

**Financial Services Committee Hearing to Examine Federal Housing Response to Hurricane Katrina**

**Prepared Statement of  
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We, the people of New Orleans public housing, need to come home in order to rebuild our cities, to reform our communities, to raise our children, who are victimized in other cities. As displaced people, other poor and oppressed communities feel we are taking something away from them.

We need to come home.

When Mayor Ray Nagin said "citizens come home," we thought we were citizens also. Many people who were shipped across the country come from far away with what little they had when they heard the mayor's message, and were again displaced. Over 60% of the city's properties remain damaged from Hurricane Katrina. However, the majority of the livable units are in public housing—and yet these units remain fenced off and boarded up by the Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO) and HUD. While other citizens were allowed to salvage their personal belongings, our possessions were stolen and vandalized because we were not allowed back. Citizenship is not based on homeownership. We are citizens too.

Employment opportunities are great in New Orleans. It is hard to work in a city where you do not have a home. While billions of dollars are given to contractors of pay employers from other states, and house them in hotels, we, the working poor in New Orleans, are able, willing, ready, to come home so we can rebuild our city ourselves—just as our ancestors did many years ago.

When opportunists come to New Orleans to exploit our livelihood, with their vision of what the new post-Katrina New Orleans should look like, they sour the gumbo. We make New Orleans what it is. The housing developments, B.W. Cooper, C.J. Peete, Guste, Iberville, St. Thomas, Florida, Fischer, St. Bernard, Lafitte, and Desire, housed over 5,100 families. Today, many of these units are livable, but we are locked out.

We would like to work with you to bring our residents home. We are organized, and we ask that you join us to open all public housing units. At this time, the rich are getting richer, and the poor are being further oppressed by the vicious plot to eliminate the low-income people of New Orleans, most of who are people of color. It is an abomination to attempt to replace one race of people with another for the sake of economic gain.

The housing developments have been a safety net, protecting us against the hurricanes and providing us with our communities when no else wanted us in theirs.

Our people want to come back to our communities, and we need this now more than ever. As displaced victims, our seniors are being denied a full range of medical services, our children are being denied a safe haven for education, and we are denied jobs. We want to come home. Without this population of people, our communities remain desolate, our schools are closed, and our businesses suffer.

The calls and cries of our people are deafening. We need to come home. To be displaced in this wealthy country is an embarrassment to our government. The message that we are getting is that America does not care about us. While the war in Iraq is going on and billions of dollars are being sent there to restore the damage that this country has caused, how can we not take care of what is going on right here at home? We, as citizens of the United States of America, deserve the right to return to our homes in New Orleans, to our culture, to our heritage, to our communities, to our families, to our jobs. We are working diligently to stay in contact with our residents and to contact more residents who have been lost through the displacement process. We pray that you work with us to provide a venue for our people to return to their homes.