



Catholic Advocacy Day 2021

Policy Brief

Housing

The lack of safe, affordable housing requires a renewed commitment to increase the supply of quality housing and to preserve, maintain, and improve existing housing through public/private partnerships, especially with religious groups and community organizations.

Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship, US Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2020

I. Programs To Aid Those Experiencing Homelessness

Housing & Essential Needs (HEN) Funding

People who are unable to work due to physical disability, advanced age, or struggles with mental health issues should be able to meet their basic survival needs. Housing needs have increased as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Housing and Essential Needs (HEN) program provides essential needs like rent and utility assistance to persons who are homeless or are at substantial risk of homelessness. HEN is a last resort safety net for people unable to work and at extreme risk of suffering poor health and even death. The state HEN program ensures that people with temporary physical disabilities or who are temporarily disabled due to mental health challenges (64 percent of the caseload) can meet their basic needs when facing extreme economic hardships. Catholic Community Services administers the HEN program in King and Kitsap Counties.

ACTION: Please ask your senator and representatives to support an increase to the highest appropriate level possible in funding for HEN assistance, which is gravely needed to help people struggling across our state.

Housing Trust Fund (HTF)

Access to safe, secure and affordable housing is a fundamental human right, yet too many in our state are homeless or insecure in their current housing. The need for affordable housing has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis. Access to housing provides stability for individuals and families, allowing them to improve their lives. One of the best tools for ensuring access to safe, affordable housing is the Housing Trust Fund (HTF), a state capital budget fund.

Since 1986, the HTF has awarded nearly \$1 billion in funding and helped build or preserve more than 50,000 units of affordable housing statewide. HTF supports first-time home ownership programs and homes for families, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities. Many of the people living in HTF-supported low-income housing are workers and their families who live below the federal poverty level.

The Housing Trust Fund provides funds that enable organizations like Catholic Charities agencies and Mercy Housing to build affordable housing. Since the number of people without

homes is still increasing, substantially increasing funding for the HTF is greatly needed. This year advocates are asking legislators to allocate the highest appropriate level possible to the HTF, which will help develop additional units of affordable housing.

ACTION: Please ask your senator and representatives to support the Housing Trust Fund by allocating the highest appropriate level of funding possible in the biennial capital budget.

II. Ongoing Support For Affordable Housing

Tenant Protections: [Senate Bill 5160](#) (SB 5160)

SB 5160 notes that Washington's workforce has experienced an unprecedented number of layoffs and reduced work hours as the result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Consequently, many of Washington's residents are experiencing economic hardship. Low and moderate-income workers have been disproportionately impacted, resulting in the inability to pay for rent and other household expenses.

In response, SB 5160 provides some tenant protections during the current public health emergency, provides legal representation for tenants in eviction cases, establishes an eviction resolution pilot program for nonpayment of rent cases, and authorizes landlords to access to rental assistance programs.

SB 5160 has been passed by the Senate and is now in the House of Representatives.

ACTION: As renters feel the economic impacts of COVID-19, ask your House Representatives to support SB 5160, which will help renters and also give landlords access to rental assistance programs.

SB 5160 is sponsored by Senators [Kuderer \(48\)](#), [Lias \(21\)](#), [Conway \(29\)](#), [Das \(47\)](#), [Lovelett \(40\)](#), [Saldaña \(37\)](#), [Wilson, C \(30\)](#).

Just Cause Eviction: [House Bill 1236](#) (HB 1236)

Under current law, landlords can evict tenants with just 20 days notice, even if the tenant has never violated lease terms nor paid rent late. Landlords are not required to provide any reason for the "no cause" terminations, which allows discrimination and retaliation to go unchecked. BIPOC households are disproportionately impacted, with Black women experiencing the highest eviction rates.

HB 1236 protects tenants by:

- penalizing the inclusion of unlawful provisions in lease agreements and
- limiting reasons for eviction, refusal to renew a tenancy, and termination of tenancy.
 - Examples of these 11 specific reasons include failure of the tenant to accept a landlord's reasonable repayment plan for overdue rent, sale of the premises, misrepresentation or omission of material on a rental application, or a substantial breach of a subsidized housing requirement.

HB 1236 was passed by the House and is now in the Senate.

ACTION: Ask your senator to protect tenants by supporting HB 1236.

HB 1236 is sponsored by Representatives [Macri \(43\)](#), [Taylor \(30\)](#), [Dolan \(22\)](#), [Gregerson \(33\)](#), [Berry \(36\)](#), [Fitzgibbon \(34\)](#), [Frame \(36\)](#), [Simmons \(23\)](#), [Ramel \(40\)](#), [Bateman \(22\)](#), [Johnson, J. \(30\)](#), [Hackney \(11\)](#), [Chopp \(43\)](#), [Thai \(41\)](#), [Peterson \(21\)](#), [Santos \(37\)](#), [Orwall \(33\)](#), [Ortiz-Self \(21\)](#), [Ryu \(32\)](#), [Wicks \(38\)](#), [Lekanoff \(40\)](#), [Slatter \(48\)](#), [Berg \(44\)](#), [Senn \(41\)](#), [Harris-Talley \(37\)](#), [Ormsby \(3\)](#), [Pollet \(46\)](#). Legislative meetings are an opportunity to thank these representatives for their support.

Farmworker Housing: [Senate Bill 5396 \(SB 5396\)](#)

SB 5396 expands tax exemptions for farmworker housing to include housing in which at least 50% of housing units are used as farmworker housing. Tax exemptions are also broadened to include seasonal farmworker housing and housing occupied by households with at least one member who is a farmworker.

Current law encourages the building and maintenance of farmworker housing through the tax exemption of goods and services used in constructing, repairing, improving, or decorating new or existing farmworker housing structures. SB 5396 increases eligibility for tax exemptions, encouraging the building, improvement, and maintenance of housing for those who labor to put food on our tables.

SB 5396 was passed by the Senate and is now in the House.

ACTION: Ask your House Representatives to support farmworker housing via SB 5396.

SB 5396 is sponsored by Senators [Lovelett \(40\)](#), [Saldaña \(37\)](#), [Conway \(29\)](#), [Das \(47\)](#), [Kuderer \(49\)](#), [Nguyen \(34\)](#), [Wilson, C \(30\)](#). Legislative meetings are an opportunity to thank these senators for their support.