

TESTIMONY OF DENNIS S. GUEST, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE COLUMBUS METROPOLITAN HOUSING AUTHORITY, BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY OPPORTUNITY ON TUESDAY, JULY 29, 2003 IN COLUMBUS, OHIO

Chairman Ney and other distinguished representatives of the Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity.

I am Dennis Guest, Executive Director of the Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority. CMHA is responsible for the operation of 3,814 units of public housing and the administration of 9,732 budgeted Section 8 vouchers throughout Columbus and Franklin County.

There are three issues on which I will comment:

- A. The HANF Block Grant proposal.
- B. Potential improvements to the Section 8 Voucher program.
- C. PHA selected project-based vouchers.

First, CMHA is opposed to the current proposal to block grant the Voucher program to the States for three reasons:

1. The concept that the Voucher program could/should be coordinated with the TANF program is weak. Specifically, of the 10,000 vouchers currently under lease with CMHA, only 24% have heads of household with TANF (in Ohio called Ohio Works First) income. The majority (76%) of our clients are seniors, the disabled, pensioners and those working with modest incomes.

2. It is proposed that the States would better administer the program because they are more aware of local needs and by allowing increased regulatory waivers could more accurately meet such needs. Members of the Subcommittee, you have by passing the QWRA bill and by permitting PHAs to utilize vouchers in a project-based manner, have encouraged the customization of the Voucher program to the community level, an outstanding achievement.

For example, CMHA has customized its program to meet the needs of the City of Columbus, Franklin County, Alcohol Drug and Mental Health

Board, MRDD Board, local non-profits, Community Shelter Board, United Way, Columbus and Franklin County Housing Trust Fund, etc. In one instance the Ohio State University and CMHA have partnered to provide housing assistance to young mothers with children who are students at OSU. Special supportive services will allow these mothers to pursue degrees and begin successful careers without the need for TANF. A list of all our partnering agencies, and non-profits is attached to this testimony.

I am hard pressed to understand how a State administered program could function more effectively at our City/County level. Rather this Committee should consider allowing PHAs more flexibility provided there is local governmental, community and private sector support.

- 3.) It is difficult to comprehend the transition of the Voucher program to a State Block Grant program being anything other than a time consuming burden.

If the State of Ohio were to decide to administer the program, absorbing

CMHA's portfolio alone would require:

- inspecting 14-15,000 units/yr.
- conducting 14-15,000 annual recertifications
- processing 30,000 landlord checks
- establishing relationships with over 2,200 landlords
- hearing 1,000 grievances
- negotiating 12,000 unit rents

Of course, a State could elect to subcontract the work to the PHAs or not participate in the program. All three scenarios are possible. It is unlikely that this would create anything less than an administrative nightmare for HUD.

B. If the goal is to improve the Voucher program, I suggest the following for your consideration:

1. ALLOW PHAS TO INSPECT UNITS EVERY 2/3 YEARS RATHER THAN YEARLY BASED ON UNIT UPKEEP BY LANDLORDS.

Eighty-five percent (85%) of landlords are diligent, professional and maintain quality units. Annual inspections of their properties are wasteful of their time and that of the PHA. Fewer inspections should result in cost savings for PHAs and to HUD.

2. RENT RE-CERTIFICATIONS FOR SENIOR CITIZENS EVERY 2 YEARS INSTEAD OF YEARLY. There is little change in yearly income for seniors and administrative savings could also be returned to HUD.

3. ESTABLISH A LOCCS SYSTEM OF FUNDING FOR SECTION 8 VOUCHERS SIMILAR TO THAT UTILIZED FOR PUBLIC HOUSING SUBSIDY AND THE CAPITAL FUND. Under such a system PHAs could electronically draw down on subsidy based on a prepared yearly schedule rather than under the current paperwork intensive system currently in effect.

C. Finally, I would like to emphasize that the project-based program is tremendously successful locally. Because of the use of vouchers as financial backing, CMHA has been able to work with the Community Shelter Board, partner housing providers, and supportive service agencies to develop over 200 new units for the homeless. Additionally, 48 new family units and 30 senior units are being developed with National Church Residencies by utilizing project-based vouchers.

Thank you for allowing me to make this presentation.

Attachment

Partners with CMHA in Voucher assisted units:

Supportive Services

Community Shelter Board

Alcohol Drug and Mental Health Board

Mental Retardation and Developmentally Disabled Board

Franklin County Children's Services

Franklin County Jobs and Human Services

United Way

Columbus Aids Task Force

Volunteers of America

Housing

Community Housing Network

YWCA

National Church Residences

Ohio State University

Creative Housing

City of Columbus

Franklin County

Ohio Housing Finance Agency

Ohio Capital Corporation for Housing

Columbus and Franklin County Housing Trust Fund

HUD

