

The Honorable «FullName»
United States «House»
Washington, DC «Zip»

May 20, 2004

Dear «TitleName»,

On behalf of the National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd, I am writing to express serious concern about the Department of Housing and Urban Development's recent ruling regarding the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program and to urge you to take action to ensure that all existing vouchers are funded this year and that adequate funding is provided for the program in FY2005.

The National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd represents Good Shepherd Sisters and programs in twenty-two states, the District of Columbia, and several U.S. territories that provide a variety services and supports to low-income and vulnerable families. In each of these ministries, from foster care to job training to domestic violence shelters, the need for access to affordable housing to help families move toward self-sufficiency is clear. More fundamentally, Catholic Social teaching, in which our advocacy efforts are grounded, emphasizes housing as a basic human right. Since its creation, the Section 8 Housing Voucher program has played a critical role in preventing and ending homelessness, providing opportunities for seniors and persons with disabilities to live with dignity in decent housing, and supporting families and individuals who, despite their best efforts, are struggling to meet their basic needs. However, recent decisions by HUD and changes proposed in the President's FY2005 budget request threaten to undermine the long-term viability of the program and dramatically decrease the number of housing vouchers that are available.

As you are probably aware, on April 22nd HUD issued a notice making changes in its policy for funding Section 8 vouchers for the current fiscal year. These changes are causing significant funding shortfalls for public housing authorities throughout the country, forcing them to make drastic cuts to families receiving assistance and terminate thousands of vouchers. In some cases, residents may even be evicted as their Section 8 support is withdrawn due to inadequate funding. This new policy marks the first time in the program's history that existing vouchers will be cut and comes despite deliberate efforts by Congress to appropriate additional funding in FY2004 to avoid such cuts. The National Advocacy Center strongly believes that the HUD notice should be rescinded and that vouchers should be funded based on their actual costs according to the latest available data. We urge you to work with the appropriate committees to direct HUD to withdraw the policy changes and fully fund all FY2004 vouchers.

In addition, the National Advocacy Center remains concerned that the Administration's budget request for FY2005 and accompanying "Flexible Voucher Program" (FVP) proposal will weaken the Section 8 program and cause hundreds of thousands of low-income families to lose housing assistance. The immediate impact of the \$1.7 billion shortfall for FY2005 would be a loss of some 250,000 vouchers and the "Flexible Voucher Program" would effectively block grant Section 8, imposing deeper cuts in subsequent years – even as waiting lists for Section 8 vouchers continue to grow throughout the country. At a time when only one-third of those eligible for housing assistance actually receive it, the Section 8 program should be strengthened, not cut. Therefore, the National Advocacy Center urges you to fight for full funding for Section 8 for FY2005 and to oppose FVP and other fundamental changes to the program.

In the spirit of the Good Shepherd mission of reconciliation and mercy, the National Advocacy Center is committed to strengthening communities and promoting the common good by addressing the needs of the most vulnerable families and individuals. We hope you will assist us in this work by maintaining the federal commitment to affordable housing and protecting the Section 8 Housing Voucher Program.

Sincerely,

Alison L. Prevost
Lobbyist