



2015 WASHINGTON STATE Legislative Agenda

We advocate for public policy supporting our vision that all **Washington residents have the opportunity for safe, healthy, affordable homes in thriving communities.**

The reasons for homelessness and housing instability include:

- An inadequate supply of homes affordable to low-income households;
- Income that is insufficient to afford a home in the private rental market;
- Inadequate services for those who need support; and
- Unfair barriers to accessing and keeping affordable homes.

In addition to the priorities listed below, **we support efforts to raise wages so that jobs pay enough to afford a home.** If more jobs paid a living wage, more workers could afford safe, healthy housing.

We also support efforts to raise revenue. Washington is \$4.5 billion short in what we need to maintain current funding levels and to make required investments in education and mental health over the next two years. To avoid harmful cuts to critical services that help people stay healthy and housed, the state must raise revenue.

LEAD ISSUES – Housing Alliance is the lead advocate for these policies.

SUPPORT ISSUES – One or more of our members and allies lead these policies, and we fully support.

We also take positions on other issues that impact affordable housing and homelessness as they arise during the session.

This document has 5 pages. Updated 1/27/15.

Create Affordable Homes

Utilize the state capital budget to build healthy communities by investing in affordable homes.

How the State Can Respond to the Need for Affordable Homes

A capital investment in affordable housing will build and preserve affordable homes for seniors, homeless families, veterans, people with mental illness and disabilities, farmworkers, and more. The capital investment will fund rental homes that will remain affordable for at least 40 years and will help low-income households become first time homeowners. The vast majority of state investments in affordable homes assist people who are extremely low-income and are otherwise unable to afford a home.

Creating Affordable Homes Will Help the State Achieve Important Priorities

A home is the foundation for health, education, and stability. Children need a home to study and do homework. Investing in affordable housing ensures that investments in education reach our most vulnerable students. Homes for people with mental illness help ensure they stay connected to health care and treatment, while reducing the use of expensive emergency services.

The Legislative Solution

Invest at least \$100 million to build and preserve safe, healthy, affordable housing.

LEAD ISSUES

HOUSING & HEALTH

Protect Washington's Lifeline for Disabled and Elderly Adults

Protect the Housing & Essential Needs Program; the Aged, Blind, & Disabled Program; and SSI Facilitation Services.

About the Housing & Essential Needs (HEN) Program

The state's HEN program provides housing support to ensure a *temporary* disability doesn't result in homelessness for very low-income adults. The program provides rental and utility assistance, and recipients have access to essential basic need items, including transportation assistance and health/hygiene products.

About the Aged, Blind & Disabled (ABD) Program

The state's ABD program helps extremely low-income adults with *permanent* mental illnesses or permanent physical disabilities by providing cash assistance of up to \$197/month while they apply to the federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. When people transition to SSI, the state is retroactively reimbursed for the full cost of the ABD cash grant.

About SSI Facilitation Services

SSI Facilitation Services assists disabled individuals through the lengthy and complicated process of applying for federal SSI benefits.

The Legislative Solution

Maintain HEN, ABD, and SSI Facilitation Services at their current funding levels.

Help End Chronic Homelessness by Creating a Medicaid Supportive Housing Services Benefit

Ensure that services for people living in supportive housing can be paid for with Medicaid.

About the Medicaid Supportive Housing Services Benefit

Because of the Affordable Care Act, most people experiencing homelessness are now eligible for Medicaid. A Medicaid Supportive Housing Services Benefit would allow some housing providers to bill Medicaid for supportive services provided to eligible residents. This would help individuals with severe and chronic health conditions stay off the street and in a healthy home.

About Supportive Housing

Supportive housing is an affordable home combined with comprehensive primary and behavioral health services. Supportive housing is a research-proven model that reduces utilization of costly emergency, inpatient, and crisis services and while improving health outcomes.

Supportive housing serves people who need services in order to succeed in housing. And these same people need housing in order to succeed in services. People living in supportive housing usually have a long history of homelessness and often face persistent obstacles to keeping their home, such as a serious mental health illness, chemical dependency, physical disability, or chronic medical condition.

The Legislative Solution

Medicaid can and should pay for supportive housing services. The state needs to take action to request this amendment to the state's Medicaid plan and make a modest investment of state Medicaid dollars.

TENANT PROTECTIONS

Pass the Fair Tenant Screening Act

Make tenant screening reports fair and affordable for all renters.

How Tenant Screening Reports Are a Barrier to a Home

The high cost of tenant screening reports, especially when tenants have to pay over and over, is a significant barrier to housing and mobility. Different companies produce tenant screening reports with virtually the same information. Despite this, whenever prospective tenants submit a single application, they must pay for a new report each time. These costs add up, especially when applicants are competing for vacancies in tight rental markets. Costly duplicate reports are not only unfair, but can also be a significant economic barrier for low-income renters in accessing a stable home.

The Legislative Solution

Pass the Fair Tenant Screening Act to make the tenant screening process more affordable and fair for both tenants and landlords.

Pass the Truth In Evictions Reporting Act

Ensure that evictions are reported only when a tenant was proven guilty.

The Problem with Current Evictions Reporting

Tenant screening companies report all eviction lawsuits as equal, even lawsuits that have been settled to the landlord's satisfaction or when the tenant has won in court. Eviction court has many different outcomes. The tenant could have been wrongfully named, the tenant could have been a victim of their landlord's foreclosure, or the tenant could have won. But tenant reports list all eviction lawsuits as equal. No matter the outcome, tenants have a mark on their record. This mark makes accessing a rental home in the future much more difficult.

The Legislative Solution

Pass the Truth in Evictions Reporting Act, ensuring that evictions are reported only when a tenant was proven guilty.

Pass Legislation to Protect Renters from Source of Income Discrimination

Provide Choice and Mobility for Renters: Outlaw Discrimination.

About Source of Income Discrimination

In the search for a home, many individuals and families face outright or unintentional discrimination. This occurs when landlords are unwilling to rent to Housing Choice (Section 8) voucher holders, seniors relying on social security income, veterans using housing subsidies, and people with disabilities who receive other legal sources of income. This discrimination has a significant impact on communities who disproportionately need to rely on housing subsidies to make ends meet: households of color, seniors, people with disabilities, and single-parent headed households with young children.

Already, several municipalities in Washington and many states have adopted laws prohibiting housing discrimination based on source of income. These protections ensure families who pay rent with a housing subsidy or other legal sources of income other than from a job can secure a safe and healthy home.

The Legislative Solution

Pass legislation to prevent landlords from categorically denying housing to all tenants relying on a lawful housing subsidy or lawful income supports to help pay the rent.

Pass Extended Foster Care

Expand Extended Foster Care to include youth with disabilities/serious medical conditions.

The Extended Foster Care Program allows young people to remain in the foster care system until the age of 21 in order to achieve a high school diploma/GED, pursue their post-secondary education, or pursue programs that break down barriers to employment. Washington has extended foster care services to all eligible youth except those with a documented medical condition. Passing this legislation will provide young people an opportunity to maintain safe housing until age 21.

Lead Partner Organizations

The Mockingbird Society and Partners for Our Children

Pass the Homeless Youth Act

Fund innovative services that protect our most vulnerable young people.

This act will establish a fund to support housing, education, employment, and other critical services for homeless youth across the state. The act will also establish the Office of Homeless Youth Programs to coordinate funding, policy, and practices related to homeless youth and young adults. The Homeless Youth Act also makes recommendations to the governor and creates a Homeless Youth Advisory Council to serve as a liaison between service providers and state government.

Lead Partner Organizations

Washington Coalition for Homeless Youth Advocacy, Partners for Our Children, Mockingbird Society, and others

Pass the Homeless Student Stability Act

Fund effective services that protect vulnerable students.

This act will provide schools with much-needed support to identify and serve homeless students. It will encourage schools and housing providers to establish partnerships to increase access to stable housing for homeless students and their families. The act will allow school districts to use a limited amount of state funds for programs or services to improve student housing stability and gather data on the effectiveness of these interventions.

Lead Partner Organization

Columbia Legal Services

Invest \$6 Million in the Washington Youth and Families Fund

Continue funding this private/public partnership that helps house young people and families.

The Washington Youth and Families Fund provides stable, long-term funding for both on- and off-site supportive services linked to affordable housing for young people and families. The Washington Youth and Families Fund allows nonprofit organizations to leverage support from private sector partners and community foundations for model programs and innovative solutions to ending youth and family homelessness throughout the state.

Lead Partner Organization

Building Changes

Invest \$20 Million in Low-Income Weatherization Assistance

Help low-income households save money and help the environment.

The capital budget often allocates funding for the weatherization of homes for low-income homeowners. These services save low-income homeowners money and keep dwellings warm in the winter and cool in the summer. Weatherization assistance is especially important in rural communities. We join our partners in requesting \$20 million for this important program.

Lead Partner Organizations

Washington State Community Action Partnership (WSCAP) and Opportunity Council

Protect TANF and the Families that Rely on this Important Program

Protect this lifeline so low-income families with children can meet their basic needs.

Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) is a critical lifeline for vulnerable families across Washington. Because of recent cuts, more than 24,000 children across our state have lost benefits since 2011 and those remaining on the program have had their benefits reduced. We support efforts to restore the cash grant and implement other improvements to make TANF work better for Washington's families. Of the TANF caseload, 5,620 are homeless families (15%). According to the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Washington State's TANF grant has experienced a 42% decrease since 1996 (after inflation).

Lead Partner Organizations

Columbia Legal Services, Partners for Our Children, and Statewide Poverty Action Network

Protect the Foreclosure Fairness Act

Protect the Foreclosure Fairness Act from any attempts to weaken it, and strengthen the act so more homeowners can keep their homes.

The state legislature passed the Foreclosure Fairness Act in 2011 to provide homeowner foreclosure assistance. The program offers free housing counseling, civil legal aid, education and outreach, and the opportunity for mediation. While the program has been quite successful, it can be improved.

Lead Partner Organization

Columbia Legal Services

Clarify King County's Bonding Authority for Affordable Housing

Clarifying language would allow King County Council to issue bonds to create affordable homes.

In 2011, the state legislature authorized King County to use a portion of lodging tax revenue for developing affordable homes (SB 5834). But these funds are not available until 2021. Clarifying language would allow the King County Council to issue bonds against a reasonable portion of the future revenue to fund affordable housing now. Pulling forward a portion of the housing revenue means projects can begin construction years earlier, while land near transit stations is still available and construction costs are lower. Current law does not exclude the ability to bond, but it also does not provide sufficient clarity or legal certainty.

Lead Partner Organization

Housing Development Consortium

Align the State and Federal Definitions of Service Animals

Changing the state definition of service animal to match the federal definition will end confusion and help disabled tenants.

The federal Fair Housing Act protects the right of a person with a disability to have a therapy animal in their home. But the Washington State Law Against Discrimination only protects this right when the animal is trained to perform a task. This bill would ensure that Washington State law aligns with the federal Fair Housing Act.

Lead Partner Organizations

Washington State Human Rights Commission and Disability Rights Washington