



Equality means dignity: Report highlights how working Americans struggle

BY ALI SOLIS AND EILEEN FITZGERALD - 01/20/17 02:20 PM EST



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This week we celebrated the contributions of a great American Leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The United Way's recently released ALICE report raises the question of whether Dr. King's Dreams for America are achievable in today's society. The movement that Dr. King led was not only inspirational, but it was essential. We know that his voice is stilled today, but we must continue to heed his message.

United Way's ALICE Report provides a comprehensive look at working families who are struggling financially in 13 states, and found that at least 31 percent of households in each state could not afford basic needs such as housing, child care, food, health care, and transportation in 2014.

While there are many households across the country that are living below the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), there are a significant number of households who qualify as, what United Way has deemed, "ALICE" - Asset Limited, Income Constrained, and Employed.

The report collected and analyzed data from 13 states (Connecticut, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Oregon, Washington and Wisconsin) and determined that millions of working Americans are struggling and unable to live a life of dignity. It is important to note that there are 8.5 million renters with incomes below the ALICE threshold, yet there are fewer than 5.6 million available rental homes - subsidized and market rate - that these households can afford without being severely cost-burdened. That is a gap of 3 million homes.

Make Room, Inc. and Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future (SAHF) believe that the next Administration has a monumental opportunity to help the working individuals and families who are ALICE. By expanding

efficient and effective programs like the Low Income Housing Tax Credit (Housing Credit) and creating new policies and programs, that incent public/private partnerships that allow affordable housing to serve as a platform for opportunity and restore hope that all Americans can achieve their American Dream – like Dr. King envisioned.

During his recent confirmation hearing to be the 17th secretary of the Housing and Urban Development Department, Dr. Ben Carson was quoted as saying, “...I believe in a holistic approach to addressing the housing needs of Americans. Housing [can be used] as a platform to access good education, healthcare and jobs.”

We agree with Dr. Carson, everyone should have a safe, quality and affordable place to call home. Anyone who works tirelessly, to provide for themselves or their families, should be able to live with dignity and respect.

This day of observance of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the release of this ALICE report reminds us that it is our duty and our moral obligation -- to always consider Dr. King's dream of an equitable society where ALL people have the opportunity to succeed.

With new leadership headed to Washington, D.C. and state houses, we must prioritize solving the nations' crisis affecting millions of Americans in this country.

Make Room, Inc. and Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future both look forward to working with President Trump, his administration and Congress to ensure that the voices of vulnerable populations are heard and that solutions are elevated on the agendas of our nation's leaders.

Affordable homes, a decent job to pay your bills, reliable child care when you are at work and the opportunity to go to a doctor and pick up your medication must be a central component of that agenda so that all families can feel secure, can thrive and prosper.

So what can we do? The incoming administration should commit to doubling the supply of quality and affordable rental housing by 2025. One strategy to do that is support the bipartisan efforts in Congress to significantly expand the Housing Credit which facilitates private investment into quality affordable rental housing. In addition, they can preserve the existing affordable housing stock and provide targeted support to cover the gap between rising rents and stagnant incomes to make more homes affordable.

In remembrance of Dr. King's dream and his legacy, we must commit that one of the basics of life – homes that are safe and affordable -- are a reality in people's lives. We look forward to working with the administration and Congress and joining together so that the next ALICE report will not tell us that 3/10 working people cannot afford the very basics of life. That collaboration will make Dr. King proud.

Ali Solis is CEO and President of Make Room, Inc. Make Room gives a voice to struggling renters and elevates rental housing on the agendas of our nation's leaders. Eileen Fitzgerald is President and CEO of Stewards of Affordable Housing (SAHF). SAHF's mission is to lead policy innovation and advance excellence in the delivery of affordable rental homes that expand opportunity and promote dignity for residents.

The views expressed by authors are their own and not the views of The Hill.