Out of Reach is an annual publication of the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) that highlights the mismatch between the wages people earn and the price of decent rental housing in every state, metropolitan area, and county in the United States.

The report’s Housing Wage is the hourly wage a full-time worker must earn to afford a modest and safe rental home without spending more than 30% of his or her income on housing costs. It is based on HUD’s Fair Market Rent (FMR), which is an estimate of what a family moving today can expect to pay for a modest rental home in the area. This year’s Housing Wage clearly indicates that housing costs are too high for low-wage workers and other vulnerable households.

Policymakers, researchers, housing advocates and members of the media use Out of Reach to talk about housing poverty, the minimum wage, households’ ability to afford a decent and safe rental home, and the need for affordable housing solutions.

NATIONAL TALKING POINTS

- Out of Reach answers the question: “How much do you have to earn to afford rent and utilities on a modest apartment?” Out of Reach compares the Housing Wage with the federal (or prevailing state) minimum wage and the average renter wage.

- The National Housing Wage for 2017 is $21.21 for a modest two-bedroom apartment. This wage is 2.9 times greater than the federal minimum wage of $7.25 per hour.

- The Housing Wage for a one-bedroom apartment is $17.14 per hour, which is 2.4 times greater than the federal minimum wage.

- Nowhere in America do minimum wage full-time workers earn enough to afford a decent two-bedroom apartment. And in only 12 counties can a minimum wage worker afford a one bedroom apartment. These 12 counties are all located in states with minimum wages higher than the federal level.

- A worker earning the federal minimum wage of $7.25 per hour would need to work 2.9 full time jobs, or approximately 117 hours per week for all 52 weeks of the year, in order to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the average fair market rent.

- A worker earning the federal minimum wage would need to work 94.5 hours per week for all 52 weeks of the year even to afford a one-bedroom at the average fair market rent.

- The affordability of rental housing is a challenge not just for minimum wage workers. The two-bedroom Housing Wage is $4.38 greater than the average hourly wage for renters of $16.38.

- Six of the seven occupations projected to add the greatest number of new jobs by 2024 provide a median wage lower than the two-bedroom Housing Wage and even the one-bedroom Housing Wage. These occupations include personal care aides, home health aides, nursing assistants, retail sales persons, and food service workers.

- The disparity between the Housing Wages needed to afford a rental home and workers’ wages underscores the need for a greater investment in affordable housing solutions. An important solution is the United for Homes (UFH) campaign that calls for modest reforms to the mortgage interest deduction. The UFH proposal would generate $241 billion over ten years that could be reinvested in affordable rental housing solutions such as the national Housing Trust Fund, rental assistance, and other rental housing programs.

- The struggle to find affordable housing is most acute among our most vulnerable and lowest-income households. An individual relying on the minimum wage for income, for example, can afford no more than $377 per month in rent, while the national average fair market rent for a one-bedroom apartment is $892 per month.
TIPS FOR TALKING TO REPORTERS

- **Review your main points.** Before you begin doing media work, pull together the three or four points you really want to get across (for example, the Housing Wage in your area, what life is like for extremely low income renters in your community, a policy solution to the problem). Write them down, practice saying them until they feel comfortable, and keep them by the phone so you’re ready when reporters call.

- **Steer reporters towards the big picture.** To encourage the public and lawmakers to consider the systematic solutions we advocate, we need to show that this is a systematic problem. When a reporter tries to engage you in finding a renter to profile, try to suggest a “landscape” story instead, like a successful community revitalization effort driven by affordable housing development.

- **Learn to pivot.** Remember that you don’t always have to answer the question you are asked. You can instead answer the question you wish you were asked! Come up with and practice some “pivot phrases” that will help get you out of answering questions that you know will lead you in the wrong direction. Using phrases like “That’s an interesting point, but I think the larger issue is…” or “It might seem that way at first, but it’s important to remember…” will help you stay on your message.

CONNECTING TO LOCAL ISSUES

- *Out of Reach 2017* presents a great opportunity for you to talk about issues specific to your community and pose your organization’s local solutions to the affordable housing problem.

- Have a statement ready that explains what life is like for extremely low income renters in your community.

- Communities across the country are debating the need to increase the minimum wage. Use the *Out of Reach* data to reveal how far the minimum wage is, even at commonly proposed levels ($12 or $15), from being a sufficient wage to afford rent. This underscores the dire need for more affordable housing in all of our communities.

- Federal, state and local budget cuts mean reduced funding for all kinds of important programs that then compete for limited funding.

- Present the data from *Out of Reach* as part of an argument about how essential affordable housing is to other aspects of life, like health and education.

- The data in *Out of Reach* reflects the widespread problem of housing affordability for people in many different occupations—from the educator, to healthcare provider, to blue collar worker.

- Whether you are celebrating a victory, building up legislative champions, or regrouping after a defeat, use *Out of Reach* to emphasize the importance of a state or local housing initiative.
Q: LOOKING AT LAST YEAR’S REPORT, I SEE THAT THE HOUSING WAGE HAS ACTUALLY GONE DOWN IN OUR COMMUNITY. SHOULDN’T THAT MEAN THINGS ARE BETTER FOR RENTERS THAN YOU’RE LETTING ON?

A: Even in the relatively few communities where the housing wage has declined, housing is still unaffordable to low-wage workers. In no county can a minimum wage worker working full-time afford a modest two-bedroom apartment at fair market rent. And in only 12 counties (not including Puerto Rico) can he or she afford even a one-bedroom apartment at fair market rent.

Affordability is a problem not just for the lowest income renters. The average renter hourly wage is enough to afford a two-bedroom apartment in fewer than 11% of U.S. counties.

Also, some changes to the Housing Wage are the result of changes to HUD’s methodology or process of determining fair market rents rather than a reflection of the market. For questions about that process, please contact NLIHC research staff.

Q: WHY DO YOU TALK ABOUT TWO-BEDROOM APARTMENTS? WHY WOULD A SINGLE PERSON EVEN TRY TO RENT THAT KIND OF APARTMENT?

A: The report uses two-bedroom apartments as the standard because the most reliable data available are for two-bedroom apartments. They are the most common rental home size.

Also, the demand for rental housing has increased significantly over the past decade, resulting in rents rising faster than household income. Being able to afford a modest two-bedroom (or larger) rental home is a struggle for many families. According to the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey (ACS), 7.1 million renter households are single-parent households. More than 41% of single-parents are extremely low-income, 73% of whom spend more than half of their income on housing, leaving few resources for other necessities.

It’s worth noting that the Housing Wage for these single-parent earners is likely underestimated because it assumes they take no unpaid vacation or sick time and work full-time for all 52 weeks of the year. They need a higher wage to afford their housing if they work fewer hours.

A low-wage single person can find it difficult to afford a one-bedroom apartment in many markets. The average renter wage is insufficient to afford a one-bedroom apartment at fair market rent in more than half of U.S. counties. The minimum wage is insufficient in every county except 12.

If you are interested in the cost of apartments of another size, the Out of Reach website offers the Housing Wage for studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, three-bedroom, and four-bedroom apartments.

Q: IF A PLACE IS TOO EXPENSIVE FOR SOMEONE, WHY DON’T THEY JUST MOVE TO A MORE AFFORDABLE LOCATION?

A: Housing affordability is a challenge to the lowest income workers and their families in all areas of the country. Jurisdictions with a lower-than-average Housing Wage are not immune to a shortage of affordable rental homes because these jurisdictions also tend to have less vibrant economies and lower-than-average household incomes, meaning a low Housing Wage is still out of reach for too many households.

In 89% of U.S. counties, the local average hourly wage for renters is insufficient to afford a two-bedroom apartment at the local fair market rent.
**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**Q** IF YOU’RE TALKING ABOUT FAMILIES, ISN’T THERE USUALLY MORE THAN JUST ONE WORKING PERSON PER FAMILY? CAN’T TWO FULL-TIME WORKERS EASILY AFFORD A TWO-BEDROOM APARTMENT?

**A** A household can find it difficult to work enough hours to afford what the rental market has to offer.

First, the Housing Wage assumes renters work 40 hours per week, all 52 weeks of the year. The average wage earner in the United States, however, works 34.4 hours per week. Therefore, the Housing Wage underestimates how much a person needs to earn on his or her own to afford a rental home.

Second, many wage earners are unable to work full-time. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of April 2017, 5.3 million workers were working part-time despite their preference for full-time work because their hours were reduced or they could not find full-time employment.

According to ACS data, the average two-adult renter household worked a total of 64.5 hours per week in 2015. This includes households where at least one adult worked. To afford a two-bedroom apartment at the fair market rent, the hourly wage would need to be $13.15 per hour – higher than some low wage occupations.

**Q** TALKING ABOUT WHAT MINIMUM-WAGE EARNERS CAN AFFORD MAKES FOR SOME SHOCKING STATISTICS, BUT IS THAT REALLY A FAIR COMPARISON? AREN’T MOST MINIMUM-WAGE WORKERS HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS?

**A** A popular myth is that teenagers make up the majority of the minimum-wage workforce. According to the latest data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, 79% of workers earning the federal minimum wage or less are at least 20 years of age; 55% are at least 25 years of age. Furthermore, 41% of workers earning the federal minimum wage (or less) are full-time workers; 72% of workers earning the federal minimum-wage (or less) work at least 20 hours a week at their primary job.

Sixty-six percent of minimum wage workers work in service occupations like preparing and serving food, personal care, and other service occupations. They are people we interact with and rely on every day.

**Q** DO WE REALLY NEED TO BUILD MORE HOUSING? CAN’T WE JUST RAISE THE MINIMUM WAGE?

**A** We need to do both. Raising the minimum wage is an important strategy for improving the quality of life for the lowest-wage workers and reducing the gap between their wages and the Housing Wage. However, legislation raising the federal minimum wage to $15 per hour would still fall more than $6 short of the national two-bedroom Housing Wage of $21.21 and more than $2 short of the national one-bedroom Housing Wage of $17.14.

All local minimum wage ordinances that have passed fall short of the local one-bedroom Housing Wage.

The lowest income renters face a shortage of 7.4 million affordable and available rental homes. Every state and major metropolitan has a shortage. Addressing this shortage is essential to solving the affordable housing crisis.
On the *Out of Reach* report homepage, you can download the full report as a PDF along with other organized content.

Hover your cursor over your state on the Map to see the State Housing Wage and Hours at Minimum Wage to afford a Two-Bedroom Rental Home. Click on "More Info" to go to the page for your state.

**NEW FOR 2017!**

You may also enter your zip code (for metropolitan areas only) to see *Out of Reach* data at the zip code level.
SOCIAL MEDIA SUGGESTIONS

PLAN OUT OF REACH PROMOTIONS

POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA (E.G. TWITTER, FACEBOOK, INSTAGRAM)

Use the hashtag #OOR17. It is helpful if you tag @NLIHC in your tweets too. @NLIHC will be tweeting all week, so you can retweet us as well!

GO VIRAL

Share Out of Reach images. Social media images and figures from the report will be available with your media toolkit. Share the images with your social media networks, and create your own specific to your state!

SCHEDULE BLOG POSTS

If your organization has a blog, schedule a post to be published two days after the release of Out of Reach to discuss issues in your state and your policy solutions. Share personal stories and pictures to further emphasize that these issues are affecting “real-people”.

SHARE OUT OF REACH AS A DUALY RELEASED REPORT

On June 8, circulate your press release to your media distribution list. Follow up with op-eds and letters to the editor that relate to articles that mention data from the Out of Reach report, the shortage of affordable housing, or the gap between renters’ wage and housing costs.

Please appropriately credit the National Low Income Housing Coalition and direct viewers to: www.nlihc.org/oor

TESTIMONIES

“This Out of Reach report shows why we must work together to expand the supply of affordable housing through common-sense legislation and campaigns.”
— Congressman Keith Ellison (D-MN)

“I’ve cited the Out of Reach study more than any other study in my entire life.”
— Julián Castro, Former HUD Secretary

“The data in Out of Reach is sobering. I encourage other leaders to use the data in this report to gain a fuller understanding of the housing needs facing their communities.”
— Kate Brown, Governor of Oregon

“Out of Reach proves that the affordable housing problem is real. It is time for all of us—advocates and policymakers alike—to collaborate on solutions.”
— Barbara Poppe, Former Executive Director, U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness
TWITTER

Use these tweets to help generate buzz around Out of Reach. Retweet and tweet using #OOR17. Don’t forget to tag @NLIHC.

• To afford a modest 2-br apt in [STATE], you need to make $ [2-BR HOUSING WAGE]/hr #OOR17 [LINK TO OOR HOMEPAGE OR YOUR STATE PAGE]
• #OOR17 is now available! Check it out for the latest information on rents & wages in [STATE] at [LINK]
• It takes [# OF JOBS] at min. wage to afford a 2 BR unit in [STATE] #OOR17 [LINK TO OOR STATE PAGE]
• A minimum-wage worker in [STATE] must work [# of hours] hours a week to afford a [1 OR 2] br apt #OOR17 [LINK TO OOR STATE PAGE]
• [STATE] has the [STATE RANK] highest #HousingWage for two-bedroom FMR apartments [LINK TO OOR STATE PAGE] #OOR17
• Is a decent home Out of Reach in [STATE]? Learn how [STATE] stacks up here: [LINK TO OOR STATE PAGE] #OOR17.

FACEBOOK

Reach a broader audience by sharing your local data with your Facebook community.

• The president’s budget doesn’t seem to acknowledge the needs of low income renters. The Out of Reach report 2017 shows just how tough it is to afford rent everywhere in the U.S. Read about what you need to earn in your state to afford a decent 2-BR home. #OOR17 [link to OOR online]
• Did you know that a renter in [STATE] must make [Needed Housing Wage in State] to afford rent and utilities for a modest two-bedroom apartment, but the average renter in [STATE] only makes [Avg. Renter Wage]? #OOR17 [link to OOR online]
• If you make the minimum wage in [STATE], you have to work [Work Hours per Week Needed in State] hours per week just to be able to afford the rent and utilities on a modest two-bedroom apartment. We need common sense legislation that will rebalance federal housing expenditures and reinvest savings into affordable rental housing solutions. Take a look at the Out of Reach report to learn more. #OOR17 [link to OOR online]
• Have you taken a look at the 2017 Out of Reach report? It shows that decent rental housing is too expensive in our community. Comment on this post to let us know what you think of the report, and what you think needs to be done to make more housing available and affordable to low income people. #OOR17 [link to OOR online]

GRAPHICS:

• You can download images for social media at: http://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/oor/OOR_2017_graphics.zip.

Sample Graphics:
MEDIA ADVISORY

[Date]

CONTACT: Renee Willis, media@nlihc.org, 202-662-1530 x247 [or your organization’s communications contact]

NATIONAL LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION HOSTS PRESS CALL ON NATIONWIDE STUDY OF THE GAP BETWEEN RENTERS’ WAGES & THE COST OF HOUSING

The 2017 Out of Reach report concludes that in no state, metropolitan area, or county can a full-time minimum-wage worker afford a modest two-bedroom rental home. In only 12 counties can a full-time minimum-wage worker afford a modest one-bedroom rental home.

What: Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing 2017 documents the mismatch between renters’ wages and the cost of rental housing. The report’s Housing Wage is the hourly wage a full-time worker must earn to afford a modest rental home without spending more than 30% of his or her income on housing costs. The report states that a person working full-time must earn $21.21 an hour to afford a decent two-bedroom rental home at the HUD-estimated Fair Market Rent and $17.14 an hour to afford a decent one-bedroom. The 2017 Housing Wage is almost three times the federal minimum wage for a two-bedroom rental home.

When: Thursday, June 8, 2:00 – 3:00 pm ET

Speakers:
• U.S. Representative Keith Ellison (D-MN)
• Diane Yentel, President and CEO, National Low Income Housing Coalition
• Andrew Aurand, Vice President for Research, National Low Income Housing Coalition


Why: Speakers will address the severe mismatch between wages and the cost of rental housing, the shortage of accessible and affordable housing for the lowest income people in America, the current political landscape for addressing the affordable housing crisis, and the opportunities and strategies for advancing practical solutions.

Please note: The embargoed report will be made available prior to the call for press who RSVP. This call is for media only. Out of Reach 2017 will be available to the public on the same day at: www.nlihc.org/oor
AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS OUT OF REACH IN [STATE NAME] FOR LOW WAGE WORKERS

In order to afford a modest, two-bedroom apartment at Fair Market Rent in [STATE], renters need to earn [HOUSING WAGE] per hour. This is [STATE]’s 2017 Housing Wage, revealed in a national report released today. The report, Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing, was jointly released by the National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC), a research and advocacy organization dedicated solely to achieving affordable and decent homes for the lowest income people, and [NAME OF YOUR ORGANIZATION].

Every year, Out of Reach reports on the Housing Wage (the hourly wage a full-time worker must earn to afford a modest and safe rental home without spending more than 30% of his or her income on housing costs) for all states, counties, and metropolitan areas in the country. The report highlights the gap between what renters earn and what it costs to afford rent at fair market value.

[INCLUDE QUOTE BY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF YOUR ORGANIZATION ON LOCAL RENTAL HOUSING MARKET.]

The federal minimum wage has remained at $7.25 an hour without an increase since 2009, not keeping pace with the high cost of rental housing. In no state, even those where the minimum wage has been set above the federal standard, can a minimum wage renter working a 40-hour work week afford a modest two-bedroom rental unit at the average Fair Market Rent. Working at the minimum wage of [STATE MINIMUM WAGE] in [STATE], a wage earner must have [#FULL-TIME JOBS AT MINIMUM WAGE] full-time job(s) or work [#WORK HOURS PER WEEK AT MINIMUM WAGE] hours per week to afford a modest one-bedroom apartment.

The typical renter in [STATE] earns [ESTIMATED MEAN RENTER HOURLY WAGE], which is [SUBTRACT THE MEAN HOURLY WAGE FROM HOUSING WAGE] less than the hourly wage needed to afford a modest unit.

“The Out of Reach 2017 data shows why millions of low income renters are struggling to afford their homes. The federal minimum wage has stayed the same since 2009 but the national Housing Wage has increased to $21.21 for a two-bedroom rental home, more than 2.9 times higher than the federal minimum wage and $4.83 higher than the average renter’s wage,” said Diane Yentel, president and CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition. “We have the resources to solve the affordable housing crisis by realigning federal tax expenditures and reinvesting the savings in rental housing programs that serve our nation’s most vulnerable. We lack only the political will to do so.”

For additional information, visit: http://www.nlihc.org/oor
In [insert title of story and date], [reporter’s name] noted that per The National Low Income Housing Coalition’s Out of Reach report, a full-time worker must earn $21.21 per hour to afford a modest two-bedroom apartment or $17.14 just to afford a one-bedroom. This is a problem, because these housing costs require a full-time worker earning the minimum wage of $7.25 to work 117 hours per week for 52 weeks of the year (or nearly 3 full-time jobs) to afford a modest two-bedroom home, or 94.5 hours per week for a one-bedroom rental home. [Replace with local data if appropriate].

The 2017 Out of Reach report confirms that the affordable housing crisis is real, and it is hurting low income people in the U.S. Seniors, people with disabilities, and individuals and families with low-wage jobs continue to struggle to find decent and affordable housing. President Trump’s budget proposal would greatly diminish the chances of these families ever receiving the affordable housing assistance they need. The proposed billions of dollars in budget cuts to HUD and USDA programs abandons households with the greatest needs while helping to pay for tax cuts for the wealthy.

Greater investments are needed for affordable housing programs, like the national Housing Trust Fund, to address the shortage of affordable rental homes. The high cost of rental housing has resulted in more than 11.2 million severely cost-burdened renter households spending more than half of their income on housing. While low income renters struggle to afford their homes, the largest share of federal housing expenditures benefit higher-income homeowners in the form of deductions from their taxable income.

It is time that members of Congress act to help low income individuals across America by rebalancing our federal housing expenditures and reinvesting in solutions for people with the lowest incomes.

[YOUR NAME, ORGANIZATION, ADDRESS, TELEPHONE NUMBER]
The National Low Income Housing Coalition’s recently published report, *Out of Reach 2017: The High Cost of Housing* finds that in no state, metropolitan area, or county can a full-time minimum-wage worker afford a modest two-bedroom rental home. In only 12 counties can a full-time minimum-wage worker afford a modest one-bedroom rental home.

The high cost of rental housing has resulted in more than 11.2 million severely cost-burdened renter households spending more than half of their income on housing. And despite minimum wage being higher than the federal level in 29 states, millions of families are still struggling.

President Trump’s proposed budget would take critical affordable housing resources away from millions of families struggling to make ends meet and instead fund tax cuts for the wealthy. The justification behind the cuts is that America can no longer afford to invest in programs that are critical for more than 20 million households. This is not true. We have the resources and solutions to end homelessness and housing poverty for people in the U.S.

Each year, Congress spends $200 billion to help house American families. Three-fourths of these resources go to help subsidize the homes of the highest income households through the mortgage interest deduction (MID) and other homeownership tax benefits. We provide more housing assistance to help the richest 7 million households – who earn more than $200,000 a year – than to help the 55 million families that earn less than $50,000 each year, even though they are far more likely to struggle to keep a roof over their head. In fact, we spend about $11 billion each year to subsidize the houses of the top 1% of earners.

Legislation like the “Common Sense Housing Investment Act of 2017” (H.R. 948) and campaigns like [United for Homes](http://www.unitedforhomes.org) would apply modest reforms the MID phased in over five years – lowering the amount of mortgage eligible for a tax benefit from $1 million to $500,000 and converting the deduction to a tax credit. This plan would generate $241 billion over ten years to invest in affordable housing for those most in need and would provide a tax cut to 25 million low and moderate income homeowners.

By rebalancing scarce federal housing resources and increasing investments in proven solutions, like the national Housing Trust Fund and rental assistance, we can assist households who face the greatest challenges in finding decent, safe, and affordable housing. America can afford to invest in programs for people with the greatest needs. We cannot afford more than 10 million renter households continuing to live in housing poverty, experience housing affordability challenges, and struggle to make choices between paying for rent, food, transportation, medical care and childcare.

We can and must do better as a nation. Everyone deserves a decent place to live, and no one should be forced to sacrifice on food, medicine, and other necessities just to keep a roof over their heads.

[YOUR NAME, ORGANIZATION, ADDRESS, TELEPHONE NUMBER]
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