

Orlando near top for lack of affordable rentals



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Metro Orlando recently ranked third nationally for its shortage of rentals that are affordable enough for the region's lowest-income residents, a new study shows.

Central Florida seniors, disabled residents and families working multiple low-wage jobs face the most daunting hunt for shelter, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition's annual GAP report.

For every 100 of the lowest-income residents in Orange, Seminole, Lake and Osceola counties, only 18 houses were within their reach financially. Of the top 50 metro areas nationally, only Las Vegas and Los Angeles had a greater shortage than Orlando's. Even pricier housing markets, such as Boston or Pittsburgh, had more affordable housing stock and support programs than Orlando.

"There's a combination of factors that make Orlando one of the worst in terms of shortages: lower-wage jobs, lack of older houses, and pressure on rental market to raise rents, which makes them less affordable," said Andrew Aurand, vice president of research for the coalition.

The ranking measured residents who spent at least half of their income on housing last year. "These households forego healthy food or delay healthcare or medications to pay the rent," the report stated.

Affordable-housing shortages in Central Florida are expected to mount as Puerto Rican evacuees attempt to transport their federal [Section 8 housing](#) vouchers from their hurricane-ravaged island to the Orlando region. Orange County officials have placed 33 families from Puerto Rico into rentals using federal vouchers; the county is working on placing at least 17 more households from Puerto Rico.

Orlando housing needs are evident to Patricia Carter, director of the Life Center for the New Life Community Church in the Lockhart area of west Orange and southwest Seminole counties. Many of the most affordable houses and apartments in the region aren't safe or fit for living, she said.

"There is no middle in our housing anymore," said Carter, who plans a town hall meeting at the center on Thursday to hear residents' concerns about housing and personal safety. "The low income isn't habitable and the high income isn't affordable."

Meanwhile housing resources dwindle. At the federal level, President Trump has proposed further spending cuts aimed at extremely low income renters, the coalition reported.

In Florida, lawmakers this year spent \$185 million of funds earmarked for housing on other spending priorities, such as school safety. About \$109 million of the money designated for affordable housing is being spent as intended.

Jaimie Ross, president of the Florida Housing Coalition, said the Legislature must reverse its decade-old practice of raiding housing funds. Florida stands as a model for funding affordable housing with its tax on real estate sales but the Legislature is "starving" housing programs intended to help residents with down payments or rental assistance, she said. The Orlando area is in particular need of help with incoming hurricane evacuees from Puerto Rico, she added.

"The affordable housing shortage in Central Florida has been exacerbated year after year as the Florida Legislature appropriates Florida's housing trust funds for uses having nothing to do with housing" Ross said.