

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 25<sup>th</sup>, 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,



john powell, Executive Director  
Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity  
The Ohio State University  
Columbus, OH

## **SIGNATORIES**

Wade Henderson, President & CEO  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
Washington, DC

Maya Wiley, Executive Director  
The Center for Social Inclusion  
New York, NY

Hilary O. Shelton, Director, NAACP Washington Bureau  
Senior Vice President for Advocacy and Policy  
NAACP  
Washington, DC

Philip Tegeler, Executive Director  
Poverty & Race Research Action Council  
Washington, DC

Shanna L. Smith, President and CEO  
National Fair Housing Alliance  
Washington, DC

Janet Murgía, President and CEO  
National Council of La Raza  
Washington, DC

Barbara Arnwine, Executive Director  
Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under law  
Washington, DC

Mike Kruglik, Executive Director  
Building One America  
Washington, DC

Margaret Fung, Executive Director  
Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund  
New York, NY

Eva Paterson, President  
The Equal Justice Society  
San Francisco, CA

---

Erin Kemple, Executive Director  
Connecticut Fair Housing Center  
Hartford, CT

Amy Eppler-Epstein, Senior Staff Attorney  
New Haven Legal Assistance  
New Haven, CT

Rob Breymaier, President  
Chicago Area Fair Housing Alliance  
Chicago, IL

Christine Klepper, Executive Director  
Housing Choice Partners  
Chicago, IL

Gail Schechter, Executive Director  
Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs  
Winnetka, IL

Michael L. Hanley, Senior Staff Attorney  
Empire Justice Center  
Rochester, NY

Jim McCarthy, Executive Director  
Miami Valley Fair Housing Center, Inc.  
Dayton, OH

Jeffrey D. Dillman, Executive Director  
Housing Research & Advocacy Center  
Cleveland, OH

Peter Harvey, Executive Director  
Fair Housing Partnership of Greater Pittsburgh  
Pittsburgh, PA

Frank Fernandez, Executive Director  
Green Doors  
Austin, TX

Betsy Julian, President  
Demetria McCain, Policy Director  
Inclusive Communities Project  
Dallas, TX

Kori Schneider Peragine  
Senior Administrator, Inclusive Communities Program  
Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Council  
Milwaukee, WI