



OUR HOMES,
OUR VOICES

CONGRESSIONAL TOOLKIT
#OURHOMESOURVOICES

NATIONAL HOUSING
WEEK OF ACTION

MAY 30-JUNE 5, 2019

WWW.OURHOMES-OURVOICES.ORG

DEAR MEMBERS OF CONGRESS,

Between May 30 and June 5, we ask that federal, state and local lawmakers stand with struggling families during the *Our Homes, Our Voices* national housing week of action by calling for greater federal investments in affordable rental homes.



The affordable rental housing crisis is reaching new heights, and 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, and half a million people are living on the street, in shelters, or in their cars on any given night. Despite the clear need, only one out of every four families in need receive housing assistance. Every state and congressional district is impacted.

During the *Our Homes, Our Voices* national housing week of action from May 30 to June 5, please take one or more of these actions – whether in-district or in Washington, D.C. - to bring attention to the critical need for federal investments in affordable rental homes.

- **D.C.-Based Activities (May 30 to May 31)**

- Issue a press statement.
- Make a floor statement.
- Submit a letter to the editor.
- Share a short video on social media.

- **In-District Activities (June 1 to June 8 during [congressional recess](https://www.ourhomes-ourvoices.org/local-events))**

- Attend local event or convene stakeholders. (Information on local events can be found at: <https://www.ourhomes-ourvoices.org/local-events>)
- Hold a town hall event.

- **National Twitterstorm on Tuesday, June 4 from 2pm to 3pm EST.**

During the week, advocates across the nation will hold events – from rallies to letter-writing campaigns, from ribbon-cuttings to demonstrations – to demand greater federal investments in affordable rental homes. We need you to stand with them to declare that 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, speeches, and tweets for the *Our Homes, Our Voices* national housing week of action from May 30 and June 5.

For more information, please contact Sarah Mickelson, Senior Policy Director, at the National Low Income Housing Coalition (smickelson@nlihc.org).

ABOUT THE NATIONAL WEEK OF ACTION

During the National Housing Week of Action, advocates across the nation will hold local events to demand greater federal investments in affordable rental homes. For more information, see www.ourhomes-ourvoices.org. A list of scheduled events is available at www.ourhomes-ourvoices.org/local-events.

The National Housing Week of Action is hosted by the Campaign for Housing and Community Development Funding (CHCDF), which is led by the National Low Income Housing Coalition and includes more than 70 national organizations working to ensure the highest allocation of resources possible to support affordable housing and community development. CHCDF's members represent a full continuum of national housing and community development organizations, including faith-based, private sector, financial/intermediary, public sector and advocacy groups. For a list of CHCDF members, see: <http://nlihc.org/partners/chcdf/members#Members>.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition is dedicated solely to achieving socially just public policy that assures people with the lowest incomes in the United States have affordable and decent homes. For more information, see www.nlihc.org.

THE ISSUE

The affordable rental housing crisis is reaching new heights, and 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.

Advocates and Congressional champions helped secure significant increases in funding for affordable housing in fiscal year 2018 and 2019. To build on this success, Congress must reach a deal to lift low federal spending caps that starve low income families and communities of the resources they need to thrive. Instead of reducing our nation's investments in affordable housing, we should make a bold and sustained commitment to ensure that everyone has a safe, accessible and affordable home – whether through appropriations, an infrastructure package, or other measures.

WHY AFFORDABLE HOMES MATTER

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

SAMPLE PRESS STATEMENT

For Immediate Release: [circulate the day of the event]

Contact:

Statement from [NAME OF ELECTED OFFICIAL] – We Must Allow All Families to Thrive, We Must Invest in Affordable Rental Homes

CITY –The following statement is issued in recognition of the National Housing Week of Action.

“All people deserve a safe, decent, and affordable place to call home.

“When people live in affordable homes, 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. 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.

“Today, three out of every four families in need of housing benefits are turned away because of the lack of funding. As a result, they are forced to sacrifice other basic needs like food, childcare, and healthcare, or they have to double-up with friends or family, even after working multiple jobs. This cost burden causes many to end up homeless on our streets and in our shelters. It is unacceptable that in a country as rich as ours, people face these impossible decisions every day.

“Over the past two years, advocates and Congressional champions achieved substantial increases in federal housing investments for low-income families. However, much more is needed. Congress must reach a deal to lift low federal spending caps that starve low income families and communities of the resources they need to thrive. Instead of reducing our nation’s investments in affordable housing, we should make a bold and sustained commitment to ensure that everyone has a safe, accessible and affordable home – whether through appropriations, an infrastructure package, or other measures.

“That’s why I am participating in the *Our Homes, Our Voices* national housing week of action to stand with America’s low-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and others to call on Congress to expand critical investments in affordable homes.”

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SAMPLE FLOOR STATEMENT

This week, as advocates across the nation are coming together to demand greater federal investments in affordable homes, I rise to stand with them.

Across the country and in my district, far too many low-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and individuals are struggling to pay rent and make ends meet. New research from the National Low Income Housing Coalition found that we have a national shortage of more than 7 million homes for America's 11 million extremely low income households. This means that for every 100 of the lowest income families, there are just 37 rental homes that are affordable and available to them. And, the crisis is not just in big cities, like New York or San Francisco. Every congressional district – in rural communities and urban neighborhoods, in small towns and suburbs – is directly impacted by the rental housing crisis.

Despite the growing need, our federal investments in affordable homes have not kept pace. Today, because of a lack of funding, three out of every four families in need of housing benefits are turned away. Without this help, they are struggling to make their rent every month and they are forced to make impossible choices between keeping a roof over head and paying for groceries and medications, or saving for a rainy day. They sacrifice other basic necessities like food, childcare, and healthcare, or they have to double-up with friends or family – just to make ends meet. This leads many families to end up homeless on our streets and in our shelters. It is unacceptable that in a country as rich as ours, people face these impossible decisions every day.

This is especially true given the research and evidence that shows the widespread positive impact of affordable housing. 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. 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.

Over the past two years, advocates and Congressional champions achieved substantial increases in federal housing investments for low-income families. However, much more is needed. Congress must reach a deal to lift low federal spending caps that starve low income families and communities of the resources they need to thrive. Instead of reducing our nation's investments in affordable housing, we should make a bold and sustained commitment to ensure that everyone has a safe, accessible and affordable home – whether through appropriations, an infrastructure package, or other measures.

That's why I am participating in the *Our Homes, Our Voices* national housing week of action to stand with America's low-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and others to call on Congress to expand critical investments in affordable homes.



SAMPLE OP-ED

I see it in our district: too many low-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and individuals are struggling to pay rent and make ends meet. The affordable rental housing crisis impacts every community, and rising rents mean that families are forced to make impossible choices between keeping a roof over head and paying for groceries and medications, or saving for a rainy day. No one in America should have to skimp on food or medicine to pay their rent each month.

New research from the National Low Income Housing Coalition found that we have a national shortage of more than 7 million homes for America's 11 million extremely low income households. This means that for every 100 of the lowest income families, there are just 37 rental homes that are affordable and available to them. And, the crisis is not just in big cities, like New York or San Francisco. Every congressional district – in rural communities and urban neighborhoods, in small towns and suburbs – is directly impacted by the rental housing crisis.

Federal investments in affordable homes can help families and communities thrive. Research has shown that 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. 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.

Over the past two years, advocates and Congressional champions achieved substantial increases in federal housing investments for low-income families. However, much more is needed. Congress must reach a deal to lift low federal spending caps that starve low income families and communities of the resources they need to thrive. Instead of reducing our nation's investments in affordable housing, we should make a bold and sustained commitment to ensure that everyone has a safe, accessible and affordable home – whether through appropriations, an infrastructure package, or other measures.

I stand ready to work with members of my community and my colleagues in Congress to expand housing resources because when we invest in affordable homes, we invest in people, in communities, and in America as a whole. Will you join me?



SAMPLE SCRIPT FOR A 1-MINUTE VIDEO

Create a one-minute video of the Member of Congress speaking in support of greater federal investments in affordable rental homes. This video can be made with a cell phone and shared on social media with the hashtags #OurHomesOurVoices and #CutsHurt. To amplify the video's reach, share it in advance with Lisa Marlow at the National Low Income Housing Coalition (lmарlow@nlihc.org).

YOU CAN USE THE SAMPLE VIDEO SCRIPT BELOW:

"This week, as advocates across the nation are coming together to demand greater federal investments in affordable homes, I rise to stand with them.

Across the country and in my district, far too many low-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and individuals are struggling to pay rent and make ends meet. Despite the growing need, our federal investments in affordable homes have not kept pace.

Today, because of a lack of funding, three out of every four families in need of housing benefits are turned away. Without this help, they struggle to make their rent every month and they are forced to make impossible choices between keeping a roof over head and paying for groceries and medications, or saving for a rainy day. They sacrifice other basic needs like food, childcare, and healthcare, or they have to double-up with friends or family — just to make ends meet. This leads many families to end up homeless on our streets and in our shelters. It is unacceptable that in a country as rich as ours, people face these impossible decisions every day.

This is especially true given the research and evidence that shows the widespread positive impact of affordable housing. When people have safe, decent, affordable, 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. 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.

Over the past two years, advocates and Congressional champions achieved substantial increases in federal housing investments for low-income families. However, much more is needed. Congress must reach a deal to lift low federal spending caps that starve low income families and communities of the resources they need to thrive. Instead of reducing our nation's investments in affordable housing, we should make a bold and sustained commitment to ensure that everyone has a safe, accessible and affordable home – whether through appropriations, an infrastructure package, or other measures.

That's why I am participating in the National Housing Week of Action to stand with America's low-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and others to call on Congress to expand critical investments in affordable homes."



SAMPLE TWEETS



NATIONAL TWITTERSTORM ON TUESDAY, JUNE 4 FROM 2PM TO 3PM EST

Use the hashtags #OurHomesOurVoices, #HousingIsInfrastructure, #CutsHurt

Sample images can be found at: <https://www.ourhomes-ourvoices.org/resources>

EXPAND HOUSING INVESTMENTS

America is stronger and prosperous when we have decent, affordable homes & stable communities. #OurHomesOurVoices #HousingIsInfrastructure #CutsHurt

In the richest country on earth, we should not have millions who struggle to keep a roof over their head. #OurHomesOurVoices #HousingIsInfrastructure #CutsHurt

Housing is a right, not a privilege. Everyone deserves a place to call home and a roof over their head. #OurHomesOurVoices #HousingIsInfrastructure #CutsHurt

What if EVERYONE had an affordable roof over their head? I'm joining #OurHomesOurVoices to help make this a reality. #HousingIsInfrastructure #CutsHurt

Having to decide between paying rent & buying food is unacceptable. I'm pledging to help right this wrong. #OurHomesOurVoices #HousingIsInfrastructure #CutsHurt

Affordable homes are critical to climbing the economic ladder. We must invest in #affordablehomes to increase opportunity #OurHomesOurVoices #HousingIsInfrastructure #CutsHurt

When the rent eats first, kids lose out. We must stand up for #OurHomesOurVoices to help kids reach their full potential. #HousingIsInfrastructure #CutsHurt

Stable, affordable homes improve all areas of life for low-income families, seniors, & people with disabilities. #OurHomesOurVoices #HousingIsInfrastructure #CutsHurt

No one should have to skimp on food and healthcare just to make rent. We are healthier when we have an affordable home. #OurHomesOurVoices #HousingIsInfrastructure #CutsHurt

LIFT THE BUDGET CAPS

At a time when far too many families struggle to pay rent, the #Trumpbudget guts housing benefits. This is wrong, plain & simple. We need a major expansion of housing investments. #OurHomesOurVoices #HousingIsInfrastructure #CutsHurt

Congress should lift the harmful budget caps and further increase funding to expand #affordablehousing. In 2018 and 2019, advocates secured a significant increase, but we have more work to do! #OurHomesOurVoices #HousingIsInfrastructure #CutsHurt

Families thrive because of housing & community development investments at HUD and USDA. Now is the time to increase funding. Congress must lift the spending caps & build on the 10% boost we won in 2018 and 2019. #OurHomesOurVoices #HousingIsInfrastructure #CutsHurt

SAMPLE TWEETS

INVEST IN HOUSING INFRASTRUCTURE

Like roads and bridges, an investment in affordable housing infrastructure will help low-income families thrive. ANY infrastructure deal must include resources to build affordable housing for families living in poverty. #HousingIsInfrastructure

Without access to affordable housing, investments in transportation and infrastructure will fall short of creating vibrant communities. Any infrastructure plan must include funds to build homes affordable to families living in poverty. #HousingIsInfrastructure

When families living in poverty have access to affordable housing—especially in areas connected to good schools, well-paying jobs, healthcare, and transportation—they are better able to climb the economic ladder. #HousingIsInfrastructure



ATTEND A LOCAL EVENT OR CONVENE STAKEHOLDERS

LOCAL EVENTS

During the National Housing Week of Action, advocates across the nation will hold events – from rallies to letter-writing campaigns, from ribbon-cuttings to demonstrations – to demand greater federal investments in affordable rental homes. A list of scheduled events is available at www.ourhomes-ourvoices.org/local-events.

CONVENE STAKEHOLDERS

1. **CONVENE** a diverse set of stakeholders to discuss the impact of the national affordable housing crisis in your community and federal solutions.
 - A. **Potential Partnerships:** Many different organizations are impacted by the lack of affordable rental housing. Below are suggested organizations you could reach out to:
 - i. [National Low Income Housing Coalition state partners](#)
 - ii. State Housing Agencies
 - iii. Child poverty and child welfare organizations
 - iv. Local housing and homelessness organizations
 - v. Fair housing organizations and civil rights groups
 - vi. Residents of federally subsidized housing
 - vii. Affordable housing providers
2. **ASK** stakeholders the following questions:
 - A. What is the local impact of the affordable housing crisis?
 - B. How do federal investments address this crisis?
 - C. What additional federal resources are needed?
3. **ENCOURAGE** the organizations planning the event to use the following strategies:
 - A. Leverage **organizational list serves** to inform the public about the event. These organizations may also be able to provide data, handouts and individual stories that can be shared at the event.
 - B. Promote the event on **social media**.
 - C. Circulate press releases and media advisories to encourage interest with local and national media.
4. **SEND** out a press statement after the event touting its success and champions.
5. **WRITE** a letter to the editor highlighting the need for affordable rental homes in your district and your participation in the event



SAMPLE TOWN HALL MEDIA ADVISORY

MEDIA ADVISORY

Date:

Contact:

[Insert Name] to Hold Press Conference on Federal Solutions to the Affordable Housing Crisis

[Insert Name] will hold a press conference and town hall event on the need to expand federal investments in affordable rental homes.

This town hall will address how our community can work to expand – not slash – housing benefits because when we invest in affordable homes, we invest in people, in communities, and in America as a whole.

When:

Where:

Why: Too many low-income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and individuals are struggling to pay rent and make ends meet. Rising rents mean that these families are forced to make impossible choices between keeping a roof over their heads and paying for groceries, medications, or saving for a rainy day.

Research show that 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 major investment in affordable rental housing for America’s low-income families is needed to end our nation’s affordable rental housing crisis.

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