

NEW JERSEY SUPPORTS SEVRA

June, 2009

The Honorable Senator Robert Menendez
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Menendez,

We are writing as supporters and providers of affordable housing in New Jersey to urge your support for the Section 8 Voucher Reform Act (which passed the House with strong bi-partisan support in 2007 as H.R. 1851 and was the subject of hearings in the House Financial Services Committee on May 21 and June 4, 2009). We strongly support this legislation, and urge you to work with Senator Dodd to bring about its prompt consideration and approval by the Senate Banking Committee later this spring.

SEVRA makes a number of important reforms that would strengthen the Section 8 voucher program as a tool for helping low-income families in New Jersey afford housing. First, it establishes a permanent voucher renewal funding formula that is directly tied to local conditions, which is a big improvement over the uneven policies that existed prior to 2007. (It also avoids the uncertainty that occurs when such an important policy is left to be made each year in the appropriations act, as has been the case in recent years.) This will provide housing agencies in our area with the stability and security they need to help more families afford housing with the available federal funds.

Second, the bill streamlines the rules relating to rents in the voucher program as well as in public and other assisted housing. Currently, there are too many complicated calculations that must be made, which are administratively cumbersome and lack the proper incentives. The reforms in SEVRA will simplify the process substantially, while encouraging tenants to increase their work effort through a new earnings disregard.

Third, the bill streamlines the housing inspection process in the voucher program, which will benefit housing agencies, property owners, and tenants alike, while still ensuring that reasonable quality standards are met.

Fourth, the bill expands use of “project-based” vouchers, which can be tied to particular buildings and used for purposes such as developing supportive housing for the formerly homeless and people with mental and physical disabilities.

Together, these and other reforms in the bill will make the voucher program run more efficiently and better serve the families with children, elderly, and people with disabilities in New Jersey and across the nation who struggle to cope with the high cost of housing.

As a leaders of affordable housing opportunities in New Jersey, we often hear first-hand from people in our state about how much housing is connected to other issues such as education opportunities and economic security. Strengthening our state’s Section 8 program makes good policy sense.

Again, we urge you to work to enact this bill, and hope that you will feel free to call upon us for our expertise and counsel on these and other housing matters.

Sincerely,

The following organizations have endorsed SEVRA Reform.

Statewide

1. Corporation for Supportive Housing – NJ Office
2. Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey
3. Lutheran Office of Governmental Ministry
4. Lutheran Social Ministries of New Jersey
5. Monarch Housing Associates, Inc.
6. New Jersey Advocacy Network to End Homelessness
7. New Jersey Catholic Conference
8. NJ Chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NJNAHRO)
9. Supportive Housing Association of NJ
10. United Ways of New Jersey

Local

1. Advance Housing
2. Back Home Again
3. Camden County Board of Social Services
4. Cathedral Kitchen
5. Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Newark
6. Catholic Charities, Diocese of Paterson
7. Catholic Charities, Diocese of Trenton
8. CHANT Food Pantry
9. Collaborative Support Programs of NJ
10. Community Enterprises Corporation
11. Community Planning and Advocacy Council (CPAC)
12. Consumer Provider Association in NJ
13. Dooley House, Inc.
14. Eva's Village
15. Family Service
16. Ft. Lee Housing Authority
17. Housing Authority of Gloucester County
18. Jersey City Episcopal Community Development Corporation
19. Jersey City Housing Authority
20. Jewish Family Services of Atlantic and Cape May Counties
21. Life Link Homes, LP
22. NewBridge Services
23. New Jersey Association on Corrections
24. Making it Possible to End Homelessness (MIPH)
25. Mercer Alliance to End Homelessness
26. Middletown Housing Authority
27. Passaic County Department of Human Services
28. Project Live
29. Regional Opportunity Center
30. Respond, Inc.

31. Robins' Nest
32. St. Dorothea's Church
33. Saint Joseph's Home/York Street Project
34. The Family Resource Network
35. United Way of Central New Jersey
36. United Way of Hudson County
37. Veterans Haven