

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** May 26, 2020

**To:** Marisa A. Zapata, PhD  
Director, PSU-HRAC

**From:** Lauren E. M. Everett  
Graduate Research Assistant, PSU-HRAC

**Subject:** Updates on COVID-19 response and people experiencing homelessness nationwide, May 18 - 24

### News

1. Nearly 100 houseless individuals in [Merced County, CA](#) (San Joaquin Valley) were moved into hotel rooms as part of Project Roomkey.
2. In [New York City](#), the struggle between homeless advocates and the Mayor's office continues. City Council was expected to vote Tuesday on a bill to shelter all of the city's houseless population in hotels, but [the vote was postponed](#) in order to provide time for the two sides to negotiate. Some service providers have also questioned the approach of housing the entire population in individual rooms, citing concerns about isolation for individuals with mental health issues. Seventy six people experiencing homelessness and 31 agency staffers have passed away from the virus. More on the conflict [here](#). Meanwhile, data shows that NYC neighborhoods with [public housing](#) developments have a 30% higher rate of virus hospitalizations.
3. A [car caravan protest](#) of medical professionals and other advocates in San Francisco demanded that the city purchase hotels to be converted into affordable housing, and for the city to lease more rooms for unhoused residents. The city is opening a number of [Safe Sleeping Villages](#) for tent sheltering. Meanwhile, there has been a 285% increase in tents in the [Tenderloin](#) neighborhood.
4. In [California](#), the Project Roomkey goal of providing non-congregate shelter in 15,000 hotel rooms lags as many localities struggle to staff the rooms they have leased. Half of the 15,000 rooms are currently empty. Los Angeles has not yet faced this limitation, though LAHSA (the CoC) anticipates being at service provider capacity soon. As of Monday the 18th, the county has secured 3,245 rooms and moved guests into 2,102. The Los Angeles Times' editorial board has [seven recommendations](#) for how the state can avoid a (further) housing and homelessness disaster, and they include rental assistance and purchasing hotels and motels. Governor Newsom has announced a plan to use \$750 million in federal pandemic relief funds [to purchase](#) some of the hotels being leased through Project Roomkey.
5. In [Covington, KY](#) (Cincinnati Metro Area), 40 houseless individuals who were staying at a hotel had to leave Friday when local funding ran out. There was no plan to relocate them.

6. In [Pasadena, CA](#), the city has secured 110 hotel rooms, sheltering an estimated 20% of the houseless population.
7. [This essay in Common Dreams](#) outlines why cities should use emergency powers to commandeer hotel rooms to shelter people experiencing homelessness. They point out there is an especially strong case for this intervention with hotels that have received public subsidies.
8. [Los Angeles City and County](#) have until September 1 to relocate anyone camped within 500 feet of a freeway into a shelter or alternative housing option, per a U.S. District Court Judge. LA Alliance for Human Rights brought a lawsuit against the city and county citing the extreme risk of sheltering adjacent to such a dangerous environment.
9. The [CDC issued guidance](#) that unsheltered houseless people be allowed to remain where they are if individual housing options are not available. This applies to both camping environments, and city infrastructure like subways.

## National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) Weekly Call (Monday, May 18) and Weekly Updates

(Register for the next call [here](#))

- **John Pollock, Coordinator, National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel:** Eviction moratoriums are uneven for states that do have them, and tenants are being pressured to move out in many places despite them. They are pushing for an extension of the moratoria on publicly-financed properties, and for extending it to all rental homes. In places that are still holding evictions hearings, they are conducted by phone or video, and there's a concern that violates due process if people can't access the required technology or maybe aren't even aware the hearing is happening. The advocacy community is trying to develop guidance around this. Some jurisdictions are looking into using CDBG money for legal representation as well as rental assistance.
- **Ras Baraka, Mayor, Newark:** Free legal counsel is available to low-income individuals through their Right to Counsel legislation and program. They have a non-congregate hotel shelter program, and have been paying up front and then seeking reimbursement through FEMA or the County's CARES Act funds. Their vendor, Bridges, does street outreach for the houseless population (they also do PIT and other outreach during normal times) to bring them into shelter.
- **Trey Price, ED, Florida Housing Finance Corporation:** They're shifting the emphasis of their [State Housing Initiative Partnership \(SHIP\)](#) Program from creating and maintaining affordable owner-occupied and rental housing, to rent and mortgage assistance. It's targeted toward people making up to 140% AMI, but there is a mandated percentage allocated for lower income segments.

- **Cheryl Cohen, ED, Montana Housing:** The state has allocated \$50 million to be used for an emergency housing program for people who have housing payment issues as a result of the pandemic starting April 1. The limit is \$75,000 a year for 1-to-2-member households. They've brought in about 40 application reviewers and have 700 applications thus far from mostly renters, but they're going to reach out to homeowners as well.
- **Erhard Mahnke, Coordinator, Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition:** The state's eviction and utility shut-off moratoriums extend through June 15. They have about 2,000 people living in motels including 300 children. Many shelters are closed, and they relocated folks to motels. There are almost twice the number of people experiencing homelessness since the PIT count last year so this number includes people who were doubling up or precariously housed. They are trying to use this emergency as an opportunity to provide a better housing system to houseless Vermonters.
- **Adrienne Bush, ED, Homeless and Housing Coalition of Kentucky:** The state's eviction and utility shut-off moratorium extends through July 1. They have decompressed shelters, and are opening a rental assistance portal this week. This will be funded by ESG and CDBG funding in Louisville only, which is the only locality in the state that is large enough to be eligible for federal funds. They're working with their partners to enforce the protections of the CARES Act, including drafting form letters for renters.

## **NLIHC: *Racial Equity During & After The COVID-19 Pandemic, with Diane Yentel & Dr. Ibram X. Kendi (special presentation, May 21)***

*Dr. Kendi is a best-selling author and founder of the Anti-Racist Research and Policy Center at American University. This conversation explored Dr. Kendi's work on racism and anti-racist activism in the context of the pandemic.*

'Race neutral' policies can perpetuate racial disparities by obscuring the underlying conditions of structural inequality. So the litmus test is whether a policy perpetuates inequities or furthers racial justice. If you're not instituting policies that consider these inequities, you can simply point to the poor outcomes and attribute them to the group in question (e.g. Ben Carson's policies, culture of poverty thesis, etc.). When this approach is applied to housing, he advocates starting with collecting data (both qualitative and quantitative) on inequities in housing, in order to understand the source. Once you have a clear and complex understanding gleaned from the data, you can create policies based on that research. If policies aren't reducing racial inequities, we should come up with new policies and keep testing them in different places, and proliferate policies that are working in some places in others.

[The COVID Racial Data Tracker](#)—a component of the COVID Tracking Project—emerged in early April when the center started calling for states to release racial data on COVID patients. They've

found disproportionate levels of infection in different states, among different groups. The first mainstream explanation for this data was that people of color were not taking social distancing seriously. When groups of white people started protesting, the new explanation was that Black people had more pre-existing conditions. These explanations lay the blame for the higher infection levels on people of color. However, a recent study came out which found that employment, access to medical care, and environmental factors were more predictive than pre-existing conditions. The refusal to expand Medicare has also disproportionately impacted Black people in the southern states. This is an example of a ‘race-neutral’ policy that is anything but.

In conclusion, it’s necessary to distinguish between a program that helps an individual and a program/policy that can uplift a community. We need to think about policy change, and that can be on the institutional level, neighborhood level, informal, etc.—not just municipal level. We need to ask whether it will help marginalized people and whether they’re part of the process. And we need to assume that there’s nothing wrong with this group of people, but rather that the policy needs to change. Anti-racist and racist ideas/actions tend to progress together, with more innovative racist ideas and policy unfolding in tandem with progress in the direction of equity. It is also important to recognize and frame the advocacy for equity and an egalitarian society as ultimately to the benefit of most Americans.

## Other resources

1. NLIHC working group [sign up](#).
2. NLIHC federal resource [guidelines](#).
3. NLIHC [webinar series](#).
4. The NLIHC has developed a [media tool kit](#) for advocates to raise awareness around the need for rental assistance and homelessness funding in the HEROES Act.
5. NAEH’s [online learning series](#): an online course curriculum designed to provide homeless system leaders and providers. As well as disaster workers and health care workers, with training and materials.
6. The CDC’s updated [interim guidance](#) on people experiencing unsheltered homelessness.
7. The Urban Institute’s Housing Matters [blog series](#) explores “evidence-based ideas for how state and local leaders can stabilize housing for renters” during the pandemic, after eviction moratoria are lifted.
8. [NLIHC’s list](#) of state and local rental assistance programs