

June 23, 2011

The Honorable Judy Biggert
Chairman
House Financial Services Subcommittee on Insurance, Housing and Community Opportunity
2129 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Madam Chair:

The undersigned groups representing owners, management agents, and lenders, who participate in HUD's assisted housing programs, offer our support of the discussion draft "Section 8 Savings Act of 2011" (SESA). Section 8 vouchers are a critical tool for housing millions of low-income American families.

The Housing Choice Voucher program has been extremely successful, but as with many other government programs, started to sag under the weight of too many burdensome and duplicative requirements. The discussion draft makes a number of important changes that will improve the program for all stakeholders.

Specifically, we support the following provisions:

Streamlined Property Inspection Requirements

We support the provisions allowing the inspection process to be streamlined. The draft legislation provisions related to inspections ensure that properties housing Section 8 voucher holders will be decent and safe, while improving the antiquated inspection process. Streamlining the inspection process allows tenants to move into their units more quickly and reduces multiple duplicative inspections over time.

Reliable Funding Formula

We are supportive of ensuring adequate funding for the program and a reliable funding formula. The provisions requiring funding allocations to be based on the Public Housing Agency's (PHA's) prior calendar year is a step in the right direction.

Limited English Proficiency (LEP) programs

We are pleased that the draft clarifies the LEP program. The draft language requires HUD to translate vital documents and establishes a task force to ensure access to translated material.

Project-based Vouchers

We appreciate the extension of the contract term for Project-based vouchers included in SESA and would welcome other administrative relief in this area. We would be happy to provide you with suggestions for improving the efficacy of Project-based vouchers, as well as suggestions to streamline use in conversion situations.

Recertification

We support the changes to recertification requirements for tenants on fixed incomes. The draft allows residents on fixed incomes to be recertified every three years, rather than annually. This will provide immediate administrative relief. We encourage the Subcommittee to consider streamlining certifications for other recipients.

Mark-to-Market Program

We support the addition of language that gives HUD the authority to re-structure FHA-insured multifamily loans through 2015.

In this difficult fiscal climate, it is important to note that these reforms would provide for a significant budget savings. At the same time, these revisions would allow more working families to qualify for vouchers, particularly in rural areas. We support the SESA discussion draft, and we look forward to working with the Committee as the legislation moves forward.

Sincerely,

Council for Affordable and Rural Housing
Institute for Responsible Housing Preservation
Institute of Real Estate Management
LeadingAge(formerly AAHSA)
National Affordable Housing Management Association
National Apartment Association
National Association of Affordable Housing Lenders
National Association of Home Builders
National Association of REALTORS®
National Leased Housing Association
National Multi Housing Council