

ISSUES

Housing for All

In the richest country in the history of the world, every American must have a safe, decent, accessible, and affordable home as a fundamental right.

Bernie



Details

For more than 40 years, we have had an affordable housing crisis in America that has only gotten worse.

In America today, over 18 million families are paying more than 50 percent of their income on housing, while last year alone the five largest banks on Wall Street made a record-breaking \$111 billion in profits.

How are families in America supposed to pay for food, transportation, health care, prescription drugs, education, and childcare when over half of their income is going to pay the rent or the mortgage? The sad and painful reality is that many of them cannot, and millions of Americans are going deeply into debt just to make ends meet.

In America today, there is virtually no city or town where a full-time minimum wage worker can afford a decent, two-bedroom apartment. Meanwhile, the top 25 hedge fund managers in America made an average of \$850 million apiece last year.

In America today, over half a million people will be sleeping out on the streets or in homeless shelters because they don't have the money to put a roof over their heads. Meanwhile, large, profitable corporations like Amazon, which is owned by the wealthiest person in the world, pay nothing in federal income taxes.

In America today, corrupt real estate developers are gentrifying neighborhoods and forcing working families out of the homes and apartments where they have lived their entire lives and replacing them with fancy condominiums and hotels that only the very rich can afford.

Sadly, we have a president right now who is not only ignoring the affordable housing crisis. He and his administration are actively making it worse.

Instead of expanding federal housing programs, Trump wants to cut them by \$9.6 billion, or 18 percent.

Instead of working to substantially reduce the outrageously high price of housing, Trump has proposed tripling what some of the poorest senior citizens and people with disabilities in America are paying for rent today.

Instead of expanding affordable housing, Trump is proposing to eliminate the National Housing Trust Fund, which invests in affordable housing and was based on legislation Bernie spearheaded in Congress.

And outrageously, Trump has signed tax legislation that further enriches wealthy real estate investors and [encourages gentrification](#). That is unacceptable and has got to change.

In the richest country in the history of the world, every American must have a safe, decent, accessible, and affordable home as a fundamental right. We need a homes guarantee.

Build the Millions of Affordable Housing Units We Need

In America today, there is a shortage of 7.4 million affordable homes for the lowest-income renters. This severe housing shortage is negatively impacting rural and urban communities throughout America.

Nearly half of the renters facing the greatest housing shortage are seniors or persons with disabilities. While rents are skyrocketing in large housing markets like New York or San Francisco, there has also been a spike in the number of Americans in rural areas who spend over half of their limited incomes on housing. Incredibly, while wages have stagnated throughout the country, average housing prices have gone up by 188 percent over the past three decades, while the median rent has increased by more than 60 percent since 1960. That has got to change.

In 2001, Bernie first introduced legislation to create the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund, based largely on the success of the Vermont Housing and Conservation Trust Fund. After a 15-year effort, in 2016, a modest version of Bernie's legislation became the first new federal affordable housing program funded in several decades. Administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, it is funded through a small percentage of revenues from the government-sponsored housing agencies, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac. Over the past four years, this program has invested \$905 million on the construction, rehabilitation and preservation of affordable housing throughout the country — but unfortunately that is not nearly enough compared to the demand.

If we are serious about addressing the affordable housing crisis, we need to build millions of apartments and homes throughout the country that will remain affordable in perpetuity to prevent displacement and serve future generations. And when we do that, we will create millions of good-paying jobs in the process.

When Bernie is president, he will:

- Invest \$1.48 trillion over 10 years in the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund to build, rehabilitate, and preserve the 7.4 million quality, affordable and accessible housing units necessary to eliminate the affordable housing gap, which will remain affordable in perpetuity. Units constructed with this funding will be eligible to be located in mixed-income developments.
 - Use federal preemption laws to ensure these new units are not segregated or excluded by local zoning ordinances.
- Invest an additional \$400 billion to build 2 million mixed-income social housing units to be administered through the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund, which will help desegregate and integrate communities. This plan will guarantee equity in social housing units, ensuring no inequality of services or conditions within units.
- Expand USDA's Section 515 program by \$500 million to build new affordable developments in rural areas, and protect existing units from being converted to market rate housing.
- Increase funding for the Indian Housing Block Grant Program to \$3 billion to build, preserve, and rehabilitate affordable housing in Indian country.

Revitalize Our Public Housing Stock

For decades, our nation has failed to provide adequate funding for public housing, causing our public housing stock to fall into a state of complete disrepair. Most public housing is in desperate need of reconstruction and rehabilitation. As a direct result of this chronic underinvestment, residents lose heat in the winter, need kitchen repairs to cook their meals, and do not have adequate accommodations for residents with disabilities. Public housing residents should not be forced to live in unhealthy and unsafe conditions because of a massive underinvestment in these facilities.

In America today, an estimated 1.6 million families are on a waiting list for public housing because of a lack of federal funding, and it can take several years before many of these families are able to receive the assistance that they need.

[In addition, more than 10,000](#) public housing units are lost each year due to demolition and disposition, often because they are in poor condition. This can eliminate the only affordable housing option for communities throughout America. That is unacceptable. It is past time to preserve, rehabilitate and expand our nation's public housing stock.

When Bernie is president, he will:

- Invest \$70 billion to repair and modernize public housing including making all public housing accessible and provide access to high-speed broadband for all public housing residents.
- Repeal the Faircloth Amendment to allow the construction of new public housing units.
- Ensure that public housing has high-quality, shared community spaces.
- Through the Green New Deal, electrify and decarbonize all public housing by conducting deep energy retrofits including appliances, power, and heating.

Make Rent Affordable

Today, 7.7 million families in America are forced to pay more than half of their limited incomes on rent because they are eligible for Section 8 rental assistance but do not receive it because of a lack of federal resources. As a result, many of these families are forced to choose between paying rent or buying the food, medicine, or prescription drugs they need.

That is unacceptable. We need to fully fund the Section 8 rental assistance program to make sure that every person in America who is eligible for this program is able to get it without being put on a waiting list. This will significantly reduce poverty, help families at risk of becoming homeless, and reduce evictions.

And importantly, this assistance will help families afford rent right away while new affordable homes are being constructed.

When Bernie is president, he will:

- Fully fund tenant-based Section 8 rental assistance at \$410 billion over the next 10 years and make it a mandatory funding program for all eligible households.
- Strengthen the Fair Housing Act and implement a Section 8 non-discrimination law, so that landlords can no longer discriminate against low-income families based on their source of income.
- Expand and strengthen enforcement of the Small Area Fair Market Rent rule to make sure that landlords are fairly compensated when they participate in Section 8, but do not make a windfall from the program.

Protect Tenants

In America today, more than two-thirds of states preempt or limit the ability of their communities to establish rent control or stabilization rules to protect the American people against excessive increases in rent. That has got to change.

We need to establish a national rent control standard and allow cities and states to go even further to protect tenants from the skyrocketing price of housing.

Further, we must recognize that we are in the midst of an eviction crisis. At least 2 million renters throughout the country are at risk of losing their homes each year. Evictions, often over as little as \$100, cause tremendous stress on families and can lead to worse health outcomes, job losses, and an unacceptable disruption in a child's education.

We need to protect tenants from unjust evictions and provide support to ensure we keep families in their homes.

Zip codes in New York City, where a right to counsel was created in 2017, saw their eviction rates drop [five](#) times faster than comparable areas. Expanding these programs to other states and cities will reduce evictions and give tenants fair representation in court.

When Bernie is president, he will:

- Enact a national cap on annual rent increases at no more than 3 percent or 1.5 times the Consumer Price Index (whichever is higher) to help prevent the exploitation of tenants at the hands of private landlords.
 - Allow for landlords to apply for waivers if significant capital improvements are made, which will incentivize landlords to improve the conditions of their properties.
- Allow states and cities to pass even stronger rent control standards.
- Implement a "just-cause" requirement for evictions, which would allow a landlord to evict a tenant only for specific violations and prevent landlords from evicting tenants for arbitrary or retaliatory reasons.
- Provide \$2 billion in federal matching grants for states and localities to provide a right to counsel for persons in eviction or foreclosure proceedings, or at risk of losing their Section 8 rental assistance.

Combat Gentrification, Exclusionary Zoning, Segregation, and Speculation

While we expand and build new housing, we must ensure that current tenants and homeowners are not forced out of their homes or neighborhoods. We must also ensure that wealthy and exclusionary neighborhoods do not prevent new development, forcing gentrification and displacement in low-income and minority areas. In addition, developers and speculators must not reap profits from these neighborhoods without reinvesting in the existing community.

Currently, nine states do not allow for inclusionary zoning rules that require developers to set aside affordable housing on their projects. That has got to change.

We also need to promote integration and end local segregation that excludes low-income and minority tenants and homeowners. Restrictive zoning ordinances are a [racist legacy](#) of Jim Crow-era efforts to enforce segregation. We need to make federal housing and transportation funds contingent on remedying these zoning ordinances and coordinate with state and local officials and leaders to ensure equitable zoning.

Federal funds must no longer be used to segregate and disrupt our communities. The interstate highway expansion [often cut through](#) low-income and minority communities, segregated urban areas, and contributed to sprawl. We must reorient federal policy to create livable, connected communities for all.

When Bernie is president, he will:

- Create an office within the Department of Housing and Urban Development to coordinate and work with states and municipalities to strengthen rent control and tenant protections, implement fair and inclusive zoning ordinances, streamline review processes and direct funding where these changes are made.
 - This office will convene key leaders, academics, experts, local officials, renters, tenants, and homeowners to create and implement these necessary solutions.
- Preempt laws that prevent inclusionary zoning for luxury developments.
- End exclusionary and restrictive zoning ordinances and replace them with zoning that encourages racial, economic, and disability integration that makes housing more affordable.
 - Require that recipients of federal funding from the Department of Transportation and the Department of Housing and Urban Development make these important zoning reforms.
 - Provide funding to states that preempt local exclusionary zoning ordinances to make housing more equitable, accessible and affordable for all.
- Make federal funding contingent on creating livable communities.
 - Encourage zoning and development that promotes integration and access to public transportation to reduce commuting time, congestion and long car commutes.
 - Prioritize projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions, create walkable and livable communities, and reduce urban sprawl.
- Encourage zoning and development designed to expand and maximize the number of units fully accessible to people with disabilities.
- Place a 25 percent House Flipping tax on speculators who sell a non-owner-occupied property, if sold for more than it was purchased within 5 years of purchase.
- Impose a 2 percent Empty Homes tax on the property value of vacant, owned homes to bring more units into the market and curb the use of housing as speculative investment.
- Encourage “circuit breakers” on property taxes to protect homeowners in gentrifying neighborhoods from being priced out of their own homes as their property values rise.

End Homelessness in America

It is unacceptable that in America tonight, more than half a million Americans will be sleeping out on the streets or in homeless shelters because they don't have the money to put a roof over their heads, while the three richest families in America experienced a \$101 billion increase in their wealth last year. This is a national embarrassment. In the richest country on Earth, we will invest nearly \$32 billion over the next five years to end homelessness in America.

When Bernie is president, he will:

- Prioritize 25,000 National Affordable Housing Trust Fund units in the first year to house the homeless.
- Double McKinney-Vento homelessness assistance grants to more than \$26 billion over the next five years to build permanent supportive housing.
- Provide \$500 million in funding to states and localities to provide outreach to the homeless to help connect them to case management and social services to ensure nobody is left behind.

Fair Housing for All

It is unacceptable that more than 50 years after the passage of the Fair Housing Act, people still face housing discrimination on the basis of race, sex, gender, religion, country of origin, or disability. That has got to end. We must strengthen and expand the Fair Housing Act and increase enforcement to eliminate housing discrimination which is still pervasive throughout the United States.

As president, Bernie will:

- Create an independent National Fair Housing Agency similar to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau dedicated to protecting renters from housing discrimination, investigating landlords who misuse Section 8 vouchers, and enforce housing standards for renters. The Fair Housing Agency will also conduct audits to hold landlords and sellers engaged in housing discrimination accountable.
- Create an office within the Fair Housing Agency to protect mobile home residents from housing discrimination, rent instability and unjust evictions.
- Fully fund the Fair Housing Assistance and Fair Housing Initiatives Programs at \$1 billion over the next 10 years.
- Pass the Equality Act to include LGBTQ+ Americans in the Fair Housing Act.
- Implement the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing rule blocked by President Trump's administration to ensure that federal funds will promote fair housing.
- Enforce the Olmstead decision, Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act to ensure access to accessible, integrated housing.
- Ensure that all new Section 811 supportive housing is fully integrated.
- Make sure that people who have served their time are not excluded from public housing.
- Ensure that no survivor of domestic violence can be evicted on the basis of their assault.
- Guarantee that renters have the right to form tenants unions free from retaliation by landlords or managing agents.

Expand Sustainable Homeownership

When Bernie was mayor of Burlington, Vermont, he took the lead in establishing the first municipally-funded community land trust to provide affordable homeownership opportunities to working families. Now called the Champlain Housing Trust, it now manages over 600 shared equity homes and has helped over 1,000 families become first-time homebuyers. In a community land trust, families purchase homes at affordable prices and agree to sell them back to the trust at a restricted price. This keeps homes affordable in perpetuity and builds wealth for families who currently are priced out of homeownership.

As president, Bernie will provide grants to states, cities, and towns to establish their own community land trusts that will enable over 1 million households to purchase a shared equity home over the next 25 years. Further, when those families begin building wealth and move on to conventional homeownership, the homes will remain affordable for future owners.

This program will also combat gentrification. For example, the Douglass Community Land Trust in Washington, D.C., which operates in gentrified areas, has successfully helped many families stay in the neighborhoods they grew up in or have lived in for decades. Moreover, this program will promote resident-owned manufactured housing communities to give residents more control over their housing costs and to prevent evictions.

As president, Bernie will:

- Invest \$50 billion over 10 years to provide grants to start and expand community land trusts and other shared equity homeownership models. This funding will enable over 1 million households to purchase affordable homes over the next 25 years.
- Invest an additional \$15 billion to enact a 21st Century Homestead Act, based on the work of [Mehrsa Baradaran](#), to purchase and revitalize abandoned properties to create community and individual wealth and assets for historically disadvantaged communities.
- Instruct HUD to assist communities establishing shared equity homeownership by ensuring they can access existing federal housing programs, and help new organizations build the necessary capacity to succeed.

Support First Time Homebuyers

As a result of stagnant wages and the outrageously high price of housing, the American dream of homeownership is simply out of reach for tens of millions of families throughout the country.

The rate of homeownership in America is lower today than it was in 1980 and still has not recovered from the 2008 housing crisis. That has got to change. We need to substantially expand federal programs to make sure that Americans throughout the country have the ability to buy their first home.

We also need to make housing counseling available to all prospective homebuyers. Study after study shows that people who receive counseling before buying a home are far more likely to succeed at homeownership.

As president, Bernie will:

- Invest an additional \$2 billion at USDA and an additional \$6 billion at HUD to create a first-time homebuyer assistance program that will increase home ownership.
- Expand pre-purchase housing counseling to all prospective homebuyers.

End Predatory Lending and Modern Day Redlining

When Bernie was on the House Financial Services Committee, he fought to end predatory lending in the subprime housing market. Congress refused to act and predatory subprime lending became rampant.

Millions of Americans lost their homes, jobs, and life savings while Wall Street received the largest taxpayer bailout in the history of the world with no strings attached.

Black Americans alone lost 40 percent of their wealth in the 2009 housing crisis and were directly targeted by predatory lenders.

While the government bailed out the crooks on Wall Street, ordinary Americans who were victims of predatory lending and mortgage fraud were left behind. That needs to change.

Americans who lost their homes as a result of mortgage fraud and predatory lending must be provided the down payment assistance they need to buy a new home or receive financial aid to pay their current mortgage or rent.

Further, many of the homes that Americans lost to foreclosure during the Great Recession were sold right back to the same Wall Street firms that caused the crisis. Since the financial crisis, firms on Wall Street have purchased thousands of homes, turned them into rentals, and securitized them to make outrageous profits. That has got to change.

As president, Bernie will:

- End the mass sale of mortgages to Wall Street vulture funds and thoroughly investigate and regulate the practices of large rental housing investors and owners.
- Make data such as evictions, rent increases, and safety violations for large landlords available to the public and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- Increase enforcement to protect families against fraudulent, deceptive, and abusive lending practices and ensure all mortgage costs are clear, risks are visible, and nothing is buried in fine print.
- Implement legislation to prevent abusive “contract for deed” transactions and use existing authority to protect communities of color, which for too long have been exploited by this practice.
 - Protect consumers currently participating in “contract for deed” agreements by ensuring aggressive protections and decent standards for the consumers.
- Create a commission to establish a financial relief program to the victims of predatory lending, mortgage fraud, redlining and those who are still underwater on their mortgages as a result of the 2008 Wall Street crash. This program shall include down payment assistance, mortgage relief, or rental assistance. This program must include protections to ensure that the financial relief it provides goes to the people who need it and not the Wall Street speculators who caused the crisis.

Decarbonize Our Housing

We will pass a [Green New Deal](#) to achieve 100 percent sustainable energy for electricity and a fully decarbonized building sector by no later than 2030.

As president, Bernie will:

- Weatherize homes.
 - Perform energy efficiency upgrades to make buildings more energy efficient and lower energy bills.

- Provide grants for low- and moderate-income families and small businesses to invest in weatherizing and retrofitting their homes and businesses.
- Because our mobile home stock is leaky and often very old, we plan to replace all mobile homes with quality zero-energy modular homes.
- Electrify homes.
 - Provide grants for low- and moderate-income families to invest in cheaper electricity for these needs. A federal mandate through the Department of Energy will ensure that all new construction and wealthy homeowners meet our electrification goals.
- Energy assistance.
 - We will expand the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) to help low-income families pay their heating and cooling bills. Additionally, the program will be expanded to provide 10 percent of program costs for maintenance of new efficient heating and cooling systems and technical assistance for the installation and use of new furnaces, heat pumps, boilers, and other upgrades for the duration of the 10-year transition.
- Decarbonize public housing.
 - Through the Green New Deal, we will electrify and decarbonize all public housing by conducting deep energy retrofits including appliances, power, and heating. We will also ensure that public housing has quality, shared community spaces to ensure every public housing complex has the capacity to serve as a community resiliency center.
- Save families money on energy bills.
 - After 2035 electricity will be virtually free, aside from operations and maintenance costs.

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