March 12, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
317 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
1236 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
322 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
2468 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Policymakers are considering a legislative spending package aimed at addressing the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) on public health and the economy. **Any comprehensive response to the coronavirus should include emergency assistance funding to help prevent housing instability and homelessness as a result of the outbreak.** An emergency assistance fund would provide both short-term financial assistance and stability services to help households with the lowest incomes overcome an unforeseen economic shock that threatens their housing stability.

Most families living in poverty who rent are spending at least half of their incomes on housing, leaving virtually no margin for an unexpected expense. Temporary declines of income and unreimbursed medical bills can quickly send them down the spiral of housing instability, eviction, and even homelessness. With the coronavirus outbreak, many low-income, hourly wage workers may see reduced wages because they have fallen ill, they must care for a family member, or they are unable to work the hours they need. **Research** is clear that providing short-term crisis assistance to keep individuals and families stably housed is much cheaper to the taxpayer than incurring the myriad of long-term costs associated with housing instability, eviction, and homelessness.

**To help ensure housing stability during the coronavirus outbreak, Congress should create a permanent emergency assistance fund,** much like the one proposed by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO), Rob Portman (R-OH), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), and Todd Young (R-IN) in the bipartisan *Eviction Crisis Act*, albeit somewhat modified to meet the immediate needs of the current outbreak. Congress could also consider providing resources for the Homelessness Prevention and Rapid Rehousing Program (HPRP), which was successfully used after the 2008 financial crisis and served as a model for the emergency assistance fund featured in the *Eviction Crisis Act*. Emergency assistance programs have a strong track record of success in places across the country and are among the most effective policy tools available to the federal government to stabilize people in times of crisis.

We are members of the Steering Committee and Roundtable of the *Opportunity Starts at Home* campaign, and we stand ready to work with you to ensure that the nation’s coronavirus response includes this vital component. For further information, please feel free to contact Mike Koprowski, National Director of the *Opportunity Starts at Home* campaign at mkoprowski@nlihc.org.

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 LGBTQ Task Force  
National Low Income Housing Coalition  
National Women’s Law Center