
HOUSES Act

Communities across the country, particularly the West, are dealing with unprecedented housing affordability and housing availability challenges. The U.S. is now short 5.24 million homes,¹ which has resulted in record housing prices. In 2021, the states with the highest increases year-over-year were Arizona (28.8%), Idaho (28.7%), and Utah (24.5%).² Prompt action to increase the supply of housing will be vital to solving this challenge. Senator Lee proposes to increase the available area for housing development of any kind – low income housing, condominiums, apartments, single family homes, etc. – to allow each community to address their unique needs.

The Helping Open Underutilized Space to Ensure Shelter Act (HOUSES Act) would create a new authority under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) that would allow a state or a unit of local government to nominate a tract of land within the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) jurisdiction to be used for housing. However, lands with special designations from Congress, like national monuments, wilderness areas, or national recreation areas would not be eligible under this new authority. Should the Department of the Interior (DOI) approve the proposal, the state or unit of local government could purchase the land from the federal government at a PILT-ratioed price³ with the proceeds dedicated for capital improvements in national parks, hazardous fuels reduction to prevent forest fires, and the development of public water infrastructure on federal land.

Bill Specifics

- Creates a process by which a state or unit of local government may nominate a parcel of BLM land to address housing shortages.
- The state or unit of local government could purchase an approved tract at a PILT-ratioed price with proceeds dedicated for capital improvements in national parks, hazardous fuels reduction to prevent forest fire, or the development of public water infrastructure on federal land.
- Requires that a unit of local government enact zoning laws to ensure development of the land proceeds as was described in the nomination proposal.
- Requires that at least 85% of the land acquired must be used for residential purposes and related community needs at a density not less than one home per quarter acre. Related community needs would include primary and secondary schools, places of worship, grocery stores, and hospitals and health clinics.
- Requires that no more than 15% of the land could be used for commercial purposes.
- Stipulates that roads, transit hubs, and facilities for the delivery of vital utilities serving the new residential community are uninhibited and do not count towards the apportionment of residential or commercial purposes.

¹ <https://www.realtor.com/research/us-housing-supply-continues-to-lag-household-formations/>

² <https://www.corelogic.com/intelligence/u-s-home-price-insights/>

³ This would make the land available at prices below market value but in line with the PILT payments the area has historically received from the federal government due to its ownership of the land. It would also leave room in the budget for communities to address housing shortages as they see fit.
