

Effectively Communicating Affordable Housing and Homelessness Policy Priorities

November 29, 2017

Washington Low Income Housing Alliance

www.wliha.org

Welcome to the Webinar

- Thank you for joining today's webinar! We will begin shortly.
- All participants will be muted during the webinar to ensure good sound quality.
- We will pause periodically to answer questions. Please type your questions into the control panel box located on the right side of your screen.
- A recording of the webinar and slide deck will be emailed to all registrants later this week.

Webinar Overview

- Part I: Leading with People Centric Language
- Part II: Framing the Issue
- Part III: Communicating the Drivers of Homelessness
- Part IV: Communicating Policy Solutions
- Part V: Tailoring Your Message for Lawmakers

Part I: Leading with People Centric Language

Language Affects the Political Will to Pass Public Policies

- Person centric language humanizes a person, emphasizes self-worth, strengths, respect, and the value of the person
- Always lead with the person:
 - **People** experiencing homelessness
 - **Person** experiencing housing instability
 - **Person** participating in a program
 - **Tenant** or **resident** accessing housing
- People first language results in more positive attitudes and actions (including public policy!)

Communication Pitfalls to Avoid

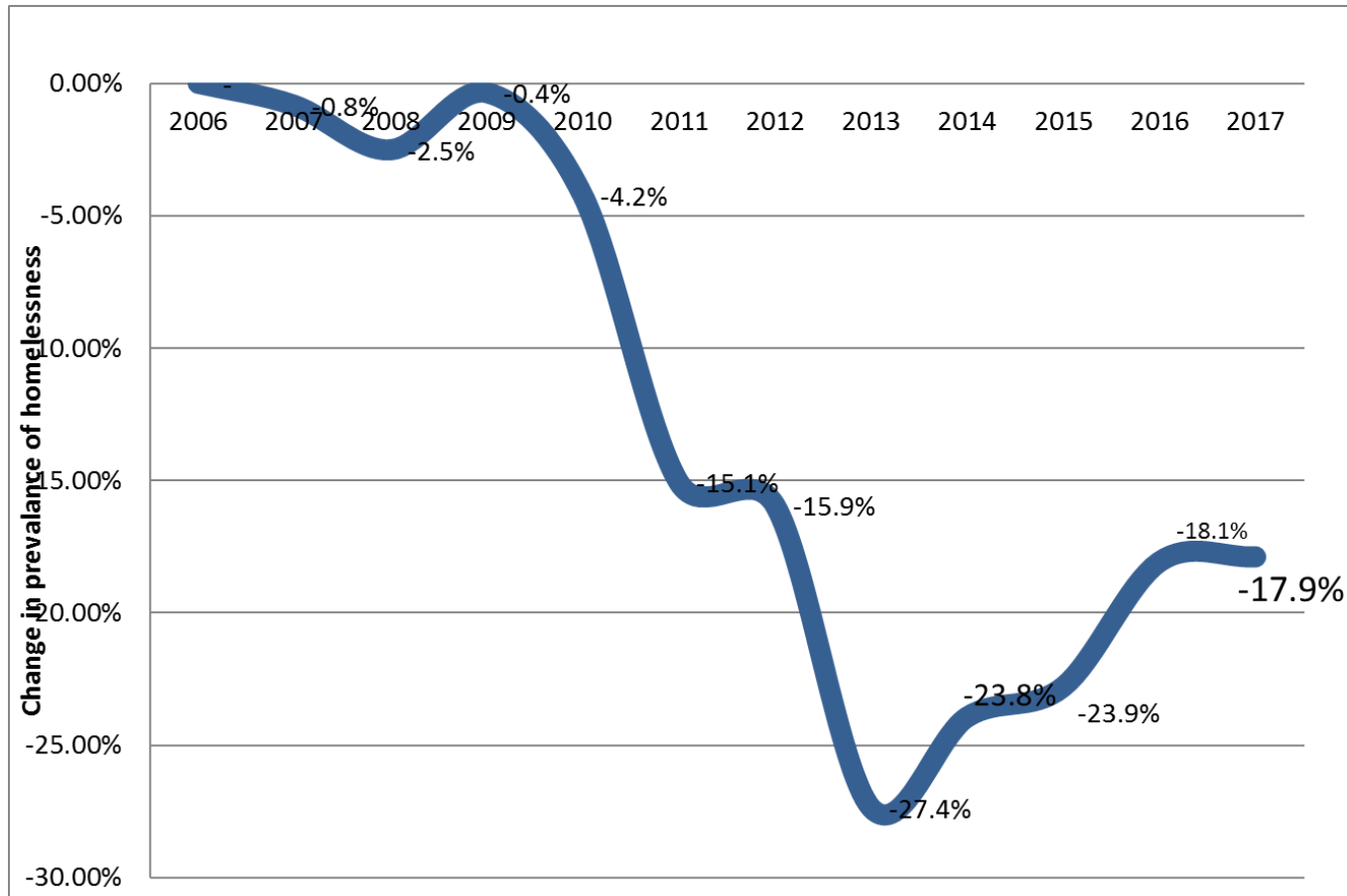
- Avoid leading with language that labels a person or a group of people, reinforces stereotypes, or equates someone's circumstance with their primary identity
- Language to avoid:
 - The homeless
 - Homeless people
 - Homeless
 - Client
 - Consumer
 - Beneficiary
 - Program user

Part II: Framing the Issue

Creating Your Message Frame

1. Lead with **values**:
 - All people should have the opportunity to live in safe, healthy, affordable homes in thriving communities.
2. Focus on the **structural drivers** of homelessness and **systemic barriers** that impede people's ability to access housing:
 - Homelessness has increased in recent years across Washington due to a number of factors created by an out-of-reach rental market, stagnant wages, and barriers to accessing the for-profit rental market.
 - Effective communication strategy for pushing back against inaccurate and harmful narratives and misconceptions that people choose to be homeless, or that the problem is simply an issue of coordination.
3. Frame homelessness and housing instability as a **solvable** problem:
 - Ending homelessness is possible.
 - We know what solutions work to expand access to housing, and we are making progress in bringing these solutions to scale.
 - What we are lacking is the political will to bring proven solutions to scale.
4. Focus on **solutions and actions** that support the values and address the problems described above:
 - We can end homelessness by passing public policies that help people access housing and mitigate factors that are causing homelessness to increase.
 - Homelessness in Washington has decreased by 17.9% since 2006 because of the public policies we have passed and investments we have made, and we can continue to build on this success.

Change in homelessness accounting for population increases (per-capita homelessness)



Communication Pitfalls to Avoid

- Avoid language that stigmatizes people experiencing homelessness or frames solutions as unattainable
- Language to avoid:
 - “The homeless problem”
 - Descriptions of homelessness as an intractable problem
 - Crisis and scarcity language that frames solutions as out of reach, too expensive, or insurmountable

Part III: Communicating the Drivers of Homelessness

Homelessness and Housing Instability Are Present in Every Community

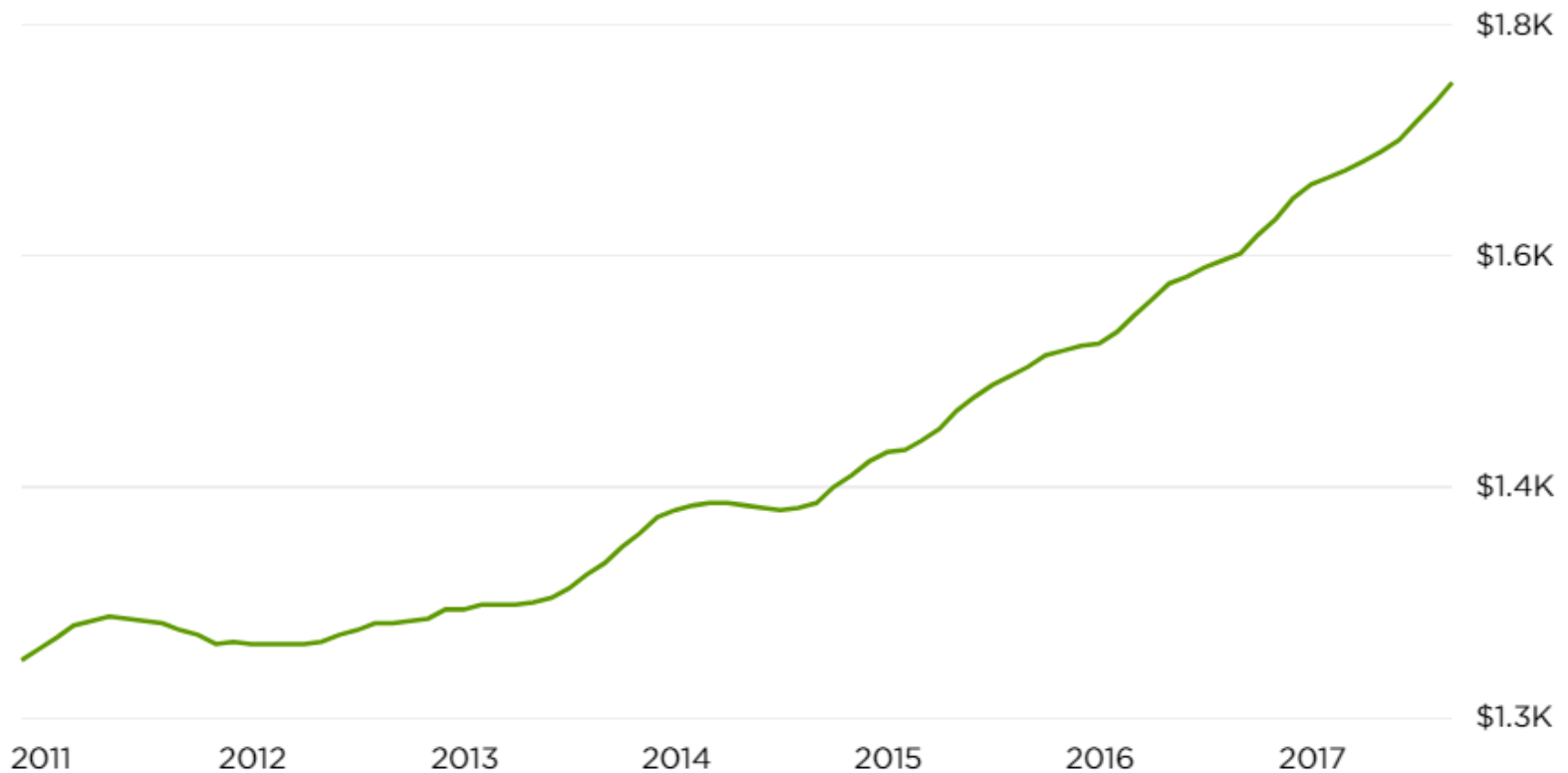
- According to data from the Department of Commerce, **84%** of households receive homelessness services in the county where they resided before experiencing homelessness, and **90%** of the people who receive services are from Washington.
- While Washington has seen significant population growth in recent years, population growth resulting from people moving to Washington is not a significant driver of homelessness.
- Between 2012 to 2014, there was only a 2% increase in people from out of state who received state funded housing stability services.

Housing Affordability and Availability is Causing Homelessness

- Washington's apartment vacancy rate reached a record low of 3.2% in 2016.
- This record low vacancy rate, coupled with a 6.6% increase in rent for a one-bedroom apartment between 2015 to 2016, has caused housing to become increasingly out of reach.
- A recent study published in the *Journal of Urban Affairs* found that every **\$100 increase** in rent is associated with a **6%** increase in homelessness in metropolitan areas and a **32%** increase in homelessness in non-metro areas, such as suburban communities.
- Washington's rental market places a heavy burden on households at or below 30% of Area Median Income (AMI). For every 100 households at or below 30%, there are only **29** affordable and available rental units statewide. Overall, our state has a deficit of **165,764** affordable and available units at or below 30% AMI.
- **We have a supply side problem, but supply side solutions alone will not fix the issue.**

Rents are growing – Washington State

Aug 2017 — Washington \$1,801/mo



Source: <http://www.zillow.com/home-values/>

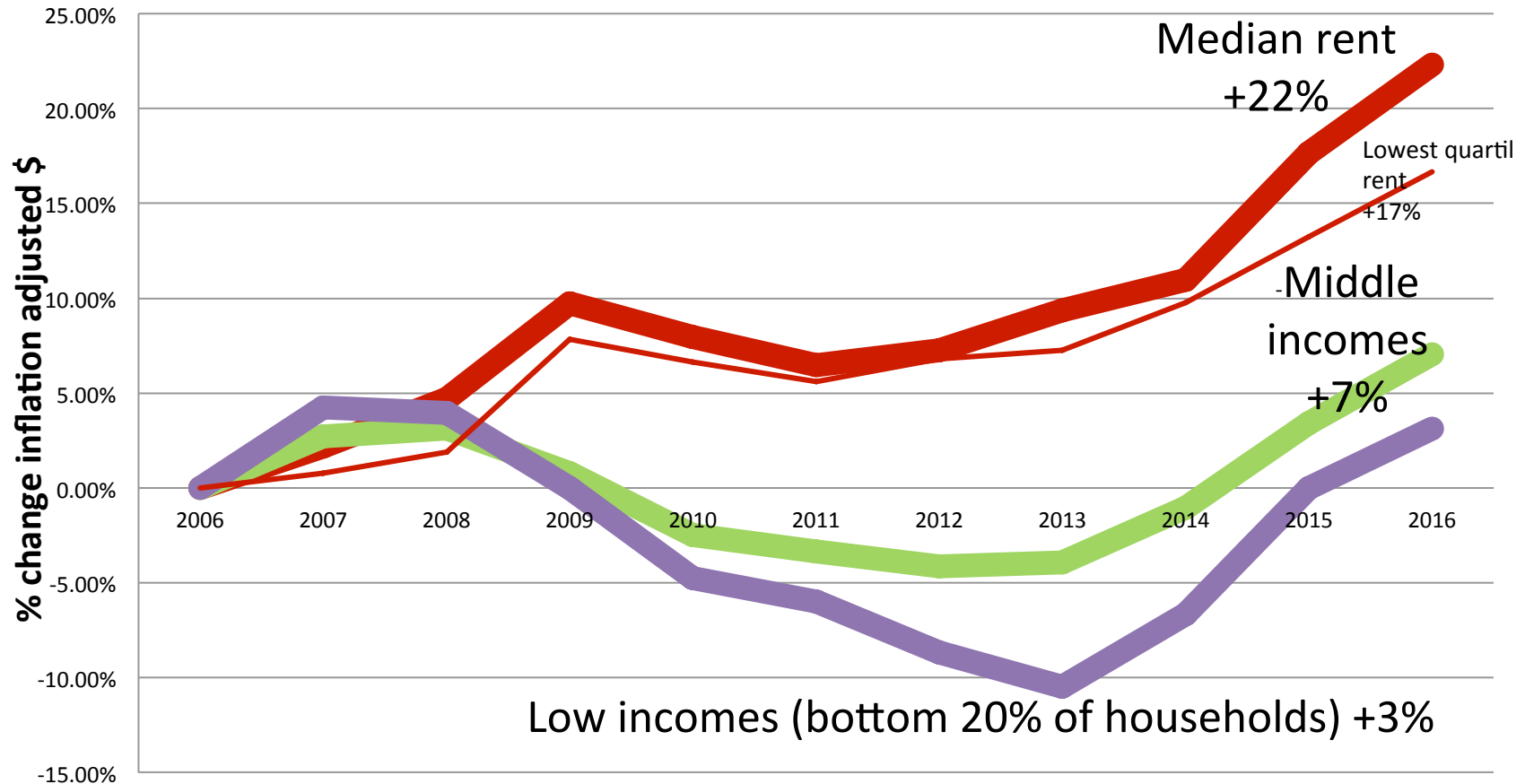


Department of Commerce

Stagnant and Low Wages Contribute to Housing Instability

- Wages in Washington are not keeping up with the increasing cost of rent, especially among people who are living on low incomes.
- According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition, workers need to earn **\$18.39** an hour in order to afford a one-bedroom apartment in our state.

Rents are growing with the economy, but middle & low income growth lags



Data sources: U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey one-year estimates; inflation adjusted using the Bureau of Labor Statistics



Department of Commerce

Barriers to the Rental Market

- Households living on low incomes often face significant barriers that prevent them from obtaining a home, beyond the high cost of rent.
- In most communities in Washington, it is legal for landlords to discriminate against tenants who pay their rent with subsidies, such as a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher.
- Discrimination based on a tenant's source of income becomes more prevalent when vacancy rates are low, and this is often used as a loophole to legally discriminate against classes protected under the Fair Housing Act, such as race, class, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, and other factors.
- This form of discrimination is frequently exacerbated by other barriers to private rental housing, including the **high cost of repeat tenant screening fees, rental application fees, and blanket rental bans against people with criminal records.**

Part IV: Communicating Policy Solutions

2018 Legislative Priorities

- Learn more about the Housing Alliance's 2018 legislative priorities here: <https://vimeo.com/238991066>
- Endorse the Housing Alliance's 2018 legislative priorities at the following link: bit.ly/2018priorities

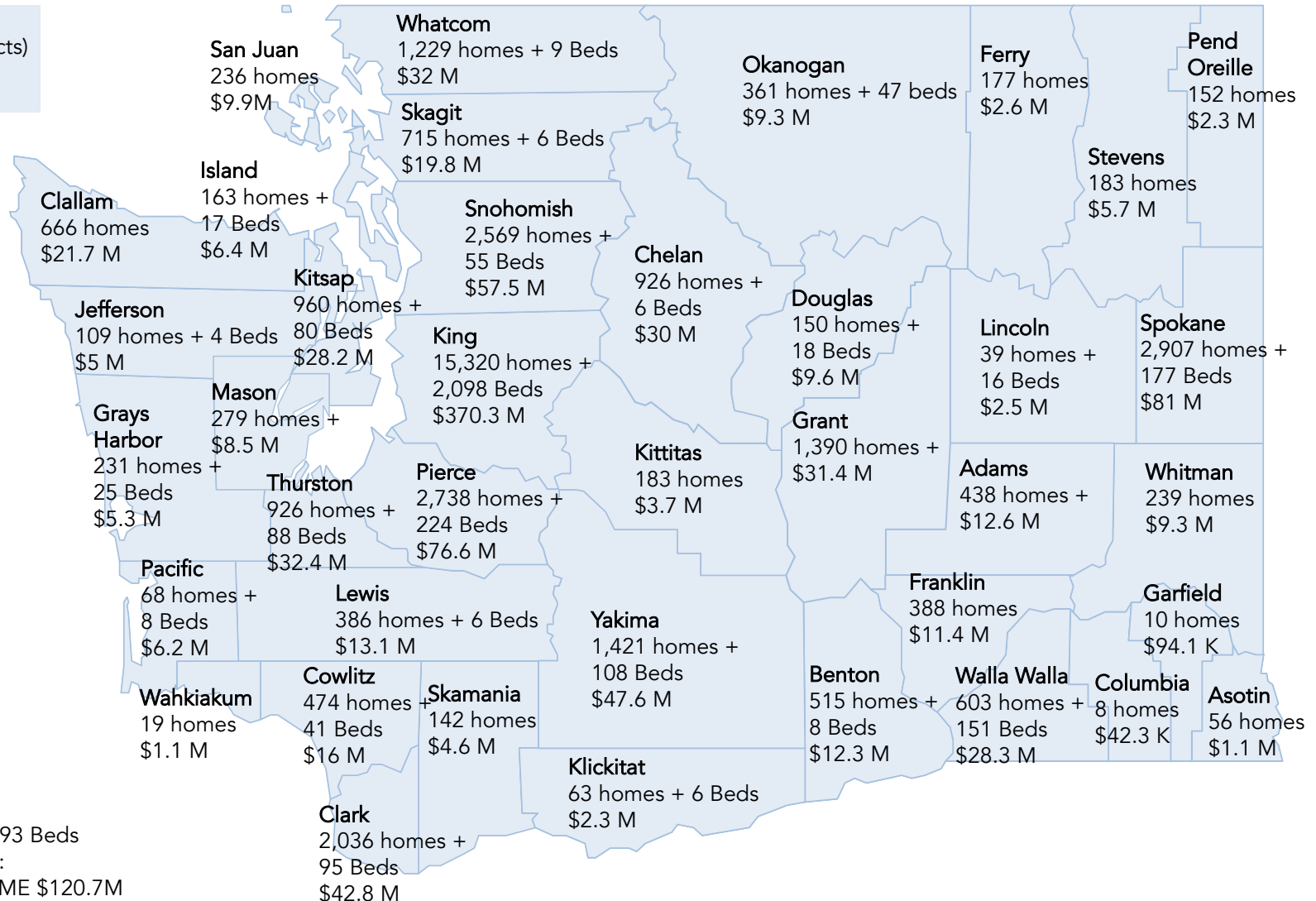
Secure Significant Funding for the Housing Trust Fund

Legislative Ask: Pass a Capital Budget with at least \$106.37 million for affordable housing, and increase biennial funding with a supplemental Capital Budget.

- *The Housing Trust Fund is critical in solving our community's affordable housing struggles. It builds safe, healthy, and affordable homes for seniors, veterans, youth, people with disabilities and mental illness, families, and other struggling households.*
- *The Housing Trust Fund is the most important investment that Washington makes to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a safe, healthy, affordable home.*
- *\$106 million from the Housing Trust Fund will build or preserve at least **3,066** safe, healthy and permanently affordable homes across Washington State.*

Housing Trust Fund Investments in Affordable Housing 1989 – 2015

Multiple Counties
(scattered-site projects)
358 homes
\$6.7 M



“Beds” refer to shelters, group-home, seasonal farmworker, barrack-style beds. Not all counties include beds.
“homes” refer to all types of rental homes such as studios, 1-bedroom, 2-bedrooms, etc.

Protect and Increase Funding for Programs that Prevent and End Homelessness

Legislative Ask: Pass Engrossed Substitute House Bill (ESHB) 1570, the Washington Housing Opportunities Act sponsored by Rep. Macri, to eliminate the sunset on over 60% of state homelessness funds, increase the Homeless Housing Assistance Surcharge to raise resources to provide additional rental assistance and services for people experiencing homelessness, and fix the 45% mandate restricting the effectiveness of homelessness assistance. *Note that the sunset is now scheduled for June 30, 2023.

- *ESHB 1570 will prevent the looming cliff in state homelessness funds by eliminating the sunset once and for all, ensuring stability for this critical resource that saves over 98,000 households from homelessness each year. Because of the interventions funded by the surcharge, homelessness in our state decreased by 17.9% between 2006 and 2017.*

1570 Talking Points Continued

- *Stability in resources to reduce and end homelessness allows our families, our communities and our service providers to plan for the future, instead of planning for cuts. If the \$30 portion of the homeless surcharge sunsets, then at least 34,000 additional people will experience homelessness each biennial budget year.*
- *Washington has one of the hottest real estate markets in the country. Home values in Washington have gone up 10.3% over the past year. And, the median rent in Washington is now \$1,795. This lack of affordability is a central driver of the increase in homelessness. It signals a growing divide between those who have homes and those who are left in the cold. A surcharge on the purchase of a new home is a commonsense and fair way to equalize the impact of real estate activity to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to live in a safe, health and affordable home.*
- *At its current level, the Homeless Housing Assistance Surcharge represents just 1/64th of 1% of the overall price of the median priced home in our state (\$309,000). If counties choose to increase it up to the full \$50, the fee will represent just 1/31st of 1% of the overall price of the median valued home.*

Outlaw Discrimination Against Renters Based on Use of Rental or Income Assistance.

Legislative Ask: Pass House Bill (HB) 1633 sponsored by Rep. Riccelli or Senate Bill (SB) 5407 sponsored by Sen. Frockt to make it illegal to categorically deny housing to renters using rental or income assistance.

- *Housing discrimination based on source of income is a loophole in Washington's fair housing laws that significantly limits housing options for people of color, single-parent headed households, seniors, veterans, and people with disabilities.*
- *Stereotypes and stigmas against low-income tenants create unfair barriers to housing that significantly impair the role of the private for-profit rental market in preventing and ending homelessness.*
- *Outlawing discrimination will give low-income households equal opportunity to compete for rental housing, ensuring a more diverse and equitable community.*

Protect State Rental and Income Assistance for People with Permanent Disabilities and Elderly Adults

Housing and Essential Needs Program and Aged, Blind, & Disabled Income Assistance

Legislative Asks:

- Pass HB 1239/Sullivan to increase access to medical records for people applying to federal SSI benefits.
- Pass HB 1831/Pettigrew or SB 5609/Darneille. Both bills revise resource restrictions for public assistance programs.
- *The Housing and Essential Need and Aged Blind (HEN) and Disabled (ABD) programs are an important part of our state's mental health housing safety net. For example, 74.7% of the people who receive ABD assistance and 80.7% of the people who are referred to HEN have a mental illness.*
- *The federal government reimburses Washington for the full cost of the Aged, Blind, and Disabled (ABD) cash grant when people successfully transition to the federal SSI program. HB 1239 is important because it will help people with permanent disabilities access a higher level of support (\$735/month), and it will help the state leverage federal resources to cover the cost of providing the ABD grant.*
- *HB 1831 and SB 5609 will help people who are living on very low incomes access housing and meet their basic survival needs by raising the resource eligibility limit for critical housing and basic need programs. Currently, program rules limit a person's resources to \$1,000 and a car worth \$5,000 or less. No one should have to choose between experiencing homelessness or selling a car they depend on to get to work or take their children to school. These bills help more people access housing and assistance programs while also allowing people to keep more of their resources, so they are better able to reach economic security.*

Ensure People with Disabilities Who Are Experiencing Chronic Homelessness Can Access Permanent Supportive Housing and Health and Social Services

Legislative Ask: Ensure full Operating Budget authority for the supportive housing services Medicaid benefit in the state's Medicaid Transformation Demonstration.

- *Permanent supportive housing is an evidence based housing and service delivery model that helps people with disabilities who are experiencing chronic homelessness access housing and health and social services.*
- *Permanent supportive housing has been proven to result in a significant return on investment that is often greater than the cost of providing housing and supportive services. These cost savings come from reduced utilization of emergency health services, avoidable hospitalizations, reduced involvement with the criminal justice system, and a reduced utilization of local emergency response.*
- *The Medicaid Transformation Demonstration is an opportunity for Washington to benefit from federal investments in homelessness which are increasingly scarce, and these investments will transform lives while saving the state money.*

Part V: Tailoring Your Message for Lawmakers

Tailoring Your Message for Lawmakers

- Personalize your messages for individual lawmakers
- Learn more about lawmakers before meeting with them:
 - Find your lawmakers: <http://app.leg.wa.gov/DistrictFinder/>
 - Research your lawmakers: <http://app.leg.wa.gov/Rosters/Members>



Senator Rebecca Saldaña (D)
Democratic Whip
37th Legislative District

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Housing and Homelessness Advocacy Day

Thursday, February 1, 2018

Olympia, Washington

Join more than 600 Housing and Homelessness advocates in Olympia for a powerful day of action. At Advocacy Day you will:

- **Gain inside information on housing policies.**
- **Attend workshops to build your advocacy skills.**
- **Meet with lawmakers. (don't worry, we'll train you!)**
- **Become a part of the growing movement for a safe, healthy, and affordable home for everyone in Washington.**

Save The Date
Follow #HHAD2018 on social media for updates



**WASHINGTON LOW INCOME
Housing Alliance**

Questions?

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