

June 21, 2022

The Honorable Maxine Waters
Chairwoman
House Committee on Financial Services
2221 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Patrick McHenry
Ranking Member
House Committee on Financial Services
2004 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairwoman Waters and Ranking Member McHenry,

On behalf of the National Association of REALTORS® 1.5 million members working in all aspects of the residential and commercial real estate industries, I write to express our support for two important pieces of legislation the committee is considering in its June 22, 2022 markup: H.R. 68, the Housing Fairness Act of 2022, and H.R. 4495, the Downpayment Toward Equity Act of 2022.

As stewards of the right to own, use, and transfer private property, our livelihoods and businesses as REALTORS® depend upon an open housing market free from discrimination. Our economy, communities, and the American people suffer when discrimination and segregation artificially constrain homeownership and limit the intergenerational wealth it builds. Yet, more than fifty years after passage of the Fair Housing Act, the homeownership rates for Black Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans continue to lag behind that of White Americans. NAR is firmly committed to the enforcement of fair housing laws and to policies that address historic and systemic barriers to homeownership.

For these reasons, the National Association of REALTORS® continues to offer its strong support of **H.R. 68, the Housing Fairness Act of 2022**. The Housing Fairness Act would increase authorization levels for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Fair Housing Initiatives Program, and the enforcement, education, and outreach activities that it funds. H.R. 68 would also authorize funds for public and private entities to study housing discrimination and issue public reports. Such studies are sorely needed after the previous administration declined to conduct the decennial Housing Discrimination Study that has been conducted every decade since the Carter administration.

The National Association of REALTORS® also continues to endorse **H.R. 4495, the Downpayment Toward Equity Act of 2022**. Even if housing discrimination were eliminated today, historic discrimination that kept millions of Americans from accumulating intergenerational wealth means that large groups of Americans face additional obstacles to homeownership. In today's market, saving for a down payment can be one of the toughest challenges in securing a home¹, even if a family can afford a monthly mortgage payment. NAR research has found that while 38% of White homebuyers can rely on the sale of an existing home to fund a down payment, only 21%

¹ National Association of REALTORS®, Obstacles to Home Buying, April 2022, <https://cdn.nar.realtor/sites/default/files/documents/2022-obstacles-to-home-buying-04-12-2022.pdf>.

of Black buyers, 16% of Asian buyers, and 25% of Hispanic buyers are able to do so.² We also found that while only 6% of White buyers have had to tap a 401(k) or pension fund for their down payment, 14% of Black buyers, 10% of Asian buyers, and 12% of Hispanic buyers have resorted to depleting retirement savings for their down payment.

These barriers, and others, account for homeownership gaps among demographic groups that have, in the case of the Black-White homeownership gap, actually widened since the Fair Housing Act's passage. Our latest research shows that while the national homeownership rate has reached its highest point since 2010, the homeownership rate for Black Americans is nearly 30 percentage points lower than that of White Americans.³

NAR recognizes the urgent need to aid homeowners who are making up lost ground due to historic and present-day discrimination. Down payment assistance to first-time and first-generation homebuyers can help overcome obstacles for qualified buyers to secure the American dream of homeownership. H.R. 4495's establishment of a grant program through the Department of Housing and Urban Development to provide targeted assistance for down payments and other costs associated with real estate transactions is a critical measure that NAR believes will help buyers overcome hurdles in the homebuying process.

The National Association of REALTORS® stands ready to work with this committee to address the ongoing challenge of housing discrimination and to help close racial and ethnic homeownership gaps.

Sincerely,



Leslie Rouda Smith
2022 President, National Association of REALTORS®

cc: House Committee on Financial Services

² National Association of REALTORS®, 2022 Snapshot of Race and Home Buying in America, February 2022, <https://cdn.nar.realtor/sites/default/files/documents/2022-snapshot-of-race-and-home-buying-in-the-us-04-26-2022.pdf>.

³ Id.