

September 17, 2007

Maxine Waters, Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity
Committee on Financial Services
B-304 Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515
FAX: (202) 226-0537

Dear Chairwoman Waters:

Thank you for your leadership on H.R. 2930, the Section 202 Supportive Housing for the Elderly Act. Strengthening housing programs, like the Section 202 Program, is vital to preventing homelessness among seniors. We are writing to encourage introduction of an amendment which would, through Section 202, offer greater prospects for housing seniors who are currently experiencing homelessness.

In attempts to use available resources to decrease homelessness, sponsors creating affordable housing for seniors occasionally adopt a program design that either sets aside a number of units or creates a preference for seniors who are homeless. Despite the Department of Housing and Urban Development's strategic plan to reduce homelessness, HUD local and regional offices have recently rejected such Section 202 program designs that create a preference or set aside units for homeless seniors.

Allowing Section 202 program flexibility could be an imperative step in addressing the aging of the homeless population. According to a landmark 14-year study, half of all people living on our city streets are now 50 or over. In fact, the average age of the homeless population has risen eight months each calendar year since the early 1990's. Aging homeless individuals face a myriad of chronic health challenges, including hypertension, diabetes, and emphysema, that worsen significantly as they approach age 62. The Section 202 Program could provide valuable supportive housing funding for some of these vulnerable individuals, who qualify for Section 202 housing but may not receive a unit without a set-aside or preference.

We therefore ask that you offer an amendment to H.R. 2930 to promote program flexibility during the development, lease-up, and operational phases of a Section 202 project. Such an amendment would allow sponsors to include set asides and/or preferences to house people experiencing homelessness in new or existing Section 202 units. While we are not requesting a mandate, we are hoping that offering this flexibility will avert obstacles for sponsors attempting to impact homelessness among seniors.

Again, thank you for your commitment to serving vulnerable populations, including homeless seniors, in your role as Chair of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Development. We look forward to seeing this amendment, as well as swift passage of H.R. 2930, a reality.

Sincerely,

Helmi Hisserich
Deputy Mayor, Mayor's Office of Housing &
Economic Development Policy
City of Los Angeles

Deborah De Santis
President & Chief Executive Officer
Corporation for Supportive Housing

Maria Foscarinis
Executive Director
National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

Matt Franklin
Director, Mayor's Office on Housing
City of San Francisco

Jeremy Rosen
Executive Director
National Policy & Advocacy Council on Homelessness

Ruth Schwartz
Executive Director
Shelter Partnership, Los Angeles