



VIRTUAL CAPITOL HILL DAY ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

MARCH 2022



NATIONAL LOW INCOME
HOUSING COALITION

CAPITOL HILL DAY OVERVIEW

DEAR ADVOCATES,

Over the past two years, millions of families have been devastated by the pandemic and economic collapse, and those with the lowest incomes and people of color have been hardest hit. Today, millions of extremely low-income renters and people experiencing homelessness who struggled to keep themselves and their families stably housed before the pandemic are even more precariously housed. Emergency rent assistance is effectively preventing evictions for many households, but long-term solutions are urgently needed.

The pandemic has underscored the link between housing and health and the urgent need to address one of the most critical issues facing extremely low-income families today: the lack of decent, accessible, and affordable housing. Now that Congress has passed COVID-19 relief funds to address the short-term impacts of the pandemic, policymakers must now turn their attention to the structural reforms and investments needed to provide longer-term housing stability. Congress must use every opportunity to advance bold housing solutions such as those included in the Build Back Better Act that will move our nation towards universal, stable, and affordable homes for everyone

The National Low Income Housing Coalition invites advocates across the nation to participate in our Virtual Advocacy Day on Thursday, March 24 to urge Congress to advance anti-racist policies and achieve the large-scale, sustained investments and reforms necessary to ensure that renters with the lowest incomes have an affordable place to call home.

Together, we will urge Congress to ensure rental assistance is universally available to all renters in need, to expand and preserve the supply of homes affordable and available to the lowest-income renters, to create permanent emergency resources to help renters in crisis, and to strengthen and enforce renter protections to disrupt the power imbalance that puts renters at risk of housing instability.

This toolkit includes the key resources you will need to participate. There are policy factsheets on NLIHC's federal budget priorities, the HoUSed campaign's top housing priorities in the Build Back Better Act, and long-term housing solutions. You will also find tips to conduct effective meetings, and additional resources to help you have successful virtual visits with your members of Congress.

Do not feel overwhelmed! No one is expecting you to memorize every talking point and every policy priority. Have these documents with you as you go through your meetings. They can be a helpful guide. In terms of NLIHC priorities, reading just one more page of this guide should help you to feel ready.

Thanks for your advocacy! It makes a HUGE impact.

TOP PRIORITIES FOR ADVOCACY DAY

Below are NLIHC's top priority asks, and legislation we are tracking to urge Congress to advance anti-racist policies and achieve the large-scale, sustained investments and reforms necessary to ensure that renters with the lowest incomes have an affordable place to call home.

You can read more about NLIHC's policy priorities at our [Legislative Action Center](#).

URGENT ACTION NEEDED

Build Back Better Act

In November 2021, the House of Representatives voted to approve the Build Back Better Act. However, the bill was stalled in the Senate after Senator Manchin (D-WV) announced he would not support the bill as written. The bill as it currently stands includes robust funding for the HoUSed campaign's [top priorities](#) including \$25 billion to expand rental assistance, \$65 billion to preserve public housing, the \$15 billion to build homes affordable to those with the greatest needs through the national Housing Trust Fund. **Urge your members of Congress to ensure that targeted investments in rental assistance, public housing, and the Housing Trust Fund remain in any budget reconciliation bill that advances.**

FY23 Appropriations

The Fiscal Year 2023 federal budget provides the opportunity for lawmakers to significantly increase affordable housing resources targeted to households with the lowest incomes. Please urge your members of Congress to provide HUD and USDA affordable housing programs with the highest possible funding in FY23, including:

(1) an expansion of housing vouchers to an additional 200,000 households, (2) significant funding to preserve and operate public housing, (3) robust resources to address homelessness through Homeless Assistance Grants, (4) additional funding for the competitive tribal housing program targeted to tribes with the greatest needs, and (5) at least \$100 million for legal assistance to prevent evictions, among other key priorities. See NLIHC's updated budget chart [here](#).

ADDITIONAL PRIORITIES

Bridge the Gap Between Incomes and Rents

Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act ([S.1991](#)) - **Ask your senators to cosponsor this bill** from Senators Van Hollen (D-MD) and Young (R-IN), which would provide 500,000 new housing vouchers and counseling services to help families with children move to areas of opportunity. The bill is also supported by the [Opportunity Starts at Home campaign](#). To learn more, see the [factsheet](#) on the Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act.

Stabilize Families During Crisis to Prevent Evictions

Eviction Crisis Act ([S.2182](#)) - **Ask your members of Congress to cosponsor this bill** from Senators Bennet (D-CO), Portman (R-OH), Brown (D-OH), and Young (R-IN), and Representative Torres (D-

NY), who will soon introduce in the House. The bill establishes a permanent Emergency Rental Assistance program, funded at \$3 billion annually, to help families facing a financial shock avoid eviction. The bill is supported by the [Opportunity Starts at Home campaign](#). To learn more, see OSAH's [factsheet](#) on the Eviction Crisis Act.

Strengthen Renter Empowerment

Our Homes, Our Votes Act ([H.R. 2215](#)) - **Ask your representatives to cosponsor this bill** from Reps. Garcia (D-IL) and Scanlon (D-PA). The bill facilitates voter registration for residents of federally subsidized housing by allowing them to register to vote as they sign their lease, and by adding federally subsidized housing to the national Motor Voter law.

Additional Legislation

There are many more pieces of legislation that NLIHC is supporting and advancing through the HoUSed campaign. These are also important solutions, and you might want to include some of them in your meetings. A full list of proposed bills supported by the HoUSed campaign can be found here: https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/housed_Key-Legislation.pdf

HELPFUL RESOURCES

As you prepare for your Capitol Hill Day meetings, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Please let a member of the NLIHC field team know about any meetings you have scheduled, if you need help scheduling any meetings, and/or you want an NLIHC staff member to attend your meetings with you. You can find who your housing advocacy organizer is [here](#). Also, please reach out if you have any questions related to the talking points, fact sheets, or data resources. You can email NLIHC Senior Vice President of Public Policy Sarah Saadian at ssaadian@nlihc.org or Field Director Joey Lindstrom at jlindstrom@nlihc.org.

Data Resources for Meetings

- [Housing Needs by State](#): State profiles include the shortage of rental homes affordable and available in the state for the lowest-income households, the number of affordable and available homes per 100 renter households at different income levels in the state, housing cost burdens by income group, and the demographic make-up of extremely low-income renter households. This is a great collection of various data sets, and a compelling factsheet to present to members of Congress and their staff.
- [Congressional District Housing Profiles](#): Each profile pulls from a variety of sources and includes several dimensions of housing affordability for renter households in each district, the surrounding area, and the state. These data sheets are especially helpful to in meetings with representatives who might not believe statewide data applies to their districts. The top portions of these data sheets prominently include data that only applies to the representative's district and constituents.
- [State Housing Preservation Profiles](#): The Preservation Profiles use data from the National Housing Preservation Database to provide an overview of the affordable housing inventory at the state level. Each profile features a graph depicting the number of affordable homes with subsidies set to expire in the near future. You can use this data sheet to argue for expanding investments to preserve these homes before so many developments potentially convert to market rents.
- [Out of Reach 2021 State Profiles](#): The Out of Reach state profiles show the significant gap between renters' wages and the cost of rental housing in each state. The profile for each state breaks down the Housing Wage data on a county-by-county level.
- [The Gap 2021 State Profiles](#): This data shows the gap between the number of renter households and rental units that are affordable and available to them. It also breaks down the number of households who are cost burdened by income groups. Much of this data is available on the State Housing Profiles.

NLIHC Staff are Available on Capitol Hill Day

Throughout the day on March 24, NLIHC staff will be available in a Zoom room to answer any questions you have as you're preparing for meetings. You can go into breakout rooms with a staff person to role play a meeting. We will also appreciate it if you can join us to report back on how your meetings went. Join the Capitol Hill Day staff room using this [link](#).

Additionally, as you are preparing for your Capitol Hill Day meetings, NLIHC's field team will be available for two sets of office hours where you can drop in, ask questions, or do a practice meeting in a private Zoom breakout room. Drop in whenever works for you. The two sets of office hours are:

1. Friday, March 18 from 3:00pm to 5:00pm eastern time. Join the office hours at this [link](#).
2. Monday, March 21 from 11:00am to 1:00pm eastern time. Join the office hours at this [link](#).

IMPORTANT TALKING POINTS

There are additional talking points sheets you might find helpful, but we elected not to include in this resource to keep the toolkit at a reasonable length. If you feel these will be at all helpful in your meetings, we encourage you to consider reviewing the following helpful talking points sheets.

- How affordable housing investments [reduce inflation](#)
- [Housing priorities](#) from the Build Back Better Act that MUST be included in a final spending package:
- Why housing investments are [foundational to other investments](#) in Build Back Better, including racial equity, climate change, healthcare, and the care economy.
- [FY2023 budget chart](#) with program-by-program funding levels breakdown
- Why [Housing First](#) is a proven solution to homelessness
- Why [housing is healthcare](#)
- How [housing advances racial justice](#)
- How [housing boosts education outcomes](#)

SOCIAL MEDIA

Post on social media (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram). Use the hashtags #HoUSed and #Housing4UsAll. It is helpful if you tag @NLIHC in your posts and follow us for ideas on what to repost on your social media channels.

Share your Capitol Hill meetings on your social media!

- Take screenshots of your meetings or photos for in-person meetings and tweet or post those images with a thank you message to the office you met with.
- Mention the issues you discussed in your meeting so that the members of Congress and their staff know that you have alerted your network to the conversation and what next steps you are hoping for.

Remember: only one in four households who qualify for housing assistance, receives it

Solution: Investment in proven affordable housing solutions - rental assistance, public housing, and the national Housing Trust Fund

SOCIAL MEDIA SUGGESTIONS:

Post and re-post comments on HoUSed campaign news throughout all your social media networks. Some sample language follows below.

- Just met with [Representative]'s office to discuss how the Housing Trust Fund is making a major impact in [our state]. We need the \$15 billion proposed in #BuildBackBetterAct to be included in any final budget reconciliation package to ensure we have the resources to build, preserve, and fix affordable housing.

- Just spoke with [Representative]’s office about how the expansion of rental assistance to every eligible person is critical in ensuring renters can find and keep a roof over their heads. This means those experiencing or at risk of homelessness and DV survivors will be able to find safe and stable housing. #HoUSed #Housing4All
- Just met with [Representative]’s office to advocate for the preservation of public housing. Our nation loses thousands of public housing units to decay, leaving a large gap of affordable and accessible housing for people with the lowest incomes. We need the \$65 billion investment proposed in BBB to address the needs of public housing. #HoUSed #Housing4All
- People w/ the lowest incomes deserve the opportunity to climb the income ladder and achieve financial stability. \$\$ for rental assistance, public housing, & the Housing Trust Fund will reduce poverty and keep low-income renters #HoUSed. <https://bit.ly/3khH7ZR>
- [Your Senator’s Name], #DYK renters who pay more than half of their limited incomes on rent are 23% more likely to face food insecurity. #BuildBackBetter serves as the foundation for any strategy to improve health, advance racial equity, address climate & more. <https://bit.ly/32YVbRX>
- Congress must advance anti-racist policies and provide the large-scale, sustained investments and reforms needed to ensure renters with the lowest incomes have an affordable place to call home. <https://nlihc.org/housed>

VIRTUAL CAPITOL HILL MEETING TIPS

BEFORE THE MEETING

Scheduling the meeting:

- Request a meeting about one to two weeks in advance.
- Schedule a meeting by phone or email using the Meeting Request Template that follows this tip sheet.
 - By phone: Call the office and ask for the scheduler. Some offices will ask you to fill out a form, but most of the time a phone call will suffice. During the pandemic, emails might be preferable to phone contact because many congressional staffers are working from home.
 - By email: Send a request to the scheduler.
 - [Contact your NLIHC organizer](#) for help getting scheduler contact info.
- When you make the request, ask to meet with the member of Congress or a housing staffer.
 - Oftentimes, meeting with staff members is just as good as or even better than meeting with the senator or representative. The member of Congress relies on their staff for key information as they make decisions. It's also true that when you meet with staff, they are more likely to have more time to explore the various issues you are discussing and to ask good follow up questions that provide for more dialogue.
- Let the office know what issue you will be discussing, the number of people attending the meeting, whether constituents will be in attendance, and your available times.
- After requesting the meeting, follow up to ensure your request was received.
- Once the meeting is scheduled, confirm what virtual platform will be used (i.e. a conference call, Zoom, Google Meet, etc.).
 - [Contact your NLIHC organizer](#) for help with setting up a virtual platform.
- 24 hours before your meeting, be sure to confirm the meeting with the scheduler or aide. In this email include:
 - The virtual meeting login information or phone number if you are using your own meeting room or conference line;
 - Links to materials you want to share with the office and agenda (optional);
 - The meeting organizer's phone number; and
 - "Cc" everyone planning to attend the meeting.

BEFORE THE MEETING

Preparing for the meeting:

- If you are conducting a meeting with a group of advocates, you may want to designate roles such as a facilitator, a tech manager, a note-taker, etc. Discuss in advance who in your group will open, close, and deliver specific asks.
- Outline an agenda with tasks for each person.
- Review the NLIHC Talking Points.
- Plan to tell stories! Stories stick in lawmakers' memories better than data and are emotionally

compelling. See the NLIHC Storytelling Guide for more details.

- Practice, practice, practice! Write out your part and rehearse.
- Establish cues for when each person should speak (this can be part of the facilitator's role).
- Practice and test technology.
- Gather materials you want to share with the office. See pages 5 and 6 of this toolkit.
- Do research on the person you are meeting with—for example, if you can say, "It's great to be meeting with you today. I was happy to see that the congresswoman received an award on a particular issue" - it shows that you're interested in what they are doing, and not only looking for them to be interested in your issues. Furthermore, knowing your legislator's past votes on housing policy will help you craft a more effective argument.

MEETING TIME!

Conducting the meeting:

- Dress professionally and avoid background clutter (if meeting on video) and background noise (for both phone and video meetings).
- Be punctual—login or call in 10 minutes before the start time.
- Open your meeting with introductions.
 - Make sure to mention your connection to the state or congressional district represented by the office you're meeting with—whether you are a constituent and voter or your organization serves their constituents.
- Stick to your agenda and speaking times.
- When switching speakers, pause to allow the next speaker to unmute.
- Actively listen and ask questions.
- If you don't know the answer to a question you receive, simply saying "I don't know" and "I will follow up with an answer to that question" is perfectly acceptable.
- Take detailed notes, especially of any feedback you receive or follow-up information you promise.
- Your elected official may not have much knowledge of affordable housing challenges in your community. Use this as an opportunity to educate them.
 - Provide the elected official or legislative staff with the NLIHC materials and refer to those materials during your meeting. You can provide these materials via email ahead of time.
 - You should provide numbers and stories about the issues you are talking about as often as possible. Share your personal story of why affordable housing matters to you.
- Connect your work to the elected official's interests as much as possible. This is another reason to do your research on them before your meeting. If you can connect your work on affordable housing to the elected official's interest in, for example, better outcomes for children, this will often create a key connection that will lead to a stronger relationship as you move forward.
- Always make a specific ask in your meeting using a question with a yes or no answer, such as, "Will you support \$150 billion in essential housing solutions in a final budget reconciliation bill?" Most often, they will say they need to think about it. This is fully acceptable. You can use that as an opportunity to follow up later.
- Confirm with whom you should follow up.
- Ask the member of Congress or staff member if you can take a snapshot of the screen or a selfie with

the screen to share later!

- Thank the elected official or legislative staff for their time and consideration.

AFTER THE MEETING

- Remember: No advocacy meeting is the final conversation with a member of Congress. The best advocacy focuses on sustained relationship building, rather than on single conversations.
- Tweet your members of Congress to thank them for the meeting with them or their staff, including a photo if you have one. This strengthens your relationship because you'll have given public gratitude for their availability. Doing so publicly also reminds them that they are accountable to follow up on the commitments they made to you, or to get more information on questions they said they wanted answers to. Remember to:
 - Mention (@) your members of Congress and @NLIHC.
 - Include the hashtag #HoUSed and #Housing4UsAll.
- Share what you learned by completing the [Lobby Visit Report Form](#) for your meeting. NLIHC can take the information you provide and follow up with specific action items, clarify any questions the members of Congress or staff might have, and get them to engage on specific legislation. We are in a better position when we know the outcomes of your meetings.
- Share what you learn during your meeting with your network - including your members, your board, and your volunteers.
- Stay in touch by sending a follow up email or thank you card to everyone you met with. You can also follow up to check in about the status of the request you made during your meeting.

**Some language adapted from our partners at RESULTS*

MEETING REQUEST TEMPLATE

Below is an email template you can use to request meetings with your members of Congress. Please personalize highlighted portions before sending. Also, please remove information that may not be pertinent to your meeting. In some cases, House or Senate offices might have online forms for you to fill out, but most often you will be fine to just send an email to the office's scheduler. To find who the schedulers are for sending a meeting request email, contact your NLIHC advocacy organizer, which you can find at https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/NLIHC_Field-Team-Map.pdf.

NOTE: This template inspired by an example from our partners at RESULTS.

Email subject line: Request for meeting

Dear [scheduler name]:

My name is [your name] and I work in Representative/Senator _____ [name of member of Congress]'s district at _____ [your organization] OR I am a constituent of Representative/Senator _____ [member of Congress's name] and I live in [insert name of community/city].

[Insert details about your organization if applicable: In a couple of sentences, who are you and what is your mission?] I am requesting the opportunity to meet with the Representative/Senator as his/her schedule permits. We would like to conduct the meeting virtually, if possible, rather than in person. Ideally, we would like to meet on _____ [insert date] and there will be _____ [insert number of people] of us attending the meeting.

The recent pandemic has brought into sharp focus how deep the problem of housing insecurity is throughout the U.S. We know the Senator/Representative is sensitive to the challenges of people struggling to find and maintain safe, decent, accessible, and affordable housing. We would like to speak with him/her about practical solutions to housing poverty and homelessness. These solutions address both immediate and long-term needs.

I/We will also be willing to meet with staff if the Senator/Representative is not available. Thank you for considering this meeting request. I/We look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

[Insert your name]

[Insert your organization, if applicable]

STORYTELLING TIPS AND TRICKS

WHY STORYTELLING?

Storytelling can add emotional weight to your meeting and help form connections with lawmakers by pointing out shared values. It can also help lawmakers see how their policy decisions impact real people.

- Request a meeting about one to two weeks in advance.
- You can schedule a meeting by phone or email using the Meeting Request Template.

ELEMENTS OF AN EFFECTIVE STORY

- Describe your direct experience about the topic at hand, such as your time working at an agency that provides shelter to others, or what an affordable home means to you.
- Share your values that are informed by these experiences.
- Describe what needs to happen next—actionable steps that relate to your story.

Tips and Reminders:

- The story you tell must be true, and it must relate to the topic at hand.
- Explain the impact of your experience.
- Keep it simple, don't overcomplicate it.
- Timing: Try to tell the story in 3-5 minutes.
- Don't explain a culture or community that is not your own. If you are telling someone else's story, make sure you have permission to share it.

PROMPTS FOR PEOPLE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCES:

- Share how your life has changed as a result of the assistance you received.
- Describe things you have accomplished and how housing has played a role in the challenges you've faced.
- How did you get to where you are today? If you've received housing assistance, how has it impacted your life?
- Describe your home and your living conditions.
- What makes you proud to live in the place you call home?
- What could be improved about your home?
- How would your community improve with more housing assistance available for households who are struggling?
- Describe your hopes for the future and how your home is a part of this.

PROMPTS FOR HOUSING SERVICE PROVIDERS:

- Describe the community and the clients you serve.
- How has access to affordable housing, or a lack of access to affordable housing, impacted your community?

- What makes you proud of your organization's mission and the work you accomplish?
- How would more housing assistance improve your community?
- How have federal housing assistance and production programs enhanced your work?

OTHER POSSIBLE PROMPTS:

- Why do you care about housing justice?
- Why did you join the organization you are representing?

**Some of this language is adapted from the RESULTS advocacy week materials.*