



# LOUISIANA FAIR HOUSING ACTION CENTER

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1300 Perdido St., 2nd Floor  
New Orleans, LA 70112

*By Electronic Mail*

### **Re: Renewing the Neighborhood Housing Improvement Fund (NHIF)**

Dear New Orleans City Councilmembers,

Thank you for your ongoing support for the Smart Housing Mix, short-term rental reform, and other policies that begin to address our city's dire affordable housing crisis. As you know, that crisis began long before COVID-19 with more than 5,000 families being forced from their homes through eviction in a normal year<sup>1</sup> and nearly half the city off-limits to median-income homebuyers in 2018.<sup>2</sup> The pandemic has only exacerbated this trend. As families continue to struggle to recover, the undersigned groups ask you to ensure the Neighborhood Housing Improvement Fund (NHIF) does not expire this year. We're grateful that a motion providing notice of the Council's intent to place the NHIF on the ballot in November will appear on the agenda for the June 3rd Council

<sup>1</sup> Davida Finger and Jane Place Neighborhood Sustainability Initiative. *New Orleans' Eviction Geography: Results of an Increasingly Precarious Housing Market*. March 2019. Available: [https://storage.googleapis.com/wzukusers/user-27881231/documents/5c95369d185a9kbj1pY4/JPNISl\\_Evictions\\_Final.pdf](https://storage.googleapis.com/wzukusers/user-27881231/documents/5c95369d185a9kbj1pY4/JPNISl_Evictions_Final.pdf).

<sup>2</sup> New Orleans Market Value Analysis 2018. The Reinvestment Fund, June 11, 2018, pg. 42.



meeting. We urge you to support that motion and the subsequent resolution required in July to formally place the millage on the ballot. Furthermore, we hope you will continue your full-throated support throughout the campaign season for a dedicated, flexible revenue stream for affordable housing.

It would be particularly egregious to allow this funding stream to lapse—even for one year—when we know there are acute and desperate needs for assistance in our community. Despite lower rates of COVID infection, tens of thousands of families in Orleans Parish are still behind on their rent<sup>3</sup> or mortgage<sup>4</sup> due to pandemic-related financial hardships. Recently, Marjorianna Willman, the Director of Housing Policy and Community Development, made it abundantly clear at a press conference that the need for rental assistance “far exceeds the amount of [federal] resources available.”<sup>5</sup> She explained that the city’s program, which pays landlords to ensure renters don’t lose their homes, currently has 11,000 applicants, but only 700 have received payment.<sup>6</sup> The NHIF millage currently brings in roughly \$3 million per year. With the average rental assistance award of \$7,000 per household,<sup>7</sup> the NHIF alone could serve another 430 families and make countless landlords whole. Without it, those families will languish on a waitlist and likely face eviction before assistance is available.

Rental assistance is also only one possible, but essential, use for the funds. NHIF funds have regularly been used to make up gap funding for major new affordable housing developments, to finance home repairs for low-income elderly and disabled homeowners, to offer first-time homebuyer assistance, and to meet the needs of our unhoused population. The NHIF is the only flexible, affordable housing funding source that can quickly be repurposed or used to meet unexpected needs. It proved its worth immediately during the pandemic, as it allowed the City to set up one of the first rental assistance programs in the country, before any federal funding was available.

The NHIF millage also has broad support, as evidenced by the signers to this letter as well as past surveys and reports. In 2017, respondents to a poll of 500 likely voters named affordable housing as the second most important issue for the Mayor and City Council. Nearly two-thirds of respondents wanted to renew the NHIF at that time and that support is likely to have grown as we are now squarely in the City’s most acute housing crisis since Hurricane Katrina.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> LeBron Joseph. “Renters advocates decry the city’s efforts to disburse aid.” *WGNO.com*. May 20, 2021. Available: <https://wgno.com/news/renters-advocate-decry-the-citys-efforts-to-disperse-aid/>.

<sup>4</sup> Anthony McCauley. “More New Orleans homeowners risk foreclosure than in any other major U.S. city; here’s why.” *NOLA.com*. January 14, 2021. Available: [www.nola.com/news/business/article\\_fece1e9a-50f5-11eb-98b1-870e753fbce2.html](http://www.nola.com/news/business/article_fece1e9a-50f5-11eb-98b1-870e753fbce2.html).

<sup>5</sup> LeBron Joseph. “Renters advocates decry the city’s efforts to disburse aid.”

<sup>6</sup> Video of the press conference posted to Mayor LaToya Cantrell’s Facebook Page. May 20, 2021. Available: <https://www.facebook.com/mayorcantrell/videos/187697793211955>.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> New Orleans Municipal Election Poll. Enterprise Community Partners. 2017. Available: [www.enterprisecommunity.org/sites/default/files/media-library/where-we-work/gulf-coast/enterprise-poll-new-orleans-likely-voters.pdf](http://www.enterprisecommunity.org/sites/default/files/media-library/where-we-work/gulf-coast/enterprise-poll-new-orleans-likely-voters.pdf).

Even the Bureau of Government Research (BGR), whose 2009 report, “The House that Uncle Sam Built,” is largely blamed for helping to cut off affordable housing funds to the City after Katrina, had kind words for the NHIF millage in its 2020 report.<sup>9</sup> Its report on the 2020 ballot initiatives concluded that there were good reasons for dedicated affordable housing funding, that the NHIF millage was appropriately sized though not nearly enough to meet the need, and that the city had a track record of spending the revenue effectively. BGR only recommended a vote against the proposition because it was tied to an economic development millage that it found lacking.<sup>10</sup>

Support for the NHIF should also not be misconstrued as only a “housing issue.” As Councilmembers, you've advanced numerous ordinances showing your understanding of the fact that we cannot solve our city's most intractable problems—poverty, violence, and trauma—simply through policing and incarceration. Addressing the root causes of these issues requires investing in education, libraries, jobs, community-based mental health services, and fundamentally—housing. Every major public health organization from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to the American Medical Association (AMA) recognizes housing stability as one of the primary social determinants of health and that connection has only been strengthened during the pandemic.<sup>11</sup>

Given the overwhelming need for safe affordable housing and the strong support for the NHIF, it would be unconscionable to let this millage lapse. Doing so would also make any future efforts to reestablish the millage vulnerable to attacks against it as “new tax.” We remain grateful for your willingness to start this process and offer our strong support for seeing it through and reauthorizing the NHIF this November.

We thank you for your attention to this matter. Any related questions can be directed to Maxwell Ciardullo, Director of Policy and Communications, at the Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center: [mciardullo@lafairhousing.org](mailto:mciardullo@lafairhousing.org) or 504-708-8172.

Sincerely,

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<sup>9</sup> Brentin Mock. “Why Louisiana Fought Low-Income Housing in New Orleans After Katrina.” *Bloomberg CityLab*. August 27, 2015. Available: [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-08-27/why-louisiana-fought-low-income-housing-in-new-orleans-after-katrina](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-08-27/why-louisiana-fought-low-income-housing-in-new-orleans-after-katrina).

<sup>10</sup> *On the Ballot: New Orleans Property Tax Propositions, December 5, 2020*. Bureau of Government Research. November 16, 2020. Available: [www.bgr.org/report-index/bgr-examines-december-5-new-orleans-property-tax-propositions/](http://www.bgr.org/report-index/bgr-examines-december-5-new-orleans-property-tax-propositions/)

<sup>11</sup> “About Social Determinants of Health.” CDC. March 10, 2021. Available: [www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/about.html](http://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/about.html); “AMA urges multifaceted approach to address social determinants of health.” AMA. November 17, 2020. Available: [www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-urges-multifaceted-approach-address-social-determinants-health](http://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-urges-multifaceted-approach-address-social-determinants-health).

504HealthNet, Inc.  
ACLU of Louisiana  
Agenda For Children  
Alembic Community Development  
Alliance for Affordable Energy  
American Heart Association  
Ashé Cultural Arts Center  
Bastion Community of Resilience  
Bill Quigley & Davida Finger, Loyola University New Orleans College of Law  
Broadmoor Improvement Association  
Bywater Neighborhood Association  
Carrollton-Riverbend Neighborhood Association  
Citywide Tenant Association  
CLB Porter  
Committee for a Better New Orleans  
Covenant House New Orleans  
Crescent City Community Land Trust  
DMS Communications  
Enterprise Community Partners  
Family Justice Center New Orleans  
Faubourg Marigny Improvement Association  
Friends of Lafitte Greenway  
Forum for Equality  
Foundation for Louisiana  
Greater New Orleans Housing Alliance (GNOHA)  
Gulf Coast Housing Partnership, Inc.  
Hagar's House  
Home By Hand  
House of Tulip  
HousingNOLA  
Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies  
Iris Development  
Jane Place Neighborhood Development Initiative  
Jericho Road Episcopal Housing Initiative  
Jewish Voice for Peace New Orleans  
Justice and Beyond  
Lift Louisiana  
Louisiana Center for Children's Rights  
Louisiana Coalition for Reproductive Freedom  
Louisiana Fair Housing Action Center  
Louisiana League of Conscious Voters  
Louisiana Public Health Institute  
Louisiana Trans Advocates  
Lower 9th Ward Homeownership Association  
March of Dimes  
Music and Culture Coalition of New Orleans  
National Birth Equity Collaborative  
Neighborhood Development Foundation

New Orleans Area Habitat for Humanity  
New Orleans Renters Rights Assembly  
New Orleans Workers' Center for Racial Justice  
Old Algiers Main Street Corporation  
Operation Restoration  
Orleans Parish Prison Reform Coalition (OPPRC)  
Orleans Public Defenders  
Ozanam Inn  
Power Coalition for Equity and Justice  
Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans  
Providence Community Housing  
REO, LLC  
ResourceFull Consulting  
Ride New Orleans  
Rooted School  
SBP, Inc  
SPLC Action Fund  
Split Second Foundation  
Step Up Louisiana  
Together New Orleans  
Total Community Action, Inc.  
Travelers Aid Society of Greater New Orleans  
Tulane/Canal Neighborhood Development Corporation (T/CNDC)  
UNITE HERE! Local 23  
UNITY of Greater New Orleans  
Vera Institute of Justice  
Voice of the Experienced (VOTE)  
Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana  
Voters Organized to Educate  
Women With A Vision, Inc.  
Workplace Justice Project at Loyola Law Clinic

Cc:

Mayor LaToya Cantrell