

First Statewide Housing Needs Assessment in Over a Decade Released

On January 12, 2015, the Washington Department of Commerce released the 2015 Washington State Housing Needs Assessment, the first comprehensive, statewide look at housing needs produced in more than a decade. The data in the assessment will help the state, local governments, housing authorities, and private and non-profit developers make the most effective policy and funding decisions to meet the state's affordable housing needs.

Faith Li Pettis, a partner at Pacifica and the chair of Affordable Housing Advisory Board (AHAB), which secured funding for the study, told the State Legislature that almost 400,000 Washington households pay more than 50 percent of their income for housing expenses.

Affordable housing includes housing needs ranging from emergency shelter and temporary housing for the lowest-income individuals and families to apartments and houses for individuals and families. Housing needs and affordability vary by region, and are different when looking at large cities as opposed to smaller, rural communities.

By quantifying housing needs on a county-by-county and region-by-region basis, the assessment is expected to help solutions be more targeted and tailored to these varying community needs and comes at an important time.

Since 2000, Washington incomes have declined 2.4 percent while median rents have increased by 7.8 percent in real dollars. Over the next five years, Washington's population is expected to grow, with most of that growth among low-income households.

The assessment does not make specific policy recommendations. Instead, it provides a solid footing for making current and future policy decisions by establishing a baseline of affordable housing data in the state, with a replicable process that could be used to measure progress in the future.

The Department of Commerce and the Washington State Housing Finance Commission have also committed to a partnership that will ensure that the

assessment, and subsequent versions of it, will continue to provide primary measures about meeting the state's affordable housing needs.

The entire assessment, including county and regional profiles and other housing information, is available on the Washington Department of Commerce website at www.commerce.wa.gov/housingneeds.

AHAB is a Governor-appointed board composed of 22 stakeholder members. As chair of AHAB, Pettis was heavily involved in making the assessment a reality. Under her leadership, AHAB secured funding for the assessments from public and private partners, including the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Washington REALTORS®, the Building Industry Association of Washington, and the Association of Washington Housing Authorities. In addition, members of AHAB also worked with state and local agencies to help obtain the data analyzed in the assessment, including a 100 percent response rate from housing authorities across Washington regarding the stock of affordable housing they manage.

Contact Information

For further information about the Housing Needs Study, please consult one of the following public finance attorneys:

Faith Li Pettis
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Dated: January 14, 2015