

EMBARGOED UNTIL 10 AM OCTOBER 19, 2005

NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OPPOSED TO VOTER RESTRICTIONS IN H.R. 1461

*c/o National Low Income Housing Coalition
727 15th St., NW, 6th Floor
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October 19, 2005

The Honorable Dennis Hastert
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Speaker,

The undersigned national organizations have learned that the compromise reached by House Leadership on H.R. 1461, the Federal Housing Finance Reform Act of 2005, includes provisions that would restrict the ability of American citizens to engage in our democratic process. We urge that these provisions be removed before the bill comes to the House floor for a vote probably during the week of October 24.

Specifically, we object to the restrictions on non-profit organizations that apply for grants through the Affordable Housing Fund established in H.R. 1461. The egregious provisions, which we strongly oppose, disqualify any nonprofit organization that has engaged in voter registration, voter identification, get-out-the-vote, and other nonpartisan voter participation activities in the 12 months prior to application from eligibility for the Affordable Housing Fund grants. It further prohibits non-profit organizations that receive grant funds from engaging in these activities.

These grants are to be used solely to produce and preserve housing that is affordable to extremely low and very low income families. For the first two years, the funds will be prioritized to rebuild housing in the areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The anti-democratic provisions do not just prohibit the use of Affordable Housing Fund dollars from being used for these purposes. The prohibition applies to any resources of a grantee, including funds specifically for civic engagement activities.

Moreover, even if a particular non-profit organization does not itself engage in any of these activities itself, "affiliation" with an organization that does would disqualify the nonprofit from applying for Affordable Housing Fund grants. Notably, for-profit companies are exempt from these restrictions.

These provisions are blatantly undemocratic and raise substantial constitutional questions in the attempt to limit the rights of affiliation. They are intended for no other purpose than to reduce access to voting by low income people. People of color are overrepresented in the low income

population, making this is a civil rights issue. Moreover, these provisions have serious implications for the broader nonprofit community by setting a very dangerous precedent.

The low income housing community has worked tirelessly to establish the Affordable Housing Fund in H.R. 1461, because we know the dire need for funds to increase the nation's affordable housing stock. But nothing is worth compromising the right of all Americans to participate in our precious democracy.

Sincerely,

Alliance for Healthy Homes

Alliance for Justice

American Counseling Association

American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees

American Network of Community Options and Resources

Americans for Democratic Action

Arc of the U.S.

Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)

Campaign for America's Future

Center for Community Change

Center for Law and Social Policy

Child Welfare League of America

Children's Defense Fund

Cities for Progress at the Institute for Policy Studies

Coalition on Human Needs

Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities

Corporation for Supportive Housing

Enterprise Foundation

Environmental Working Group

Episcopal Church

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Leadership Conference on Civil Rights

Local Initiatives Support Corporation

Lutheran Services in America

Mercy Housing

National AIDS Housing Coalition

National Alliance of HUD Tenants

National Alliance on Mental Illness

National Alliance to End Homelessness

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

National Association of Housing Cooperatives

National Association of State PIRGs

National Center for Responsible Philanthropy

National Coalition for the Homeless

National Community Reinvestment Coalition

National Council on the Aging

National Council of Nonprofit Associations

National Council on Independent Living

National Fair Housing Alliance

National Head Start Association

National Health Care for the Homeless Council

National Housing Conference

National Housing Law Project

National Housing Trust

National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

National Low Income Housing Coalition

National Neighborhood Coalition

National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness

National Urban League

OMB Watch

Poverty and Race Research Action Council

Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office

Public Housing Authorities Directors Association (PHADA)

RESULTS

Smart Growth America

Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future

Technical Assistance Collaborative

U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG)

United Cerebral Palsy

United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries

Women's Committee of 100

YWCA USA