

March 22, 2004

The Honorable Ted Stevens
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
S-128 Capitol Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Stevens:

The undersigned groups are writing to express our strong opposition to the severe cut to the Section 8 voucher program in the HUD Fiscal Year 2005 budget. The President's request for the voucher program is more than \$1.6 billion short of fully funding all vouchers in use. At this funding level, approximately 250,000 low income families with children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities could lose their vouchers.

This shortfall comes at a time when a recent analysis of the American Housing Survey reveals 31% of all households had housing problems in 2001. Now is not the time to cut the funding for a housing program that has served as the "linchpin" of our federal housing policy for the last two decades.

We also urge you to oppose the proposed Flexible Voucher Program that would make significant changes in the program's structure. The proposed changes would create a block grant program and eliminate many of the long-standing rules that benefit low income families. Under the proposed block grant, PHAs would receive a lump sum that would not be adequate to serve all current voucher holders. The elimination of statutory requirements including targeting the program to the lowest income families and ending the requirement that tenants pay no more than 30% of their income for their rent could have a devastating effect on families across the nation.

The Administration has expressed concern about the growth in costs of the voucher program. This increase was largely the result of rising utilization rates, expansion of the voucher program by Congress, and the widening gap between rental housing costs and family incomes in recent years. However, a recent study by CBO projects that the growth rate of Section 8 expenditures will slow to 1.8% in fiscal year 2005. They also project the costs to continue to level off because of the cooling of the housing market as well as increases in wages as the economy recovers.

The Section 8 voucher program is an effective and critical resource. Housing assistance is needed by the many low income families with children, elderly, people with disabilities, and victims of domestic violence who would not have safe, decent, and affordable housing without it. Housing authorities cannot be expected to do more with inadequate resources. We respectfully urge you to provide the necessary funding for all existing vouchers and reject HUD's plan to dismantle the housing voucher program.

Sincerely,

ACORN
Alliance for Children and Families
Alliance for Healthy Homes

Alliance for Retired Americans
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Association on Mental Retardation
American Baptist Churches USA
American Friends Service Committee
American Network of Community Options and Resources
American Society on Aging
Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historical Black Colleges and Universities
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Brain Injury Association of America
Catholic Health Association
Child Welfare League of America
Children's Defense Fund
Church Women United
Corporation for Supportive Housing
Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
Families USA
Generation United
Gray Panthers
International Union, UAW
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Local Initiatives Support Corporation
Lutheran Services in America
National Advocacy Center of The Sisters of the Good Shepherd
National Affordable Housing Management Association
National AIDS Housing Coalition
National Alliance for The Mentally Ill
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
National Association of Housing Cooperatives
National Association of Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs
National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers
National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems
National Coalition for Homeless Veterans
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
National Council of Jewish Women
National Council on Independent Living
National Council on the Aging
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Housing Conference
National Housing Trust
National Low Income Housing Coalition

National Mental Health Association
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness
National Rural Housing Coalition
National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness
Network, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty And Law
The Arc of the United States
The Coalition on Human Needs
The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Housing Task Force
The Enterprise Foundation
The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
Union For Reform Judaism
United Cerebral Palsy
United Spinal Association (formerly Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association)
United Way of America
US Jesuit Conference
Volunteers of America