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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Did you lose power and water during the winter storm? Tens of thousands face that every day, regardless of the weather.

By hour 10 of sitting in the darkness, with no phone or internet and temperatures plunging to three degrees Fahrenheit, I knew a slow-motion disaster was underway. There was nothing to do but wait. Without electricity, my well would not pump water, which meant I couldn't drip faucets, which meant as soon as they thawed, I would see burst pipes.

By 3 AM, I could hear electric company line workers outside trying to get power to my neighborhood. They were heroes. No power for 23 hours in record low temps led to five days without running water and another four days without hot water.

Like so many of my fellow Texans plunged into the cold darkness of last month's "snowpocalypse," routine needs of drinking water, flushing toilets, cooking, and dog water bowls became something I had to plan for.

It wasn't pioneer woman hard, but it was hard. I lost a week of productive work, just trying to survive.

A month after the storm, most people are back to normal. Except for the nearly 100,000 Texans whose homes lack kitchens or basic plumbing every single day of the year, no matter if it is three degrees or 115. A staggering one in three Texans lives in a substandard home like that. Or their house is overcrowded, or too expensive, leaving little money for other basic necessities.

Sure, it's easy to say, "Well, they shouldn't live there if it is run down or they can't afford it," but that isn't an option for many. In no part of Texas can someone who earns minimum wage afford a modest, two-bedroom apartment, so is it really realistic to say every minimum or low wage worker should move out of the state?*

Sure, we are seeing a housing boom in Texas right now. But those homes are not being built for lower wage earners and working professionals like teachers and police. That sector of the

housing market is tightest because, frankly, there is little money to be made in building homes for this income bracket.

Nine million Texans -- neighbors who take care of our kids when they are young and our parents when they are old, who load our cars with groceries during pandemics, and who get the electricity back on in the middle of the night -- deserve a decent place to live.

When the problem is that big, it is a problem we must address together.

Every societal ill improves when people have access to safe and stable homes, especially home ownership – to name a few: children of homeowners are more likely to graduate from high school and go on to college, teen pregnancy rates are reduced, and homeowners are less likely to be victims of crime.** It is such a fundamental building block of neighborhoods and communities that it is easy to overlook until something like a winter storm reminds us of how wonderful it is to flip a switch for lights, turn on a heater, flush a toilet.

You want productive, tax paying citizens? Then make sure people have access to decent shelter. Give them a figurative *and literal* foundation from which to launch. Ask your city officials what their plan is to invest in housing infrastructure and home ownership, and don't be afraid of who your neighbors might be. Often, when a term like "affordable housing" is used, people assume that means something bad like reduced property values or increased crime. In actuality, that just might mean your child's kindergarten teacher is moving in next door.

Neighbor helping neighbor. That is the Texan way. We do things big in Texas, and our housing crisis is big. Let's come together to fix it. Ask your local, state, and federal elected officials what they are doing to make sure safe and decent homes are available in the community. There are lots of solutions to a complex issue, but we can start with recognizing that everyone truly does deserve a decent place to live.

Amy Ledbetter Parham is Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity Texas.

About Amy Ledbetter Parham

For the past eight years, Amy has served as the executive director of Habitat for Humanity Texas. She holds a master's degree in Public Leadership from the LBJ School of Public Affairs and B.A. in Government from the University of Texas and a B.A. in Design from Texas State University – San Marcos.

About Habitat for Humanity Texas

Habitat for Humanity affiliates do not give away homes, they empower and strengthen communities by building simple, decent, affordable housing for low-income families and

individuals. Through volunteer labor and donations of money and materials, Habitat affiliates finance affordable loans and sell to partner families selected through nondiscriminatory policies. Habitat homeowners invest hundreds of hours of their own labor into building their Habitat house and the houses of others. Habitat for Humanity Texas is a 501(c)3 organization empowering Texas's 71 affiliates to serve more families and individuals in need by providing assistance with advocacy, resource development, training and technical assistance, and disaster preparedness and support. To learn more about Habitat for Humanity Texas, visit www.habitattexas.org

* Source: The National Low-Income Housing Coalition released their 2020 [Out of Reach](#))

** Source: Social Benefits of Homeownership and Stable Housing, April 2012, National Association of Realtors.

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