



Washington Low Income Housing Alliance 2023 state priority agenda

The state should make a significant investment of \$400 million in affordable housing to build and preserve permanently and deeply affordable homes.

- Housing Trust Fund investment of \$400 million from the state capital budget. This appropriation should build and preserve permanently affordable homes and invest in homeownership opportunities for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color.
- A new permanent fund source for the Housing Trust Fund would ensure significant investments. Options include a new state level Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) on very high value properties or eliminating certain tax exemptions for financial institutions.
- The state should also authorize new local options to fund affordable housing, such as a new Real Estate Excise Tax (REET) for affordable housing and operations.
- The State's Operating Budget should invest approximately \$8 million for Black, Indigenous, and other people of color led organizations for organizational support and capacity building 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 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 services.
- End the Housing & Essential Needs "benefits cliff" by extending the Social Security Income (SSI) pilot statewide and making it permanent. This would allow tenants to get continued rental assistance once they qualify for SSI or Social Security Disability Income (SSDI).
- Change the Aged, Blind and Disabled program to end the requirement that extremely low-income, disabled people pay back the benefit.
- Bring back the cash assistance program for temporarily disabled extremely low-income people that was eliminated during the great recession budget cuts in 2011.

The state should invest in eviction prevention.

- Continue funding for pre-eviction civil legal aid and add \$400k 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 an 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 \$1,953,561 in FY 2024 and \$2,502,860 in FY 2025.
- Increase funding for the Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP) and the 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 Department of Commerce anticipates that an appropriation of approximately \$10 million would address the backlog and prevent many tenants from experiencing eviction and homelessness.

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

- Make the 2022 one-time Department of Commerce grantee administrative increase permanent. This would impact nonprofit organizations providing affordable housing and homelessness services that are funded through the state budget.
- More ideas are being discussed and explored – stay tuned!

The state should address rent increases.

- HB 1904* (Rep. Peterson, introduced in 2022) would require landlords to provide 6 months' notice of significant rent increases, provide tenants with the right to quit their lease due to a rent increase, and cap late fees. Applies to both residential tenants and manufactured housing tenants.
- Prevent rent gouging by capping rent increases, cap and regulate fees, and close the just cause loophole that allows landlords to use rent increases to deny tenants of their rights under the state Residential Landlord Tenant Act.

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

- Pass HB 2023* (Rep Hackney, introduced in 2022) to create an enforcement mechanism for landlord obligations under the Residential Landlord Tenant Act.
 - This would create a legal 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. This would create a fast, very affordable and very accessible court process for tenants to ask a judge to intervene.
 - Right now, tenants have no mechanism to hold their landlord accountable – even when tenants are illegally locked out, even when tenants face serious repair issues, even when landlords violate source of income discrimination protections, even when landlords harass tenants or illegally enter apartments, etc.
 - 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.

**All bill numbers will be re-assigned for the new biennium starting on January 9th, 2023.*

Contact Michele Thomas at the Washington Low Income Housing Alliance with any questions.

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