

Testimony of John Jackson, Head Organizer Los Angeles ACORN
“Section 8 Housing Assistance Program: Promoting Decent Affordable Housing for
Families and Individuals Who Rent”
July 1, 2003

Good morning. My name is John Jackson and I am the Head
Organizer for Los Angeles ACORN. I would like to thank
Subcommittee Chairman Bob Ney for holding these field hearings
and would like to also send my sincere thanks to Congresswoman
Maxine Waters for championing many of the causes that are dear
to ACORN. ACORN, the Association of Community
Organizations for Reform Now, is the nation's largest community
organization of low- and moderate-income families, with over
150,000 member families organized into 700 neighborhood
chapters in 51 cities across the country. Since 1970 ACORN has
taken action and won victories on issues of concern to our
members. Our priorities include: better housing for first time
homebuyers and tenants, living wages for low-wage workers, more
investment in our communities from banks and

governments, and better public schools. We achieve these goals by building community organizations that have the power to win changes -- through direct action, negotiation, legislation, and voter participation. Our Los Angeles chapter consists of 20 organizers and 5500 member families. Our office is located at 3655 South Grand Avenue, Suite 250.

I'm here today to express ACORN's opposition to restructuring the Section 8 voucher program into a state block grant. First let me clearly state ACORN adamantly believes that changing the voucher program from its current funding structure based on actual costs for the number of vouchers used to a state-administered block grant is likely to result in reduced program funding. Reduced funding is the last thing the Section 8 program needs right now. At a time where we struggle for affordable housing for the poor we need to increase funding not diminish resources. With less funding, few federal requirements and pressures to spread reduced funding across more households, states are likely to reduce the

value of voucher subsidies, shift costs to tenants and assist higher income families. Weakened federal protections for program participants will likely mean that a reduced number of households will have to pay a higher share of their income to rent lower quality housing in less desirable neighborhoods, with their housing assistance potentially subject to time limits and employment requirements.

In addition, vouchers are likely to become less useful as a tool to promote housing development or homeownership, as lenders are likely to become more wary of relying on voucher funding. One concern echoed by several organizations is whether states would be tempted to redirect voucher block grant funds to other uses, given the fiscal crises most states are facing currently. The state of California alone is on the brink of fiscal disaster and as we speak the state hurries to solve a \$38 billion deficit. The shifting of block grant funds to other programs is almost inevitable in a state as financially strapped as California. Furthermore, the effects of state

politics could allow for geographic discrimination in the distribution of vouchers. With the short end of the stick so to speak given to ACORN members and other low-income citizens.

ACORN believes the voucher program reflects a national objective to provide safe, affordable housing and that a federal agency should be responsible for fulfilling a national objective. ACORN expects to fight against any proposal to block grant the Section 8 voucher program. A change of such magnitude would hurt many of our members the most.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss my personal experiences and further expand on ACORN's position that turning the Section 8 program into a block grant is wrong and detrimental to the low-income citizens of the state of California.