

Op-Ed: Governor's Housing Budget

What would you do if you had to choose between paying the rent and buying medicine for your children? This kind of painful circumstance is faced by 250,000 Washington families every single day. Hardworking people should be able to afford a home and still have enough money for groceries and other basic necessities, but in our hot housing market, it's becoming harder and harder for people in Washington State to make their lives work.

The consequences are all around us. Our highways are clogged with commuters who cannot afford to live near their jobs. Our emergency rooms are filled with people who must make impossible choices between housing and health. Our schools struggle to serve students whose education is disrupted every time their families move in search of an affordable home.

On December 17, Governor Gregoire and state legislative leaders announced an historic investment in affordable housing. This \$57.5 million package builds momentum for ending homelessness, develops affordable housing, and fights the foreclosure crisis.

The Governor's new housing budget invests in proven programs including the Washington Families Fund, the Housing Trust Fund, and education and counseling for homebuyers.

A public-private partnership, the Washington Families Fund brings housing and services to homeless families to help them stabilize. Thanks to the work of Families Fund organizations like the International District Housing Alliance, 95% of children in the program attended school regularly, and the number of parents with jobs nearly doubled.

Washington State's Housing Trust Fund leverages nearly \$5 for every public dollar spent to build or rehabilitate affordable housing across the state. In King County, the Trust Fund has allowed nonprofits like Compass Center create quality new homes for veterans in need.

Finally, homebuyer education, like that provided by Seattle's HomeSight, is a proven way to help lower-income homebuyers keep their homes. According to a New York *Times* analysis, the counseling provided by organizations like HomeSight before and after low-income homebuyers receive their home loan is one of the main reasons these buyers are able to stay in their homes and avoid foreclosure.

While we applaud the Governor's incredible investment, we are well aware that this is only a start. In King County alone, there are still 8,000 people who are homeless on any given night. While the Housing Trust Fund has produced 32,000 units of housing, this leaves 218,000 families in need. And experts predict the real pain of foreclosure still lies ahead.

Home is the heart of it all. We must continue our investment in affordable housing if we want Washington's children and families to have access to the opportunities we all need to grow and succeed in life. Everyone in our community deserves a safe, decent place to live. As this new legislative session begins, we encourage the legislature to build on this momentum and pass this key legislation. The future of Washington's families is at stake.

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*Ben Gitenstein is the Executive Director of the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance, who with the support of its over 200 member organizations promotes safe, decent, and affordable homes for everyone in Washington State.*