

November 11, 2019

Dear Ms. Welker,

Since you will be a moderator for the fifth Democratic presidential debate in Atlanta, we are reaching out to you concerning a matter of increasing importance that constitutes a major crisis across the country: the lack of housing affordability, especially for people with modest incomes. For too long, the critical importance of safe, decent, affordable housing has been overlooked in presidential campaigns.

We are the Steering Committee of [Opportunity Starts at Home](#), an unprecedented multi-sector campaign to tackle the nation's housing affordability crisis. Although we come from a wide range of sectors – education, healthcare, hunger, civil rights, criminal justice, and others – we all believe that our predominant areas of concern are exacerbated by the lack of housing affordability. 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. It is high time, in our judgment, that the nation enacts a robust plan to solve the housing affordability crisis.

Housing affordability has worsened dramatically over the past 15 years, and more families 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: roughly 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. Out of over 3,000 counties in the United States, there are only 28 where a full-time worker earning minimum wage can afford a one-bedroom rental home at Fair Market Rent.

**During the presidential debate in Atlanta, we urge you to ask the presidential candidates how they intend to address this growing crisis. Families across the country would undoubtedly find the candidates' responses highly relevant to their own lives.**

According to a recent national public opinion [poll](#) that *Opportunity Starts at Home* commissioned through Hart Research Associates, 60% of people say housing affordability is a serious problem in the area where they live, which is up an astounding 21 points from 2016 – and that includes majorities in cities, suburbs, and rural areas, as well as majorities of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans. And 61% of people reported having to make at least one sacrifice in the past three years because they were struggling with housing costs, such as cutting back on learning activities for their child, nutritious food, or healthcare.

The poll reveals that strong majorities of the public, on a bipartisan basis, expect solutions. In fact, 83% agree that elected officials are not paying enough attention to the cost of housing and the need for more affordable housing. Nearly 8 in 10 say the President should “take major

action” to make housing more affordable for low-income families. And 76% said they are more likely to vote for candidates who have detailed plans for making housing more affordable.

The issue is also garnering significant media attention, as evidenced by the recent piece published by the Editorial Board of *The New York Times*, entitled “[A New Approach on Housing Affordability.](#)”

In addition to you, we are sending this communication to your colleagues, Rachel Maddow, Andrea Mitchell, and Ashley Parker. If you seek any additional information, please contact Mike Koprowski, National Director of *Opportunity Starts at Home*, at [mkoprowski@nlihc.org](mailto:mkoprowski@nlihc.org).

Sincerely,

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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 Social Workers  
National Education Association  
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National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund  
National Low Income Housing Coalition  
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