



NEW ENGLAND HOUSING NETWORK

c/o Citizens' Housing and
Planning Association

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April 14, 2020

Congressman Joseph Kennedy III
304 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Addressing Housing and Homelessness in COVID-19 Response

Dear Congressman Kennedy:

I am writing on behalf of the New England Housing Network (NEHN), a broad coalition of affordable housing organizations from each of the New England states (Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont). Created in 1995, the Network was the first organization to leverage the political diversity of our region in order to advocate for a broad range of affordable housing issues, no matter who is in leadership.

NEHN understands Congress is currently negotiating a Phase 4 legislative funding package in order to aid the country in its recovery from the crisis. Additional relief for housing and homelessness is needed to address the affordable housing crisis and get the economy up and running again. The affordable housing sector is in a unique position to help stimulate the post-COVID-19 economy with “shovel-ready” projects, much as it did after the Great Recession. As such, NEHN urges Congress to consider including more funding for the following programs that address housing stability for low-income families and individuals experiencing homelessness:

\$48 billion Emergency Appropriation for HOME: A \$48 billion appropriation to the HOME program would help stabilize low-income families, cover increased operating costs associated with addressing COVID-19 related expenses, and stimulate the preservation and production of affordable homes. Funds should be allocated to support state and local efforts, and targeted towards: 1) Emergency rental assistance for tenants (without a rental subsidy), 2) landlord operating costs (for cleaning, health and safety, etc.), and 3) grants or flexible debt funding for short and long term housing needs. Additional provisions should be included to waive statutory requirements including expanding the income limits.

\$100 billion for Housing Choice Vouchers: Housing assistance is already underfunded and only one in four families gets the housing assistance it needs. A \$100 billion allocation for the Housing Choice Vouchers program is needed for our ongoing recovery from the crisis. This investment will help families and our workforce – including essential workers – keep more of their incomes for food, medicine, education, and transportation during and after the crisis. Assistance for hard-hit seniors and families in mobile home communities as well as tenants in single room occupancies and other forms of congregate housing must be included in this expansion.

\$45 billion for the National Housing Trust Fund: The National Housing Trust Fund helps create and preserve housing for those with the lowest incomes and those experiencing homelessness. NEHN requests that \$45 billion be allocated for the purpose of expanding the National Housing Trust Fund, which can be used to build and operate affordable rental housing.

Additional Funding for PPE: New England has a lack of adequate PPE for frontline health care workers and other essential service personnel, including respirators, gloves, face shields, gowns, and hand sanitizer. In Italy, health care workers experienced high rates of infection and death due to inadequate access to PPE. NEHN requests more funding be allocated to New England states for more respirators and surgical masks.

New England Housing Network Lead Agencies

Citizens' Housing and Planning Association / Connecticut Housing Coalition / Housing Action New Hampshire
HousingWorks RI / Maine Affordable Housing Coalition / Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition



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LIHTC Rescue Package: The Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is our most successful tool for investing in affordable housing. However, diminishing value of the credit is threatening the viability of many critically needed affordable housing properties. NEHN requests the following supports for LIHTC:

- **Support the 4% LIHTC Minimum:** LIHTC rate has diminished to a low of 3.12% (and will likely decline even further). NEHN urges Congress to enact a minimum 4% rate.
- **Increase the 9% LIHTC allocation.** A minimum 9% rate played a critical role in the 2008 recession recovery. NEHN urges Congress to increase the 9% allocation or extend the current increase period.
- **Provide Additional LIHTC Basis Boosts:** NEHN proposes enacting additional basis boost provisions for properties identified as needing additional equity in many circumstances, such as: 1) a 30% boost for Housing-Bond financed properties, 2) a 50% boost for developments serving extremely low-income tenants, and 3) a 30% boost for properties in rural areas.
- **Extend Key LIHTC Deadlines:** Many LIHTC developments in the middle of the construction process are in jeopardy of missing key program deadlines. NEHN requests one-year extensions for: 1) 10% test; 2) Placed in service; 3) Rehabilitation expenditure; and 4) Difficult to develop areas.
- **Increased rental assistance for LIHTC tenants:** NEHN requests addition rental assistance for LIHTC rentals – without PBRA, PBV's, or PRAC - to compensate for losses due to income losses.

Fund the USDA Rural Development and Preservation Programs: Broad investments to address rural housing are needed to offset losses of rental revenue and cover added costs at housing developments that receive rural rental assistance through USDA. NEHN recommends the following emergency allocations: 1) **\$500 million** for Rental Assistance; **\$200 million** for Section 515 Rural Rental Housing; 3) **\$100 million** for MFH Preservation and Revitalization Demonstration Program (MPR); 4) **\$1 billion** for Section 502 Direct Loans; 5) **\$50 million** for Section 523 Rural Housing Site Loans; and **\$10 million** each for Rural Community Development Initiative Grants at USDA and Rural Capacity Building at HUD.

Housing is Infrastructure: Safe and affordable housing is an essential part of our nation's infrastructure. Phase 4 must include housing provisions that make central the Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act.

Please support these additional resources to ensure that access to housing and other essential services and protections are made available to everyone in need. We will follow up with a separate letter on the various regulatory waivers needed to deploy these and other federal COVID-19 funds flexibly to address the needs.

Sincerely,

Connecticut Housing Coalition
Community Housing of Maine
Maine Affordable Housing Coalition
Citizens' Housing and Planning Association
Greater Worcester Community Foundation
Metro Housing | Boston
Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts
Preservation of Affordable Housing

Housing Action New Hampshire
Housing Network of Rhode Island
HousingWorks Rhode Island
Cathedral Square
Housing Vermont
Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition
Vermont Housing & Conservation Board
Windham & Windsor Housing Trust

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HousingWorks RI / Maine Affordable Housing Coalition / Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition