

Waters Releases Draft of Housing is Infrastructure Bill

The proposal seeks \$70 billion for public housing capital fund and more.

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Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.) has released draft legislation, Housing is Infrastructure Act of 2019, that calls for major investment in public and affordable housing.

Chair of the Housing Financial Services Committee, Waters also recently held a hearing to assess the infrastructure needs of the nation's housing stock.

"Congress must recognize that our nation's infrastructure extends beyond making investments in our roads, bridges, ports, and airports," she said at the hearing. "It also includes our nation's affordable housing."

Waters went on to say that "neglecting our housing infrastructure hurts our economy. Studies have found that the lack of affordable housing hurts economic productivity and wages."

As a result, she has put forth a discussion draft that contains \$70 billion to address the public housing capital backlog, \$10 billion for a Community Development Block Grant set-aside to incentivize states and cities to eliminate impact fees and streamline the process for developing affordable housing, and \$5 billion for the Housing Trust Fund to support new housing for the lowest-income households.

"Public housing is as much a part of the national infrastructure as Route 66, the Lincoln Tunnel, and the Hoover Dam," said Sunia Zaterman, executive director of the Council of Large Public Housing Authorities. "Public housing helps communities and families thrive by providing more than 1 million low- and very low-income families, children, elderly, and persons with disabilities with a stable place to live, connecting low-income workers to economic opportunities, and spurring regional job creation and economic growth."

"But, years of chronic underfunding have led to the deterioration of the public housing stock, and, since 1990, at least 300,000 units have been lost because of the lack of adequate resources to maintain them. The federal disinvestment in public housing has contributed to an untenable shortage of stable housing for low-income households," Zaterman added.

She credited Waters for taking on the issue.

"The bill is attempting to get us on an even keel," Zaterman said. "We do have challenges moving forward in the appropriations process on the annual funding levels for public housing operating and capital funds, but what Ms. Waters is saying in this bill is that we can no longer stand by idly and watch this public investment start to crumble when we need it the most."

Waters is sending a message to congressional leadership and the appropriators that housing must be included in large funding bills, according to Zaterman, noting that the bill is an important step in a discussion about the recapitalization of the public housing portfolio so it's sustainable over the long term.

Equally important is thoughtful consideration about additional tools that public housing authorities can use to modernize and develop affordable housing. Expanding the Rental

Assistance Demonstration program and increasing low-income housing tax credit allocations, for example, would support public housing authorities' recapitalization and redevelopment efforts, she said.

Earlier this year, Waters introduced the Ending Homelessness Act of 2019 (H.R. 1856), which would appropriate \$13.27 billion in emergency relief funding over five years for housing programs, including \$5 billion to McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Grants.

About the Author

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