

BUILDING OUR FUTURE

grassroots reflections on **social housing**



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Soaring housing costs and continual economic instability across the country are striking at the core of our communities' well-being and social fabric. Corporate landlords driven by profit have expanded their control over our homes. And Wall Street investors are gambling on real estate at unprecedented levels, unleashing gentrification, flipping for a profit, and vacancy alongside homelessness in our neighborhoods. Today, millions face the daunting reality of skyrocketing costs and the constant threat of eviction and displacement. The increasing use of housing as a wealth and investment vehicle, the concentration of profit-driven corporate control of housing, and the political and financial retreat of the state are key drivers of our housing affordability crisis.

This report, "Building Our Future: Grassroots Reflections on Social Housing," delves into the urgent need for social housing as a radical, transformative, and common-sense solution to our housing crisis. A growing movement of organizers is advocating for permanently and deeply affordable social housing, that is publicly, collectively or non-profit owned and under democratic resident or community control. Through tenant unions, rent strikes, and policy campaigns, groups are demanding public, government intervention to overcome catastrophic market failures and ensure housing for everyone.

As the report makes clear, campaigns for social housing are underway across various regions, for example: in California, organizers claim legislative victories such as SB 555, which mandates a government study on social housing; in Seattle, the establishment of the Seattle Social Housing Developer (SSHD) to build publicly owned, permanently affordable housing; and in Kansas City, Missouri, organizers secured a \$50 million bond for affordable housing and through mass tenant organizing are shifting towards campaigns for building municipal social housing.

This report, crafted by organizers, policy analysts, and educators rooted in housing, racial, and climate justice movements, is intended to serve as a rallying cry and blueprint for transformational housing futures.



PRINCIPLES

- **Social housing is housing that is permanently and deeply affordable;** publicly, non-profit or collectively owned; and protected from the private market. It is grounded in principles of equity, racial justice, community control, tenant power, and climate and environmental justice. Social housing includes quality public housing, community land trusts, and tenant or resident cooperatives.
- **Across the country, grassroots campaigns are advancing housing that is for people, not profit.** In this report, frontline organizers share their experiences, challenges, and successes in advancing social housing. While tactics and strategies range – from directly confronting for-profit landlords to running ballot measures – campaigns are united by a shared commitment to decommodifying housing and building a new housing system where housing is for people, and not profit.
- **Policy solutions must center the people and communities who are most impacted.** Tenant unions, organizations of unhoused people, and others who are deeply impacted by our housing crisis, are putting forward and advancing solutions to best meet our communities' needs. These voices and advocacy are critical for social housing proposals.
- **Diverse models** such as community land trusts, tenant cooperatives, and quality public housing **are part and parcel of the social housing toolbox.** Public housing serves over a million low-income families, offering deeply affordable homes and fostering community resilience. Yet, chronic underfunding and privatization threaten its viability, necessitating bold policy reforms and massive investments in updating and expanding its reach.
- The organizations authoring and highlighted in the report represent some of **the leading grassroots organizations at the forefront of the fight for housing justice across the United States**, including in New York, California, Texas, Missouri, Maryland, Washington State and more. The report, a culmination of extensive translocal collaboration, sheds light on the root causes of the housing crisis impacting communities in large and small cities, in red and blue states, and presents social housing as a viable solution.





GRASSROOTS REFLECTIONS

The bulk of this report presents grassroots reflections on the housing commodification crisis and the emergence of social housing campaigns across the United States. Through interviews and written responses, frontline activists share their experiences, challenges, and successes in advocating for social housing. Organizers, researchers, and policy advocates from various jurisdictions and institutions contribute insights into past and ongoing campaigns, as well as future plans. While the highlighted groups exemplify the diverse efforts toward housing justice, they represent only a portion of the broader social housing organizing landscape. Despite differences in progress and tactics, these groups share a common commitment to housing as a fundamental human right, free from private profiteering and exploitation.

THE MOVEMENT NOW & THE MOVEMENT AHEAD

The report concludes with an analysis and summary of where the social housing movement is, and where it is headed. Social housing is experiencing a clear resurgence, fueled by grassroots organizing and a shared vision of housing justice. The pandemic laid bare the precariousness of housing, highlighting the urgent need for meaningful government response and community-driven solutions.

Campaigns for social housing are diverse, reflecting the unique contexts and histories of local communities. From California to Connecticut, organizers are pushing for a range of interventions, from rent stabilization measures to the establishment of community land trusts and public development authorities. While the strategies may vary, the goal remains consistent: long-term structural change to the housing system.

The movement for social housing is gaining momentum, with grassroots contests, legislative efforts, and ballot initiatives driving change at the local and national levels. By building coalitions, engaging in direct action, and leveraging political power, organizers are challenging the status quo and advancing a vision of housing as a fundamental human right.

As we look ahead, it is crucial to prioritize inclusivity and deep affordability in social housing initiatives. Grassroots groups are advocating for policies and practices that prioritize the lowest-income brackets and ensure access for historically excluded communities. Housing advocates, policymakers, and organizers must continue to listen to the solutions lifted up by those who are most harmed and most deeply impacted. By centering the demands and power of impacted communities and fostering mutual learning and collaboration, we can create a more equitable and sustainable housing system. Social housing will be most effective in meeting immediate needs, and in creating a more equitable and sustainable housing system, if policymakers heed these calls.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 **A Case for Social Housing**

02 **The Commons**

03 **Grassroots Reflections**

Local

Bay Area

Houston

Inland Empire

Los Angeles

Kansas City

Seattle

Statewide

California

Connecticut

Illinois

Maryland

New York

Rhode Island

Washington DC

National

04 **The Movement Now/The Movement Ahead**

05 **What Comes Next?**

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