

2023 HOUSING JUSTICE AGENDA

These priorities move us toward our vision of an equitable and racially just Washington where each and every one of us lives in a healthy, affordable home in a thriving community of our choice.

To develop our 2023 priorities, we heard from people across Washington through survey responses, listening sessions, and one on one interviews. We prioritized gathering input from people and communities most impacted by homelessness and the lack of affordable housing.

What we heard aligns with the results of recent polls: people in Washington want the Legislature to address the affordable housing and homelessness crisis.

WHAT WE HEARD

Housing justice is racial justice...

“To achieve housing justice, we must reckon with the injustices of the past. We must intentionally and collectively dismantle racist institutions; denounce modern day redlining; and build liberatory and community health oriented spaces in their place.”

Housing costs too much and people are hurting...

“I have been living with a friend for five years as it is all I can afford. I sold my house because I wanted to retire and couldn't afford to keep up the mortgage payments. In hindsight, those payments were less than current apartment rental rates for a one bedroom.”

If we made significant progress in five years...

“People wouldn't have to have 3 jobs simply to pay rent. There would be money for other things besides just rent. We have to get to be human.”

“I wouldn't panic every time my landlord posted something on my door or called me! I'd feel more secure and might actually unpack all my boxes and truly create a home for myself.”

“You would have options within your price range, help if you fall behind, and know your rights as a renter and be able to self-advocate for things you need.”

This agenda provides solutions to create equitable housing opportunities for every community in our state and address the affordable housing and homelessness crisis. It reflects the most urgent priorities informed by stakeholders across the state who know best what their communities need. If the Legislature embraces these priorities, we will make significant progress toward ending homelessness and ensuring that everyone in Washington has a safe, healthy, affordable place to live.

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BUDGET PRIORITIES

The state should invest \$400 million into the Housing Trust Fund to build and preserve permanently and deeply affordable homes.

The appropriation should build and preserve permanently affordable homes and invest in homeownership opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.

The Legislature should create a permanent fund source for the Housing Trust Fund by enacting a new state level Real Estate Excise Tax on very high value properties and also authorize a new local Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) for affordable housing and operations.

The State's Operating Budget should include funding for organizational support and capacity building of Black, Indigenous, and other people of color led organizations to address inequitable access to Capital Budget (Housing Trust Fund) dollars.

The state should invest in homelessness prevention, cash assistance, and Housing & Essential Needs rental assistance.

Address the up to 50% decline in funding for homelessness prevention with General Fund dollars.

The state's document recording fees are experiencing an almost 50% reduction and the state must take action to fill the gap to prevent a loss of critical homelessness services, especially given the increased need across the state.

Prevent the Housing & Essential Needs "benefits cliff" by extending the SSI pilot statewide and make it permanent. This would prevent loss of rental assistance once disabled tenants qualify for federal SSI or SSDI.

End the Reagan-era requirement that extremely low-income, disabled people pay back Aged, Blind and Disabled cash assistance.

BUDGET PRIORITIES

The state should invest in eviction prevention to prevent homelessness.

Continue funding for pre-eviction civil legal aid and add \$400,000 to allow the Eviction Defense Screening Line to assist tenants who are not yet eligible for right to counsel. Total request is \$2.408 million (this includes inflation adjustment).

Increase funding for statewide Right to Counsel to properly operate the program, meet statutory requirements and serve eligible tenants. Total increase needed from baseline is \$1,902,440 in FY 2024 and \$2,448,949 in FY 2025.

Increase funding for the Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP) and Landlord Mitigation Fund. There is a currently a backlog of requests from landlords and the TPP program is a critical strategy to prevent evictions.

The state should support and stabilize the nonprofit housing and homelessness workforce.

The state should increase administrative funding for nonprofits providing homelessness services and affordable housing with at least a 6% grant increase.

This would impact nonprofit organizations providing affordable housing and homelessness services that are funded through the Department of Commerce. A permanent increase will allow for wage and benefit adjustments which are a critical solution to the workforce crisis facing this sector.

POLICY PRIORITIES

The state should prevent unfair, abusive, and extreme rent increases.

Prevent abusive and extreme rent increases that are used to deny tenants of their rights, including to protections against no-cause evictions. Bill number to come.

Cap yearly rent increases that a landlord can charge a tenant to a fair amount to account for costs and improvements. Bill number to come.

HB 1124/Peterson: Require landlords to provide 6 months' notice of significant rent increases. What this bill does:

- Requires a landlord to provide 6 months' notice for any rent increase greater than 5%.
- If you receive a rent increase over 5% but are still locked into fixed-term lease, you can move and not pay any early termination penalties or face other penalties.
- Limits late fees on rent to \$75.
- Applies these provisions to residential tenants and manufactured homeowners.

The state should enforce obligations and protections under the state Landlord Tenant Act

Create an accessible and expedited enforcement process for tenants to use when their landlord does not abide by their basic obligations under the residential landlord tenant act (HB 2023 in 2022).

- This would create an accessible and expedited process for tenants to hold their landlord accountable and to shift state laws from "self-help laws" to rights that can be enforced by a court of law.
- Right now, tenants have no mechanism to hold their landlords accountable even when tenants are illegally locked out, even when tenants face serious repair issues, even when landlords violate source of income discrimination protections, and even when landlords harass tenants or illegally enter apartments.
- This would also put tenant protections under the enforcement of the State Attorney General and the "consumer protection act". The CPA provides important protections and penalties when violated.