Talking Points: Washington

These talking points are meant to be used during conversations with Washington state lawmakers, potential allies and the media.

* It’s no secret that a growing number of working families are struggling to find housing they can afford. It is a clear strain on families that must be addressed.
* Almost half of Washington apartment households paid more than 30 percent of their income on housing costs. That’s simply too much. On top of that, from 2000 to 2015, 23 states [under-produced housing](https://www.upforgrowth.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/housing_underproduction.pdf) to the tune of 7.3 million units, including over 225,000 units in Washington State, which has created a significant supply and demand imbalance that is reflected in today’s home prices.
* We have seen this supply and demand balance inverted in many major cities nationwide during the COVID-19 pandemic. In several regions, residents flocked from cities to the suburbs and exurbs during the pandemic-fueled lockdowns. In these areas, supply began to outpace demand, yielding significant rent decreases. In the Seattle area, rents fell by 5.5% year over year by the end of 2020, according to RealPage.
* The evidence is clear: the best way to address our housing affordability crisis is to ensure supply can meet demand. That’s the only way to bring rents down.
* Americans are searching for solutions to the housing affordability crisis. And in lieu of innovative, proactive solutions, some will advocate for antiquated rent control policies that are universally known to be ineffective and harmful.
* That’s why we need holistic solutions that will lead to a wider range of housing options, from apartments and duplexes, to single-family homes and townhouses.
  + First, we must address the tremendous shortage of homes and remove barriers to adding more supply. Without doing so, we will never meet the demand for [4.6 million new apartments nationwide by 2030](https://weareapartments.org/vision). Seattle alone needs to build at least 7,000 new apartments every year to keep up with demand.
  + Second, local governments must take the lead and find creative, public-private partnership opportunities to bring the price point down to create more affordable housing.
  + Third, we must use targeted subsidies to help the neediest families today.
* New York and California have learned the hard way that rent control policies have unintended consequences that far outweigh any benefits. For instance, a [1995 rent control policy in San Francisco](https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-01-18/yup-rent-control-does-more-harm-than-good) reduced rental-unit supply by 15 percent and made people much less likely to move over the medium and long term. That’s why California voters resoundingly rejected ballot initiatives in 2018 and 2020 that would have broadened rent control across the state.
* As the 2021 legislative session unfolds, it is imperative that holistic solutions dominate discussions of remedies to the housing affordability issue in Washington, rather than outdated, ineffective policies like rent control.