



## 2022 Issue Paper: Affordable Housing and Homelessness

### Position Statement

The LWVUS believes that the “federal government shares with other levels of government the responsibility to provide equality of opportunity for education, employment and housing for all persons in the United States regardless of their race, color, gender, religion, national origin, age, sexual orientation or disability” and “ In order to promote self-sufficiency for individuals and families, the LWVUS supports policies and programs designed to prevent or reduce poverty.”

The LWVUS has worked on fair housing since the late 1960s and supported passage of fair housing since 1980. In 2002, the LWVUS formally endorsed legislation to establish the National Housing Trust Fund, which uses surplus funds from the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) to create new housing for low-income families. In 2005, the LWVUS urged Congress to create the Affordable Housing Fund, a long-overdue step toward addressing the housing crisis that confronts low- and extremely low-income families. It also urged House members to protect activities of the nonprofit groups providing the bulk of housing services for our poorest communities.

The LWVUS has specific criteria for income assistance, supportive services, and housing supply in its [Impact on Issues 2020-22](#).

The LWVWA policy on housing, HO-1, states that “All levels of government and the private sector share the responsibility to help alleviate the housing shortage in the low income sector. Identifying housing needs and planning to meet these needs is best done at the local level. The state should set minimum standards for safe and decent housing and provide for their enforcement. Policies should be formulated to allow for maximum use of available federal funding as well as encourage the participation of industry, business, local and nonprofit groups in meeting housing needs. The state government should provide information, assistance and coordination for housing programs at all levels.”

### Summary of Issues for the 2022 Legislative Session

#### Background

The Washington State Department of Commerce has for years reported a shortage of affordable housing units in the state of about a quarter of a million units. This crisis got worse during the COVID pandemic, when many people lost their jobs. The federal and state governments appropriated millions of dollars for rental assistance to assure that as few people as possible would lose their homes during this period.

The prevailing cause of homelessness is the widening gap between housing costs (both purchase and rental), which are increasing dramatically, and wages, which are not. It is important to recognize that many adults experiencing homelessness are employed. After the eviction moratorium ended, many landlords instituted massive rent increases.

A long list of legislative actions were taken in 2019, 2020 and 2021 to address homelessness and housing insecurity, including historic funding of the Housing Trust Fund and preventive programs such

as rental assistance; land use opportunities to increase density for smaller, lower cost housing development; changes in the landlord-tenant act to make conditions more beneficial to tenants; and much more.

Legislation anticipated in 2022 includes these:

- additional investment in the Housing Trust Fund, which will allow addition of many new affordable housing units;
- a bill that would prevent landlords from denying housing solely based on tenant or family member's previous arrest or incarceration;
- significant increase in the Aged, Blind and Disabled cash grants (from about \$200 to over \$400/month);
- Anti-rent gouging and tenant protections against unduly high rent increases;
- Registration requirement for for-profit landlords;
- A real estate excise tax exemption for sales of property to affordable housing developers
- Support for nonprofit homelessness providers whose employees are financially at risk.

Additional measures are likely, and as they are put forth will be measured against the League's positions cited above to determine whether they will receive League support.

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