates among people in families but not among unaccompanied youth or single adults. Higher crowding rates were associated with higher homelessness rates among unaccompanied youth and single adults but not among people in families.

The study relied on HUD Point-In-Time (PIT) count data about the number of individuals experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2020 in 270 of the 392 Continuum of Care (CoC) areas in the U.S. A CoC is a regional or local planning body that coordinates housing and services funding for people experiencing homelessness. Non-metro CoCs categorized by HUD as “largely rural” and CoCs in the non-contiguous U.S. (Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico) were excluded. For each CoC area, Rai aggregated census tract-level data on vacancy rates, crowding rates, median rents, and other characteristics from the 2019 American Community Survey (ACS). Vacancy rates were restricted to rental housing units rather than all vacant housing units. For example, vacant units that were for sale and those used for seasonal or recreation purposes were not included. Crowding rates were also based only on rental housing units, with rental units classified as crowded if they had more than one occupant per bedroom. In measuring the association between local rental market characteristics and homelessness rates, the statistical models used controlled for local economic, demographic, social safety net, climate, and transient conditions that have been shown to impact homelessness rates.

Rai first found that the average homelessness rate across CoCs was highest for single adults, followed by unaccompanied minors and people in families. On average, single adults experiencing homelessness accounted for 115 of every 10,000 persons living alone. In comparison, unaccompanied minors experiencing homelessness accounted for 10 of every 10,000 persons living alone and families experiencing homelessness accounted for seven of every 10,000 families. Overall, in the general population of the U.S., an estimated 18 people experience homelessness per 10,000.

Rai found that higher vacancy rates in CoC areas were significantly associated with lower rates of homelessness among families. Specifically, Rai found that a 10% increase in vacancy rates was associated with a 3% decrease in rates of homelessness among adults in families. In comparison, no significant association was found between vacancy rates and homelessness rates among single adults. Rai notes the value of this finding given that prior research has suggested that vacancy rates have no association with homelessness. Rai recommends that areas with lower vacancy rates should increase the supply of affordable multifamily rental units and permanent housing solutions to stabilize both families exiting homelessness and those at risk of homelessness.

Rai found varying associations between overcrowding and homelessness rates when comparing unaccompanied youths, single adults, and families. Higher rates of crowding were significantly associated with higher rates of homelessness among unaccompanied youth and single adults, while there was no significant association between crowding and homelessness rates among families. A 10% increase in crowding rates resulted in a 3% increase in homelessness among single adults. Based on this finding, Rai calls for increased resources for emergency shelter and rental assistance that would help unaccompanied youth and single adults in the short-term and an

increased supply of affordable studio and one-bedroom rental units that could stabilize them in the long-term.

Finally, Rai found that higher median rents were associated with significantly higher rates of homelessness among single adults and people in families but were not associated with homelessness rates among unaccompanied youths. The association between median rents and homelessness rates was not found to be significantly different between single adults and people in families. Rai notes that prior research has found that median rents were associated with increased homelessness rates for single adults but not for families but speculates that these differences may be the result of using different study designs.

Rai concludes that researchers, policymakers, and service providers should be aware of how various rental market factors influence homelessness rates for different populations and create affordable housing interventions that are designed to reduce and prevent homelessness for each population. In areas with lower vacancy rates, Rai's findings suggest the need to increase the supply of affordable housing that meets the needs of low-income families who are at risk of or are currently experiencing homelessness. In areas with higher overcrowding rates, increasing the supply of affordable single-occupancy units could meet the needs of single adults and unaccompanied youth who are at risk of or are currently experiencing homelessness. Moreover, Rai acknowledges prior research that has demonstrated the greater behavioral health needs of unaccompanied youth and single adults and calls for the delivery of social and behavioral health case management and services to ensure these populations remain stably housed.

Read the article at: <https://bit.ly/4aQn4cD>

From the Field

NLIHC Releases Spring Issue of *Tenant Talk*

NLIHC released on April 25 the Spring 2024 issue of *Tenant Talk*, a semiannual newsletter designed to engage residents in housing advocacy. The new issue, *Tenant Talk: The Resilient Work of Tenants*, explores the past, present, and future of tenant organizing. [Download a free digital copy](#) or [register to receive a free physical copy](#) in the mail.

Tenant organizing has always been the bedrock of housing justice. From tenement organizing in industrial cities during the late nineteenth century to present efforts to prevent displacement and evictions, tenant organizers have worked relentlessly to advance housing justice. The new edition of *Tenant Talk* explores the long history and current state of tenant organizing in the U.S., as well as the future prospects for organizing efforts. Featuring stories about lifetime advocates as well as those who have just joined the movement for affordable housing, the issue brings together articles about organizing efforts at the local and state levels as well as federal advocacy at the national level.

As always, readers will hear directly from organizers, researchers, NLIHC staff, and individuals with lived experience of housing insecurity. Articles explore organizers' work to strengthen

disaster recovery, promote rent stabilization, and address source-of-income discrimination, as well as the challenges involved in organizing large groups of people, the power of youth action boards, and the role of local organizing networks in advancing tenants' rights. The publication includes updates on NLIHC's policy work, IDEAS, and new research.

A [digital version](#) of the latest *Tenant Talk* is now available for free to NLIHC members and partners, as well as members of the public. Digital copies will also be available in Spanish.

If you have registered in the past for a physical copy of *Tenant Talk*, we ask that you please [register](#) again. The registration form will close on May 2, or whenever the stock of available copies of *Tenant Talk* is exhausted – whichever comes first.

Access present and past issues of *Tenant Talk* [here](#).

Congresswoman Ramirez Holds Press Conference on Two Reintroduced Housing Bills

Congresswoman Delia Ramirez (D-IL) held a “Future of Housing” press conference on April 23 to celebrate the reintroduction of two bills in the U.S. House of Representatives: the “Green New Deal for Public Housing Act” ([H.R. 7782](#), [S. 4012](#)) and the “Tenants’ Rights to Organize Act” ([H.R. 5827](#)). The Green New Deal for Public Housing [proposes](#) new grant programs to rehabilitate and upgrade public housing to decrease health hazards and improve energy-efficiency, while the Tenants’ Rights to Organize Act would [protect](#) the organizing rights of tenants with Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) and tenants living in Low-Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) properties. NLIHC has endorsed both bills.

Congresswoman Ramirez was joined at the press conference by supporting statewide organizations, including LUCHA, Leaders and Organizers for Tenant Empowerment (LOFTE) Network, CHA Tenant Representative, Bickerdike, Association House, Shriver Center on Poverty Law, and NLIHC's Illinois state partner Housing Action Illinois. The event was held at LUCHA's Passive House, the first sustainable, eco-conscious multi-family building in Illinois.

If enacted, the “Green New Deal for Public Housing Act” would repeal the Faircloth Amendment, which currently limits construction of new public housing developments. The bill would also create two grant programs aimed at modernizing existing public housing units through energy retrofits, decarbonizing units, water quality upgrades, climate adaptation and emergency disaster response, and community resiliency and sustainability.

“Today is a day of hope,” said Representative Ramirez. “We want bold, progressive, affordable, sustainable housing for everyone...[T]he ‘Tenants’ Right to Organize Act and ‘The Green New Deal for Public Housing Act’ are desperately needed now, and we are asking my colleagues around the country to sign on to the legislation because the need for housing isn’t for next week, for next year, for the next ten years...[W]e will see tents all over this country if we don’t strengthen our public housing system.”

“The Green New Deal for Public Housing is a model for all housing in our society to be zero-carbon and highly energy-efficient,” said Foluke Akanni, a housing policy organizer with Housing Action Illinois. “To make this transformation, we’ll be creating good paying jobs and addressing climate change.”

The press conference also highlighted the reintroduced “Tenants’ Right to Organize Act,” which would guarantee the right to organize for tenants utilizing HCVs and those living in LIHTC housing. Currently, only public housing tenants have a legally recognized right to organize. The bill also would expand protections to mixed-status families and those who might be ineligible for tenant-based rental assistance.

“Tenants themselves and tenant organizations bravely speak to better their lives and their communities, but they too often face retaliation and even eviction,” said Eric Sirota, director of housing justice at The Shriver Center on Poverty Law. “The ‘Tenants Right to Organize Act’ helps protect these brave tenants and brave tenant organizations.”

Read a one-pager on the “Tenants’ Right to Organize Act” [here](#).

Read a one-pager on “The Green New Deal for Public Housing” [here](#).

Watch a recording of the press conference [here](#).

City of Olympia Passes New Protections for Tenants, Including Relocation Assistance

Lawmakers in Olympia, Washington, passed on April 16 a comprehensive set of tenant protections aimed at keeping renters stably housed amid a growing housing crisis in the city. Enacted through “[Ordinance No. 7391](#),” the city’s new law addresses persistent rising rental costs and habitability issues present throughout the state’s capital while also seeking to ensure that tenants can remain stably housed and free from the threat of displacement over the long term.

Olympia’s new tenant protections package ensures that tenants facing the threat of a forced move due to an excessive rental hike or a habitability concern that makes a residential unit uninhabitable will be able to request relocation assistance from their landlords. Moreover, in cases when tenants are faced with an excessive rental increase, the new law requires landlords to provide tenants with advance notice of their right to terminate a lease early after receiving an unaffordable rent increase, allowing tenants to break their lease within 30 days of receiving a new rental rate.

Tenants seeking relocation assistance must first qualify for support under the law. Under “[Ordinance No. 7391](#),” tenants facing a habitability concern at their residence that requires them to vacate their property may be eligible to apply for relocation support. Tenants must meet eligibility requirements to apply for support – for example, a tenant may be eligible if they live in a property that is being demolished or rehabilitated or if their residential property is changing in use. To qualify for relocation assistance due to habitability concerns, the tenant must also be

making at or below 50% of the city’s median income. Under the law, the median income will be [adjusted](#) for family size, meaning that, for single-individual households, the individual must be making \$39,450 or below to qualify.

To qualify for relocation assistance due to a rent increase, known also as “economic displacement relocation assistance,” a tenant must be facing a rental increase that totals a change of more than 7% within a 12-month period. Under the law, a tenant is eligible to receive two and a half months’ rent as a payout from their landlord. In comparison to the eligibility requirements a tenant is required to satisfy to apply for relocation assistance for a habitability concern, there are no requirements that an individual tenant must meet if faced with a rent increase. Lawmakers noted in the ordinance that in Olympia it is common for tenants who are displaced from their residence due to a change in rental cost to accrue thousands of dollars in fees from simply leaving their homes. These can include moving fees, security deposit fees, cleaning fees, and administrative fees. As such, the passage of relocation assistance seeks to offset some of the costs for renters, making it easier for a tenant to secure new housing opportunities without amassing debt.

Known as the “Renter Protections Ordinance,” the passage of the city’s new law also provides three additional protections to tenants. Not only does the law place limits on the amount that can be charged in rental fees, but the law also denotes the allowable types of fees that can be charged to a tenant during their lease term to ensure that tenants are not charged any “junk” fees. Under the original ordinance, move-in fees were the only fees mentioned in the bill. However, amendments to the bill modified the types of fees that can be charged to a tenant, ensuring tenants are not charged arbitrary or surprise fees during their lease term. With the passage of the law, landlords are permitted only to charge tenants application screening fees, a refundable security deposit fee, a refundable pet damage deposit, utility charges, late fees for rent (not to exceed \$10 a month), landlord reimbursement fees, and attorney’s fees (if applicable). Under the law, a tenant is allowed to opt out of any fees that are non-essential.

The final protection included under Olympia’s new tenant protection ordinance protects tenants who install a cooling device within a unit – such as a portable air conditioner – and establishes that tenants who do so may not be cited or evicted on that basis.

[The population of Olympia is made up largely of renter households](#). Of the city’s more than 55,000 individuals, over 53% live in rental housing, the result of a steady increase from 2019, when renter households comprised 35% of the housing market. As the share of renter households has risen, so has the threat of housing instability. In 2023, it was found that 54% of all renters within the city – more than 6,000 households – were cost-burdened, a number that has only risen since the pandemic. As recently as 2021, 46% of renter households in Olympia were cost-burdened. According to HUD, a renter is [cost-burdened](#) when they pay more than 30% of their monthly income towards rent.

In Olympia, rising rental costs coupled with stagnant wages have led to increases in cost-burdened renters. Since 2021, the median rental cost in the city has increased more than 13%, making housing unaffordable for many. According to NLIHC’s [Out of Reach](#) report, a renter in Olympia would have to work 77 hours a week at the minimum wage to afford a modest one-bedroom rental at a fair market rate of \$1,577.

The lowest-income renters experience the [greatest share](#) of housing unaffordability. Of the city's renters, 82% of individuals who make 30% or below of the city's area median income (AMI) are cost-burdened, while 73% of renters making 30% or below of the city's AMI are severely cost-burdened, paying more than 50% of their monthly income towards rent. In Olympia, the median income for a household of one at 30% AMI is \$23,700, making a person with an income at or below this number extremely low-income. When an individual pays such a large share of their income towards rent, they are left with little money for other necessities, such as food, healthcare, or transportation costs.

The passage of Olympia's new tenant protection package will likely strengthen and reinforce a growing wave of tenant protections passed in Olympia since the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2021, city officials released a detailed "[Housing Action Plan](#)" made up of proposed steps that can be taken to address the city's housing needs and rectify gaps in the city's rental housing market. On the basis of recommendations in the Housing Action Plan, which included increasing housing stability for renters, the city passed in 2023 "[Ordinance No. 7376](#)," creating several new rights for renters. The law requires landlords to register their rental properties and acquire a business license annually, and to arrange for an inspection of their rental properties once every five years. The law also prohibits landlords from charging a tenant any fee levied against a landlord for registering the rental property; prohibits landlords from increasing a tenant's rent if their property is uninhabitable; and protects tenants against landlord retaliation.

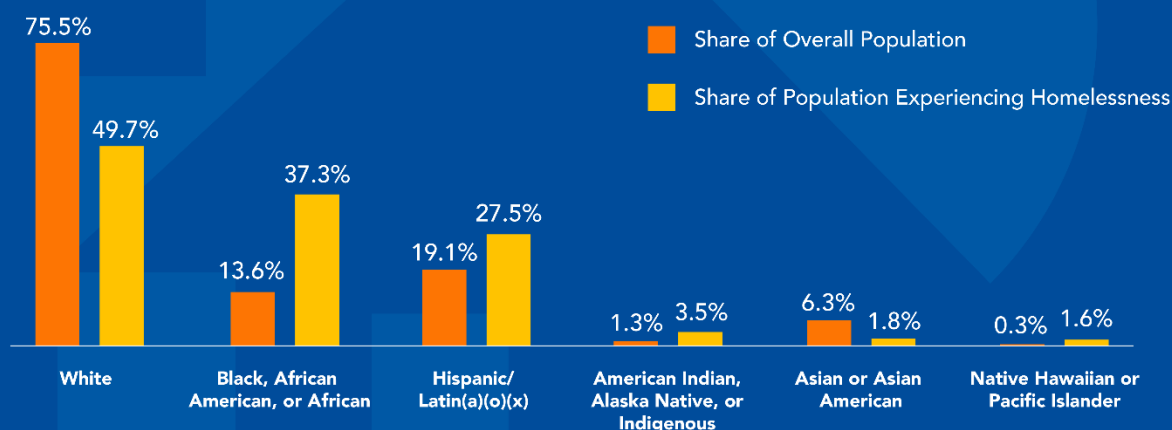
Many tenants and housing advocates showed support for "[Ordinance No. 7391](#)." Speaking about the passage of the new law, Rachael Myers, the executive director of the [Washington Low Income Housing Alliance](#), an NLIHC state partner, noted the role of tenant organizing in passing the city's new ordinance, as well as the impact of the bill on tenants. "Congratulations to the organizers who made this happen," she said. "This is a victory that will help tenants who are facing big rent hikes on top of already out of reach rents. Olympia is the latest in a long list of Washington cities where tenants have organized successfully for better protections, and I expect to see much more of that." The Washington Low Income Housing Alliance and others in its network plan to continue their advocacy for a statewide rent stabilization law so that all residents across the state are protected from unsustainable rent increases.

Learn more about Olympia's new renter protection package [here](#).

Fact of the Week

Homelessness Impacts Different Racial and Ethnic Groups at Rates Disproportionate to Their Share of the Overall Population

Share of Total U.S. Population and Share of Population Experiencing Homelessness, by Race and Ethnicity



Source: HUD, 2023 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress. Available at <https://bit.ly/2023AHAR>. U.S. Census Bureau, QuickFacts: Population Estimates, July 1, 2023, (V2023).



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NLIHC in the News

NLIHC in the News for the Week of April 21

The following are some of the news stories to which NLIHC contributed during the week of April 21:

“‘Housing, not handcuffs’: Advocates seek solutions for homelessness beyond fines and arrests” *WBUR Boston*, April 22, at: <https://tinyurl.com/mrxpckc5>

“This program helped Fresno renters find affordable housing in a competitive market. It might lose funding” *Fresnoland*, April 23, at: <https://tinyurl.com/wr3n95cd>

“‘We need somebody’: Birmingham public housing residents left without board representation” *AL.com*, April 25, at: <https://tinyurl.com/ywnxnab5>

NLIHC News

NLIHC Welcomes New Members in First Quarter of 2024

Welcome to those individuals and organizations that joined NLIHC as members during the first quarter of 2024! NLIHC members support strategic advocacy for our policy priorities and build connections across our nationwide network. Benefits of membership include invitations to quarterly members-only Policy Advisory Committee [meetings](#), discounted print publications, discounted tickets to our annual Policy Forum, and more!

To become an NLIHC member, visit nlihc.org/membership. Contact outreach@nlihc.org for more information.

New Organizational Members

- Alaska House Residents Association
- BlueHub Capital
- CANOA
- Dallas County MHMR dba Metrocare Services
- Delaware State Housing Authority
- Eviction Prevention Project
- Florida Coalition to End Homelessness
- Friends Of Parkside
- Greenville Housing Authority
- Heading Home of South Central Indiana
- HomePowerColorado
- Homes For All South
- HomesteadCS
- Integrated Community Solutions, Inc.
- Johnson County Affordable Housing Coalition
- Meridian Street UMC Housing Justice Task Force
- Mississippi Center for Justice
- National Women's Shelter Network, Inc.
- New Way Homes, Inc.
- Northern Ponca Housing Authority
- Office of the Tenant Advocate
- Phelps House Tenant Association
- Priorities Party for President Of The United States Of America World Union Party
- Quality Housing Coalition
- RESPECT The Haven CDC
- Rockaways Neighbors Helping Neighbors
- Somerville Office of Housing Stability
- SquareOne Villages
- Texas Appleseed
- The Kelsey
- Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority

New Individual Members

- Aatikah Muhammad
- Abdul-Salaam Muhammad
- Adam Musters
- Alfred Harris
- Allessandra Lamar
- Amanda Kelley
- Amy West
- Andrea Wiley
- Angela Shrum
- Annie Rivera
- Ashaki Brown
- Ashley Sparks
- Ayanna Sims
- Betty Washington
- Brenda Kitchen
- Brianna Washington
- Caden Lucas
- Candace Cain
- Carla Earhart
- Casey Cunningham
- Catherine T. Murray
- Chris Forbes
- Chris Kolerok
- Christopher Boyd
- Clifton Sims
- Cody Wilson
- Crystal Grafft
- Darlene Ewing
- Deborah Dunnaway
- Deborah Dunnaway
- Dionne Larson
- Elena Shehan
- Ellen Nelson
- Fannie Mae Hall
- Felicia Alston-Singleton
- George Clare
- Gerry la Londe-Berg
- Gilberto Vera
- H. Demetrius Bonner
- Hannah Friedrich
- Isa Idris Muhammad
- Jacob Kesherim
- James Amenta
- Jamira Carter

- Jeffrey Hada
- Jennie Edem
- Jennifer Monterroso
- Jodi Bergman
- John Boylan
- Johna Savage
- Josephine Clarke
- Joyce Tavon
- K.A. Foster
- Kathy Purnell
- Keally Cieslik
- Kelly Westlund
- Kiara Batson
- Kimi Wei
- Krystal Young
- Kyle Lucchese
- Liliana Monge
- Linda Soderstrom
- Lyndsey Gibbons
- Mary Yeaton
- Matesia Howell
- Max Glick
- Maya Brennan
- McCall Christensen
- Miroslava Tsvyakh
- Mohamed Elakashlan
- Morgan Kingston
- Nancy Heller
- Olabisi Odusanya
- Paula Henry
- Qianna Decker
- Rana Jezzini
- Rebecca Hartnett
- Regina Carter
- Ronald Murphy
- Safiyyah Amina Muhammad
- Sarah Akhtar
- Sarah Spansail
- Sarah Sue Wood
- Shaddai Hayes
- Sharon Norwood
- Sharon Underwood
- Stephen Box
- Sufyaan Muhammad

- Susan Mills
- Tamerra Bailey
- Teresa Hemingway
- Teresa Mattox
- Tyne Hayflinger
- Vikram Surya Chiruvolu
- Willie JR Fleming
- Yvonne Davis

Where to Find Us – April 29

- [CHAPA Annual Federal Forum](#) – Boston, MA, May 3 (Sarah Saadian)
- [2024 National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster Conference](#) – Phoenix, AZ, May 6 (Noah Patton)
- The Housing Ohio Conference – Columbus, OH, May 7-8 (Diane Yentel; Courtney Cooperman)
- [Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future \(SAHF\)/NAHT Retreat](#) – May 15 (Diane Yentel)
- [2024 National Mass Care Exercise](#) – Shippensburg, PA, May 23 (Noah Patton)
- Mississippi Center for Justice Social Justice Empowerment Dinner (Keynote Speaker) – Washington, D.C., June 5 (Diane Yentel)
- [22nd Annual New York Supportive Housing Conference](#) – New York, NY, June 20 (Sarah Saadian)
- A Home for Everyone Conference (Keynote Speaker) – Madison, WI, July 17 and 18 (Diane Yentel)
- Rainbow 16th Annual Awards Banquet – Scottsdale, AZ, October 17 (Diane Yentel)
- Neighborhood Preservation Coalition of New York annual conference - Poughkeepsie, NY, October 22 (Lindsay Duvall)

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Tia Turner, Housing Advocacy Organizer
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Chantelle Wilkinson, OSAH Campaign Director, x230
Renee Willis, Senior Vice President for Racial Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, x247
Diane Yentel, President and CEO, x225