



April 9, 2019

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair, THUD Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Price
Chair, THUD Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member, THUD Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Ranking Member, THUD Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Collins, Ranking Member Reed, Chairman Price, and Ranking Member Diaz-Balart:

Federal rental assistance programs play a critical role in urban, suburban, and rural communities across the United States, helping to make homes affordable for almost 10 million people, including nearly 4 million children. Without question, research demonstrates that when people have stable affordable homes, lives dramatically improve. They are healthier and less hungry. Their children do better in school. They can more readily escape poverty and climb the income ladder. Economic productivity is stronger. And our nation is more just and equitable.

Yet despite the documented successful outcomes of our nation's federal rental assistance programs, only a small fraction of eligible households receives the assistance they need to help cover the rent. Currently, due to chronic underfunding, only 1 in 4 eligible households receive federal rental assistance of any kind, even as rising rents have reached historic heights. Since 1960, renters' incomes have increased by only 5% while rents have risen 61%. Out of over 3,000 counties in the nation, there are only 22 where a full-time worker earning minimum wage can afford a modest one-bedroom rental, and there are no counties where they can afford a modest two-bedroom. Nationally, there are only 37 available and affordable homes for every 100 extremely low-income renter households. When it comes to being able to pay your rent in America, hard work simply is not enough anymore.

Congress must take bold action to reverse this alarming trend and provide housing stability and opportunity for millions of people. Therefore, if Congress reaches a budget agreement that raises the budget caps in a meaningful way, **we urge you to invest \$5 billion over the next two years to expand and preserve federal rental assistance for vulnerable people.** This level of investment would lift more than 100,000 households out of poverty, significantly reduce homelessness among families with children, and improve the health and chances of succeeding in school for tens of thousands of at-risk children.

We also urge you to direct at least half of the additional rental assistance to at-risk families with children. Alarming, the number of families with children with "worst-case housing needs" — unassisted very low-income families that either pay more than half their income for rent or live in severely substandard housing — *has risen 53 percent*, to 2.9 million households since 2003. Yet over roughly the same period, the number of families receiving federal rental assistance *has fallen by 250,000.*

Specifically, we urge you to provide an additional \$4 billion over the next two years to fund 340,000 new Housing Choice Vouchers and an additional \$1 billion over this period to increase funding for the Public Housing Capital Fund and Choice Neighborhoods Initiative, the latter of which will enable housing agencies to repair and renovate public housing, thereby preserving this critical source of affordable housing for the future. As noted above, we recommend that at least half of the new vouchers go to at-risk families with children; the remaining vouchers should be flexible, enabling housing agencies to address other urgent housing needs in their communities. The recommendation for new vouchers for families with children can be easily scaled in accord with the amount of additional resources that any forthcoming budget cap deal makes available. But, at minimum, we strongly recommend Congress provide at least \$300 million for new vouchers in FY 2020 that are specifically targeted to assist at-risk families with children.

We also recommend that Congress provide \$25 million to enable more communities to participate in the Housing Voucher Mobility Demonstration, which was included in the final FY 2019 funding bill. This important demonstration program is based on highly regarded research which demonstrates that when low-income families with young children can use rental vouchers to move to neighborhoods with quality schools and other opportunities, the children's life prospects improve markedly. Providing an additional \$25 million would restore total funding for this key program to the \$50 million level and help thousands of more families use vouchers to relocate to neighborhoods of opportunity with strong schools, job prospects, and other resources.

We look forward to working with you to help make housing more affordable and stable for millions of people in need. Please feel free to contact Mike Koprowski, National Director of Opportunity Starts at Home, at mkoprowski@nlihc.org and Sarah Mickelson, Senior Director of Public Policy at the National Low Income Housing Coalition, at smickelson@nlihc.org.

Sincerely,

Catholic Charities USA
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
Children's Defense Fund
Children's HealthWatch
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

CC: The Honorable Richard Shelby, Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Patrick Leahy, Vice Chairman, Senate Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Nita Lowey, Chair, House Appropriations Committee
The Honorable Kay Granger, Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee