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**United States Senate**  
COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND  
URBAN AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6075

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July 24, 2019

President Donald J. Trump  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Trump:

I noted your recent expression of interest in addressing homelessness in our country. During a recent Fox News interview with Tucker Carlson, you indicated interest in the issue and that you were considering getting the “whole thing cleaned up”<sup>1</sup>.

The fact that so many are homeless in one of the richest countries in the world should disturb us all. It is important to note, however, that homelessness did not begin two years ago and that not all homelessness is visible from a motorcade. Homelessness affects rural, urban, and suburban communities. Too many workers and families who can’t afford housing are also living in their cars or temporarily living on someone’s couch as an alternative to living on the streets. Many others live one emergency away from eviction.

**If you truly wish to intercede to address homelessness in America, I offer you the following recommendations on how we can work together to achieve this goal.**

As a nation, we have learned much about preventing and ending homelessness in recent years. Through better, evidence-based practices and increased federal resources over the past decade, we have made significant progress in addressing homelessness. We have cut veteran homelessness nearly in half since 2010<sup>2</sup> by improving supportive services through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and increasing federal investments, including 93,000 new Department of Housing and Urban Development-Veteran Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) housing vouchers<sup>3</sup>. We have reduced chronic homelessness among people with disabilities by 16 percent by investing in permanent supportive housing that combines safe, stable housing and supportive services<sup>4</sup>. Promising models around the country emerging from HUD’s Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program have helped communities collaborate across homeless and family services systems to develop youth-centered approaches to keep vulnerable children off the street. Research has shown that rental housing assistance is effective

<sup>1</sup>Rosenberg Eli and Horton Alex, “Trump paints a dark picture of homelessness in cities: ‘We may intercede’,” Washington Post, July 2, 2019, available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/07/02/trump-paints-dark-picture-homelessness-cities-we-may-intercede/?utm\\_term=.44b50b4b86c2](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/07/02/trump-paints-dark-picture-homelessness-cities-we-may-intercede/?utm_term=.44b50b4b86c2)

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “HUD Announces a Decline in Veteran Homelessness,” HUD, November 1, 2018, available at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/news/hud-announces-a-decline-in-veteran-homelessness/>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “HUD and VA Announce Additional Support to Help Homeless Veterans Find Permanent Homes: Second Round of HUD-VASH Vouchers to Provide Housing for Veterans and Their Families,” HUD, December 11, 2018, available at: [https://www.hud.gov/press/press\\_releases\\_media\\_advisories/HUD\\_No\\_18\\_143](https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/HUD_No_18_143)

<sup>4</sup> HUD Press Release, December 17, 2018, available at: <https://www.hudexchange.info/news/hud-reports-homelessness-unchanged-in-u-s-in-2018-with-notable-declines-among-veterans-and-families-with-children/>

in reducing homelessness and housing instability.<sup>5</sup> We have been aided in this effort by the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, which disseminates best practices and coordinates efforts across federal agencies.

Despite this progress, more needs to be done. Over 550,000 people - including families with children, veterans, and people with disabilities - were homeless on a single night in January 2018, according to HUD's annual count.<sup>6</sup> Department of Education data on homelessness, which includes doubled-up households, indicate that 1.3 million school-age children and their families were homeless at some point during the 2015-2016 school year.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, our fight to end homelessness is facing the "headwinds of rising rents," as HUD Secretary Carson noted at the release of the most recent Annual Homeless Assessment Report (AHAR). The market alone is not producing enough affordable housing for working families and those on fixed incomes. People are working harder and producing more, however, hard work is not paying off as it should. A person with a full-time job needs to earn an hourly wage of \$22.96 in order to afford a modest, two-bedroom rental at HUD's national average fair market rent<sup>8</sup> - far above the minimum wage or average renter wages. As wages continue to remain flat, even people with good paying jobs, face housing instability. In fact, seven of the ten occupations expected to grow the fastest over the next ten years do not pay enough for their full-time workers to afford a one- or two-bedroom rental home.<sup>9</sup> As a result, many renters face high housing cost burdens. Nearly half of all renters paid more than 30 percent of their incomes for housing in 2017, and a quarter of all renters - nearly 11 million households - paid more than half their incomes for housing.<sup>10</sup> Families burdened by high housing costs have fewer resources available to meet other essential needs like transportation to work, food, and medicine, and may even face homelessness.

Despite the effectiveness of rental assistance in preventing homelessness, federal affordable housing resources are falling far short of meeting these needs. The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) documents a shortage of 7 million affordable and available rental units for the nation's extremely low-income renter households.<sup>11</sup> Only one-in-four eligible households receives federal rental assistance, and the nation's limited stock of federally-assisted housing is under threat due to physical obsolescence and expiring affordability contracts.<sup>12,13</sup>

The first thing you can do to address homelessness is stop advocating for policies that make the problem worse.

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<sup>5</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Policy Basics: Federal Rental Assistance," CBPP, November 15, 2017, available at: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/policy-basics-federal-rental-assistance>

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "HUD and VA Announce Additional Support To Help Homeless Veterans Find Permanent Homes," December 11, 2018, available at: [https://www.hud.gov/press/press\\_releases\\_media\\_advisories/HUD\\_No\\_18\\_147](https://www.hud.gov/press/press_releases_media_advisories/HUD_No_18_147)

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Education, "Education for Homeless Children and Youths (EHCY) Program Profile - October 2018," p.2, available at: <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/homeless/ehcyprogramprofile.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), Out of Reach 2019, p.1, available at: [https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/orr/OOR\\_2019.pdf](https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/orr/OOR_2019.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> NLIHC, Out of Reach 2019, p. 3, available at: [https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/orr/OOR\\_2019.pdf](https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/orr/OOR_2019.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, "State of the Nation's Housing 2019," p. 31, available at: [https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Harvard\\_JCHS\\_State\\_of\\_the\\_Nations\\_Housing\\_2019.pdf](https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Harvard_JCHS_State_of_the_Nations_Housing_2019.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> NLIHC, The Gap, March 2019, available at: [https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/Gap-Report\\_2019.pdf](https://reports.nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/Gap-Report_2019.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Policy Basics: Federal Rental Assistance," CBPP, November 15, 2017, available at: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/policy-basics-federal-rental-assistance>

<sup>13</sup> Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, State of the Nation's Housing 2019, p. 34, available at: [https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Harvard\\_JCHS\\_State\\_of\\_the\\_Nations\\_Housing\\_2019.pdf](https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Harvard_JCHS_State_of_the_Nations_Housing_2019.pdf)

Your Administration has advocated a number of initiatives that would only exacerbate the homelessness and affordable housing crisis. Each of the budgets proposed by your Administration has called for deep cuts in America's safety net, including HUD programs that create and maintain affordable housing in our communities. Rather than investing in affordable housing, your FY 2020 budget eliminates or inadequately funds key HUD programs such as:

- National Housing Trust Fund
- Tenant-Based Rental Assistance
- Project-Based Rental Housing
- Homeless Assistance Grants
- Public Housing Capital Fund
- Public Housing Operating Fund
- Choice Neighborhoods Grants
- Fair Housing Initiatives Program
- Community Development Block Grants (CDBG)
- HOME Investment Partnerships
- Capacity Building
- Self-Help Homeownership Opportunity Program
- Housing for the Elderly
- Housing for Persons with Disabilities
- Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDS (HOPWA)
- Native American Housing Block Grants
- Native Hawaiian Housing Block Grants

If adopted, these proposals will set back our national efforts to address homelessness and housing affordability, leaving more people without a safe and stable place to call home.

Your Administration is also promoting policies that are likely to cause greater homelessness among vulnerable populations. For example, HUD recently announced that it intends to propose changes to the 2016 Equal Access Rule. That proposal will allow homeless shelter providers to consider an individual's sex assigned at birth, rather than their gender identity, in determining access to federally-funded shelters. If adopted, this change would weaken protections for vulnerable transgender people experiencing homelessness, and would likely reduce their access to federally-funded shelter that aligns with their gender. Similarly, your Administration has proposed a rule that would effectively evict over 25,000 families with members of mixed citizenship and immigration status from their homes. These families include 55,000 children, the majority of which are U.S. citizens.<sup>14</sup> This loss of housing is likely to increase housing instability and potential homelessness among these families. These policies must be reversed.

The second thing you can do is to support initiatives that will help prevent and end homelessness.

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<sup>14</sup> Alicia Mazzara, Demographic Data Highlight Potential Harm of New Trump Proposal to Restrict Housing Assistance, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, July 1, 2019, available at: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/demographic-data-highlight-potential-harm-of-new-trump-proposal-to-restrict-housing>

These include encouraging local policies and capacity to support the production of inclusive, affordable housing. You recently established a task force on eliminating regulatory barriers to housing creation. An examination of unnecessary barriers to the creation of affordable housing could help encourage greater housing production. However, it remains to be seen whether this task force will produce recommendations that increase access to affordable housing without undermining safety and worker protections. Fortunately, a proposal to encourage local governments to identify and remove such barriers already exists. HUD's Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule provided communities with the information and tools necessary to analyze their own housing markets and engage the public on how they would eliminate barriers to fair and affordable housing. Unfortunately, your Administration suspended this rule in 2018. Your Administration should resume implementation of this valuable tool to ensure housing equity for all Americans.

We must invest in the creation and preservation of affordable housing. This includes serious investments in federal homelessness response and affordable housing programs. We must also invest to ensure that, when economic growth comes to our communities, it does not displace existing residents. This also includes targeted tax incentives for the production and preservation of affordable housing. In January 2017, Senate Democrats advanced an Infrastructure Blueprint that included additional funding to create and preserve safe, affordable housing. Unfortunately, you have not been willing to make real investments in the nation's infrastructure thus far. Democrats continue to stand ready to work with you on a comprehensive infrastructure package that will make real investments in affordable housing and our communities.

Safe, stable housing is the foundation for successful outcomes for many of our national priorities, including improving educational achievement, supporting our veterans, fighting hunger, and improving health outcomes for children and seniors. Given the importance of housing stability to our families and our nation, it is imperative that you and your Administration use the tools and authorities you have to help address – not exacerbate – these issues.

But this is not an exhaustive list of actions we can take to address homelessness and housing instability. We must make sure federal policies support the dignity of work so that all workers are not just getting by, but getting ahead. This includes women and people of color, who continue to face disproportionate economic challenges.

America is facing a housing affordability crisis that is pushing millions of people into housing instability, eviction, and homelessness. Ending homelessness is a bipartisan issue. If you truly want to tackle this issue, I stand ready to work with you.

Sincerely,

  
Ranking Member  
Sherrod Brown