

**A Place To Call Home
Advocacy Toolkit**

Talking Points

Federal Budget Challenges

- **Congress must lift the low spending caps required by the *Budget Control Act* equally for defense and non-defense programs and ensure the highest level of funding possible for affordable housing programs.**
- Despite their proven track record, HUD and USDA affordable housing programs have been chronically underfunded. Today, of the families who qualify for housing assistance, only a quarter will get the help that they need.
- Low federal spending caps required by the *Budget Control Act of 2011* have decreased funding for affordable housing and community development programs. This has only made it more difficult to ensure low income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, and other vulnerable populations are stably housed.
- Spending caps will push housing assistance spending to their [lowest level in 40 years](#). Unfortunately, the need for housing assistance programs continues to far outpace supply.
- Budget cuts threaten affordable housing and community development investments and millions of low income families. More than 85% of HUD's budget goes directly to renewing housing assistance already in place. When HUD's resources are cut, families may lose access to stable housing, putting them at increased risk of homelessness.
- While we must work to reduce our nation's deficit over the long-term, balancing our budget should not be done on the backs of our nation's low income families who are already struggling to get by.
- Parity for defense and non-defense programs is critical. Without parity, non-defense spending is at risk of additional, deep cuts. President Trump's plan to increase defense spending by \$54 billion and to pay for it through cuts to other programs is short-sighted.
- Funding for non-defense programs have been cut too much already. In fiscal year (FY) 2017, funding for non-defense programs is 13.4% below 2010 levels, adjusted for inflation. Unless Congress acts, funding for non-defense programs in FY 2018 would decline to 3.1 percent of GDP—the lowest level in more than 50 years.

Importance of Federal Affordable Housing Investments

- Federal investments in affordable housing—at HUD and USDA—provide families and communities with the resources they need to thrive.
- Research has shown that when families have stable, decent, and accessible homes that they can afford, they are better able to find employment, achieve economic mobility, perform better in school, and maintain improved health.
- HUD and USDA affordable housing programs have lifted millions of families out of poverty. Without this investment, many of these families would be homeless, living in substandard or overcrowded conditions, or struggling to meet other basic needs.

Sample Tweets

Budget Cuts

- Tell Congress to lift the unfair budget caps for a stronger and more prosperous America. #CutsHurt
- #CutsHurt the most vulnerable in our communities: low income seniors, veterans, ppl with disabilities, those who are homeless.
- Families thrive bc of housing & community development investments at HUD and USDA. Now is not the time to cut funding #CutsHurt
- Congress must lift spending caps & increase \$\$ to protect #affordablehousing for low income families and communities. #CutsHurt
- We should not balance the budget on the backs of low income families struggling to get by. #CutsHurt

Federal Housing Programs

- America is stronger and prosperous when we have decent, affordable homes & stable communities. #CutsHurt
- Families thrive bc of housing & community development investments at HUD and USDA. #CutsHurt
- With an affordable home, families can climb the economic ladder and kids do better in school. #CutsHurt
- Affordable housing is linked to better health. #CutsHurt will only make our communities less healthy.

Share the Report

- Learn more about why housing matters to health, education, and economic mobility <http://bit.ly/2ljnEed>
- HUD investments led to half a million jobs in 2015, on top of providing homes to 5 million families. <http://bit.ly/2ljnEed>
- Thanks to HUD, 5 million families have a place to call home. <http://bit.ly/2ljnEed>
- Find out the economic impact of federal investments in affordable housing in your state. <http://bit.ly/2ljnEed>

Sample Op-Ed (430 Words)

As the [title] of [organization], it is disheartening to see that the budget debate in Washington largely ignores the very real impact that spending cuts will have on our communities.

Take housing. More people are struggling to pay their rent each month. New research from the National Low Income Housing Coalition found a national shortage of more than 7 million apartments that are affordable to our nation's 11 million families with extremely low incomes. This means that there are only 35 affordable apartments for every 100 extremely low income families. With few options, a full three-quarters of these households pay more than half of their limited income on rent. Because "the rent eats first," as sociologist and author of *Evicted* Matthew Desmond says, these families are forced to make harmful tradeoffs and skimp on groceries, medical care, and other basic needs.

Every state and congressional district is directly impacted by this growing problem. Yet, low spending caps—required by the Budget Control Act of 2011—have already led to deep cuts to critical housing programs. Since 2010, funding for federal housing programs at the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has been cut by \$4.3 billion, adjusted for inflation. The programs hardest hit include those that support public housing, community development, housing construction, and housing for our neighbors who are elderly or have disabilities.

The impact of these cuts can be felt in our community. [Add a sentence about the impact of recent budget cuts to HUD or USDA Rural Housing programs have had on your organization and in your community].

While the White House and Congress have reached short-term agreements in recent years to provide some modest budgetary relief, harmful spending caps will return for the fiscal year 2018 budget. Add to that the additional cuts proposed by President Trump. Unless Congress acts, millions of low income families could be negatively impacted and thousands of families could lose access to stable housing, putting them at increased risk of homelessness.

Today, just one out of four families that are eligible for federal housing assistance win the lottery and receive the help that they need. Further cuts to the budget will only make their odds of receiving this critical lifeline even longer.

It is time for President Trump and Congress to lift these arbitrary low spending caps that have done little to address our nation's debt problem, but which continue undermine critical pieces of the federal safety net like housing. Policymakers need to look at the harm these spending cuts have on our communities, and not just numbers on a page.

Sample Op-Ed: Public Housing (450 Words)

Across the country, sequestration—coupled with general appropriations cuts over the past few years —has had devastating impacts on housing authorities and the vulnerable families they serve, as well as their broader communities.

In 2011, the Budget Control Act imposed spending caps on defense and non-defense funding and mandated further reductions in the caps beginning in 2013 – through a process known as sequestration. In the years since, Congress has enacted some measures to provide relief from sequestration cuts, but these measures have only been temporary and partial. Most recently, the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 provided sequestration relief in 2016 and 2017, but its provisions expire in 2018.

The Congressional Budget Office projects that the 2018 non-defense spending cap represents a reduction of approximately \$50 billion below 2016 funding levels. If Congress does not act to replace sequestration with a balanced deficit reduction plan, vital affordable housing and community development programs, including public housing, are facing significant cuts for fiscal year 2018.

Public housing authorities are already operating in an austere budget climate. The Public Housing Operating Fund has only been fully funded four times in the last 15 years and the Public Housing Capital Fund has remained chronically underfunded. Current Capital Fund levels do not even provide half of the funding needed to meet annual accrual needs or begin to address the capital backlog of more than \$26 billion. [Add a sentence about the impact of recent budget cuts to HUD or USDA Rural Housing programs have had on your organization and in your community].

Further funding cuts will severely disrupt housing authorities' ability to serve current families in the public housing and (formerly Section 8) Housing Choice Voucher programs and will result in the loss of housing for thousands of low income families and households, further lengthening waiting lists and negatively impacting communities. Additionally, reduced funding and staff will force some housing authorities to cancel programs and services, affecting the quality of life for residents; impeding housing authorities' ability to improve education, workforce development and health outcomes; and, in some cases, reducing neighborhood safety.

Choosing to continue the sequester will decimate public housing programs and harm the low income households that these programs serve. For households served by HUD programs, many of these cuts will be felt immediately, unlike other agencies where impacts may take one or more months to appear.

We urge Congress to immediately take action to replace sequestration with a deficit reduction plan that protects low income households in need of affordable housing. While we must work to reduce our nation's deficit over the long-term, balancing our budget should not be done on the backs of middle and low income families.

Sample Op-Ed: HOME program (450 Words)

In the coming fiscal year, caps on federal discretionary spending will be about \$3 billion less than the year before. This means that without an increase in the spending caps, Congress will have to cut funding for discretionary programs, meaning affordable housing programs administered by the Departments of Housing and Urban Development and Agriculture are at risk at seeing their funding slashed. These housing programs are simply too important to local economies and the lives of millions of low income Americans who rely on them.

HUD and USDA programs, such as HUD's Housing Choice Voucher program help low income families afford safe, decent, and accessible housing, while flexible block and formula grants allow states and communities to address their unique housing and community development needs. These programs enable local agencies and nonprofit organizations to develop and rehabilitate affordable housing for families, seniors, people with disabilities and other vulnerable populations in every type of community across the country. At the same time, federal investments in local housing and community development creates jobs, boosts families' incomes and encourages further developments in rural and urban areas alike.

HUD investments are also used as crucial gap financing for Low Income Housing Tax Credit (Housing Credit) deals. The Housing Credit is the main driver of affordable housing production in the U.S. but it is not designed to cover the full cost of financing a development. This means that developers need access to both public and private gap financing to make these housing deals pencil out.

One key federal funding source of Housing Credit developments is the HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME). About a quarter of Housing Credit developments use HOME grants as gap financing, and more than one-third of HOME dollars disbursed are used as gap financing in LIHTC deals. Cuts to the HOME program would undermine the ability of Housing Credit to produce or rehabilitate affordable homes that are in high demand. [Add a sentence about the impact of recent budget cuts to HUD or USDA Rural Housing programs have had on your organization and in your community].

The case for greater federal investment is simple. Affordable housing production and preservation creates jobs and gives an economic boost to communities, while also ensuring people of modest means have a home where they can prosper and gain economic mobility. In contrast, caps on federal spending will ensure more funding cuts to HUD and USDA programs, further impairing their ability to serve Americans with the lowest incomes in communities across the country.

Instead, Congress and President Trump must work to lift these spending caps and ensure affordable housing programs receive the highest amount of funding possible. We must invest in the resources families and communities need to thrive.

Invite Your Members of Congress to Visit Your Organization

One of the most powerful things you can do to build relationships with your Senators and Representatives is invite them to visit your organization. You can make a lasting impression by showing them first-hand how your organization improves lives in your community and how you use federal programs to support your work.

Best Practices

There are a number of things you can do to increase the likelihood that your Senators and Representatives will accept your invitation to visit your organization:

- **Secure a date with your Members of Congress first.** Coordinate with schedulers and district offices and give them as much notice as possible. Offer a range of days and be flexible. It's important to consider holidays, competing community events, weather, and the size of the event location.
- **Invite guests after you secure a date with your Members of Congress,** including people from other organizations involved in your work, as well as local officials, neighbors, and potential or current residents. Ideally, you should send out invitations three to four weeks in advance.
- **Maximize the value of the event by inviting media to attend.** Make sure your Members of Congress know about the media's involvement in advance. Identify key messages that you want reporters to understand. Give media outlets one-week's notice of the who, what, when, where, and why. Prepare a press release and make a staff member available on the day of the event to give quotes and answer questions.
- **Make the event photo-op ready.** Identify participants and tell them in advance of any photo-ops. Bring props, like hard hats and shovels or ribbon and large scissors, to help make a strong statement. Do you have a banner or sign with your logo that you can display?
- **Create opportunities** for your Members of Congress can speak to, and meet with, a significant number of constituents at the event.
- **Connect the dots.** You are not only showcasing your organization, but the federal programs that support your work. Tell your Representatives and Senators about the federal programs you rely on.
- **Put a human face on the work you do.** Personalize the experience by inviting a constituent who can share a personal story of how your organization has impacted their life.

Meet One-On-One with Your Members Of Congress

A one-on-one meeting with your Members of Congress or their staff to discuss the issues carries much more weight than signing a petition, sending a letter, or making a phone call.

Best Practices

There are a number of things you can do to prepare to ensure that these meetings are as productive as possible:

- **Do your homework.** Knowing their background, information about the committees they're on, and other positions they hold will be helpful in crafting a persuasive message. Try to make a direct connection between your advocacy efforts and what they care about.
- **Focus on only one or two critical issues.** Since time is limited, focus on the most important issues. Every additional issue that you raise will only overwhelm the staffer or dilute your message.
- **Know the issue well, but assume they are unfamiliar.** It is critical that you know the facts, figures, arguments, and counter-arguments surrounding the issue before your meeting. But avoid the temptation of using industry jargon or getting into the weeds.
- **Make it personal.** Share a real-life example of how your organization has benefitted voters in their state or district. Putting a human face on the work you do can often be more important than just numbers.
- **Remember to listen.** Finding out their views is just as important as conveying yours because it gives insight on how you can make your message more persuasive. Show genuine respect for any differences in opinion.
- **Be clear and ask for what you want.** Do not end your meeting without asking your Senators and Representatives to take specific action on your issue. How else will they know what they can do to help?
- **Say “thank you” at the start and end of your meeting.** Start your meeting by thanking your Member of Congress for any helpful action they may have taken. Regardless of the outcome, end your meeting by thanking your Senators and Representatives for the opportunity to meet and raise your concerns.
- **Follow up.** Send your Members of Congress and their staff an email to thank them for the meeting. Include any additional information in a clear and concise manner. Be sure to confirm any agreed-upon actions.