

March 12, 2024

The Honorable Sherrod Brown  
Chairman  
Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban  
Affairs  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tim Scott  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban  
Affairs  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Letter for the Record: “Examining Proposals to Address Housing Affordability, Availability, and Other Community Needs”

Chairman Brown and Ranking Member Scott,

On behalf of the [J. Ronald Terwilliger Center for Housing Policy](#), I am writing to express our sincere hope that Congress will enact meaningful bipartisan legislation this year to address our nation’s housing affordability crisis.

We believe the six bipartisan proposals listed below represent the best and most immediate opportunity for your committee to take legislative action that would increase housing stability and economic mobility for low-income families, improve and streamline existing housing programs, cut red tape to build more affordable housing, and modernize the rural housing program. Most of these initiatives are reflected in the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) and BPC Action’s comprehensive legislative plan, the [American Housing Act](#), created in conjunction with the Terwilliger Center.

### **Help Families with Young Children Through Targeted Mobility Housing Vouchers and Counseling**

Congress should enact the Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act (S. 1257) to connect low-income families with economic and educational opportunities. This bipartisan bill, introduced by Sens. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and Todd Young (R-IN), would improve outcomes for low-income children by helping their families afford homes in opportunity-rich neighborhoods. The bill authorizes 250,000 new “mobility” housing vouchers, as well as counseling services to help low-income families with young children move to communities of their choice—including those with high-performing schools, strong job prospects, and other essential resources.

Access to safe, stable, affordable housing is linked to nearly every quality-of-life measure, including better educational and health outcomes. In fact, a landmark [study](#) by Harvard University economist Raj Chetty demonstrated the enormous positive impact of affordable housing on upward economic mobility for children of low-income families.

### **Boost Landlord Participation in the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) Program**

Congress should strengthen HUD’s Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program by enacting the bipartisan Choice in Affordable Housing Act (S. 32) introduced by Sens. Chris Coons (D-DE) and Kevin Cramer (R-ND). This legislation would reduce inspection delays, incentivize landlords to

utilize the program, facilitate recruitment efforts with local property owners, and expand the use of Small Area Fair Market Rents. Such changes could increase voucher holders' housing choices and reduce programmatic barriers to help attract and retain landlords in the program. To help renters on tribal land, the bill would also increase funding to the Tribal HUD-Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program.

### **Encourage Communities to Remove Restrictive Regulations**

Congress should incentivize state and local governments to reduce or eliminate restrictive zoning and land use requirements that constrict the supply of housing and drive-up housing costs, especially in growing markets.

As part of this effort, Congress should enact the bipartisan Yes In My Backyard (YIMBY) Act (S. 1688) introduced by Sens. Todd Young (R-IN) and Brian Schatz (D-HI). The bill would require HUD Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) recipients to report on actions taken to remove zoning and land use barriers. These barriers often delay or prevent the construction of new affordable housing and restrict communities' economic development. Through its transparency requirements, the YIMBY Act would encourage local communities to re-examine and reform these rules.

### **Preserve Affordable Rental Housing in Rural America**

Congress should also pass legislation that increases the supply of affordable housing in rural towns and communities, which would help attract new businesses, residents, and talent.

The Rural Housing Service Reform Act (S. 2790), introduced by Sens. Tina Smith (D-MN) and Mike Rounds (R-SD), would build upon U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) rural housing programs by restructuring existing Section 515 loans, extending incentives for owners to stay in the program, and providing properties with additional resources to repair and restore homes. It would accomplish these objectives while ensuring residents continue to have access to federal rental assistance. The legislation also makes permanent a USDA pilot program to make mortgage loans available in Native communities by partnering with local community development financial institutions and updates the Section 504 program to help very low-income homeowners make needed home repairs.

### **Encourage the Development of Affordable, Walkable Communities**

Congress should enact the Build More Housing Near Transit Act (S. 3216) introduced by Sens. Brian Schatz (D-HI) and Mike Braun (R-IN). The legislation, which would instruct the Department of Transportation to incentivize housing development around transit in future New Starts projects, would support the construction of affordable housing, boost transit ridership, and make the most of federal dollars. States and localities would receive favorable ratings for projects that include plans to remove restrictive barriers to housing construction and preservation.

### **Help Our Nation's Veterans Achieve Homeownership**

To help veterans and their families achieve the dream of owning a home, Congress should pass the VA Home Loan Awareness Act (S. 3068). Introduced by Chairman Brown (D-OH) and Sen. Mike Braun (R-IN), with the bipartisan support from 24 Senate cosponsors, the bill aims to increase

awareness of the VA Home Loan Program. This program is the primary tool to help veterans become homeowners, but too many veterans are simply unaware of its existence. If passed, the bill will work to combat this lack of information in several ways, including adding a disclosure form on the Uniform Residential Loan Application and directing applicants to consult their lenders for more information.

## **Conclusion**

Beyond these initiatives, we hope the Senate Banking Committee will work closely with other Senate committees to ensure that Congress enacts the most comprehensive response possible to the housing affordability crisis. Passage of the bipartisan Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act (S. 1557), Neighborhood Homes Investment Act (S. 657), and Affordable Housing Bond Enhancement Act (S.1805), all within the jurisdiction of the Senate Finance Committee, is critical to closing the gap between the demand for affordable housing and available supply. Taken together, enactment of these bills would lead to the construction and rehabilitation of millions of affordable homes over the next ten years.

Housing policy is one of the most powerful tools to drive economic prosperity for families and communities, yet ambitious housing measures have not been a top bipartisan legislative priority in recent years. Congress has a historical legacy of bipartisan collaboration to advance housing solutions: in 1949, members of both political parties came together to pass the Housing Act, setting forth a clear national objective to provide “a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family.” Today, more than 70 years later, it is time for Congress to make that powerful aspiration a reality.

We stand ready to assist you in advancing these and other bipartisan policies to address the crisis of housing affordability in our country.

Sincerely,



Dennis Shea  
Executive Director