

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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## Habitat for Humanity tells Congress housing stability needed now, more than ever

**(COLUMBIA, SC) May 6, 2020** —Long before COVID-19 arrived in the U.S., more than 18 million households in the U.S. were spending more than half their income on housing - leaving little or no margin for lost income or unexpected health care costs. Now, with [more than 400,000 South Carolinians newly out of work](#), and rent and mortgage payments stubbornly still due, the housing affordability challenges have been magnified.

In a [letter signed by the South Carolina Association of Habitat for Humanity](#), and more than 600 other Habitat for Humanity organizations from all 50 states and Washington, D.C., [Habitat](#) is urging Congress to take greater action to support housing stability and the nonprofit organizations that serve low- income families. The organizations are calling for their elected officials to take specific actions in the next stimulus package, by providing funding to nonprofit mortgage lenders like Habitat as well as providing mortgage payment assistance, relief for nonprofits, and funding for housing programs.

“In this pandemic, we cannot restore good health without maintaining access to good homes,” stated George Druyos, president and CEO at [Habitat for Humanity of Berkeley County](#).

Between March and April, [Habitat statewide](#) experienced a total of 20 postponed mortgage closings, 75 temporarily suspended construction projects, and 61 additional delayed start dates on construction projects. Habitat is committed to providing affordable homeownership solutions to South Carolinians, but says it needs strong legislative action to better support communities across the state.

“In the midst of a health pandemic, Habitat has continued to [serve communities](#), navigate [disaster response](#) from tornadoes, and [distribute PPE to healthcare organizations and first responders](#),” said Nancy Lee, executive director at South Carolina Association of Habitat for Humanity. All of this has occurred while also adjusting to the inability to rely on volunteers as heavily as normal operations previously allowed due to social distancing. “Habitat operations relied on over 35,000 volunteers last year. With the current CDC, DHEC, and OSHA safety standards, the cost and length of time to build or repair homes is increasing at a time when the correlation between housing and healthcare is more critical than ever before.”

One recommendation supports a Homeowner Assistance Fund (HAF) to increase stability for those facing the economic shocks of the pandemic. Recent reports show more than 3.4 million borrowers have requested forbearance and the number is expected to grow exponentially. In South Carolina, Habitat expects at least 20% of their homeowners will experience a COVID-19 mortgage delinquency.

“One very deep concern we have at Habitat is how we will be able to continue to build homes with the expected drop in mortgage payments to come from a result of COVID-related loss of income,” shared John Rhoden, executive director at [Sea Island Habitat for Humanity](#).

In fiscal year 2019, the affiliate support organization’s economic impact report found that for every home Habitat built, not only was a family elevated from substandard living, over \$640,000 was added to South Carolina’s economy. “A Homeowner Assistance Fund focused on safeguarding at risk homeowners will stabilize communities and restore hope for families in York County as well as across the state and nation,” said Tim Veeck, executive director and CEO at [Habitat for Humanity of York County](#).

As organizations like Habitat urge Congress to take stronger action to support nonprofits and low-income families, Lee Close commented, “We believe that the stronger the bipartisan support for this measure turns out to be, the more likely we can continue to serve our Habitat families and avoid mortgage delinquencies in the future.” Close is the executive director at [Habitat for Humanity of Spartanburg](#).

Read the full letter, and list of signatory Habitat organizations, [here](#).

#### **About South Carolina Association of Habitat for Humanity**

Established in 2012, South Carolina Association of Habitat for Humanity is a nonprofit housing organization that brings people together to build homes, communities, and hope. The affiliate support organization expands the capacity of 30 local affiliates through advocacy, training, resource development, as well as disaster preparedness and recovery. Serving 36 counties across South Carolina, Habitat affiliates have built over 2,862 new homes, repaired 1,123 houses, and rehabilitated 126 homes. They have served and housed 10,000+ children and adults and invested over \$200M in affordable housing since 1978. To learn more, visit: <https://southcarolinahabitat.org/>.

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