**Housing is a Human Right Act of 2020**

**Lead sponsors:** Representatives Pramila Jayapal (D-WA) and Grace Meng (D-NY)

**Original co-sponsors:** Representatives Earl Blumenauer (D-OR), Jesus “Chuy” Garcia (D-IL), Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Ilhan Omar (D-MN), Ayanna Pressley (D-MA), and Rashida Tlaib (D-MI).

**Endorsing Organizations:**

**National Organizations:** Center for Popular Democracy; Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, Coalition for Juvenile Justice; Fund for Empowerment; Funders Together to End Homelessness; International Center for Advocates Against Discrimination (ICAAD); Justice in Aging; Justice Revival; Minority Veterans of America; National Coalition for the Homeless; National Health Care for the Homeless Council; National Innovation Service; National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty; National Lawyers Guild International Committee; National LGBTQ Task Force Action Fund; National Low-Income Housing Coalition; People's Action; PolicyLink; StandUp for Kids; True Colors United

**Regional Organizations:** American Civil Liberties Union of West Virginia; BASTA, Inc.; Building Changes; California Homeless Youth Project; Denver Homeless Out Loud; East Bay Community Law Center; Health Justice Innovations, LLC; Homeless Rights Advocacy Project; H.O.M.E.S. Campaign; International Human Rights Clinic of the George Washington University Law School; La Fondita de Jesus; Law Foundation of Silicon Valley; One Stop Career Center of PR; Santa Clara University - International Human Rights Clinic; Sisters of the Road Café; Stern Community Lawyering Clinic; Washington Low Income Housing Alliance; Western Regional Advocacy Project

**Description:**

People in the U.S. face a dual crisis of homelessness and housing instability. Rates of unsheltered homelessness have increased[[1]](#endnote-1), including a sharp uptick in schoolchildren sleeping in places not meant for human habitation.[[2]](#endnote-2) One in four renters spends half of their monthly income on rent[[3]](#endnote-3) and almost a million tenants are evicted each year.[[4]](#endnote-4)

Not only is there a shortage of affordable housing everywhere in the country, existing programs designed to provide housing support for people meet only a small amount of the existing need, so that a person seeking federal housing support must often wait years or decades to qualify for assistance.

As a result, many members of our communities do not have adequate, safe places to live. On a single night in 2019, there were over half a million persons who experienced homelessness.[[5]](#endnote-5) Due to these harsh conditions, people experiencing unsheltered homelessness have a mortality rate that is four to nine times higher than that of the general public.[[6]](#endnote-6)

With the COVID-19 pandemic, people experiencing homelessness have been hit especially hard. Across the country, people are being told to shelter in place, engage in social distancing, and use heightened hygiene measures. This is almost impossible for people who reside in overcrowded shelters. It is equally impossible for people who are unsheltered, who do not have adequate access to handwashing facilities and often must gather at places like soup kitchens in order to access food and other necessities. Social service providers, cities and towns are overwhelmed, struggling to assist far too many people with far too few resources.

This bill will invests federal resources in existing programs that have been shown to successfully address and reduce homelessness; creates new programs to invest resources in crucial infrastructure to address homelessness; raises revenue for homelessness-related services and housing while addressing root causes of homelessness; incentivizes cities and states to invest in resources and support rather than criminalizing people who do not have homes; improves the federal government’s ability to support people experiencing homelessness to replace key personal documents, and ensures that people experiencing homelessness and housing instability can participate in the decisions that impact their lives and can vote.

This bill also has fixes that would immediately address COVID-19 needs, including billions of federal dollars in funding for cities, states and non-profits serving people experiencing homelessness; an emergency FEMA program that would help non-profits serve communities quickly; and an infusion of cash to create infrastructure to serve people experiencing homelessness – from handwashing stations to permanent housing.

1. HUD Office of Community Planning and Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, “2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress,” at 1 (January 2020) <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. National Center for Homeless Education, “Federal Data Summary: SCHOOL YEARS 2015-16 THROUGH 2017-18,” at iii, <https://nche.ed.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Federal-Data-Summary-SY-15.16-to-17.18-Published-1.30.2020.pdf> (January 2020) [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University, “America’s Rental Housing 2020” at 4, <https://www.jchs.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/Harvard_JCHS_Americas_Rental_Housing_2020.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Eviction Lab at Princeton University, “National Estimates: Eviction In America,” <https://evictionlab.org/national-estimates/> (May 11, 2018) [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. HUD Office of Community Planning and Development, Office of Community Planning and Development, “2019 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress,” at 1 (January 2020) <https://files.hudexchange.info/resources/documents/2019-AHAR-Part-1.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Centers for Disease Control, “National Homeless Persons Memorial Day,” <https://www.cdc.gov/features/homelessness/index.html> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)