



2021 Issue Paper: Affordable Housing and Homelessness

Position Statement

The LWWUS 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 LWWUS supports policies and programs designed to prevent or reduce poverty.”

The LWWUS has worked on fair housing since the late 1960s and supported passage of fair housing since 1980. In 2002, the LWWUS 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 LWWUS 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 LWWUS has specific criteria for income assistance, supportive services, and housing supply in its [Impact on Issues 2018-2020](#).

The LWWWA 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 2021 Legislative Session

Background

- The Washington State Department of Commerce has for years reported a shortage of affordable housing units in the state upward of 220,000 units.
- 2020 point-in-time count data is not available but in 2019 21,621 individuals were homeless. Extrapolating from this one night, approximately 225,000 people were

homeless in 2019.

- An additionally, public school data reported an estimated 40,186 homeless students in the 2018-19 school year.
- 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.
- A majority of adults experiencing homelessness are employed.
- A long list of legislative actions were taken in 2019 and 2020 to address homelessness and housing insecurity, including historic funding of the Housing Trust Fund and preventive programs; 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.

Anticipated Legislation

Among the measures that did not pass and will be raised again during 2021 include just cause for tenant evictions, a ban against discrimination against renters based on a prior criminal record, and foreclosure prevention funding. Also anticipated in 2021 are additional appropriations to the Housing Trust Fund and the HEN program, provided that new revenue can be identified.

During 2020, the COVID pandemic created a sudden drop in state revenue as well as added costs, resulting in the need for either significant budget reductions or new progressive revenue that could increase the state's funds without adversely impacting those at the lowest income levels. Additionally, the huge increase in unemployment has resulted in a likely flood of evictions once the state eviction moratorium ends, which will increase homelessness unless additional measures are taken, such as rent assistance, to avoid these evictions. It should be noted that the cost of addressing homelessness is much greater than the cost of prevention.

The capital gains tax was discussed in 2019 and 2020 but did not pass either year. Consideration of this again in 2021 is anticipated as a way of offsetting the budget deficit and avoiding the reductions to expenditures that would reduce support to homelessness prevention.

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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