

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 9, 2009

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Transportation,  
Housing and Urban Development,  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
SD-142  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Christopher Bond  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Transportation,  
Housing and Urban Development,  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
SD-128  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Oliver  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Transportation,  
Housing and Urban Development,  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
Room 2358-A, Rayburn HOB  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Tom Latham  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Transportation,  
Housing and Urban Development,  
and Related Agencies  
Committee on Appropriations  
1016 Longworth HOB  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Murray, Ranking Member Bond, Chairman Oliver and Ranking Member Latham,

We are writing in reference to the serious funding problem within the Housing Choice Voucher Program and to seek your support for a legislative change to stabilize the program. Given your commitment to provide housing assistance for low-income families with children, the elderly, and the disabled, we are urging you to address this issue in the upcoming Conference on the Fiscal Year 2010 Appropriations bill for Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies.

As you are well aware, the Housing Choice Voucher Program is the single largest low-income housing program administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). It helps to bridge the difference between rent and what low-income individuals can afford to pay for housing, and is a critical source of support for more than two million families nationwide.

As you know, as a result of a shortfall in funding for the Housing Choice Voucher Program for calendar year 2009, state and local housing agencies across the country are facing the prospects of reducing or eliminating rental assistance for a significant number of the low-income families they serve. The shortfall is due to several factors, including incorrect projections based on voucher usage, cost and turnover, and decline in tenant income due to the recession and rising unemployment.

What is most concerning to us is that the burden of this shortfall will fall primarily on low-income families, often in the form of sharply increased rental costs. Many housing agencies are being forced to reduce the number of low-income families they serve, despite a growing need. Across the nation, an estimated 400 housing authorities will be forced to reduce or eliminate rental assistance, the equivalent of more than 15,000 families that could face the possibility of being dropped from the program and becoming homeless.

To avoid further cuts in assistance to renters, state and local housing agencies nationwide will need an additional \$130 million in funding for vouchers in 2009, according to estimates from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Additional renewal funding for vouchers that Congress approved as part of the 2009 Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) appropriations act will become available when the FY2010 bill is enacted and could be used to address this problem. For that to occur, Congress will need to give HUD the authority to use a portion of these funds to help the agencies with the most severe shortfalls.

We are particularly pleased with the Senate-passed version of the Fiscal Year 2010 Transportation, Housing and Urban Development Appropriations bill, which includes an amendment by Chairwoman Murray that seeks to address the funding shortfall. The language provides that up to \$200 million in advance appropriations from the \$4 billion which are available on October 1 will be made available to adjust funding shortfalls for public housing agencies to maintain current Housing Choice vouchers. Including this language in the final conference report could provide urgent relief for these agencies, and more importantly, low-income families that need affordable homes.

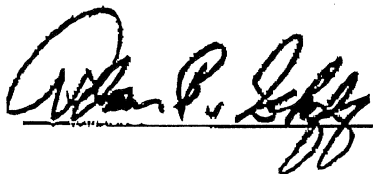
As you continue conference negotiations, we urge you to maintain the inclusion of the amendment as part of the HUD appropriations bill for fiscal year 2010, or the continuing resolution, if necessary. Further, we ask that you modify the amendment to ensure that state and local housing agencies will not be compelled to reduce the voucher rental assistance they are currently providing to low income families.

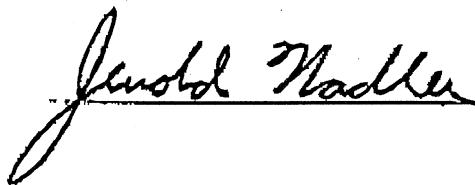
Specifically, we ask that the use of funds provided in SA2405 be broadened beyond "preventing termination of assistance" so that the funds can also be used to: prevent or reverse reductions in payment standards that have caused significant increases in rent burdens for low income families using vouchers; to prevent or reverse reductions in the number of low income families served through attrition; and to permit increased leasing by agencies that have utilized a high proportion of amounts allocated to them but which are experiencing leasing rates significantly below their authorized numbers of units.

The highest priority for these funds should be to prevent terminations, followed by use to bolster payment standards, loss of voucher assistance through attrition, and, finally, distributing these funds to agencies that will use them to assist additional families.

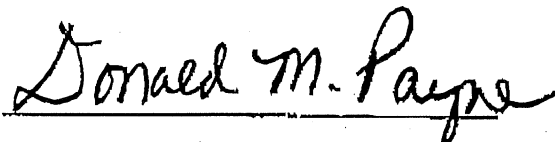
Thank you for your consideration of this very important matter.

Sincerely,

  
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Marian E. Watson

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List of Signatories:

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