

June 23, 2008

Honorable Maxine Waters  
Chair, House Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity  
35<sup>th</sup> District, California  
2344 Rayburn Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**Re: Regional Field Congressional Hearings on the Crisis in Public and Low Income Housing**

Dear Representative Waters,

As housing rights organizations working around the country, we applaud the efforts you have taken to address the dire situation facing the residents of public and low income housing across the nation. Several of our organizations have worked with you or your staff over the years to address the growing housing crisis facing low income Americans. In particular, we have been meeting with your staff for over a year to discuss the possibility of regional field congressional hearings on the crisis in public and low income housing and its effect on the rising levels of homelessness across the United States. We appreciate your office's recognition of the importance of these hearings. We believe that now is the time to effectuate our collective concern and finalize dates and locations for the hearings.

As discussed with your staff, we would like the hearings to address, among other issues, the following immediate concerns:

- (i) The devastating toll the demolition of public housing units under the federal HOPE VI program and similar urban redevelopment programs and policies have had on low income communities across the country. This includes discussion around ensuring one-for-one replacement, the right to return of former residents, their right to participation in rebuilding processes and concerns around HOPE VI's reauthorization.
- (ii) The loss of more than 300,000 privately-owned, HUD subsidized multifamily housing units to market conversions since the elimination of the Title VI Preservation Program in 1996, and the need to restore a national regulatory framework to halt the steady erosion of low income housing.
- (iii) The current \$6.5 billion shortfall in the Administration's Fiscal Year 2009 HUD budget, including the \$2.8 billion shortfall in HUD's project-based Section 8 program, which threatens the additional loss of 500,000 low income apartments and potential displacement of 300,000 families.
- (iv) Policies affecting the quality of life, dignity and livelihood of public and subsidized housing residents, including community service requirements.
- (v) Overall HUD reform with particular emphasis on greater participation by residents, increased oversight of HUD's fiscal management and measures to combat and address corruption within the agency.

We recognize the leadership of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity and the House Committee on Financial Services in crafting progressive legislation to address the crises affecting low income renters and communities of color, including the Gulf Coast Recovery Act, the Section 8 Voucher Reform Act, and the Mark to Market Reform Act. We envision the proposed hearings as an opportunity to garner support for such landmark legislative solutions, as well as publicize the growing crisis in public and subsidized housing and HUD's direct role in this crisis. The hearings' focus on the loss of public and subsidized housing will complement the national media's recent focus on the homeowner foreclosure crisis and the Subcommittee's and Committees' leadership in addressing this issue as well.

***Hence, we urge you to finalize dates for the hearing to take place during the next congressional calendar. We believe the hearings will be instrumental in building the necessary consensus to put the growing housing crisis for low income Americans on the national agenda.***

As discussed with your staff, we propose town hall meetings in New Orleans, New York, Chicago, Atlanta, Los Angeles, and Minneapolis – as HUD’s policies have been particularly destructive in these cities – the culmination of which would be a joint congressional hearing in Washington, D.C.

Under the direction of HUD, the Housing Authority of New Orleans recently demolished over 4,800 units of public housing in New Orleans, Louisiana potentially displacing over 20,000 residents while the city’s homeless population has already doubled to more than 12,000 since Hurricane Katrina. Additionally, an estimated 12,000 low income project-based Section 8 units remain destroyed and uninhabitable in the Gulf Coast area. In New York, New York the Housing Authority of New York City is in financial disarray and remains vulnerable to private control at the same time that the city’s planning commission has moved forward with plans to rezone Harlem’s 125<sup>th</sup> Street for luxury, high-rise condominiums. Meanwhile, more than 40,000 privately owned HUD and Mitchell Lama apartments have been converted to high market rents in Manhattan alone in the past two years.

Under the HOPE VI program, HUD brutally demolished more public housing units in Chicago, Illinois than they have thus far replaced. The over 13,000 demolished units in Chicago have forced approximately 20,000 residents from their homes and has left tens of thousands more on an indefinite waiting list. Thousands more have been threatened by HUD’s policy of Section 8 contract terminations, demolitions, and sale of foreclosed or HUD owned buildings.

The residents of public housing in Atlanta, Georgia are currently bracing for the demolition of over 3,200 units that is scheduled to begin this month. In Los Angeles, California there are initial plans to dispose of substantially all of the city’s public housing stock. Other cities have experienced similar large-scale loss of public housing. In Minneapolis, Minnesota, for example, more than half of the family public housing stock was demolished between 1998 and 1999. Replacement of that low-income housing stock lagged for years and has still not been fully achieved.

The U.S. government passed the Housing Act of 1949, in which the government pledged to realize: “as soon as feasible . . . the goal of a decent home and a suitable living environment for every American family, thus contributing to the development and redevelopment of communities and to the advancement of the growth, wealth, and security of the nation.”<sup>1</sup> Additionally, international human rights instruments speak to the human right to housing. Article 25(1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was unanimously adopted by all the member countries of the United Nations, states: “Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of himself and of his family, including . . . housing . . .”

Our nation and human rights principles have long recognized the importance of guaranteeing to every citizen the right to housing. Therefore, we call on your leadership in making the congressional hearings a reality and taking on this potent issue.

To discuss the hearings and finalize dates and locations, please contact Tiffany M. Gardner of the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative at 212.253.1771 or, alternatively, at [tiffany@nesri.org](mailto:tiffany@nesri.org).

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<sup>1</sup> The Housing Act of 1949, 42 U.S.C.A. §1441.

***We, the undersigned organizations, including members of the US Human Rights Network, NTIC's Housing Justice Organizing Movement, and National Alliance of HUD Tenants, call on your leadership to organize hearings around the crisis in public housing and subsidized.***

Sincerely,

National Groups

Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions – National  
National Alliance of HUD Tenants – National  
National Economic and Social Rights Initiative – National  
National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty – National  
National Training & Information Center – National  
Poor Peoples Economic Human Rights Campaign – National  
US Human Rights Network (Housing Caucus) – National

Local Groups

African American Leadership Council - St. Paul, MN  
Alliance to Develop Power – Springfield, MA  
Atlanta Jobs with Justice – Atlanta, GA  
Beyond Shelter, Inc. – Los Angeles, CA  
Bowan Homes Resident Association - Atlanta, GA  
CAAAY (Organizing Asian Communities) – New York, NY  
Cabrini Green Rowhouse Council - Chicago, IL  
Camden United - Camden, MA  
Center for Constitutional Rights – New York, NY  
Central Illinois Organizing Project – Bloomington, IL  
Coalition to Protect Public Housing - Chicago, IL  
Coalition to Save Harlem – New York, NY  
Communities United for Action - Cincinnati, OH  
Concerned Citizens of Harlem – New York, NY  
Elim Transitional Housing – Minneapolis, MN  
Friends of the Court Friends of Public Housing Residents – New York, NY  
Georgia Task Force for the Homeless - Atlanta, GA  
Good Old Lower East Side - New York, NY  
HomeBase/ The Center for Common Concerns, Inc. – Los Angeles, CA  
Housing Rights Committee of San Francisco – San Francisco, CA  
Integrated Community Solutions, Inc. – Fridley, MN  
Iowa Citizens for Community Action – Des Moines, IA  
Jewish Community Action (JCA) - St. Paul, MN  
Kalamazoo Homeless Action Network - Kalamazoo, MI  
Legal Redress Committee of the NAACP Minnesota/Dakota State Conference - St. Paul, MN  
Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger & Homelessness – Los Angeles, CA  
Los Angeles Community Action Network – Los Angeles, CA  
Louisiana Justice Institute – New Orleans, LA  
Masjid An Nur - Minneapolis, MN  
Massachusetts Union of Public Housing Tenants – Dorchester, MA  
May Day New Orleans – New Orleans, LA  
Metro Atlanta Task Force for the Homeless - Atlanta, GA  
Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing (MICAHA) - Minneapolis, MN

Minneapolis Branch of the NAACP – Minneapolis, MN  
Minnesota Chapter of the National Lawyers Guild – Minneapolis, MN  
Minnesota Council on Black Minnesotans – St. Paul, MN  
Minnesota Tenants Union – Minneapolis, MN  
Minnesota Welfare Rights Committee - Minneapolis, MN  
Muslim American Society-Minnesota Chapter - Inver Grove Heights, MN  
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People - Richmond, VA  
NAACP Minnesota/ Dakota State Conference- St. Paul, MN  
National People's Action – Chicago, IL  
New York City Public Housing Residents Alliance – New York, NY  
Northside Neighbors for Justice - Minneapolis, MN  
Park Plaza Residents Union – Minneapolis, MN  
People for Community Recovery - Chicago, IL  
People Organized for Westside Renewal - Los Angeles, CA  
Public Housing Residents of the Lower East Side - New York, NY  
St. Paul Branch of the NAACP – St. Paul, MN  
St. Paul Department of Human Rights - St. Paul, MN  
St. Stephen's Human Services - St. Paul, MN  
Save Our Children - Minneapolis, MN  
Somali Education and Social Advocacy Center – Minneapolis, MN  
Soul Patrol (New Orleans Diaspora) – Council Bluffs, IA  
South Austin Coalition Community Council - Chicago, IL  
Survivors Village - New Orleans, LA  
Urban Justice Center – New York, NY  
Working In Neighborhoods – Cincinnati, OH  
Washington Tenants Union – Seattle, WA