

POLICY AGENDA

2025-2027

MISSION & PURPOSE

Center for Heirs' Property® (CHP) empowers under-resourced families to safeguard their land and homes for generations to come. Working in deep relationship with home and landowners, we provide legal support and financial education, help to maintain resilient and affordable housing and support to grow working landscapes that sustain generational wealth. Heirs' property, also known as the family home or land, is a form of property ownership created when an owner passes away without a will and/or if the property remains in a deceased person's name. Heirs' property owners are often held back—not by lack of care or vision, but by legal barriers that have built up over generations. When families have free and clear titles, they can make informed decisions, access opportunities, safeguard their homes, and put their land to work – preserving legacy, building generational wealth, and strengthening the communities they call home. CHP supports policies that remove those barriers by clarifying and securing ownership.

As a national leader in providing solutions-oriented support to heirs' property owners, CHP seeks to engage impacted community members, prospective institutional partners, and elected officials in the promotion of heirs' property owner-responsive, research-based policy solutions for the urgent challenges these home and land owners face.

BUDGET & PUBLIC SPENDING

CHP supports public spending decisions that expand access to essential services, promote family stability, and strengthen local economies by supporting heirs' property owners.

Heirs' property owners, through no fault of their own, inherited property that is legally complicated and unstable. Decades of inadequate investment in educational and legal services for heirs' property owners has undermined the full property value of thousands of homes, acres of forest and farmland. Inadequate investment in solutions-oriented support to heirs' property owners has broader impacts than the individual family members. For example, when an heirs' property owner does not access forest management planning, entire regional ecosystems, rural development, and local economies are negatively impacted. Given the far-reaching impacts, public investments must be made to help heirs' property owners access solutions-oriented services to improve their stewardship and promote healthy region-wide ecosystems and economies.

RESILIENT & AFFORDABLE HOUSING

CHP supports housing policies that expand opportunities for heirs' property owners to build wealth, strengthen property improvements, and access disaster recovery programs that benefit all communities.

Homes that are improperly maintained or not restored following a natural disaster are not only a blight on their local community, but also undermine affordable housing stock. The vulnerable status of their title often unfairly excludes heirs' property owners from participation in programs for housing rehabilitation, retrofitting, or improvements after a natural disaster. For example, when an heirs' property home owner is unable to access disaster assistance, entire neighborhoods, property values and local economies are negatively impacted. Inclusive policies that improve heirs' property owners' access to these programs preserves family wealth and improves property values for entire communities.

PROPERTY TAX POLICIES

CHP supports fair and transparent tax policies that protect heirs' property owners, prevent unnecessary property loss, and uphold the rights of all property owners.

Heirs' property owners are unfairly excluded from many of the property tax benefits afforded other property owners. Heirs' property owners should receive the same tax credits available to all other property owners (e.g. Reforestation Tax Credit). Further, many communities make it unnecessarily difficult for heirs' property owners to claim homestead exemptions, agricultural tax exemptions, receive proper notice, or access tax foreclosure redemption rights¹ that would extend these property rights to heirs' property owners. Again, this is not an individual homeowner problem. If any heirs' property homeowner is unable to redeem their home from a tax foreclosure, the resulting auction makes the entire neighborhood vulnerable to community-wide depreciation which negatively impacts the entire local economy. Property tax policies that do not meet the needs of heirs' property owners undermine their rights as property owners.

Source

1. Andrea Bopp Stark & Odette Williamson, Property Tax Foreclosures on Heirs Property: The Devastating Consequences and Recommendations for Prevention, National Consumer Law Center (2023), https://www.nclc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/202308_Property-Tax-Foreclosures-on-Heirs-Property.pdf

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