



# Talking Points & Messaging Guide

## STATE LEGISLATIVE PRIORITY TALKING POINTS

### 1. Capital Budget Investments in Affordable Homes (Housing Trust Fund)

- Everyone should have the opportunity to live in a safe, healthy, affordable home.
- The capital budget is Washington’s best and primary tool for addressing the drastic shortage of affordable housing in our state.
- We recommend leading with a “capital budget investment” frame rather than “Housing Trust Fund.”
- **Invest at least \$100 million of the capital budget to build & preserve safe, healthy, affordable homes.**

### 2. Housing & Essential Needs (HEN) / Aged, Blind & Disabled (ABD) and SSI Facilitation

- HEN ensures that people with temporary mental or physical disabilities can meet their basic needs and access stable housing when facing extreme economic hardship.
- ABD helps extremely low-income adults with permanent mental or physical disabilities by providing \$197 per month while they’re applying for federal Supplemental Security Income.
- These programs are springboards that help real people keep their home so they can more quickly bounce back, to achieve stability, to survive, recover, and thrive.
- **Protect HEN, ABD, and SSI Facilitation Services by maintaining their current funding levels.**

### 3. Medicaid Supportive Housing Services Benefit

- Most people experiencing homelessness are now eligible for Medicaid because of the Affordable Care Act.
- A Medicaid Supportive Housing Services Benefit would allow some housing providers to bill Medicaid for supportive services provided to eligible residents.
- This would help people with severe & chronic health conditions stay off the streets & in healthy homes.
- This is also a success for taxpayers: instead of frequently utilizing expensive emergency services living on the streets, eligible residents can access lower-cost regular services in their home.
- **The state needs to take action to request this amendment to the state’s Medicaid plan and make a modest investment of state Medicaid dollars.**

### 4. Fair Tenant Screening Act

- In a home search, renters usually pay for a tenant screening report as part of the application process.
- Although the information in each report is virtually identical, tenants have to pay for the brand new report to accompany every application submitted.
- This adds a significant cost that’s an unnecessary hardship for families on limited incomes and a hurdle that can increase the amount of time people and families spend homeless.
- This proposal would ensure that if an applicant can supply a landlord with a secure, current, and comprehensive tenant screening report, the landlord would not be able to charge the tenant for a new report.
- **Pass the Fair Tenant Screening Act to address the high costs of unnecessary duplicate tenant screening reports, and give people more opportunities to afford a place to call home.**

### 5. Truth in Evictions Reporting Act

- Tenant screening companies report all eviction lawsuits as equal, even lawsuits that have been settled to the landlord’s satisfaction or when the tenant has won in court.
- Eviction court has many different outcomes: a tenant could have been wrongfully named or could have been a victim of their landlord’s foreclosure, or could have won. But tenant reports list all eviction lawsuits as equal. No matter the outcome, tenants have an “eviction mark” on their record.
- **Pass the Truth in Evictions Reporting Act, ensuring that evictions are reported only when a tenant was proven guilty.**

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## 6. Source of Income Discrimination Protections

- In many communities in Washington, it's still legal for landlords to deny renting to Housing Choice (Section 8) voucher holders, seniors relying on social security income, veterans using housing subsidies, and people with disabilities who receive other legal sources of income.
- This discrimination has a significant impact on communities who disproportionately need to rely on housing subsidies to make ends meet: households of color, seniors, people with disabilities, veterans, and single-parent headed households with young children.
- **Pass legislation to prevent landlords from categorically denying housing to all tenants relying on a lawful housing subsidy or lawful income supports to help pay the rent.**

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### Washington State Housing and Homelessness Facts

- According to the Department of Commerce Washington State Housing Needs Assessment, **more than 390,000 households** in the state spend more than 50% of their income on housing per year.
- According to the same Department of Commerce report, **only 29 of every 100 rental units** are affordable for low-income Washington households.
- Commerce's 2014 Point in Time Count found **6,289 people unsheltered and on the streets** across the state, a 25 percent increase from the previous year.
- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction counted **32,494 homeless students** in 13-14 school year.

### Use a Value, Problem, and Solution Frame

Using the Housing Trust Fund as an example, this guide will walk you through how to build a powerful advocacy message for any issue.

**Value:** The value explains your vision for the community, state, and society. It should be the purpose and goal that underpins why we need the proposed solution.

**Example:** "Children deserve a chance to succeed in school and in life, which all begins with their families being able to afford a decent place to live."

**Problem:** This is a clear statement of the problem, described in a way that everyone can relate to.

**Example:** "In the 2013-2014 school year, more than 32,000 students were counted as experiencing homelessness in Washington State. No child should have to do their homework by the dome light of their family's car."

**Solution:** Every message should be tied to the solution we are proposing, as well as the values and outcomes it would accomplish.

**Example:** "A \$100 million capital budget investment to create and preserve quality, affordable homes will serve as a stable foundation for students to build success and ensure every child in Washington can reach their full potential."

### Effective Homeless and Housing Messaging

The Washington Low Income Housing Alliance used focus groups and a statewide survey to identify several value messages that resonate with people in our state. By framing affordable housing issues in terms of closely held values, these messages can build support for our work.

- Everyone should have the opportunity to live in a safe, healthy, affordable home.
- It should be possible for working people to afford a home and still have enough left over for the basics like groceries, transportation, and childcare.
- Children deserve a chance to succeed in school and in life, which all begins with their families being able to afford a decent place to live.
- It's better for society, the environment, and families if people can afford to live close to where they work.