

Support Long-Term Rental Assistance via Guaranteed Multi-Year Funding for Housing Choice Vouchers

Please join Senator Merkley (D-OR) and Representative Ritchie Torres (D-NY) in the call for substantial affordable housing infrastructure investments as part of the broader effort to repair and modernize our nation's critical infrastructure systems. For more information, or to sign onto the letter, please contact matthew_traylor@merkley.senate.gov in Sen. Merkley's office or christopher.jerrolds@mail.house.gov in Rep. Torres's office.

June XX, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232 U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
House Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204 U.S. Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

We write to highlight the urgent need for substantial affordable housing infrastructure investments as part of the broader effort to repair and modernize our nation's critical infrastructure systems. Without proportional affordable housing investments, there is no path for an equitable recovery and long-term financial stability for low- and middle-income American families.

If we fail to act now, our nation's economic growth will continue to be held back by the over 7-million-unit deficit in affordable homes. Our current low affordable housing inventory is a significant driver of higher housing costs, which in turn strains limited federal rental assistance programs. Despite the clear and urgent need, only one in four households who qualify for housing assistance receives it due to decades of chronic underfunding by Congress. Millions of eligible households are currently stuck on waiting lists – often for several years – hoping for help to come sooner.

The long wait for help sets families further back year after year. Eight million of the lowest income renters pay at least half of their income on rent, leaving them without the resources they need to put food on the table, purchase needed medications, or make ends meet. Coronavirus and the compounding effects of explosive wildfires and extreme weather events have made the need for

affordable housing more clear than ever in both rural and urban communities. Even before the coronavirus pandemic, fifty-four million rural residents lived in areas that had either a severe need or moderately severe need for the production of more affordable rental housing.

The President's call to invest more than \$300 billion in housing in the American Jobs Plan is a critical first step, but we must ensure that these resources are targeted to help the millions who pay more than half of their income on rent today. The American Jobs Plan laudably includes funds for affordable housing development, and capital investments are indeed needed to repair public housing and build and preserve affordable and supportive housing through the national Housing Trust Fund. Without rental assistance, however, people below the poverty line generally will not be able to afford to live in homes built with investments in the American Jobs Plan. Development subsidies typically do not cover the ongoing costs of operating and managing housing, and the lowest-income households cannot afford rents sufficient to cover those costs. We must ensure that any homes built with these federal investments are affordable to people with the greatest needs.

For these reasons, we urge you to include at a minimum the following key affordable housing infrastructure programs in the Build Back Better infrastructure package.

- Build on recent investments in short-term, emergency rental assistance by providing multi-year mandatory funding for a major housing voucher expansion to pave the way toward universal rental assistance.
- At least \$70 billion to address the Public Housing repair backlog.
- \$45 billion for the National Housing Trust Fund, of which \$26 billion should be reserved for permanent supportive housing for people experiencing homelessness.

While these programs and funding levels merit additional emphasis, this list should not be regarded as a complete list of all the ways we all can or should act to lower housing costs for American families. For example, Congress should make additional investments to preserve and create affordable housing in rural and tribal communities, address lead-based paint and other home health hazards, increase access to affordable homeownership for people and communities who have been too often locked out, and ensure that all communities provide access to opportunity for those who live and work there. However, we respectfully encourage you to consider these three principal recommendations as minimum housing investments that will help ensure the broader in the Build Back Better infrastructure package delivers broad and equitable benefits to all Americans.

Sincerely,