

September 2, 2010

Chairman Barney Frank
House Financial Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2252 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Spencer Bachus
House Financial Services Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
2246 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Frank and Ranking Member Bachus,

We are writing to urge the Financial Services Committee to maintain the important housing mobility and choice elements in the Preserving, Enhancing, and Transforming Rental Assistance (PETRA) draft bill released by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) on May 12, 2010 as one of a suite of tools the Administration can use to support healthy communities. Strategic and sustainable investment in communities is complemented by strategic and sustainable investment in people, and federal resources should both build up disinvested neighborhoods and support individual and family choices.

This innovative initiative has the potential to stem the continuing loss of public housing and other assisted units, while simultaneously opening up new choices for public and assisted housing residents who, for too long, have had to forego opportunities to move to be near family, a better job, or better schools simply because they could not afford to give up their housing subsidy. Sadly, history also tells us that this lack of resident choice has often gone hand in hand with racial and economic isolation for public housing tenants and disinvestment in many public housing communities.

For these reasons, we write collectively as groups committed to civil rights, fair housing, and increasing opportunity for all to reaffirm our belief that the principle of tenant mobility – embodied in the Resident Choice provision of HUD’s draft legislation recently transmitted to Congress – must remain in any effort to consolidate and streamline HUD’s balkanized rental assistance programs. As noted in an earlier letter from civil rights advocates dated May 25th, 2010, such a mobility option is essential to fulfilling the obligation of HUD, and the federal government as a whole, to “affirmatively further fair housing” as required by Section 808(d) of the Fair Housing Act.

As individual organizations and in coalition, we have expressed to HUD, the White Office of Urban Policy, and Congress our opinions regarding how this voluntary mobility principle should be implemented to ensure success and to avoid reconcentration of voucher holders in low opportunity urban areas and fragile first-ring suburbs with high levels of racial and economic segregation and isolation. It is important that the tenant mobility program allow families to live or remain in increasingly desirable areas, neighborhoods where opportunity is growing or high opportunity areas. We would suggest that this program use measures that would increase the

economic and educational opportunities for all families no matter where they settle. This includes high quality mobility counseling assistance for HUD tenants, ongoing emphasis on region-wide opportunities, higher FMR rents in opportunity areas, strong mobility performance goals and geographic targeting, enforceable rights, and funding for fair housing testing and enforcement.

However, because issues of tenant mobility are complex (and become particularly challenging in the current fiscal environment), and because much of the publicity and comment concerning this bill has focused on the importance of retaining public ownership, protecting resident rights, and guaranteeing long term preservation of low income housing units – all of which we strongly support – we feel it necessary to make crystal clear that we collectively: (1) support HUD’s ambitious effort to streamline and improve its welter of rental assistance programs; and (2) regard the principle of tenant mobility and choice to be an absolutely necessary element if such an initiative is to fulfill the legal and moral obligation for the federal government to use its precious resources to take positive steps to break down the barriers of residential segregation and promote equal housing and economic opportunity for all.

Sincerely,



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