WASHINGTON LOW INCOME
Housing Alliance

IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 30, 2016

Contact: Reiny Cohen, 206.251.4083
reinyc@wliha.org

Legislature Misses Opportunity to Address Statewide Homelessness Crisis
Disappointing Budget Results for Affordable Housing and Homelessness

Olympia – Investments in affordable housing and homelessness in the compromise operating and capital budgets are a small step forward in recognizing the crisis afflicting tens of thousands of families and individuals in communities across Washington. However, these investments fail to expand the proven solutions we need to address homelessness.

The supplemental budgets fall far short of addressing the existing need on the streets and in communities across our state. The original House Operating Budget proposal (HB 2376) was passed by the Democratic-majority House of Representatives and included an additional $37.5 million for affordable housing and supportive services for those in need. The Bring Washington Home Act, (SB 6647) proposed by Senate Democratic Leader Sharon Nelson (D-34, Maury Island) would have invested an additional $186.8 million in a range of affordable housing solutions, homelessness outreach and intervention, and supportive services. Either of these earlier proposals would have made a significant positive impact in the lives of the families and individuals across Washington who are homeless or at risk of becoming so - but the Republican-controlled State Senate refused to give either proposal serious consideration beyond a cursory public hearing.

The final compromise Capital and Operating Budgets passed by the Legislature does total approximately $15 Million for affordable housing and homelessness services. Some of the investments and re-appropriation of funds support important youth homelessness programs, including: $2 Million for the Homeless Student Stability Act (HB 1682), $1.028 Million for HOPE Beds for homeless youth, and $800,000 for Street Youth Services. Unfortunately, the vast majority of this is from existing program funding and does not actually invest new resources in proven solutions to homelessness.

The final compromise Capital Budget (HB 2380) provides an additional $8 million for affordable housing, including for the Housing Trust Fund, which will fund affordable homes through a competitive grant process and will also fund four specific projects including two youth shelters. Additionally a new program is created, modeled from a similar program in Oregon, which provides incentives for landlords to rent to tenants relying on federal Housing Choice (section 8) vouchers by funding reimbursement for damages to units that exceed normal wear and tear. This new program seeks to help break down unnecessary and unfair barriers to housing by addressing the unfounded fears of landlords that low-income renters cause more damage to units.

Handout at the April 5, 2016 HNH meeting -
from Michele Thomas, WA Low Income Housing Alliance
2016- B0081

Overall, these budgets do not keep pace with the growing need in Washington State. Recent data from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction shows that 35,511 pubic school children were homeless at some point in the last school year. During the recent point in time count in January, 4,505 people were counted outside in the middle of the night, after the shelters were full in King County. That represented a 19% increase over 2015. Snohomish County saw a 54% increase in unsheltered homelessness in that same period. Kitsap County saw a 30% increase, including a doubling of people living unsheltered.

Significantly greater investment is needed to address this crisis. The Washington Low Income Housing Alliance will continue to work with elected officials toward meaningful, comprehensive solutions.

The Washington Low Income Housing Alliance is the statewide leader and champion for affordable homes for all. As a powerful coalition of diverse organizations and individuals we work together to ensure that everyone in Washington has the opportunity to live in safe, healthy, affordable homes in thriving communities.

<div align="center">###</div>