



NATIONAL LOW INCOME
HOUSING COALITION



Statement from

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Submitted to the Milwaukee Common Council, Public Safety and Health Committee

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On behalf of the National Low Income Housing Coalition and the National Alliance to End Homelessness, we thank you for the opportunity to submit this statement for the November 11 meeting of the Milwaukee Common Council's Public Safety and Health Committee.

The National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) is an organization that is dedicated to achieving racially and socially equitable public policy that ensures people with the lowest incomes have quality homes that are accessible and affordable in communities of their choice. NLIHC's members include residents of public and assisted housing, people experiencing homelessness and other low-income people in need of affordable homes, housing providers, homeless services providers, fair housing organizations, state and local housing coalitions, public housing agencies, faith-based organizations, concerned citizens, and others. While our members include a spectrum of housing interests, we do not represent any one segment of the housing field. Rather, NLIHC works on behalf of and with low-income people who receive or need federal housing assistance, especially extremely low-income people and people who are homeless.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization whose sole purpose is to end homelessness in the United States. We use research and data to find solutions to homelessness; we work with federal and local partners to create a solid base of policy and resources that support those solutions; and then we help communities implement them. Our strength is that we are an outcome-driven organization. Starting with our name and continuing with how we choose the work we do, allocate staff time, and use our resources, we focus on one thing: ending homelessness.

Together, our organizations applaud Milwaukee for the progress it has made in addressing homelessness by focusing on proven solutions like [Housing First](#). Working broadly with various stakeholders, including shelter and service providers and community-based organizations, has contributed to that success. As this committee continues its work to address homelessness, we urge you to continue to bring together the broader community and work to secure the large-scale, sustained investments and reforms necessary to ensure that every person has an affordable place to call home. We also urge you to leverage partnerships with stakeholders to provide emergency, life-saving resources to those who have nowhere else to go, as we work towards permanent solutions.

In many communities across the country, unsheltered homelessness is increasing, leaving many more of our neighbors living on the streets, in abandoned buildings, or in other places not meant for human habitation. The [underlying cause](#) of homelessness, as you know, is the severe shortage of homes affordable to people with the lowest incomes and a widening gap between incomes and housing costs. Chronic health and mental health conditions, domestic violence, and [systemic racial inequality](#) also contribute to homelessness.

To end homelessness once and for all – in Milwaukee and across the nation – we must work together to build the political will to invest in affordable housing solutions at the scale needed. Nationally, there is a shortage of [seven million homes](#) that are affordable to people with the lowest incomes. In Milwaukee County, there is a shortage of 46,480 rental homes affordable and available to extremely low-income households – those with incomes at or below the poverty line or 30% of the area median income, whichever is greater. For every 10 of these households, there are fewer than 3 affordable and available homes. Without affordable options, more than 55,700 extremely low-income households in Milwaukee County pay at least half of their limited incomes

on rent, leaving them without the resources they need to put food on the table, purchase needed medications, or make ends meet. These households are one financial shock away from economic hardship that could quickly spiral out of control into rent arrears, evictions, and, in worst cases, homelessness.

Despite the progress made by Milwaukee and other communities, unsheltered homelessness is increasing in many communities. Because of chronic underfunding by Congress, local homelessness groups do not have enough resources to provide every individual experiencing homelessness with the housing and services they need. Many communities are experiencing a shortage of available shelter beds, increased lengths of stay, and staffing shortages. Individuals experiencing homelessness may also face barriers in accessing quality emergency assistance. These barriers can include unsafe or poor shelter conditions; restrictive policies, such as sobriety requirements, entrance fees, and separation from partners or pets; and insufficient resources to fund a robust emergency response system. Moreover, strict entry and exit times at shelters can make it more difficult for individuals who work different shifts to maintain work or school.

In light of these challenges, we urge you to consider [interim solutions](#) for people experiencing homelessness, as we work collectively to address the root causes of homelessness – the shortage of homes affordable to people with the lowest incomes and those who are most marginalized. Interim solutions can be a [necessary emergency response to the crisis of encampments](#).

Providing individuals experiencing homelessness with tents, drinking water, hygiene items, and other necessities does not discourage people from accepting housing; rather, these actions should be considered an imperative emergency response to protect the health and wellbeing of those who have no place else to go.

We agree with the assessment by the [U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness](#) that street outreach plays a critical role within systems for ending homelessness. While the long-term focus is on creating connections to permanent housing, outreach workers reduce harm and ensure that people's basic needs are met by providing life-saving resources like food, water, blankets, and tents. The Street Angels Milwaukee Outreach team provides individuals experiencing homelessness with critical resources while also cultivating relationships and helping connect individuals to long-term housing and services. The work of organizations like The Street Angels positively contributes to our collective work to end homelessness and places the well-being of individuals experiencing homelessness front and center.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to submit this statement. We look forward to continuing to work with you to address root causes of homelessness, expand housing and service programs to meet the need, and create healthy neighborhoods for all.