



national policy and advocacy council on homelessness

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June 28, 2007

The Honorable Christopher Dodd
Chairman, United States Senate
Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member, United States Senate
Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Chairman, United States Senate
Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation,
and Community Development
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
Ranking Member, United States Senate
Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs
Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation,
and Community Development
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Dodd, Shelby, Schumer, and Crapo:

The National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness (NPACH) is a grass roots anti-poverty organization. Our mission is to ensure that national homelessness policy accurately reflects the needs and experiences of local communities.

I write today to thank you for holding the June 20, 2007 Subcommittee on Housing, Transportation, and Community Development hearing entitled "Reauthorization of the HOPE VI Program." The context for this hearing was the recent introduction of S. 829, legislation to reauthorize HOPE VI. While NPACH is pleased that the issue of HOPE VI reauthorization was the focus of a hearing, NPACH cannot support S. 829 as currently drafted.

NPACH strongly supports the prompt reauthorization and full funding of HOPE VI, in recognition of the fact that several decades of cuts in federal funding have resulted in many of our nation's existing public housing units falling into disrepair, and in some cases becoming uninhabitable. NPACH believes that no low income family, senior, or person with a disability should have to live in substandard housing – particularly when that housing is subsidized by the government.

In order to preserve the supply of permanent affordable housing, existing units of public housing must be repaired, and the HOPE VI program can serve as a valuable tool for local governments and housing authorities to accomplish this critical goal, while creating vibrant mixed income communities. However, as HOPE VI reauthorization legislation moves forward, NPACH believes that one principle must be made a part of any bill – the principle of "one for one replacement," which holds that all affordable housing units lost during a HOPE VI redevelopment must be replaced with new affordable housing units.

Any HOPE VI redevelopment must be judged on two things - whether it will lead to better quality housing opportunities for the individuals and families living in a particular public housing development, and whether it will broadly ensure that a community does not suffer a net loss of affordable housing units. One for one replacement is the only way to meet this test.

NPACH HOPE VI Letter

Of course, communities must be permitted a degree of flexibility in meeting these obligations. For example, in renovating a 300 unit public housing development, it may be appropriate to put 200 public housing units and 100 market rate rental units on the redeveloped site – as long as the additional 100 public housing units are replaced in a different location. However, the cost of one for one replacement must not be allowed to serve as a justification for reducing the number of affordable housing units under a HOPE VI redevelopment. Existing public housing tenants must receive new housing units, so that no individual or family falls into homelessness.

The provision of Section 8 vouchers is no substitute for one for one unit replacement. While vouchers are an important tool for making housing more affordable, increasing the supply of vouchers in a community while reducing the number of available affordable housing units is a recipe for driving housing prices up – not down. And employing this strategy means subjecting public housing residents who once had a stable place to live to the vagaries of local rental housing markets – rental markets in which many current Section 8 voucher holders cannot find housing units to rent with their vouchers.

The potential for HOPE VI redevelopments to result in homelessness is not just a hypothetical. At the June 20 hearing, Charles Elsesser of Florida Legal Services presented dramatic testimony about the HOPE VI redevelopment at Scott Homes in Miami, Florida. As Mr. Elsesser's statement detailed, over 1,100 families were relocated from Scott Homes using Section 8 vouchers. However, after less than seven years, a newspaper story recently reported that over 600 of these families are no longer receiving housing assistance. Consequently, many of these families have become homeless, with most in emergency shelters, or doubled up in order to avoid living on the streets. In a number of cases, children have been separated from their parents due to a family's inability to find housing. This is an unacceptable result for a program designed to benefit public housing residents.

Thank you again for holding your recent hearing. We look forward to working with you and your staff to create sensible HOPE VI legislation that restores communities and benefits public housing residents, without reducing the already limited supply of affordable housing units.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Rosen

Jeremy Rosen
Deputy Director