



March 28, 2019

**Dear 2020 Presidential Hopefuls:**

For too long, the critical importance of safe, decent, affordable housing has been overlooked in presidential campaigns. Rental housing affordability has worsened dramatically over the past 15 years, and more households than ever are struggling to pay the rent and make ends meet. For those at the bottom of the income scale, the problem is most acute: more than 10 million households with extremely low incomes are either homeless or pay unaffordable rental costs that force them to make impossible choices between paying the rent and paying for heat, food, medications, transportation, and other necessities. Research demonstrates that when people have stable affordable homes, lives dramatically improve. We are healthier. Our children do better in school. Our families are less hungry. We can more readily escape poverty and climb the income ladder. Economic productivity is stronger. And our nation is more just and equitable.

We are the Steering Committee of [Opportunity Starts at Home](#), an unprecedented multi-sector campaign to address the housing needs of the nation's lowest-income people. We come from a wide range of sectors, each with our own perspectives and concerns. Yet we all understand the importance of housing within our respective fields, and we all believe that more robust and equitable federal housing policies will help us achieve our own respective goals.

We are not alone in our call to action. The campaign recently commissioned a national public opinion poll to assess the public's opinions and perspectives on issues related to housing affordability. The polling revealed that the vast majority of the public (85%) believes that ensuring everyone has a safe, decent, affordable place to live should be a **"top national priority."** This view is strong across the political spectrum – from 95% of Democrats agreeing it should be a top national priority to 87% of independents to 73% of Republicans. Eight in ten also say that both the president and Congress should "take major action" to make housing more affordable for low-income households.

The public clearly expects action: in fact, 78% say government has an important role to play in making sure there are enough affordable places to live (including 91% of Democrats, 76% of independents, and 62% of Republicans). Eighty-two percent think it is very or fairly important for their elected leaders to address housing affordability, and this is a priority that crosses the political spectrum with 94% of Democrats, 80% of independents, and 69% of Republicans saying it is important. It is not surprising, then, that 76% of people in the United States say they are more likely to vote for a candidate that has a detailed plan for making housing more affordable.

The poll also reveals that the public strongly supports, on a bipartisan basis, concrete policy solutions, such as expanding funding for rental assistance, giving renters a tax break, expanding investments in housing development programs, and providing emergency crisis assistance to help cover rent. The *Opportunity Starts at Home* campaign has articulated these strategies in its [National Policy Agenda](#), calling for a major expansion of rental assistance through vouchers or a tax credit; major investments in the national Housing Trust Fund to increase the supply of housing affordable to the lowest-income people; and the creation of a "National Housing Stabilization Fund" which would provide emergency financial



assistance to ensure housing stability and prevent homelessness for poor households experiencing an unexpected economic hardship, such as a job loss or medical crisis not covered by insurance.

Being able to afford a decent home is a prerequisite for opportunity in the United States. The promises that we regularly hear during each election cycle – better health, better economic opportunity, better education – can be more fully realized when people have stable affordable homes. The country’s housing sector is broken, at least for those vulnerable people at the bottom of the income scale. It demands a major, long-overdue federal response.

**We respectfully urge each of you to prioritize housing affordability as a key pillar of your presidential campaigns and, if you have not done so already, to develop a detailed national plan to solve the problem.** We stand ready to work with you and are confident that the public will support you in these efforts.

Sincerely,

Catholic Charities USA  
Children’s Defense Fund  
Children’s HealthWatch  
Community Catalyst  
Food Research & Action Center  
JustLeadershipUSA  
NAACP  
National Alliance to End Homelessness

National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association of Community Health Centers  
National Association of Social Workers  
National Education Association  
National League of Cities  
National Low Income Housing Coalition  
UnidosUS