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To: Partnership for Affordable Housing
From: John Horvick, DHM Research
Re: Washington rent control survey, #00971

INTRODUCTION & METHODOLOGY

From July 6 to 10, 2020, DHM Research conducted a survey of Washingtonians for the Partnership for Affordable Housing. The purpose of the survey was to assess their opinions about housing affordability and rent control in the state.

Research Methodology: The online survey consisted of 404 Washington residents ages 18+. This is a sufficient sample size to assess residents' opinions generally and to review findings by multiple subgroups.

Respondents were members of a professionally maintained online panel. Respondents were invited to the survey via email. A variety of quality control measures were employed, including questionnaire pre-testing and validation. A combination of quotas and weighting by age, gender, area of state, education and race were used to match the demographic makeup of the general population in the surveyed counties.

Statement of Limitations: Any sampling of opinions or attitudes is subject to a margin of error. The margin of error is a standard statistical calculation that represents differences between the sample and total population at a confidence interval, or probability, calculated to be 95%. This means that there is a 95% probability that the sample taken for this study would fall within the stated margin of error if compared with the results achieved from surveying the entire population. The margin of error for this survey is $\pm 4.9\%$.

DHM Research Background: DHM Research has been providing opinion research and consultation throughout the Pacific Northwest and other regions of the United States for over 40 years. The firm is nonpartisan and independent and specializes in research projects to support public policy making.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

Housing affordability in Washington is a major concern and persistent problem.

- 80% of Washington residents are concerned about housing affordability in the state, including 41% who are “very” concerned.
- The groups that most likely to report that they are “very” concerned about housing affordability are renters (55%), those with high school education (50%), and those with household incomes below \$50,000 (49%).
- Washington residents have seen little progress on housing affordability. In 2019, 82% of the state’s residents also reported being concerned about it, which is essentially the same rate as now.

Washington residents strongly prefer that rental rates be set collaboratively between renters and landlords rather than regulated by the government.

- By a margin of more than 2 to 1, residents prefer rental rates be set by an agreement between landlords and their tenants (62%) rather than be regulated by the government (23%); a margin of 39 percentage points.
- The preference for agreements between landlords and tenants is shared by all demographic groups and political persuasions. The margins for key groups include 34-points in King County, 30-points among household incomes below \$50,000, 17-points among Democrats, and, importantly, 19-points among renters.

Washington residents believe that there are many better ways to address housing affordability than rent control.

- The survey provided respondents with neutral descriptions of rent control and several alternative policies to address housing affordability in Washington. For each policy, they were asked if it is a better or worse approach than rent control. Across the board, Washingtonians believe that there are better ways than rent control to ensure residents have an affordable place to live:
 - By a 63-point margin residents prefer partnerships between state and local governments and the private sector to provide a wide range of housing than rent control (76% vs. 13%).
 - By a 52-points margin residents prefer providing a property tax exemption to property owners who voluntarily agree to keep rents below the market rate than rent control (67% vs. 15%).
 - By a 48-point margin residents prefer more state funding for affordable housing projects than rent control (67% vs. 19%).
 - And by a 42-point margin residents prefer providing rental assistance vouchers to low-income households than rent control (64% vs. 22%).
- Belief that these policy options are better than rent control cut across all demographic groups.
- Notably, even those who open to government regulating rent believe that these are better policies than rent control. Between 61-72% of those who said that rent should be regulated by the government believed that these are better policy options than rent control.

Washingtonians continue to believe that the state is on the wrong track.

- More Washington residents believe that the state is on the wrong track (45%) than feel that it is headed in the right direction (37%).
- Feelings about the state are more divided by political party than any other characteristic. Republicans are twice as likely than Democrats to believe that the state is on the wrong track (61% vs. 31%). Differences by age, gender, income, education, race, and area of the state are all modest in comparison, ranging no more than 10 percentage points within each demographic group.
- The percentage of residents who feel that the state is on the wrong track is unchanged since April 2019. This shows that negative feelings about the state extend beyond the current crises of COVID-19, the economic recession, and recent protests.