



NEIGHBORHOODS *First*

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September 21, 2007

Chairwoman Maxine Waters
Subcommittee on Housing & Community Opportunity
House Committee on Financial Services
US House of Representatives

Dear Congresswoman Maxine Waters,

We would like to thank you for your work on the HOPE VI Improvement & Reauthorization Act. While HOPE VI has traditionally been a destructive force on our communities, our feeling is that this is an excellent bill in its promotion of the *fundamental principles of rebuilding in the community*, as well as right-to-return and 1-for-1 replacement. We are especially impressed with your determination to hold prominent the needs of residents against the interests that have traditionally driven the HOPE VI dialogue.

We are of the perspective that residents must be central to the discourse around policies that affect them – both at the local and national level. In order to ensure that public housing residents are driving the dialogue on HOPE VI reform, National People's Action and the Miami Workers Center convened a series of discussions around the HOPE VI Improvement & Reauthorization Act with residents from 26 states - including many communities that have experienced HOPE VI redevelopment. The result of these conversations was a strong endorsement of the principles set forth in your bill by the 120 undersigned local, statewide, and national organizations.

HOPE VI redevelopment must not promote racist development patterns that lead to displacement and the loss of housing affordable to low-income families. It is the consensus among the undersigned resident organizations and community organizing groups that all replacement housing must be on site or in the surrounding area. This is critical to ensure that communities are strengthened through redevelopment and not negatively impacted through mass displacement and the draining of resources from community institutions. Furthermore, while certain interests would claim otherwise, it is indeed the case that significant numbers of residents do desire to return to the general vicinity in an effort to maintain social networks and proximity to employment, children's schools, and healthcare. The undersigned organizations would like to commend the stand your bill takes against racist and denigrating policies that tell people what is best for them in terms of where to live.

HOPE VI redevelopment must not result in the overall loss of housing affordable to low-income families. As resources for affordable housing are shrinking, it is more critical than ever that HOPE VI not be a tool for eliminating the public housing stock. The undersigned organizations stand united in the call for the mandatory replacement of all units lost through the HOPE VI process. This includes units that are not occupied at the time of application and those which may be demolished just before application in an effort to reduce the number of required replacement units. In order for HOPE VI to be a tool for economic recovery that benefits low-income residents and communities, we would like to applaud your effort to ensure that the affordable housing stock is preserved.

HOPE VI redevelopment must not allow for displacement through screening procedures. Many communities have experienced large incidences of homelessness as a result of HOPE VI redevelopment. One of the avenues through which families end up homeless under the HOPE VI process is that around burdensome screening requirements. We would like to commend your efforts to close this hole through which many residents have landed on the streets. While your bill does go farther than the current program in preventing re-screening upon return to housing, many communities are facing the issue of re-screening at the point of displacement. There should be no screening additional to that already existing in the public housing program. We would like to applaud you for raising this issue and recommend that it is extended to protect displaced families.

HOPE VI redevelopment must not result in a loss of affordable family units. We are very pleased with the requirement of one-for-one replacement in your bill. While this requirement will go a long way towards preserving the affordable housing stock, this does not address the trend of replacing family units with 1-bedrooms and studios. Many families are forced out of their communities as replacement housing is not of comparable sizes. We recommend that replacement housing must be of comparable size unless it can be demonstrated that there is a need for smaller-unit housing.

HOPE VI resources must only be available to projects which are severely distressed. We are pleased with the principles set forth in your bill that viable public housing units not be lost. However, we believe that the definition of "severely distressed" is not adequate in the bill. Our feeling is that this can be satisfactorily addressed by considering both resident endorsement of the need for redevelopment as well as any certification that the project doesn't meet the criteria for physical distress.

HOPE VI redevelopment must be driven by residents of public housing. It is the strong conviction of public housing organizing groups and resident organizations that communities and residents must be substantively involved in the decisions that guide the HOPE VI process. An acute limitation of the current HOPE VI program is that resident input is neither meaningfully binding nor required at all phases of development. It is our stance that endorsement or opposition for redevelopment by a majority of the residents should bare significant weight on an application for HOPE VI funds. We would like to praise the position you have taken in your bill to elevate resident and community involvement to a level of consequence.

HOPE VI redevelopment must prevent displacement when at all possible. Overall, your bill presents the principle that displacement is detrimental to families and should be avoided at all costs. The requirements for right-of-return and one-for-one replacement will neutralize many of the destructive elements of the HOPE VI program and should promote balanced development that will be beneficial to the families living in the community. Although experience has shown that even where residents have a right to return, the "relocate first, build later" approach to public housing revitalization harms low income families and undermines many of the goals of the HOPE VI program. It is also essential that tenant-based subsidies are not considered "replacement housing" for the purposes of the relocation plan. The undersigned organizations would like to applaud your effort to prevent displacement and recommends that this is expanded to include phased development and the right-to-remain whenever possible.

Again, thank you for taking on the critical task of addressing this program. We have been in contact with your office with specific language to expand upon this effort. The undersigned organizations would like to reiterate our support for the principles put forward in the HOPE VI Improvement & Reauthorization Act. As always, we appreciate your willingness to listen to the voices of the people.

CC: Chairman Barney Frank (D-MA), Congressman Spencer Bachus (R-AL),
Congressman Christopher Shays (R-CT), Congressman Mel Watt (D-NC),
Congresswoman Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-CT),
Sen. Richard Shelby (R-AL), Sen. Mike Crapo (R-ID), Sen. John Sununu (R-NH),
Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY)

Signed,

Border Fair Housing & Economic Justice Center – *El Paso, TX*
Access Living – *Chicago, IL*
Alliance for the Development of Power – *Springfield, MA*
Beacon Glen Resident Association – *Cincinnati, OH*
Bethune Village Resident Initiative Council – *Daytona Beach, FL*
Cabrini Green Rowhouse Council – *Chicago, IL*
Central Advisory Council – *Chicago, IL*
Chinese Progressive Association – *Boston, MA*
City Life/Vida Urbana – *Boston, MA*
Clinton Springs Resident Association – *Cincinnati, OH*
Coalition of Public Housing Residents – *College Park, MD*
Coalition to Protect Public Housing – *Chicago, IL*
Collective SPACE – *Los Angeles, CA*
Communities United for Action – *Cincinnati, OH*
Consumer Action – *National*
Contra Costa County Council – *Contra Costa, CA*
Council of Reno Residents – *Reno, NV*
Detroit United Organizing for Power – *Detroit, MI*
Direct Action for Rights and Equality – *Providence, RI*
Empowering and Strengthening Ohio's People – *Ohio State*
Essex Manor Resident Council – *Reno, NV*
Everywhere Now Public Housing Residents Organizing Together Nationally - *National*
Fabulous Independent Educated Radicals for Community Empowerment – *New York, NY*
Facilitating Leadership in Youth – *Washington, DC*
Families United for Racial and Economic Equality – *Brooklyn, NY*
Fearless Leading by the Youth – *Chicago, IL*
Fillmore Gardens Council – *Phoenix, AZ*
Findlater Gardens Resident Association – *Cincinnati, OH*
Good Old Lower East Side – *New York, NY*
Granite State Association of Residents – *New Hampshire State*
Grassroots Organizing Power – *Las Vegas, NV*
Grove Park Tenants Association – *Chicago, IL*
Horizon Hills Resident Association – *Cincinnati, OH*
Housing Choices Coalition – *Santa Cruz, CA*
Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco – *San Francisco, CA*
Inquilinos de la Playa – *San Diego, CA*
Janie Poe Residents Association – *Sarasota, FL*
Jurisdiction-Wide Resident Advisory Board – *Cincinnati, OH*
Just Cause Oakland – *Oakland, CA*
Kalamazoo Homeless Action Network – *Kalamazoo, MI*
Kimbark Tenants Association – *Chicago, IL*
Lake Park East Tenants Association – *Chicago, IL*

La Playa Resident Council – *Santa Cruz, CA*
La Raza Centro Legal – *San Francisco, CA*
Lebanon Resident Association – *Lebanon, PA*
Legacy of Equality, Leadership and Organizing – *Seattle, WA*
Legal Aid Justice Center – *Richmond, VA*
Liberty Apartments Resident Association – *Cincinnati, OH*
Livermore Tenants and Neighbors – *Livermore, CA*
Low Income Families Fighting Together – *Miami, FL*
Massachusetts Union of HUD Tenants – *Massachusetts State*
Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants – *Massachusetts State*
Madera Action Coalition – *Madera, CA*
Mar Vista Tenants Association – *Los Angeles, CA*
Metro Atlanta Task Force on Homelessness – *Atlanta, GA*
Metropolitan Tenants Organization – *Chicago, IL*
Miami Workers Center – *Miami, FL*
Millvale Resident Association – *Cincinnati, OH*
Mineral Manor Resident Council – *Reno, NV*
Minneapolis High Rise Council – *Minneapolis, MN*
Mission Terrace Residents Association – *San Jose, CA*
Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities – *Mississippi State*
Mothers On the Move/Madres en Movimiento – *New York, NY*
Myra Birch Manor Resident Council – *Reno, NV*
National Alliance of HUD Tenants – *National*
National Association of Consumer Advocates - *National*
National People's Action - *National*
National Training & Information Center - *National*
Neill Resident Association – *St. Paul, MN*
New Venture Co-operative – *Chicago, IL*
North Valley Community Cooperative – *North Valley, NM*
Oahu Housing Task Force – *Oahu, HI*
Olneyville Neighborhood Association/Organizacion de Vecinos de Olneyville – *Providence, RI*
Organizing Neighborhood Equity – *Washington, DC*
People Organized for West Side Renewal – *Los Angeles, CA*
People Organizing To Demand Environmental & Economic Rights – *San Francisco, CA*
People Organized to Win Employment Rights – *San Francisco, CA*
Power U Center for Social Change – *Miami, FL*
Picayune Council of Presidents – *Picayune, TN*
Praxis Project – *National*
Priess-Steele Tenants Association – *Durham, NC*
Public Housing Association of Residents – *Charlottesville, VA*
Public Housing Residents of the Lower East Side – *New York, NY*
Resident Action Council – *Seattle, WA*
Resident Owned Business Initiative, Inc – *Gary, IN*
Residents of Salem United – *Salem, OH*
Rhode Island HUD Tenant Project – *Rhode Island State*
Richland Resident Council – *Richland County, MT*
Rockhill Gardens Neighborhood Association - *Kansas City, MO*
Roosevelt Homes Resident Association – *St. Paul, MN*
Rose Garden Apartment Association of Residents – *Las Vegas, NV*
Safe Streets/Strong Communities – *New Orleans, LA*
San Diego Council of Tenants – *San Diego, CA*
Sanford Resident Advisory Council – *Sanford, ME*

Senior Action Council – *Phoenix, AZ*
Service Employees International Union Local 11 – *Miami, FL*
Silver Bow Homes Resident Association – *Butte, MT*
Silverada Manor – *Reno, NV*
South Asian Network - *Artesia, CA*
South Florida AFL-CIO – *South Florida*
Southside Together Organizing for Power – *Chicago, IL*
Stamford Residents of Public Housing – *Stamford, CT*
Stead Manor Resident Council – *Reno, NV*
Strategic Action for A Just Economy – *Los Angeles, CA*
Sunflower Community Action – *Wichita, KS*
Sutter View Resident Council – *Cincinnati, OH*
Syracuse United Neighbors – *Syracuse, NY*
Tenants & Workers United – *Northern Virginia*
Tri-City Resident Council – *Southeastern Kentucky*
Union de Vecinos – *Los Angeles, CA*
United Community Housing Coalition – *Hartland, VT*
United Residents for Housing Rights – *Jackson, OH*
Upland Residents Association – *Upland, CA*
Urban Justice Center – *New York, NY*
Washington Manor Council – *Phoenix, AZ*
Washington Scene Tenants Association – *Chicago, IL*
Wichita Association of Residents – *Wichita, KS*
Winton Terrace Resident Association – *Cincinnati, OH*
Youth Media Council – *Oakland, CA*