

# Housing and Safety Are Human Rights

Catholic teaching instructs us that all people have basic human rights that include a right to what is necessary to live in dignity. Every person has a right to stable, safe and affordable housing.

**“Decent housing for all our people is a moral imperative.”**

The U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Right to a Decent Home*, 1975

## Today's Reality

Almost 95 million people in the U.S. have housing problems that include homelessness and overcrowded, unhealthy living conditions. Up to 3.5 million people, including 1.35 million children, experience homelessness each year.

—*America's Housing: Confronting Myths and Promoting a Balanced Housing Policy*, 2005

The federal government has made little progress in halting the loss of affordable housing. An ever-shrinking percentage of the federal non-military discretionary budget—which itself has been shrinking—has gone to affordable housing programs in the past few years.

—Joint Center for Housing Studies, Harvard University

Hate crimes against our nation's homeless population are increasing. In 2006, there were 142 reported attacks on homeless persons, up 65% from 2005 and almost 300% from 2002. The actual numbers are certainly higher because a large percentage of attacks, which include rapes and beatings, go unreported.

—Southern Poverty Law Center

## What You Can Do

- Tell your senators and representative that our nation can no longer afford to ignore the growing crisis of a lack of affordable housing, especially for people living in poverty. You can reach Congress through **NETWORK's Web site ([www.networklobby.org](http://www.networklobby.org))** or by calling the **U.S. Capitol switchboard (202-224-3121)** and asking to be connected to your senators and representative.
- Support local, state and federal efforts to address housing problems. To learn more, go to:
  - National Low Income Housing Coalition** [www.nlihc.org](http://www.nlihc.org) — an excellent source for information about current housing legislation, including the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act and hurricane recovery issues.
  - National Coalition for the Homeless** [www.nationalhomeless.org](http://www.nationalhomeless.org) — find out about the growing crisis of violence against those who are homeless and what needs to be done.
  - National Housing Conference** [www.nhc.org](http://www.nhc.org)
  - National Alliance to End Homelessness** [www.naeh.org](http://www.naeh.org)
  - National Housing Trust** [www.nhtinc.org](http://www.nhtinc.org)
  - National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty** [www.nlchp.org](http://www.nlchp.org)
  - National Fair Housing Alliance** [www.nationalfairhousing.org](http://www.nationalfairhousing.org)

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# Homes that Serve the Earth and Communities

Affordable housing advocates are rallying around programs and legislation to protect the environment and achieve sustainable community development. Green housing requirements are an important tool that works toward these goals.

For example, the National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act of 2007 includes a provision that gives preference to developers who comply with Green Community standards. Green Communities ([www.epa.gov/greenkit/basicinformation.htm](http://www.epa.gov/greenkit/basicinformation.htm)) is a federal program focused on sustainable community building. They provide a checklist to determine if communities:

- Provide adequate affordable housing
- Comply with environmental regulations
- Practice waste minimization and pollution prevention
- Conserve natural resources through sustainable land use
- Promote diverse, locally-owned and operated sustainable businesses (profitable, non-polluting, socially responsible)
- Promote mixed-use residential areas that provide for open space
- Promote economic equity
- Actively involve citizens from ALL sectors of the community through open, inclusive public outreach efforts
- Ensure that public actions are sustainable, while incorporating local values and historical and cultural considerations
- Create and maintain safe, clean neighborhoods and recreational facilities for ALL
- Provide adequate and efficient infrastructure (water, sewer, etc.) that minimizes human health and environmental harm, and transportation systems that accommodate broad public access, bike and pedestrian paths
- Ensure equitable and effective educational and healthcare systems.

## Some “green” legislative efforts:

**H.R. 2895 National Affordable Housing Trust Fund Act of 2007.** Sponsor: Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA)

*How it helps:* Not only does the bill create a trust fund for the construction, rehabilitation and preservation of decent, safe and affordable housing for low-income families, but it also includes a provision that would show preference to developers who adhere to the Green Community standards.

**H.R. 1259 High Performance Buildings Act of 2007.** Sponsor: Rep. Adam Smith (D-WA)

*How it helps:* The bill authorizes HUD to provide money to carry out energy-efficiency improvements in affordable housing and economic development in low-income communities.

**H.R. 2536 HOPE VI Green Building and Technical Assistance Act of 2007.** Sponsor: Rep. John Olver (D-MA)

*How it helps:* The bill requires that any grant from the Secretary of HUD for a revitalization project can be given only if the project complies with the green communities criteria checklist of the national Green Communities program.

NETWORK Intern Tim Brown contributed to this section.

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