



## NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION

Opening Statement of Diane Yentel  
President and CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition  
U.S. House of Representatives Financial Services Committee Roundtable  
May 22, 2020

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at today. I am Diane Yentel, President and CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. We are a membership organization dedicated to advancing federal policies that ensure the lowest income renters have decent, accessible and affordable homes.

Rent is due again soon, and millions of people in America cannot afford to pay. Low-wage workers are [losing jobs fastest](#) from COVID-19-related shutdowns, and most of these individuals [struggled to pay the rent](#) even before the coronavirus. A [patchwork](#) of federal, state, and local eviction moratoriums give short-term relief to [some renters](#), but they leave many unprotected and create a financial cliff when moratoriums are lifted and back rent is owed.

Even before the coronavirus, the country was in the grips of a pervasive affordable housing crisis, impacting rural, suburban and urban communities alike. [Over half a million people experienced homelessness](#) on any given night. A [national shortage of 7 million affordable apartments](#) left fewer than 4 affordable and available homes for every 10 extremely low-income renters. Nearly 8 million of the lowest-income renters paid at least half of their limited income on rent, leaving them one financial emergency away from eviction and, in worst cases, homelessness.

For many of these renters, the coronavirus is that financial emergency. [More than half of low-income households](#) report having experienced a recent and sudden decline in income or a job loss. In the first week of May, only [74% of renters](#) in older, lower-cost apartments made rent, compared to nearly 90% in luxury apartments. Many of the low-income renters who paid rent in May did so with one-time stimulus checks, while others [paid with credit cards](#).

Structural racism results in people of color being [disproportionately low-income, rent-burdened](#), and [homeless](#) even before COVID-19. Low-income Latinos are [bearing the brunt of historic job losses](#). Without focused action, the pending tsunami of evictions and spike in homelessness will be disproportionately felt among Black, Latino and Native people.

The temporary increase in unemployment insurance (UI) benefits and stimulus checks are not enough to ensure stable housing for the lowest-income renters. Many people are excluded from receiving these benefits, and others face barriers to receiving the assistance for which they are eligible. Economists predict that the country's [economic recovery will be slow](#), unemployment will remain high through 2021, and some public health experts project coronavirus outbreaks may continue into the fall, long after UI has expired and one-time stimulus checks have been spent.

In the meantime, state and local eviction moratoriums are expiring rapidly and courts are beginning to address a backlog of eviction cases. Twelve states ended their eviction moratoriums in mid-late May; another six states are set to allow eviction cases to move forward over the next two weeks.

Some state and localities have cobbled together resources to provide rental assistance and avoid evictions. In Houston, a \$16 million rental assistance program was depleted within [90 minutes](#) due to overwhelming demand; in Dallas it took [hours](#) and in Florida, North Carolina, California and other communities across the country, programs had to [stop accepting](#) applications [within days](#). Demand is overwhelming resources throughout the country.

The very least the federal government should do during a global pandemic – as both a moral and public health imperative – is assure each of us that we will not lose our homes. Increased evictions and homelessness have enormous individual and public health consequences; overcrowding to save on rent makes social distancing impossible, and our nation's homeless service system is already strained with efforts to decongest shelters and encampments. In the long-term, evictions create a spiraling into poverty that is hard to reverse, with myriad costs to families, communities, and the country.

Congress should immediately implement a uniform, national moratorium on evictions for the duration of the public health emergency. But eviction moratoriums, on their own, aren't enough. Without further action, we will end this crisis having burdened low-income renters with more debt and having lost some of our country's essential housing stock. Congress must provide [at least \\$100 billion in emergency rental assistance](#) to keep America's lowest-income renters stably housed during and after the pandemic.

In addition to a much-needed broad eviction moratorium for almost all renters, the HEROES Act includes the [Emergency Rental Assistance and Rental Market Stabilization Act](#), legislation to provide \$100 billion in emergency rental assistance. The legislation is cosponsored by over [145 Representatives](#), [35 Senators](#), and is championed by Financial Services Committee Chair Maxine Waters, Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer.

The House passed the HEROES Act last week, but the Senate has not yet acted. Every day of inaction puts more low-income renters – seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, veterans – at immediate risk of losing their home. Without a significant federal intervention, there will be a rash of evictions and a spike in homelessness across the country, with all of its associated costs to individuals, their communities and our economy. Congress must act with urgency to prevent this unnecessary and costly outcome.