

STATEMENT OF FAIR HOUSING AND CIVIL RIGHTS ADVOCATES **ON HOPE VI REAUTHORIZATION**

In the ongoing discussions concerning the reauthorization of the federal HOPE VI public housing revitalization program, there has been much said about specific details of wording but less discussion about “first principles”. As H.R. 3524 moves to the full House and eventually to the Senate, we offer the following set of constitutional and civil rights principles for interested parties to consider.

The important civil rights issues surrounding the HOPE VI program – including the right to return to the redeveloped site, the impacts of relocation on nearby neighborhoods, and the right to expanded housing opportunities throughout the region – cannot be considered without an understanding of the historical use of public housing as a policy to segregate and contain poor people of color. The history of public housing development, beginning in the era of Jim Crow and continuing through the late 1950s and 60s, must be understood in the context of each city and region where a HOPE VI redevelopment is proposed.

(1) We support one for one replacement of all units. The replacement of units that have already been vacated or demolished before HOPE VI redevelopment is essential to prevent the loss of affordable housing that has been a part of the affordable housing inventory. Because a portion of this housing is currently unoccupied (or demolished), due to the condition or undesirability of the location, one for one replacement creates a pool of units that does not involve even temporary displacement of current residents, and can be used to address the issues of segregation and lack of housing choice for low income families in the broader housing market.

(2) We support meaningful involvement of residents in the planning process, but advocates and policymakers must also recognize that the interests of residents are not “monolithic”. In any given development, some residents may wish to return to the original site, while others may wish to leave. These preferences will vary depending on the location of the development. A significant number of residents may be willing to consider relocation options in racially integrated or predominantly white areas, when such options are offered. These opportunities should not be denied because a majority of residents wish to remain in the neighborhood, or because housing in such areas will take longer to build. The future interests of families on the public housing waiting list – and their children – should also be considered.

(3) We support requiring public housing authorities (PHAs) to account for and keep track of every family who is relocated both temporarily and permanently. Displacement, at least temporarily, is unavoidable if really bad public housing is to be replaced with anything approaching decent housing. However, displacement can and should be done in such a way that minimizes the hardship on families and insures that people do not get lost in the process.

(4) We support every current resident’s right to be placed in a housing unit that is as good or better than the housing on the redeveloped site. PHAs must provide assistance in the housing search process to insure this right is protected.

(5) Right of Return: we support the right of all current residents, who choose to do so, to return to the redeveloped site. We further support a redevelopment process that insures that an adequate number of replacement units are replaced on site.

(6) Right to a Desegregated Housing Opportunity: we support the right of all current residents who wish to relocate to an area/development in which their race does not predominate, either in a public housing unit or with a voucher. Further, we support decisions that consider the similar interest of future residents, including the thousands of families on PHA waiting lists.

(7) We support giving residents, who wish to return to the redeveloped site, a truly meaningful and enforceable right to participate in the decisions about the redevelopment.

(8) We support replacement of units with units of comparable size. Under no circumstances should the demolition and replacement under HOPE VI result in a smaller number of family units unless it can be convincingly demonstrated that the housing need in the eligible community is disproportionately for smaller units as demonstrated by census and planning data, as well as the composition of the waiting list, and that the market is not producing smaller units than can be used with housing subsidies. In most markets, as HUD has recognized, it is more difficult for families to secure three bedroom and large units in the market.

(9) If a development is determined to be “distressed” as a result of physical factors, but is located in a higher income, non-minority or racially integrated neighborhood – or in an area which can reasonably be expected to attract significant market driven investment in the near future, then the revitalization plan should preserve as many affordable housing units as possible, consistent with the other principle outlined in this statement, on the site or in the surrounding neighborhood, and in no instance shall any replacement housing be located in an area with higher poverty or greater racial concentration than the development site will have after redevelopment.

(10) If a development is determined to be “distressed” as a result of non-physical factors (e.g. environmental factors, or distressed conditions in the surrounding neighborhood), but HUD does not consider it infeasible to develop on the site, then no more replacement public housing units will be returned to the site than are necessary to accommodate the preference of current residents to return, and current residents shall be given a range of locational choices in terms of replacement based upon their expressed preference.

(11) Finally, we support the requirement that each HOPE VI redevelopment plan take into consideration the extent to which public housing in that housing market area has operated to perpetuate racial and economic segregation of low income families, and whether the replacement housing plan takes adequate steps to correct this segregation by expanding housing opportunities in more varied locations, including housing in low poverty and non-minority concentrated areas throughout the city and region.

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