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ADVOCATES GUIDE
TO ATTENDING

TOWN HALLS

*Taking Action for
Affordable Homes and
an End to Homelessness*

Local town hall meetings and telephone town halls are a powerful way to participate in democracy. Your state lawmakers, who have spent the past few months working in Olympia, will be back home in your district to hear from *you* about which issues should be their priority. This is your opportunity to elevate affordable homes, ending homelessness, and other issues you care about. **Ready to show up? Here's what to do.**

1 Prepare

- ☐ Find out when and where a town hall meeting is happening in your district.
- ☐ Invite friends, neighbors, or colleagues to join you.
- ☐ Print this guide or save it to your phone for sample questions and quick facts.
- ☐ Bring a pen so you can write down how your lawmakers respond to your questions.

2 Ask questions and share your story

Your lawmakers may or may not share your perspective on housing and homelessness issues. It's helpful to set a framework for your question by stating the problem, introducing a specific program or policy solution, and asking your lawmakers if they support the solution. If you have been personally impacted by housing instability and you're comfortable sharing your story, this can be a powerful way to illustrate the problem.

Framework for a powerful question

1. State the problem - if time allows, you can share your story
2. Introduce a specific solution
3. Ask for your lawmakers' support



WASHINGTON LOW INCOME
Housing Alliance

Sample questions

We are facing rising housing costs and growing homelessness in our communities. The Housing Trust Fund is our state's most important resource for building affordable homes. **Do you support a strong investment of \$200 million for the Housing Trust Fund?**

A \$200 million appropriation for the Housing Trust Fund would create 5,700 affordable homes in Washington state.

Homelessness is a serious problem in our community and across the state. We should be investing more in services that prevent and end homelessness, but more than 60% of these state funds are set to expire. **Will you vote yes on Substitute House Bill 1570 to protect homelessness funding for the future and allow local communities the option to increase the fee?**

If these funds expire as scheduled in 2019, at least 37,000 people will be plunged into homelessness in our state each budget cycle. We must act this year before services are reduced in anticipation of the cuts. SHB 1570 is sponsored by Rep. Macri.

Everyone should have equal opportunity to apply for rental housing, yet state law allows landlords to deny applications from tenants solely based on their source of income. This discrimination especially impacts people of color, seniors, people with disabilities, single parents, and veterans. **Would you vote yes on a bill to ban source of income discrimination?**

HB 1633 and SB 5407 would have made it illegal to deny housing solely because a person uses a housing voucher or other assistance to pay the rent. Unfortunately, the bills did not get voted on in time to advance this legislative session.

People shouldn't become homeless because they have a disability that prevents them from working. They should have access to rental support such as Housing and Essential Needs or cash assistance from the Aged, Blind and Disabled program. **Will you work to ensure that the state budget fully protects these programs and vote no on a budget that does not?**

These programs serve young adults who have aged out of foster care as well as extremely low income people. Billions of dollars have been cut from safety net programs since the great recession.

3 Follow up

If a lawmaker needs more information about an issue you raised, share one of the Housing Alliance's issue fact sheets or contact Michele Thomas at michele@wliha.org for help compiling more information. Please also let us know how lawmakers responded to your questions! Type up some notes and email them to michele@wliha.org. It'll make her day. 🌻

Build and Preserve Safe, Healthy, Affordable Homes



INVEST \$200 MILLION IN THE HOUSING TRUST FUND

Everyone should have the opportunity to live in a safe, healthy, affordable home. Since 1986, the Housing Trust Fund has created 47,000 homes across Washington. At any given time, approximately 78,000 of Washington's most vulnerable residents live in Housing Trust Fund homes.

The Housing Trust Fund is funded through the Capital Budget and investments are allocated to non-profits and public housing authorities on a competitive basis. Homes built by the Housing Trust Fund remain affordable for at least 40 years, and provide homes for families, seniors, veterans, people with disabilities, farmworkers, and more.

Across Washington, rents are rising rapidly. A full time worker must earn \$18.39 per hour to afford the average cost of a modest one-bedroom rental home. Homes created by the Housing Trust Fund help ease this disparity by

increasing the number of homes available to lower wage workers, and are created across the state in rural, urban, suburban, and small town communities.

Children need a stable home to take advantage of educational opportunities, but in the 2014-2015 school year, 35,511 students in Washington were identified as homeless. Without a home children struggle more in school, which is why the graduation rate for homeless students is just 52%. Housing instability causes families to relocate frequently, and every time a child changes schools they lose four to six months of educational progress. The Housing Trust Fund creates homes that provide the foundation a child needs to thrive.

A home is the foundation for health, education, and well-being. The Housing Trust Fund is Washington's most important investment in affordable homes.



DID YOU KNOW?

- \$200 million in the Housing Trust fund will help create more than 5,700 newly affordable homes
- Every dollar invested in the Housing Trust Fund leverages nearly six additional dollars from other public and private sources
- Over half of the households served include at least one person with special needs
- Two thirds of Housing Trust Fund households are considered extremely low income, earning approximately \$22,000 per year for a family of four
- Approximately 10% of Housing Trust Fund homes have helped low-income households become first time home owners
- Creating homes also creates jobs and generates income in local communities. \$200 million would fuel 9,016 local jobs and generate over \$655 million in local income

Track our advocacy on social media using the hashtag #WAhomes

Protect Services That Prevent and End Homelessness

HB 1570

Washington Housing Opportunities Act



ELIMINATE THE SUNSET ON DOCUMENT RECORDING FEES, INCREASE THE FEE, AND ELIMINATE THE 45% MANDATE

Everyone should have the opportunity to live in a safe, healthy, affordable home, but during the 2016 point in time count 20,844 people were found experiencing homelessness. While that number has increased statewide over the last two years, fewer people are actually experiencing homelessness than otherwise would, thanks to a critical state resource - the Document Recording Fees.

A modest fee paid to file real estate related documents provides Washington's most important source of funding to combat homelessness. The fees fund domestic violence shelters, youth shelters, outreach services, short- and long-term rental assistance, move-in assistance, permanent supportive housing services, and more.

The fees are paid on real estate transactions such as home purchases. The amount has been adjusted over time, but hasn't kept pace with rising rents and inflation. Because of the

sunset in current law, in 2019 more than 60% of Washington's homelessness funding will vanish.

The dramatic cliff in funding for community resources will increase homelessness for people with mental and physical disabilities, veterans, families, homeless youth and young adults, and more.

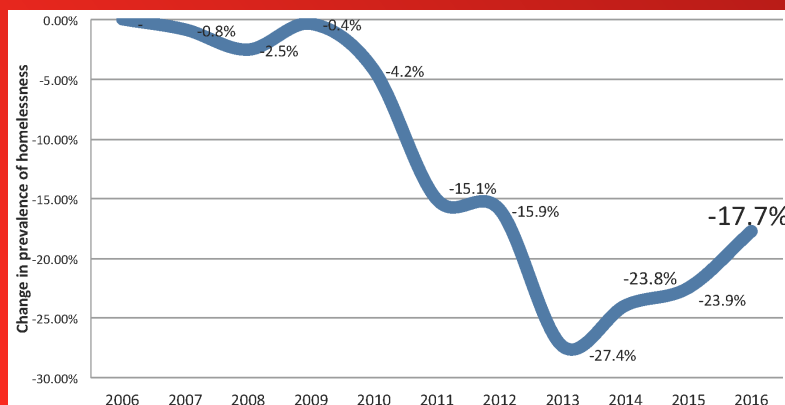
Additionally, 45% of fees collected are mandated to be used for vouchers in the for-profit market. But discrimination by landlords who refuse to accept vouchers greatly limits the opportunity for people to use their vouchers, and money meant to end homelessness is not as effective as it could be.

The state legislature should eliminate the sunset on these fees, increase the fee to keep pace with rising rents, and eliminate the 45% mandate so that all homelessness dollars can be used in the most efficient way possible and be tailored to local needs.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Document Recording Fees are Washington's most important resource for combatting homelessness
- Services funded with these fees are working. Predictions based on rent, unemployment, and population could have caused the January 2016 Point in Time count to be almost 50% higher than it was
- A \$50 increase, if coupled with new Housing Trust Fund investments, would enable Washington to end family homelessness, reduce chronic homelessness by 50%, and ensure that no youth exits a public institution into homelessness
- If the fees sunset, more than 34,000 additional people are likely to experience homelessness in the first two years
- There is a logical connection between real estate activity, housing prices, and rent levels. For every \$100 increase in rent, homelessness increases by between 15 and 39%. A modest fee on the filing of real estate related documents helps to off-set that impact

Homelessness has decreased since 2005, when the state first enacted these fees.



Track our advocacy on social media using the hashtag #WAhomes

Ban Discrimination Based on a Renter's Source of Income

SB 5407/HB 1633



ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO HOUSING FOR RENTERS RELYING ON HOUSING SUBSIDIES OR INCOME ASSISTANCE TO HELP PAY THE RENT

No one should be denied a home just because they use a housing voucher, social security, child support, or some other form of legal income support to help pay the rent. But in most places in Washington, landlords can categorically deny applications from tenants simply for using these methods of payment.

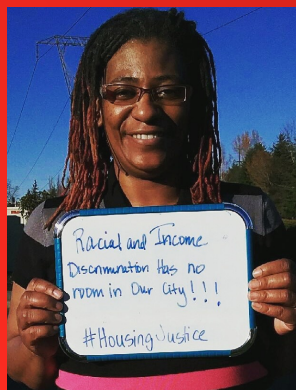
The private market must be part of the solution to ending homelessness, but when landlords refuse to rent to tenants who use subsidies, they contribute to the crisis. State law requires that 45% of the Home Security Fund - Washington's primary homelessness resource - be spent for vouchers in the for-profit rental market. Yet, tenants who try to use their vouchers are often not even given a chance to have their applications considered. This is a

significant mismatch in state priorities. Washington must ban discrimination in order to fully utilize the private market as a partner in ending homelessness.

Either intentionally or unintentionally, source of income discrimination can be a legal loophole for racial discrimination or discrimination against members of other protected classes, including families with children and people with disabilities. Refusing to accept vouchers limits options for families, and reduces access to thriving neighborhoods with jobs, transit, good schools, and other services.

Protection from discrimination is crucial to maximizing a family's ability to secure a safe and healthy home.

Protection From Discrimination Matters



Just after the beginning of this school year, dozens of families in Renton received notices that they had to move because their landlords would no longer be accepting Housing Choice Vouchers.

The tenants organized, spoke to the media, and took the fight to the Renton City Council. The apartment owners changed course, allowing the families to stay. And, Renton City Council enacted an emergency ordinance to protect tenants who pay rent with Housing Choice Vouchers. However, that measure expires in June.

DID YOU KNOW?

- Source of Income Discrimination disproportionately impacts people of color, veterans, seniors, families with children, and people with disabilities, increasing their risk of homelessness
- Expanding choice allows tenants to live in high opportunity neighborhoods with good jobs, schools, and transit
- Source of Income Discrimination reduces the effectiveness of state and federal housing subsidies
- These communities in Washington already provide some protection against this kind of discrimination:

Seattle - Bellevue
Redmond - Kirkland
Renton - Olympia
Tumwater - Vancouver
Unincorporated King County

Track our advocacy on social media using the hashtag #WAhomes

Protect Washington's Lifeline for Disabled and Elderly Adults



FULLY FUND LIFE-SAVING SERVICES THAT PREVENT HOMELESSNESS

Services that allow people to weather a short or long-term disability can mean the difference between a living in a safe and healthy home, or homelessness.

The state's **Housing and Essential Needs** (HEN) program ensures that extremely low-income people diagnosed with significant, temporary mental illnesses or physical disabilities can meet their basic needs while unable to work. The program provides rent and utility assistance, as well as access to health and hygiene items.

The **Aged, Blind, and Disabled** (ABD) program helps extremely low-income adults with permanent mental health illnesses or physical disabilities by providing modest cash assistance of up to \$197 per month while they apply to the federal

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. When people transition to SSI, the federal government reimburses the state for the full cost of the ABD cash grant. ABD also provides support to low-income elderly and disabled documented immigrants who are not yet eligible for federal medical and income support benefits.

Medical Care Services provide health care coverage for elderly or disabled immigrants who have legally verified immigration status.

SSI Facilitation Services assists disabled individuals through the lengthy and complicated process of applying for SSI benefits. This process can take several years, but results in \$733 per month for recipients, allowing them to meet their most basic needs.

"The Housing and Essential Needs program saved my life."

For years I cycled in and out of homelessness, until finally I was connected with the HEN program. My caseworkers with HEN found me a home, gave me rental assistance, helped with transportation, and hygiene articles. For the first time in my adult life I had the stability, the dignity, and the security of my own place to live. It allowed me to focus on my health, my employment, my education, and to ultimately get my life going in a direction I am proud of.

I am now completing a degree, serve on non-profit boards, and work to help others like me. If it weren't for the HEN program, I don't know if I'd be alive



DID YOU KNOW?

- HEN prevents homelessness by providing assistance for people unable to work because of temporary mental illness or disability
- ABD provides extremely low-income adults diagnosed with a permanent disability with cash assistance of \$197 per month while they apply for federal benefits
- Medical Care Services provides temporary health care coverage for elderly or disabled immigrants who are living on very low incomes
- SSI Facilitation Services assists disabled individuals through the process of applying for SSI benefits, which can be a lengthy and complicated process
- SSI Facilitation Services are a win-win: people with disabilities gain access to greater stability, and the state receives a federal reimbursement for the interim Aged, Blind, and Disabled cash support

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