



October 20, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.  
President  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Charles Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. President, Speaker Pelosi, and Majority Leader Schumer:

As philanthropy member organizations that represent more than 7,000 foundations from across the country, we write to urge Congress to enact the housing investments in President Biden's Build Back Better Act, including \$90 billion to expand rental assistance to 1 million more households, \$80 billion to preserve public housing for more than 2.5 million residents, and \$37 billion for the national Housing Trust Fund to build, preserve and rehabilitate 330,000 apartments affordable to the lowest-income people.

The House Financial Services Committee approval of \$327 billion in housing investments through the Build Back Better Act gives us a real opportunity at everyone having a safe and affordable place to call home and a pathway to racial justice. We cannot fulfill the Administration's commitments to advance racial equity without addressing our nation's housing crisis.

There is a strong focus on our country's infrastructure and the vast need to both repair our current bridges and roads while constructing new ones to connect communities to each other to grow opportunity and prosperity. But without safe, accessible, and affordable housing, our roads and bridges are just mere concrete paths to empty promises. Housing is infrastructure. Housing saves lives.

The need cannot be overstated. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimates that more than 11 million renters are behind on rent, in part because of the lack of affordable housing options for those with extremely low incomes. We are also witnessing an increase in people experiencing homelessness on a single night, a population overrepresented by people of color. In fact, last year homelessness increased in more states than it decreased in, and we are bracing for this to only worsen as we navigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Philanthropy, on its own, is unable to resource this need. It takes robust and sustained investments to move us, the size of which the private sector does not have. Private philanthropy cannot be a substitute for the federal government. Without bold federal funds, our grantmaking simply puts a band-aid on the inequities that are created and perpetuated by bad policy, which is unsustainable and ineffective.

In 2020, philanthropy gave nearly \$2.2 billion towards housing and homelessness programs and services, according to Candid, which is \$324.8 billion less than what is being proposed in the Build Back Better Act. Not only are those kinds of resources not available from philanthropy, if we even attempted to meet that need, it would take away funds from other housing focused programs and services, setting up conditions for another crisis to evolve that would once again require federal investment to address.

The \$327 billion allocated for housing would provide a path to achieve housing justice and start an overdue journey towards racial healing and justice. For example, through the \$75 billion investment in the Housing Choice Voucher Program, around 1.7 million people, including 660,000 children, 180,000 seniors, and 330,000 people with disabilities, would be able to afford stable housing. This investment would help our nation live up to the commitment to advance racial equity as more than 70 percent of those who would receive this assistance would be people of color, helping to reduce racial disparities caused by decades of systemic racism and intentional underinvestment.

Outcomes of this magnitude cannot be reached with only private dollars at the helm, which is why this funding in the Build Back Better Act is so imperative. Now is the time to act on this collective opportunity to end housing instability in this country.

In partnership,

Funders Together to End Homelessness  
Funders for LGBTQ Issues  
United Philanthropy Forum  
Women's Funding Network