

NEW YORK HOUSING CONFERENCE

March 18, 2020

Dear Member of Congress,

We are writing with an urgent appeal to move swiftly on a new emergency housing bill in response to the emerging coronavirus crisis. Unfortunately the aid package recently passed by Congress did not include housing assistance, which will be critical to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 among homeless and housed families and help people affected by business closures to stay housed.

The following recommendations, supported by 18 housing and homelessness nonprofits in New York State, are necessary to protect homeless and at-risk housed households and need to be included in future legislation.

1. **\$5B for Emergency Shelter & Housing-** McKinney-Vento Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) can provide emergency shelter and housing assistance to reduce street homelessness and move individuals out of a congregate setting as needed to prevent COVID-19 spread. It is imperative that homeless eligibility rules are waived to ensure that this funding can be used to prevent homelessness during this public health crisis. For example, people coming out of prisons and jails are not eligible currently, even when they do not have a home, and they need to be included. Localities should also be given broad waivers on use restrictions to meet local emergency shelter and housing needs.
2. **Direct Payment Program-** Assistance should be provided to households for the duration of this crisis and monthly allocations must be appropriately sized for high-cost markets for household to afford rent and other necessities.
3. **Emergency Rental Assistance-** Funding should be provided to support vouchers for all households who are experiencing homeless or at-risk of homelessness.
4. **Emergency funds for public housing and other HUD housing providers-** Funding should be provided to ensure HUD-assisted providers can maintain buildings even when rent collection falls.
5. **CDBG funding to support nonprofits-** Federal funding will be necessary for nonprofits serving low income populations.
6. **Moratorium on foreclosures and evictions-** Moratoriums should be immediately adopted for foreclosures and evictions to prevent families from becoming homeless during this crisis.
7. **Rent Freeze and Mortgage Deferment Option for Renters, Homeowners & Building Owners-** Bold measures are required in an unprecedented and widespread interruption to the economy. If renters cannot pay rent, building owners will not be able to pay their mortgage. Eviction and mortgage foreclosure moratoriums only delay eviction or foreclosure for renters and homeowners experiencing a substantial loss of income, kicking the can down the road.
8. **HUD & IRS Should Offer Broad Waivers-** Waivers should be implemented for eligibility, asset management and compliance reporting to ensure federally assisted housing can be immediately utilized to meet local emergency needs.

There are currently more than 565,000 homeless Americans, with more than 200,000 unsheltered and tens of thousands of others living in congregate settings or otherwise living close to other people. As we are asking citizens to stay home and practice social distancing, most homeless people right now do not have that option. Housing the homeless should be an immediate priority and federal resources must be appropriated for a swift response or COVID-19 is certain to rip through homeless communities and reverse other containment efforts.

Federal action is also needed to make sure everyone that is housed can stay housed. New York State has suspended eviction proceedings and pending eviction orders, which will at least temporarily prevent many people from becoming homeless. But longer-term national action is necessary and it must consider both renters and homeowners and affected building owners, including a nationwide eviction and foreclosure moratorium, while also freezing rents and allowing for mortgage deferment.

The federal government also needs to support residents unable to pay their rent. Many renters are living on the edge; 450,000 New Yorkers pay more than half of their income on rent and nationally 47 percent of renters were rent burdened before the

crisis. Many renters will not be able to pay their rent when they lose income because their hours are cut or their place of employment closes, or they have to stay home do care for their children while schools are closed.

Direct cash payments to impacted households could work but must be sized appropriately to account for the cost of living including rent, food and medicine so families don't have to choose which necessity they will pay for during this unprecedented crisis. The government should also provide flexible rental assistance with broad and uncomplicated access for homeless and at-risk households to help them weather this crisis.

Finally, the government needs to support building owners and nonprofits that are serving homeless and at-risk housed people. They will see their rental income decline, which will make it hard to maintain staffing and basic operations. Financial support and mortgage deferment will be necessary and nonprofits should be given maximum flexibility to spend funds.

Federal action must include housing to stop the spread of the Coronavirus and to help renters and homeowners remain housed and providers maintain operations. We urge members of the New York Congressional delegation to prioritize an emergency housing response in the third federal relief package currently being negotiated.

Sincerely,



Rachel Fee
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New York Housing Conference

Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development
Citizens Housing & Planning Council
Coalition for the Homeless
Community Service Society of New York
Cypress Hills
Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.
The Fortune Society
Habitat for Humanity New York City
Homeless Services United
Leading Age NY
The Legal Aid Society
LiveOn NY
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
New York State Association for Affordable Housing
Regional Plan Association
RiseBoro Community Partnership
Settlement Housing Fund, Inc.
Supportive Housing Network of New York
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