



Promoting Economic Prosperity and Fair Growth through Access to Affordable and Stable Housing

In Spring 2022, the House Select Committee on Economic Disparity and Fairness in Growth, led by Chairman Jim Himes (CT-04), held two hearings—one in Washington, DC, “Promoting Economic Prosperity and Fair Growth through Access to Affordable and Stable Housing,” and one in Milwaukee, WI, “Addressing Milwaukee Housing Inequality to Improve Financial Security and Expand Wealth-Building”—to listen to experts on how access to fair, safe, and consistent housing is crucial to economic wellbeing.



Stable housing is a prerequisite to living a healthy life, maintaining consistent employment, and engaging productively in society and the economy. A 2020 report from the United States Government Accountability Office confirmed that even before the COVID-19 pandemic, a growing share of renters were spending unsustainable amounts of income on rent, while homeownership was becoming increasingly out of reach for lower- and middle-income Americans—especially those of color. Ensuring that housing is a complement to success - not an obstacle – is key to providing all families in the U.S. with the means to live with dignity and participate equitably in the economy.

Possible Policy Solutions

During the hearings, experts offered the following recommendations to the Select Committee:

- Substantially raise investment in critical programs we know work, including Low-Income Housing Tax Credits; Housing Choice Vouchers and project-based rental assistance; public housing; the national Housing Trust Fund; the Community Development Block Grant; Community Development Financial Institutions; and homeless assistance grants to prevent and end homelessness.
- Encourage states and localities to adopt zoning policies, like removing minimum lot sizes, allowing accessory dwelling units, and loosening other non-safety related standards, to reduce barriers to building affordable housing in high-opportunity neighborhoods.
- Invest in homeownership education, provide pathways for developers to create more affordable housing, support low-income housing in historically marginalized communities, and encourage production and acquisition models that provide alternative financing and ownership structures, such as community land trusts.
- Repeal the tariffs on Canadian softwood lumber to lower construction costs.
- Create a targeted, first-generation home buyer down payment assistance program, such as the Downpayment Toward Equity Act of 2021, to help close racial wealth and homeownership gaps.

- Design down payment assistance programs to help increase the supply of housing stock and lower overall prices in local housing markets.
- Reform the mortgage interest deduction as a credit to ensure families that do not itemize their deductions can still benefit from this tax benefit. It should also be better targeted to lower-priced primary residences, with savings reinvested in solutions like down payment and rental assistance.
- Support the Neighborhood Homes Investment Act and the Capital Magnet Fund to help fill the gaps in funding for homeowners who cannot afford critical home improvements.
- Target access to lending products for those historically locked out of the market by policies such as redlining and racial covenants, like encouraging lenders to explore special purpose credit programs.
- While maintaining responsible lending and consumer protections, provide access to lending products for those newly locked out following the Great Recession and passage of Dodd-Frank.
- Invest in fair housing and fair lending programs at the Department of Housing and Urban Development and other agencies to root out discrimination in the home buying process.
- Ensure data and algorithms in the lending and buying process are used to remedy rather than perpetuate historical patterns of discrimination.

Expert Hearing Panelists

The following experts in Milwaukee and Washington provided possible policy recommendations:

Washington, DC Hearing:

- **The Honorable Shaun Donovan**, Former United States Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and Former Director of the Office of Management and Budget
- **Ms. Nikitra Bailey**, Senior VP of Public Policy, National Fair Housing Alliance
- **Ms. Jacqueline Waggoner**, President of Solutions Division, Enterprise Community Partners
- **Mr. Kevin Nowak**, Executive Director, CHN Housing Partners
- **Dr. Salim Furth**, Senior Research Fellow, The Mercatus Center at George Mason University



Milwaukee, WI Hearing:



- **Dr. Anne Bonds**, Assistant Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
- **Mr. John Johnson**, Research Fellow in the Lubar Center for Public Policy Research and Civic Edu. at the Marquette University School of Law
- **Ms. Sakuri Fears**, Senior Program Officer, LISC Milwaukee
- **Ms. Trena Bond**, Executive Director of Housing Resources Inc
- **Mr. Shaun Luehring**, President/CEO, LUMIN Schools