



August 14, 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:

We are pleased that Congress has agreed to raise the discretionary funding limits established under the Budget Control Act for fiscal years 2020 and 2021. **We, the Steering Committee of the [Opportunity Starts at Home](#) campaign, urge you to prioritize housing assistance for the nation's most vulnerable people – and the Housing Choice Voucher and public housing programs, in particular – for additional resources when you negotiate final appropriations legislation for fiscal year 2020.**

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 28 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 rental. 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 the United States, hard work is simply not enough anymore.

Congress must take bold action to reverse this alarming trend and provide housing stability and opportunity for millions of people. Earlier this year, we wrote to you to ask that Congress, if it reached a budget agreement that raised the caps in a meaningful way, invest \$5 billion over the next two years to expand and preserve federal rental assistance for vulnerable people. Specifically, we requested \$4 billion to fund 340,000 new Housing Choice Vouchers for at-risk families and \$1 billion to make critical repairs to public housing. 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 recognize that the budget deal, while an important step forward, is more modest than some had hoped it would be. Yet, our recommendations for new housing vouchers and funds to preserve public housing can easily be scaled to a level that is feasible within the revised budget caps. We request that, in the final bill, Congress at least match the Housing Choice Voucher and public housing funding levels in the House-passed bill.**

We urge you to target a share of any 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*.

Investments in Housing Choice Vouchers and the Public Housing Capital Fund and Choice Neighborhoods Initiative will enable housing agencies to address urgent housing needs in their communities and to repair and renovate public housing, thereby preserving this critical source of affordable housing for the future. Additionally, we also recommend that Congress provide funding 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. An additional \$25 million (which was included in the House FY 2020 bill) would help thousands of more families use vouchers to access 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 the *Opportunity Starts at Home* campaign, at [mkoprowski@nlihc.org](mailto:mkoprowski@nlihc.org) and Sarah Mickelson, Senior Director of Public Policy at the National Low Income Housing Coalition, at [smickelson@nlihc.org](mailto: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 LGBTQ Task Force  
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