



January 26, 2021

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

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
1236 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 2051

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

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

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

On behalf of the *Opportunity Starts at Home* campaign, I write to urge Congress to take the next step to ensure housing stability for low-income renters during the COVID-19 pandemic. We applaud the bipartisan emergency relief measure enacted in December 2020, which provided \$25 billion in emergency rental assistance and extended the federal eviction moratorium. This was a critical step in the right direction, but more resources and protections are needed to ensure individuals and families harmed by the pandemic have the housing stability necessary to fully participate in the economic recovery, including workforce re-entry. **Specifically, Congress must now: 1) provide \$30 billion in emergency rental and utility assistance; 2) provide \$28 billion in new funding for Housing Choice Vouchers; 3) provide \$8 billion in new funding for Emergency Solutions Grants; 4) provide \$44 billion for the national Housing Trust Fund; and 5) further extend, strengthen, and enforce the national eviction moratorium.**

Opportunity Starts at Home is an unprecedented campaign led by top national [organizations](#) from a variety of sectors, including health, education, civil rights, food security, environmental protection, faith, municipal governance, child welfare, criminal justice, anti-poverty, and more. Despite these various issue areas, all these organizations understand that achieving their own goals depends on whether people have access to stable, affordable homes. Without continued federal intervention to ease the economic shocks of the pandemic, up to [40 million](#) renters could lose their homes. A mass wave of evictions and homelessness would put lives at risk, strain our already overstretched public health systems, harm the educational progress of children, threaten food security, and generate unnecessary costs to taxpayers.

As such, Congress must take the following actions to ensure housing stability during the pandemic:

- **Provide \$30 billion in emergency rental and utility assistance (which is included in President Biden's recent relief proposal).** While an eviction moratorium during the pandemic is necessary, it is not sufficient alone. A moratorium still allows rent arrears to accumulate and many people who have lost income because of the pandemic will struggle to cover large sums of back-rent once it comes due. The moratorium must be paired with emergency rental and utility assistance so that renters do not fall off a financial cliff once back-rent is owed, and so that landlords continue to receive rental income, which, in turn, enables them to continue to operate their properties. An additional \$30 billion in emergency rental and utility assistance will help eliminate back rent and utilities owed by low-income renters, build capacity of program administrators to get the money out



quickly to those most in need, and provide legal and other services to help renters avoid unnecessary and unlawful evictions.

- **Provide \$28 billion for 5-year funding of 500,000 new housing vouchers.** States and localities are working hard to administer the \$25 billion in emergency rental assistance that Congress approved in December, and hopefully there are more emergency rental assistance dollars that Congress will soon authorize. To expand communities' administrative capacity — and deliver rent aid more quickly to more people — some federal rental assistance should also be provided via the Housing Choice Voucher program, which is administered by a separate network of 2,200 state and local housing agencies. Moreover, vouchers offer long-term support that emergency rental assistance does not. Renters with extremely low incomes and histories of housing instability are likely to recover more slowly than the economy overall as the pandemic subsides, and they are likely to need longer-term aid to remain stably housed during this time. Additional housing vouchers would provide stability to such renters and avert a potential wave of evictions and instability when short-term aid runs out. In addition, during his presidential campaign, President Biden articulated a commitment to universal vouchers so that everyone who qualifies for help receives it. Investing in 500,000 new vouchers immediately could be a down payment towards the president's long-term vision.
- **Provide \$8 billion in new funding for Emergency Solutions Grants (which is \$3 billion above President Biden's relief proposal).** These funds are needed to help prevent and respond to outbreaks among people who are already experiencing homelessness. People who are homeless and contract coronavirus are much more likely to be hospitalized, to require critical care, and to die than the general public. These hospitalizations, critical care needs and deaths have significant implications for individuals, their communities, and our already overstretched hospital systems. Funds are needed to move people living in homeless encampments and congregate shelters to safe alternative spaces, including hotels, as well as funding for short-term rental assistance and housing stabilization services.
- **Provide \$44 billion for the national Housing Trust Fund.** During the pandemic, states and localities worked quickly and creatively to move individuals experiencing homelessness into non-congregate settings, including hotels and motels. Now, these communities need resources to help individuals exit these facilities to permanent housing solutions, rather than allowing them to be pushed back into homelessness. An estimated \$44 billion in National Housing Trust Fund resources are needed to help states and localities acquire and convert non-traditional properties, including hotels, motels, and commercial real estate, into long-term housing solutions for people experiencing homelessness and to reconfigure shelters into healthier environments.
- **Further extend, strengthen, and enforce the federal eviction moratorium (which is included in President Biden's recent relief proposal).** To prevent the spread of COVID-19 and help keep millions of renters stably housed, Congress should extend the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) eviction moratorium through the duration of the public health emergency. But an extension, on its own, is insufficient. The moratorium should also be [improved](#) to address several shortcomings. For example, as it stands now, renters are only protected under the moratorium if they know about it and affirmatively submit a "declarative statement" to their landlords. Instead, the moratorium should provide automatic, universal protection to renters and it should apply to all stages of eviction. Moreover, federal agencies must better enforce the moratorium. The



Department of Justice under President Trump did not provide any mechanism for renters to file complaints against landlords who violate the moratorium.

- **Protect Renters.** Congress should ensure renters cannot be evicted for back rent accumulated during the pandemic, provide renters a reasonable time to repay back rent accumulated during the pandemic, prohibit late fees and penalties, and prevent evictions from being reported to consumer agencies.

I know that, like me, you do not want to see enormous numbers of individuals and families facing housing instability during the pandemic. The *Opportunity Starts at Home* campaign stands ready to work with you on enacting these proven solutions. If you have any questions, please contact me at mkoprowski@nihc.org. Thank you for taking the time to consider these urgent requests.

Sincerely,

Mike Koprowski
National Campaign Director
Opportunity Starts at Home

CC: The Honorable Sherrod Brown
The Honorable Pat Toomey
The Honorable Maxine Waters
The Honorable Patrick McHenry
The Honorable David E. Price
The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
The Honorable Jack Reed
The Honorable Susan Collins