

## Talking points for key policy priorities

You can find more information about these priorities on our fact sheets. This document is meant to give you some ideas for simple ways to talk with your lawmakers about why you support these issues. You don't have to be an expert on these policies for your opinion to matter to your lawmakers!

It's always helpful to share a **brief** statement about yourself, your organization, or why this matters to you. Your story will be unique but here are some examples of how to briefly say why you care:

*Last year my rent went up 20% with just two months' notice. I was panicked about how I was going to pay that and keep my kids in the school they love. We're still there, for now, but now our food budget is more limited, and my kids get fewer fresh fruits and vegetables.*

*My organization works with people who are homeless. The need is greater than ever, but we have fewer options for housing that's affordable for people leaving homelessness. At the same time, most of my co-workers can barely afford their own rent. Some of us are looking for other jobs even though love what we do – it's just not sustainable.*

*My faith community offers overnight shelter for adults. We've seen more and more people showing up looking for a safe place to stay. Many have had lost their homes because they couldn't keep up with rent increases. Landlords in Washington need limits on rent increases and we make sure there is enough help for people who do face homelessness.*

### Pass statewide rent stabilization (House Bill 1217)

- A 7% yearly cap on rent increases would provide predictability so households can plan, and it would prevent the destabilizing rent increases that many are getting now.
- A landlord's biggest cost – the mortgage – doesn't change. Small landlords tell us that a 7% rent increase provides more than enough to cover costs that do change, like taxes and repairs. A 7% rent increase still lets landlords maintain their profit and cover their costs, while stabilization our communities.
- Washington is already one of the most expensive rental markets in the country. Washington has the fifth highest housing wage in the country – the amount you need to earn to afford a modest two-bedroom rental home (National Low Income Housing Coalition's Out of Reach Report). On top of that people are getting 15, 20, 30% increases, and sometimes even higher. People can't afford that on top of our already high rents.
- Black, Indigenous, and other people of color are more likely to be renters because historic racist housing policies that excluded BIPOC households from homeownership are still impacting communities today. Limiting rent increases will help people of color stay in their rental homes and allow people an opportunity to save money to purchase a home in the future.
- Washington had the highest number of eviction proceedings ever last year and January had the highest ever in one month – and the vast majority of evictions are because people couldn't afford their rent. Rent increases are causing evictions and are increasing homelessness.

### Fund the Housing Trust Fund with at least \$536 million (capital budget investment)

- The Housing Trust Fund builds homes and ends homelessness for low-wage workers, families with kids, people with disabilities, and seniors. And it provides an opportunity for first-time homeownership for moderate income households.
- It's the most important investment the capital budget can make to solve the affordable housing and homelessness crisis.
- In 2023, the Department of Commerce projected that over the next 20 years our state needs to build 650,000 new homes affordable to low-income households. Those will only get built with investments from the Housing Trust Fund.
- With federal funding at risk, Housing Trust Fund investments are more important than ever.
- *If your organization uses HTF money, tell your lawmaker about how the funds have impacted your community.*

### **Prevent cuts to homelessness services (operating budget investment)**

- To prevent severe cuts to homeless services in every community in our state, we need at least \$253 million in the operating budget to make up a shortfall caused by a lag in document recording fee revenue. Without this funding, we'll see shelters close and homelessness will increase.
- We know that there is a significant budget deficit, but homelessness will significantly increase if we can't retain the current level of prevention services. We aren't asking for an increase in funding – we are asking to hold steady on what our communities already do.
- **Please also support House Bill 1858**, which has passed out of the House. This would eliminate a document recording fee exemption for financial institutions when they sell a mortgage. It would increase revenue for homelessness services and reduce – but not fully address – the gap. It would also increase funding for the covenant homeownership program.

### **Right to Counsel - invest \$8.8 million over two years to keep up with the need**

- In eviction court, almost every landlord has a lawyer representing them. Before our Right to Counsel program started in 2021, very few tenants had legal representation.
- The court process is complex and overwhelming, and even more so when it could end with you losing your home. Low-income tenants shouldn't have to face their landlord's attorney on their own.
- Since the Right to Counsel program started, 81 percent of tenants who have been helped by the program have maintained permanent housing after facing an eviction. Funding for Right to Counsel is preventing homelessness.
- 2024 had the highest level of evictions in state history and this January had the highest ever in one month. Because of increased evictions, more funding is needed to keep up with demand.

### **Progressive revenue**

- I understand that we're facing a big budget shortfall but solving that with cuts will devastate services that we all rely on. Our communities are already more vulnerable because of federal government cuts. We expect Washington lawmakers to do everything possible to protect housing and human services – and we want new revenue to cover the budget gap – not cuts.
- Our tax system is upside down. The lowest income people pay 14% of their income in taxes while the richest pay only 4%. You need to fix this with new, progressive revenue.
- The wealthiest people and most profitable corporations need pay their fair share to keep our communities safe and secure.
- Washington voters overwhelmingly upheld the capital gains tax in November, making it clear that this is the type of commonsense solution Washington voters want.

**Protect the rights of people experiencing homelessness (House Bill 1380) - unfortunately this bill is dead.** But you can express your disappointment and the need for local governments to be restrained from enacting terrible laws to punish people who are experiencing homelessness.

- I'm disappointed that HB 1380 didn't advance this year. Our local governments need restraints on what they can pass. Some local governments are enacting laws that only punish people trying to survive unsheltered homelessness. We need our local governments to do better and the state has an important role in limiting harm. I hope this bill comes back next year and you will support it then.