



OPPOSE THE CRIMINALIZATION OF HOMELESSNESS AND ADVANCE LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

GRANTS PASS V. JOHNSON
ADVOCACY TOOLKIT

NATIONAL WEEK OF ACTION

APRIL 22 TO APRIL 26

| NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION | NATIONAL HOMELESSNESS LAW CENTER | NATIONAL COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS |

| NATIONAL ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS |

DEAR ADVOCATES,

On April 22, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear the case of *City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Johnson*, the most significant Supreme Court case about the rights of people experiencing homelessness in decades. The Supreme Court will determine whether a local government can arrest or fine people for sleeping outside when adequate shelter is not available.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition, National Homelessness Law Center, National Coalition for the Homeless, and National Alliance to End Homelessness invite advocates across the nation to take action during the week of April 22.

Together, we will urge policymakers at all levels of government to oppose the criminalization of homelessness and instead support long-term solutions to the affordable housing and homelessness crisis.

The Supreme Court case comes amidst a growing wave of criminalization in communities nationwide. Criminalization is not a solution to homelessness; it is an outdated, dehumanizing, and counterproductive approach that makes it harder to address this crisis. Criminalization disproportionately harms Black and Indigenous people, who are overly represented among those who experience homelessness due to longstanding, systemic racism in housing and other sectors.

Instead, the approach proven to be most effective in addressing homelessness is [providing access to affordable housing and voluntary supportive services](#), including case management, healthcare, and behavioral health services. Rather than arresting people for being unhoused, policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels should use all available tools to address the affordable housing crisis that fuels homelessness and to help unhoused people move into homes and access supportive services.

This toolkit contains all the key resources you will need to participate in the Week of Action. We know what it takes to end homelessness and housing poverty; we hope you will join us in building the political will and congressional support necessary to do so.

Your elected officials need to hear from you, from people directly impacted by homelessness, and from other advocates in your community!

Sincerely,

Diane Yentel

President and CEO



Antonia Fasanelli

Executive Director



Donald Whitehead

Executive Director



Ann Oliva

CEO



ABOUT **CITY OF GRANTS PASS, OREGON V. GLORIA JOHNSON**

On April 22, the U.S. Supreme Court will hear the case of *City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Johnson*, the most significant Supreme Court case about the rights of people experiencing homelessness in decades. The Supreme Court will determine whether a local government can arrest or fine people for sleeping outside when adequate shelter is not available.

What is the case about?

In *Grants Pass v. Johnson*, a federal judge and Ninth Circuit panel struck down an anti-camping ordinance enacted in Grants Pass, Oregon. Because the city did not have adequate shelter, the courts held that an ordinance to arrest or ticket people for sleeping outside when they have no other safe place to go violates the U.S. Constitution's Eight Amendment, which prohibits cruel and unusual punishment.

The Supreme Court will now review the case and a previous decision of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit, which held in *Martin v. Boise* that cities cannot punish people experiencing homelessness for violating anti-camping ordinances if there are no available shelter beds in the community.

What is the timeline of the case?

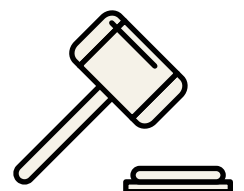
The Supreme Court will hear oral arguments on April 22 and issue a ruling by the end of June. Learn more here: <https://johnsonvgrantspass.com/>

What are the impacts of the case?

If the Supreme Court upholds the lower court decision, jurisdictions around the country will no longer be able to enforce blanket bans on basic survival activities, like sleeping or protecting oneself from the elements, in the absence of adequate shelter or housing. Without expensive, short-sighted, and harmful criminalization options on the table, cities and states will have to focus on the true solution to homelessness: affordable housing and supportive services. Ruling in favor of the unsheltered individuals who brought the case would affirm the humanity of every community member.

If the Supreme Court rules in favor of Grants Pass, however, it will give states and cities across the country permission to punish people who are forced to sleep outside, even though they have no other safe option. A ruling of this kind would make it more difficult for people to exit homelessness and punish people for existing in public in a country that has failed to ensure that everybody has a safe place to sleep. Overturning the lower court standard would exacerbate - not end - homelessness.

Regardless of how the Supreme Court rules, this case amplifies the need for evidence-based, permanent solutions to end homelessness.



TAKE ACTION!

Your elected officials need to hear from you and other advocates in your community! Together, we can stop [outdated and dehumanizing approaches like criminalization](#) and instead invest in proven and humane solutions, starting with [affordable housing and voluntary supportive services](#).

Day of Argument: If you live near Washington, D.C., show up for a **National Event** on the steps of the Supreme Court on April 22! [RSVP here](#).

Community Rallies: If you can't come to D.C., join other homelessness advocates for one of the planned local rallies. Local actions will be announced on www.johnsonvgrantspass.com.

Other Actions You Can Take:

- Meet with your local, state, or federal elected officials to discuss the real solutions to homelessness.
- Organize a press conference to call attention to harmful local criminalization efforts and demand real solutions.
- Host a roundtable or other gathering where people with lived experience of homelessness can share their stories with elected officials.
- Host a teach-in, film screening, or other educational event.
- Publish an op-ed or submit a letter to the editor to your local or state newspaper.
- Amplify social media put out by National Homelessness Law Center (@homeless_law).
- Bring your elected officials on a site visit to supportive and affordable housing or other homelessness programs in your community.

Learn more about the Supreme Court case here: <https://johnsonvgrantspass.com/>



ADVOCACY TIPS AND RESOURCES

Meet with Elected Officials

Elected officials at every level of government have a role to play in ending and preventing homelessness. As the Supreme Court hears *Grants Pass v. Johnson*, advocates have an important opportunity to build relationships with elected officials and encourage them to prioritize proven solutions to homelessness.

Here are some tips for organizing an effective meeting with your elected officials:

- **Determine which elected officials to target.** Policies affecting housing and homelessness fall within the jurisdiction of different levels of government. Depending on your policy ask, you may choose to meet with local, state, or federal offices. The “Solutions to Homelessness” section of this toolkit can help you determine which offices to prioritize.
- **Bring together a coalition of constituents.** Elected officials want to hear from people who live within the community that they represent and staff from organizations that serve their community.
- **Request a meeting at least two weeks in advance.** When you request a meeting, share what issue you will be discussing, how many people will attend, what organizations they represent (if applicable), your available times, and whether your group intends to meet virtually or in-person.
- **Research the elected official and determine what issues they care about most.** This research will allow you to draw connections between your policy asks and the elected official’s top priorities. You should also research their record on housing and homelessness issues.
- **Outline an agenda** that includes four components: 1) introductions, 2) data and stories relevant to the issues you are discussing, 3) a connection to the elected official’s priorities, and 4) a clear ask. Determine the amount of time to spend on each section and assign speaking roles to each member of your group.
- **Meet with your coalition to practice ahead of time.** Doing a roleplaying exercise, where one person practices their role as an advocate and the other pretends to be the elected official, is an especially effective way to prepare. Be sure to test your technology if you are holding a virtual or hybrid meeting.
- **Gather factsheets or other materials** that you want to share with the office. Have physical copies on hand if you are meeting in-person and follow up with digital copies by email after the meeting.
- **Be explicit about how you define criminalization.** Proponents are quick to deny that their tactics constitute criminalization. Increasingly, they redefine their tactics as acts of compassion. Explicitly defining the term up front helps pre-empt those pivots.
- After the meeting, **thank the elected official or staff for their time and consideration.** Then, ask for a picture to share on social media!
- When posting the picture, **tag the elected official’s account and thank them for meeting.** Doing so publicly strengthens your relationship and reminds them of any commitments they made to you.
- **Send a follow-up email or thank-you card to everyone you met with.** You can also follow up to check in about the status of the ask you made during your meeting.

Organize a Press Conference

A press conference is an opportunity to educate the media about homelessness in your community and gain press coverage on the topic. Here are some tips for organizing a successful press conference:

- **Recruit community leaders and organizations to cosponsor and plan the event together.** Divide up responsibilities among coalition members to increase your capacity.
- **Choose a time and location for your event.** Consider a state capitol, city hall, park, community center, house of worship, or your federal representative's or senator's district office. Ensure that your location is convenient for local reporters, that it does not have disruptive background noise, and that it can be equipped with microphones, speakers, and other event needs.
- **Select your speakers and moderator.** Invite speakers with expertise and local credibility, such as the director of a local housing or homelessness nonprofit. Find a moderator with media relations experience and subject matter expertise. The moderator will introduce the topic and the speakers, and they will answer questions from reporters or direct them to the appropriate speaker.
- **Include and empower people who have experienced homelessness or housing instability.** The most powerful speakers are those who can personally attest to the impact of housing and homelessness policies in their own lives.
- **Practice!** Ensure that each speaker is well-versed in your message and can deliver their remarks concisely. Prepare speakers to answer questions from the press. You may want to host a practice session for speakers and work on responding to tough questions.
- **Invite the media.** Put together a list of reporters and editors at local TV stations, newspapers, and radio stations. Be sure to include any reporters that have covered housing and homelessness issues recently and any of your organization's media contacts. Circulate a press advisory with details about the event. Send reminder calls and emails in the days leading up to the event.
- **Develop strong visuals.** Posters with cosponsoring organizations' logos, eye-grabbing graphics or slogans, or other visuals make a powerful backdrop for your speakers.
- **Prepare for day-of logistics.** Determine in advance who will bring the necessary equipment and arrive with plenty of time to set up. Plan to meet accessibility needs for your speakers and attendees. Ensure that there is enough seating for reporters and space for their equipment.
- **Connect with the media.** Assign someone to welcome members of the press as they arrive. Maintain a sign-in sheet where media representatives can sign in with their name, publication, and contact information. After the press conference formally ends, speakers should be available for 1:1 interviews or follow-up conversations.
- **Collect clips!** In the days following the press conference, keep track of stories that news outlets publish about homelessness and share them with your networks.

Host a Roundtable or Gathering

Case Study from Street Voice Council Legislative Luncheon

The Street Voice Council (SVC) is a community of people experiencing homelessness in Lexington, Kentucky, that gather regularly for fellowship, food, and conversation. The Catholic Action Center, which provides a welcoming space and services to meet community members' basic needs with dignity, sponsors SVC gatherings. First convened in 2009, the SVC is an active presence in Lexington civic life: SVC members regularly participate in local parades, festivals, voter registration, and official Census outreach. SVC members also make their voices heard to decision-makers in the community. The Mayor of Lexington, city councilmembers, the local sheriff, and the chief of police have all attended SVC meetings to hear members' perspectives.

When Kentucky lawmakers introduced HB 5, a proposed bill that includes a ban on street camping, members of the SVC mobilized to make lawmakers aware of the harmful impact that this bill would have on their community and encourage them to support alternative approaches that get people stably housed. After SVC members and other advocates held successful constituent meetings with their legislative offices, SVC and its partners were inspired to organize a legislative luncheon.

The content of the luncheon was based on the Catholic Action Center's successful "See Me, Hear Me, Know Me" conversation series, which ran from February through November 2023. The conversation series brought together housed community members and individuals experiencing homelessness for shared meals at local community organizations and houses of worship. By creating a safe and welcoming space for individuals experiencing homelessness to share their stories and connect with housed community members, the conversation series successfully fostered understanding and dismantled stereotypes about homelessness in Lexington. More than 1,000 individuals participated in the series, including elected officials, business leaders, faith community members, student athletes, and other college students.

The legislative luncheon took place at the Kentucky Capitol Annex on February 7, 2024. Seventeen members of the Street Voice Council and 67 legislators - nearly half of the entire state legislature! - attended the event.

To prepare for the legislative luncheon, SVC created a booklet that included an explanation of SVC's history and profiles of 23 SVC members that spotlighted information about their birthplaces, hobbies, families, and important influences in their lives. Every legislator who attended the luncheon received a copy of the booklet to take home, leaving them with an enduring reminder that unhoused Kentuckians are unique individuals with their own stories, aspirations, and perspectives.

The legislative luncheon was one pillar of the Catholic Action Center's three-pronged approach to raising awareness about HB 5. Catholic Action Center and the SVC partnered with Central Kentucky Housing and Homeless Initiative and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth to conduct the Kentucky Citizen Survey on the Criminalization of Homelessness. According to the survey, an overwhelming majority of Kentuckians do not believe that the bill's provisions to criminalize homelessness will increase public safety. About 89 percent of those surveyed responded that requiring public safety officers to cite and arrest the unsheltered for camping will not make Kentucky safer.

Catholic Action Center and SVC also produced a five-minute video featuring a diverse cross-section of individuals experiencing homelessness in Lexington. Individuals in the video shared their stories of how they became homeless, what their day-to-day experiences look like, and their perspectives on the harmful impact of the proposed camping ban. The video was shared with the entire Kentucky state legislature, the Lexington-Fayette Urban County Government, faith-based organizations, and other community groups across the state.

Collectively, the luncheon, survey, and video generated substantial press coverage. Catholic Action Center also authored an op-ed putting a human face to the impact of HB 5, including a call for readers to contact their legislators. More than 35 outlets across the state ran the op-ed, creating a ripple effect that increased statewide awareness of the legislation and sparked further advocacy.

SVC and Catholic Action Center’s strategic approach to oppose the criminalization of homelessness offers valuable lessons for advocates in other cities. Their advocacy demonstrates the power of creating a welcoming space for people experiencing homelessness where they are also empowered to connect with public officials and directly share their perspectives. SVC and Catholic Action Center fostered connections between housed and unhoused community members and successfully challenged stereotypes. They highlighted the individual experiences and personalities of the city’s unhoused community, putting a range of human faces to the concept of homelessness and sharing stories that resonated with decision-makers. They harnessed the media to amplify these activities, gained attention throughout the state, and disseminated a clear call to action.

While Kentucky’s legislature voted to approve the bill to criminalize homelessness, this case study underscores the importance of power-building and relationship-building needed for long-term advocacy.



Street Voice Council advocates and lawmakers come together at the legislative luncheon. Photo courtesy of Catholic Action Center

Host an Educational Event

To educate the broader community about homelessness, host an educational event such as a teach-in or film screening. A teach-in is an opportunity to share essential information about housing and homelessness with community members, mobilize them to act, and build a base of advocates. A film screening followed by a facilitated conversation can achieve the same goals. Here are some tips for hosting a successful educational event:

- **Recruit other organizations to co-host the event.** Partner organizations will spread the word to a wider network and bring in new attendees. Hosting the event at a partner organization's space, like a school or house of worship, can also encourage community members who are familiar with those spaces to attend.
- **Identify a location for your event.** Ensure that the location is equipped to meet your event's tech needs, especially if you are hosting a film screening, and that the space is accessible to people with disabilities.
- **Make the event fully accessible.** This may include providing closed captioning, ASL interpreting, or translation into another language. Offering childcare or making the event kid-friendly will also make the event more accessible to people with young children. Provide food for attendees, especially if your event takes place during a meal time.
- If you are hosting a film screening, **select a film that will capture your viewers' attention and inspire them to take action.** Determine whether you will need to take any steps to acquire the film or pay a fee, if you are hosting a large-scale screening. Film recommendations include:
 - [The Public](#)
 - [The Soloist](#)
 - [Kaiser Permanente's The Way Home documentary series](#)
 - Documentaries from Invisible People, including [Finland Solved Homelessness: Here's How](#), and [From a Tent to a Home: No Longer Homeless](#)
- Following the film, **facilitate a discussion** about homelessness in your community, the potential impact of the Supreme Court case, and the need for proven solutions.
- **Create an opportunity for attendees to take action.** Your agenda should include an action that can be completed during the event, like writing postcards or sending emails to elected officials.
- **Distribute commitment cards.** These handouts should collect participants' contact information and ask them how they want to get involved. Include a list of upcoming events or advocacy opportunities and ask participants to select which activities they plan to attend.
- **Follow up with event attendees afterwards.** The follow-up email should thank them for attending, provide digital copies of any resources that were shared, and remind them of upcoming action opportunities.

Publish an Op-Ed or Letter to the Editor

Below are a **sample op-ed and letter-to-the-editor** that you can adapt and submit to your local or state newspaper.

Sample Op-Ed

Homelessness is at its highest level on record, and many communities - including [CITY] - are seeing an increase as more people struggle to afford sky high rents. Homelessness is a crisis that demands urgent action from all levels of government, but too often, elected officials turn to responses that are politically expedient, but proven to be ineffective and inhumane, rather than real solutions. And now, a case before the U.S. Supreme Court could make it easier for politicians to rely on harmful approaches.

On April 22, the Supreme Court will hear the case of City of Grants Pass, Oregon v. Johnson, the most significant Supreme Court case about the rights of people experiencing homelessness in decades. Amidst the worsening affordable housing crisis, the Supreme Court will determine whether a local government can arrest or fine people for sleeping outside when adequate shelter is not available.

Criminalization is not a solution to homelessness. Arrests, fines, jail time, and criminal records [make it more difficult](#) for individuals experiencing homelessness to access the affordable housing, health services, and employment necessary to exit homelessness. Because of systemic racism in housing and other sectors, Black and Indigenous people experience homelessness at far higher rates than white individuals, and they are most likely to be harmed by criminalization. If the Supreme Court decides that localities can arrest people who have nowhere to sleep at night, we may see even more resources wasted, lives harmed, and racial disparities deepened.

The affordable housing crisis and the inability to afford housing is the primary cause of homelessness. Nationally, there's a shortage of 7.3 million homes affordable and available to people with the lowest incomes. Without affordable options, 11.7 million renters pay more than half of their limited incomes on rent, leaving them with few resources to make ends meet. Any financial shock can cause these households to fall behind on rent and face eviction and, in the worst cases, homelessness. Despite the clear need, only one in four people eligible for housing assistance receives any help due to chronic underfunding by Congress.

In [STATE], there are only [\[# OF AFFORDABLE HOMES\]](#) rental homes affordable and available for every 100 of the lowest-income renters, and someone working full time would need to earn [\[STATE HOUSING HOURLY WAGE\]](#) an hour to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment - well above the minimum wage.

We know what works to end homelessness: providing individuals with immediate access to stable, affordable housing and voluntary supportive services, such as case management, mental health and substance use services, and employment services, to help improve housing stability and well-being. This approach is backed by decades of research, learning, and bipartisan support, and it is credited with cutting veteran homelessness [in half](#) since 2010.

Rather than arresting people for being unhoused, policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels need to use all the tools available to address the affordable housing crisis that fuels homelessness and to help unhoused people move into stable, affordable homes.

State and local leaders should leverage a wide range of community partners, follow the evidence on what works, and invest resources effectively. States and communities should provide rental assistance to help unhoused individuals move directly from homelessness into stable housing and use hotels and motels as a temporary resource until permanent options are available. They can ensure emergency shelters are low-barrier and safe and use proactive street outreach to connect unhoused people to housing and resources. By reducing zoning and land use restrictions, communities can help keep up with the demand for more housing supply, and by enacting strong renter protections and creating eviction diversion programs, communities can help prevent people from becoming homeless in the first place.

Congress must also play a critical role in ending homelessness and housing security by investing in long-term solutions at the scale needed. This starts with making rental assistance available to all eligible households, preserving and expanding the number of homes affordable to people with the lowest incomes, providing emergency rental assistance to stabilize families and avoid homelessness, and strengthening federal renter protections. Congress must expand access to healthcare, including mental health and substance use services, and it must pay the workforce on the front lines a living and equitable wage.

Regardless of how the Supreme Court rules, policymakers here in [CITY or STATE] and in Congress should focus on real solutions rather than making it harder for those who are already struggling to get by.

Sample Letter to the Editor

As homelessness increases in our community, it is critical for elected officials to turn to real solutions, and not responses that are politically expedient but ineffective and inhumane, such as fining, ticketing, arresting, or otherwise punishing people for not having a home.

Criminalization is not a solution to homelessness. Arrests, fines, jail time, and criminal records [make it more difficult](#) for individuals to access the housing, employment, and healthcare needed to exit homelessness. Criminalization is ineffective and expensive and will only fuel racial inequities in our community.

Instead, the public must demand that elected officials follow the evidence on what works.

Luckily, decades of evidence make clear that the best way to address homelessness is to provide people with affordable, stable housing and supportive services, like case management, healthcare, and mental health and substance use services. Rather than allowing our elected officials to waste resources on failed, inhumane approaches, we must hold them accountable and demand real investments in what works.

Amplify Social Media from the National Homelessness Law Center and Other Trusted Sources

Social media can shape the narrative around housing and homelessness in your own community. Well-crafted posts on social media can amplify key messages and contribute to the national conversation about the need for long-term solutions.

The National Homelessness Law Center (NHLC) is coordinating a video project to lift up the voices of people with lived experience of homelessness. You can support the project by connecting NHLC with people who have experienced homelessness and criminalization so the public can hear directly from them. To learn more, reach out to Jesse Rabinowitz at jrabinowitz@homelesslaw.org.

You can also follow national organizations leading the response to *Grants Pass v. Johnson* and amplify their messages with your networks:

- National Homelessness Law Center: @homeless_law (X)
- Housing Not Handcuffs Campaign: @HNHCampaign
- National Low Income Housing Coalition: @NLIHC (X) @NLIHC (Instagram), @NLIHCDC (Facebook)
- National Coalition for the Homeless: @NationalCoalitionfortheHomeless (Facebook), @NationalHomeless (X), @nationalhomeless (Instagram and TikTok)

Check out these examples of how [Open Table Nashville](#) and [Invisible People](#) are using social media to explain why this case is such a big deal.

Research demonstrates that social media can most effectively influence elected officials when it includes certain features:

- The elected official's account is tagged. This ensures that their staff will see the post.
- The post comes from a constituent. Your post or account should make it clear that you are based within the elected official's city, state, or district.
- Multiple constituents post at the same time. A flood of posts that reinforce the same message or call to action will have a greater impact than a single post. A social media campaign is most effective when it occurs during a designated window of time, like a coordinated Day of Action.
- The posts demonstrate an affiliation with a group. Tagging local, state, or national organizations will show that you are part of a larger movement that shares your call to action.
- Include images or videos. Multimedia posts are more eye-catching and are more likely to stick with the viewer.



Sample Tweets

Criminalization

- At its core, the *Grants Pass v. Johnson* Supreme Court case asks whether ticketing & arresting unhoused people for trying to survive when there are no other options is cruel and unusual punishment. It is. Learn more about the case & how to get involved: <http://johnsonvgrantspass.com>
- The research is irrefutable: access to affordable, stable housing and supportive services is the most effective approach to ending homelessness. It is a bipartisan, evidence-based practice backed by multiple, national studies: <https://tinyurl.com/2p8p5dbr>
- Criminalization makes it harder for people to exit homelessness. Instead, we need to invest in proven and humane solutions. Learn about best practices in responding to unsheltered homelessness: <http://tinyurl.com/46s7t4fb>
- Criminalization is not a solution to homelessness. Imposing fines and jail time is counterproductive, expensive, and dehumanizing. States & leaders should follow the evidence on what works. Learn more: <http://tinyurl.com/46s7t4fb>
- Providing access to affordable homes & voluntary services is more effective at ending homelessness than outdated & dehumanizing strategies like criminalization. Learn about how criminalization exacerbates homelessness & what communities can do instead: <http://tinyurl.com/mr3b7p4t>

Long-Term Solutions

- To end homelessness in our communities, we must invest in proven solutions, like affordable housing and supportive services, at the scale necessary. Take action today to advance real solutions to homelessness: <https://nlihc.org/take-action>
- We know how to end homelessness. The clearest example is veteran homelessness, which has been cut in half in recent years. Let's build on lessons learned to end homelessness for others in need. <https://nlihc.org/take-action>
- Criminalization is not a solution to homelessness. We can't lose sight of what ends homelessness: affordable homes! Congress must pass long-term solutions to ensure that people with the lowest incomes have a stable, affordable home. Learn more: <https://nlihc.org/housed>
- More families are struggling to make ends meet, rents are high, eviction filings are up, and homelessness is increasing in many communities. We need robust federal investments in affordable housing more than ever. Take action today: <https://nlihc.org/take-action>
- To end homelessness, we need to invest in what works. Congress must provide robust funding for affordable housing & homelessness programs in FY25, and enact the #EndingHomelessnessAct, #HousingCrisisResponseAct, and #EvictionCrisisAct. Take action today! <https://nlihc.org/take-action>

Robust Funding

- Urge Congress not to slash funding for affordable housing and homelessness, and instead to work together to ensure these vital programs receive the highest allocation of funds possible in fiscal year 2025. <https://p2a.co/2xztqvh>
- Federal housing investments reduce homelessness and housing instability and support thriving communities. Sign the national letter urging Congress to invest in affordable housing, homelessness, & community development programs in fiscal year 2025. <https://p2a.co/nliqghj>
- No one should be forced to make impossible choices between paying rent and putting food on the table or making ends meet. Tell Congress to expand - not slash - federal investments in affordable housing in FY25 to help more people afford a roof over their head. <https://nlihc.org/take-action>

Ending Homelessness Act

- We can end homelessness if we act with urgency & invest in what works. The #EndingHomelessnessAct ensures universal rental assistance for every eligible household & includes other key measures to help end homelessness. Learn more: <https://tinyurl.com/2dnk2usr>
- Congress should enact the #EndingHomelessnessAct to create universal rental assistance and 400,000+ new rental homes for people experiencing homelessness to effectively end homelessness! Learn more: <https://tinyurl.com/2dnk2usr>

Housing Crisis Response Act

- Enact the #HousingCrisisResponseAct now! The bill would represent the single largest investment in affordable housing in our nation's history, creating nearly 1.4 million affordable & accessible homes, & helping nearly 300,000 households afford their rent. <https://tinyurl.com/yrub556p>
- The #HousingCrisisResponseAct would address our nation's affordable housing crisis by providing over \$150 billion in critical investments to increase housing supply, decrease housing costs, and end homelessness. Learn more: <https://tinyurl.com/yrub556p>

Eviction Crisis Act

- Families living in poverty spend over half their incomes on rent, leaving no room for unexpected expenses. The #EvictionCrisisAct can provide a safety net, closing gaps & preventing households from spiraling into eviction & homelessness. <https://tinyurl.com/34pzk3e>
- Congress should enact the #EvictionCrisisAct now! Let's learn from pandemic ERA programs to create a permanent program to stabilize families before they face eviction, displacement, or homelessness. <https://tinyurl.com/34pzk3e>
- Millions are on the brink of eviction & homelessness, with people of color disproportionately affected. Congress should enact the #EvictionCrisisAct to prevent eviction and homelessness & reshape the housing landscape for a more equitable future! <https://tinyurl.com/34pzk3e>

Bring Your Elected Officials on a Site Visit

To turn your elected officials into champions of proven solutions to homelessness, invite them to get a firsthand look at a program that is resolving homelessness in your community. If the program receives federal funding, invite your federal congressional delegation so they can see the impact of federal investments.

Here are some tips for planning an effective site visit:

- **Choose a time and location for your event.** Recruit other organizations to co-host the site visit. Even if the event is at one organization's program or property, the presence of other organizations can demonstrate broad support for your call to action on housing and homelessness.
- **Engage directly impacted individuals in the planning process.** If you are organizing a site visit at an affordable housing development, be sure to engage the resident council, tenant association, or other tenant leaders.
- **Invite your elected officials ahead of time.** If an office tells you that the elected official is not available, consider inviting a staff member to come in their place.
- **Promote your event on social media** and your organization's website if it is open to the public.
- **Work with your elected official's press secretary** to coordinate media contacts in advance of the site visit.
- **Task a member of your team with taking pictures during the event** and be sure to share on social media afterwards.
- **Work with tenant leaders and property management** to identify residents who would be interested in sharing their stories during the event. Elected officials should hear directly from people served by housing and homelessness programs.
- **Be prepared!** In the days leading up to the event, ensure that partner organizations and elected officials' offices know the plan for the day. Consider sending a site map or other materials if there is not a clear meeting place. Consider following up with any offices that declined or did not respond to your invitation to again invite them to the site visit. Work with the property manager to ensure that the site is looking its best, and plan for a clear path around the property or neighborhood.
- **Share key information about the property or program, its residents or participants, and the funding it has received** from the city, county, state, and federal government. Share what this program means to the larger community. Draw a connection between the impact of this program, the need for greater investments in proven solutions to homelessness, and best practices for responding to homelessness.
- **After the event, send an email thanking the elected officials and their staff.** Be sure to include answers to any questions that were raised or any materials that were requested. Reiterate your call for the elected officials to support proven, long-term solutions to homelessness.

TALKING POINTS

What are the major causes of America's housing and homelessness crisis?

- The underlying cause of America's housing and homelessness crisis is the [severe shortage](#) of homes affordable to people with the lowest incomes and a [widening gap](#) between incomes and housing costs.
- There is a national shortage of [7.3 million homes](#) that are affordable to people with the lowest incomes. There are just 34 affordable and available rental homes for every 100 extremely low-income renter households. Every state and congressional district is impacted.
- Housing costs are [out of reach](#) for too many of the lowest-income renters. A household needs to earn [\\$28.58 per hour](#) - four times the federal minimum wage of \$7.25 per hour - in order to afford a decent, two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent without spending over 30% of income on rent alone, or \$23.67 for a one-bedroom rental unit. These rents are far higher than what the lowest-income and most marginalized renters - including seniors, people with disabilities, and working families - can spend on housing.
- [Three in four](#) (74%) of America's lowest-income households pay at least half of their limited incomes on rent, leaving few resources to put groceries on the table, cover medical costs, or meet their other basic needs. One emergency or unexpected expense could send these households into homelessness.
- Despite the clear need, Congress only provides housing assistance to [one in four](#) eligible households, leaving the rest to fend for themselves. Without this assistance, far too many people become homeless.
- Because of the housing crisis, an estimated [653,000 people](#) in America experience homelessness on any given night, and millions more are at risk.
- Because of long-standing historical and systemic racism in housing and other sectors, Black and Indigenous people experience homelessness at far higher rates than white people. Black individuals represent 13% of the general population, but they account for [37%](#) of people experiencing homelessness and more than 50% of homeless families with children. Native Hawaiians, Pacific Islanders, and American Indians/Alaska Natives experience the highest rates of homelessness.

Why is homelessness increasing in many communities?

- America's severe rental housing affordability crisis pushes more and more people into homelessness each year. Even as our homelessness response system works to move people into safe, long-term housing, more people become unhoused than the system can process.
- [In 2023](#), the number of people who exited homelessness to permanent housing increased by 8%. However, the number of people who experienced homelessness for the first time rose by 25%.
- Recent spikes in rents have far outpaced the wages paid to extremely low-income workers. [Thirteen of the nation's 20 most common occupations](#) pay median wages that are less than what a full-time worker needs to reasonably afford a two-bedroom rental unit at the national fair market rent. Ten of those occupations, accounting for more than one-third of the country's

workforce, pay median wages less than the wage needed to afford a typical one-bedroom apartment.

- Even after taking into consideration states and counties with higher minimum wages, on average a minimum wage worker must work 104 hours per week – [more than 2.5 full-time jobs](#) – to reasonably afford a two-bedroom rental home at fair market rent.
- Because housing costs are out of reach for the lowest-income households, any financial shock can push households out of their homes and into homelessness.

Why are some policymakers turning to misguided and harmful measures to address homelessness?

- Homelessness and housing poverty are crises that stem from decades of underinvestment in affordable housing, healthcare, and community-based services and urgent action is needed. Instead of meeting their responsibilities to address the underlying causes of homelessness and produce the housing and shelters that benefit the entire community, some policymakers are responding to increased visible homelessness by turning to harmful but politically expedient measures that remove unhoused individuals from public view but do not solve the homelessness crisis.
- Too often, policymakers and members of the public blame people experiencing homelessness rather than the systems that have failed them. This “personal failure” narrative leads officials to focus on ineffective, short-term approaches instead of long-term solutions. Moreover, this narrative ignores the long-standing historical and ongoing systemic racism in housing and other sectors that has resulted in people of color being overly represented among those who experience homelessness.
- Criminalization does not address the root causes of homelessness. People experiencing unsheltered homelessness are [not unsheltered by choice](#) but because they lack access to affordable housing.
- Individuals experiencing homelessness often live in encampments or other unsheltered locations because of barriers in accessing quality emergency assistance. Barriers can include unsafe or poor shelter conditions, restrictive policies, such as sobriety requirements, entrance fees, and separation from partners or pets, and insufficient resources to fund a robust emergency response system. Strict entry and exit times at shelters can make it more difficult for individuals who work different shifts to maintain work or school.
- Criminalization is counterproductive. Arrests, fines, jail time, and criminal records [make it more difficult](#) for individuals experiencing homelessness to access the affordable housing, health services, and employment necessary to exit homelessness. Landlords are less likely to rent to people with a criminal record, employers are less likely to hire a worker with a criminal record, and encampment raids often result in the loss of vital records needed to obtain housing assistance.
- Criminalization is harmful to marginalized communities. Criminalization [disproportionately harms](#) individuals who are Black, Indigenous, Latino, Asian, and multiracial, who are overrepresented in both the homeless and incarcerated populations.
- Criminalization is an ineffective and expensive use of resources. Criminalization laws often require municipalities to allocate resources to costly crisis interventions, such as police and

jails, rather than to permanent housing solutions that will assist people for the long term. A [growing body of research](#) shows that providing affordable housing and voluntary services is more cost-effective than outdated approaches, including criminalization, because it [reduces the public costs](#) of the homelessness-jail cycle. With limited state and local budgets, elected officials should turn to humane, cost-effective policies, not ineffective measures that waste taxpayer dollars.

What are the long-term solutions needed to end America's homelessness and housing crisis?

- Policymakers must invest in [proven solutions to homelessness](#): providing individuals with immediate access to housing and voluntary supportive services.
- [Research](#) irrefutably shows that providing stable, affordable, accessible housing and voluntary supportive services is the most effective approach for ending homelessness. This approach is [backed](#) by [decades of research](#), learning, and bipartisan support.
- These investments benefit the entire community because our cities, towns, and neighborhoods are strongest when everyone has a stable place to call home.
- Our nation must significantly expand investments to make homes affordable and accessible for people with the lowest incomes. This must start with [ensuring rental assistance is universally available](#) to everyone in need, [preserving and expanding](#) the supply of homes affordable to people with the lowest incomes, [providing emergency rental assistance](#) to prevent evictions and homelessness, and [strengthening and enforcing renter protections](#). Congress must expand access to healthcare, including mental health, substance use, and community-based services, and it must pay the workforce on the front lines a living and equitable wage.
- These solutions must be paired with antiracist reforms to break down barriers that prevent access to critical resources and that deepen racial disparities.

SOLUTIONS TO HOMELESSNESS

Federal Solutions

To fully address the affordable housing and homelessness crises, Congress must:

- **[Bridge the gap between incomes and housing costs](#)** by expanding rental assistance to every eligible household. Today, only [one in four](#) households eligible for rental assistance receives it.
- **[Expand and preserve the supply of rental homes and supportive housing](#)** affordable and accessible to people with the lowest incomes.
- **[Create permanent tools to prevent evictions and homelessness](#)** by stabilizing households experiencing a financial shock.
- **[Strengthen and enforce robust tenant protections](#)**. The power imbalance between renters and landlords put renters at risk of housing instability and homelessness.
- **[Expand access to supportive services](#)**, including outreach, healthcare, and mental and substance use services.

Congress should:

- **[Provide robust funding for affordable housing and homelessness programs in the fiscal year \(FY\) 2025 budget](#)**. It is critical that Congress provide full funding for Homeless Assistance Grants, fully renew and expand Housing Choice Vouchers to serve more households, and invest in eviction prevention tools. Congress must also ensure that workers on the front lines are paid a living and equitable wage.
- **[Enact the Ending Homelessness Act of 2023](#)** (H.R.4232) – Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA). This bill would ensure rental assistance is universally available to all eligible households. The bill would also prohibit source-of-income discrimination to help increase housing choice and would invest \$5 billion over five years in the national Housing Trust Fund to address the shortage of affordable housing and combat homelessness. For more information, see [Rep. Waters’s factsheet](#) on the Ending Homelessness Act.
- **[Enact the Housing Crisis Response Act of 2023](#)** (H.R.4233) – Rep. Maxine Waters (D-CA). This bill proposes \$150 billion in critical investments to help renters with the lowest incomes afford the cost of rent. Investments would include funding for key priorities: \$25 billion to expand rental assistance, \$65 billion to repair and preserve public housing, and \$15 billion to build rental homes for those with the greatest needs through the national Housing Trust Fund. If enacted, this legislation would amount to the single largest investment in affordable housing in our nation’s history, creating nearly 1.4 million affordable and accessible homes, and helping nearly 300,000 households afford their rent. For more information, see [Rep. Waters’s factsheet](#) on the bill.
- **[Enact the Eviction Crisis Act and Stable Families Act](#)** (S.2182 and H.R.8327 in the 117th Congress) – Sens. Michael Bennet (D-CO) and Todd Young (R-IN) and Rep. Ritchie Torres (D-NY). This bill would create a permanent program to provide emergency rental assistance (ERA) and housing stability services to renters facing temporary financial setbacks that put them at risk of housing instability, eviction, and homelessness. The bill would build on the success of

the pandemic-era ERA programs that helped reduce eviction filings and keep households stably housed.

State and Local Solutions

State and local elected officials should help address unsheltered homelessness by:

- **Expanding or sustaining prevention tools**, including emergency rental assistance and renter protections, to keep renters stably housed and prevent evictions and homelessness.
- **Providing rental assistance and eliminating barriers** to help people living in encampments move directly into stable housing using a Housing First approach. When permanent housing is not immediately available, states and localities should use hotels as a temporary resource until permanent housing is available.
- **Increasing the development of supportive and other affordable housing** through zoning and land use reforms and targeting public resources to create deeply affordable rental homes.
- **Ensuring shelters and other emergency options are low-barrier, welcoming, and safe.**
- **Using harm reduction approaches when delivering services in encampments, and leveraging a wide range of community partners**, including the housing authority, the public health authority, healthcare providers, and nonprofit and faith-based organizations, to deliver culturally competent services that meet a diverse set of needs.
- **Conducting proactive street outreach and engagement** to connect people to housing and resources that meet basic needs, as well as comprehensive health and behavioral health care and support services.
- **Leverage Medicaid for tenancy supports and fund case management services.**
- **Enacting civil and human rights protections** for people experiencing homelessness, including prohibiting criminalization.

Learn more about [best practices](#) in responding to unsheltered homelessness.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Grants Pass v. Johnson:

- [Learn more about the case.](#)
- [Learn how advocates can help.](#)

NLIHC Housing First Page: This page includes general introductory information about Housing First as a strategy to end homelessness, including:

- Why [Housing First is a critically important strategy](#) for ending homelessness.
- [Evidence supporting Housing First](#) over treatment first and abstinence-based programs.
- [Research](#) on the effectiveness of Housing First.
- Information on how Housing First [cut veteran homelessness](#) in half.
- An explanation of how Housing First supports [recovery from substance use disorders](#) and people with [mental health conditions](#).
- [Key facts](#) about Housing First.
- [Housing First Q&A](#).
- Tips on responding to [unsheltered homelessness](#).
- An explanation of how [criminalization makes homelessness worse](#).

Housing Needs by State: This resource provides state profiles recording the shortage of rental homes affordable and available in each state for the lowest-income households, the number of affordable and available homes per 100 renter households at different income levels in states, housing cost burdens by income groups, and information about the demographic make-up of extremely low-income renter households.

The resource offers a valuable collection of data sets and includes a compelling factsheet to present to elected officials and their staff. The Congressional Housing District profiles for your state can be found under the resources tab on each state profile. These data sheets are especially helpful for use in meetings with representatives who might not believe statewide data applies to the people in their districts.

For more information, please contact outreach@nlihc.org.

