

June 15, 2022

The Honorable Brian Schatz
Chair
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Transportation, Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies

The Honorable David Price
Chair
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Transportation, Housing and Urban
Development, and Related Agencies

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on
Transportation, Housing and Urban Development,
and Related Agencies

The Honorable Mario Diaz-Balart
Ranking Member
House Appropriations Subcommittee on
Transportation, Housing and Urban
Development, and Related Agencies

Dear Chair Schatz, Ranking Member Collins, Chair Price, and Ranking Member Diaz-Balart,

The undersigned organizations, which include a broad cross-section of stakeholders committed to enabling low-income families to live in affordable, accessible, and decent quality housing in well-resourced neighborhoods of their choosing urge your subcommittee to include in the fiscal year (FY) 2023 appropriations bill funding and policy provisions that support and strengthen the effectiveness of the Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program.

The HCV program is a cornerstone of communities' efforts to help more households with low incomes afford decent, stable housing. Rigorous research shows that vouchers are highly effective at reducing homelessness and other hardship, and the voucher program has a long history of putting virtually all of the funds Congress provides to use assisting people struggling to afford rent. After dipping during 2021 in the face of an extremely challenging rental market, the budget utilization rate in the main voucher program is again nearing 100 percent. Thanks in large part to your strong support, there are more vouchers in use overall today than at any time in the program's history. Despite this, large unmet needs remain, and we strongly urge you to increase the resources available to state and local housing agencies so that they can continue to extend the voucher program's proven benefits to more people in need.

While utilization data and a large body of research show that vouchers are highly effective at helping families afford stable housing and that more resources are needed, it is also true that some families that receive a voucher are only able to access housing in a limited range of neighborhoods and others struggle to find any unit they can rent. These challenges have grown more difficult as national rental vacancy rates have dropped to their lowest level in decades. For these reasons, we also urge you to take steps to make vouchers easier to use and broaden the choices available to voucher holders.

We recommend Congress take the following actions to help strengthen the voucher program and ensure more people facing housing hardship receive assistance:

- 1. Fully fund renewal of existing vouchers.** It is crucial that Congress provide sufficient funding in 2023 to cover sharply rising rent and utility costs and renew all vouchers in use.

Congress's consistent track record of fully funding voucher renewal costs is a critical factor in maintaining landlord participation in the program.

- 2. Support the President's request for additional funding to expand vouchers to an additional 200,000 households.** As noted above, public housing agencies (PHAs) spend close to all of their funding every year, and we strongly believe that they would be able to use these expanded resources. The pressing need is clear: because of limited funding, most housing agencies' have long voucher waiting lists; for those who have received a voucher, they first had to wait an average of two and a half years for assistance.¹
- 3. Include robust funding (\$445 million) for mobility services to expand housing choice for families with vouchers.** Rigorous research shows that neighborhoods with quality schools and other resources can significantly improve children's health and chances of academic and economic success over the long term.² Yet families with low incomes who would like to use housing vouchers in neighborhoods that better meet their needs often face significant barriers. There is evidence that tailored search assistance, proactive landlord outreach, and other types of support can break these barriers down and significantly improve families' success in locating housing in neighborhoods of their choice.³
- 4. Provide full funding for voucher administrative fees to help PHAs effectively and efficiently administer the program.** Providing at least \$3 billion, as proposed by the Biden administration, would support an estimated 100 percent proration for housing agencies to assist program participants, fairly compensate staff, and increase landlord engagement through recruitment events, advertising, and risk mitigation funds.
- 5. Extend the deadline for reissuing Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHVs) for at least a year – until September 30, 2024 – and preferably for two years or longer.** EHVs are a crucial and highly effective component of local efforts to address homelessness. Maintaining the September 30, 2023, deadline would mean that in just 15 months, agencies would no longer be able to reissue these vouchers to new households when a current voucher holder leaves the program, greatly diminishing communities' ability to make progress in reducing homelessness. Including an extension in the FY 2023 appropriations bill is likely the only legislative opportunity to ensure it is in place before agencies have to take steps to end reissuance that could be difficult to reverse. An extension would not require additional budget authority in the fiscal year 2023 bill and would help more people access stable housing. The program's relatively slow ramp up largely reflects the time needed to build

¹ Sonya Acosta and Erik Gartland, "Families Wait Years for Housing Vouchers Due to Inadequate Funding," CBPP, July 22, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/families-wait-years-for-housing-vouchers-due-to-inadequate-funding>; Sonya Acosta and Brianna Guerrero, "Long Waitlists for Housing Vouchers Show Pressing Unmet Need for Assistance," CBPP, October 6, 2021, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/long-waitlists-for-housing-vouchers-show-pressing-unmet-need-for-assistance>.

² For a summary of this research, see: <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/research-shows-rental-assistance-reduces-hardship-and-provides-platform-to-expand>.

³ See the study of the Creating Moves to Opportunity program in Seattle: <https://opportunityinsights.org/paper/cmto/>.

capacity and establish the necessary programmatic relationships and procedures. This new infrastructure is strengthening communities' ability to provide effective assistance to people experiencing homelessness and could be maintained through an EHV extension.

- 6. Authorize the use of voucher housing assistance payments (HAP) funds for security deposits and holding fees.** Inability to pay security deposits can be a significant barrier for low-income families seeking to lease units with housing vouchers. Allowing all PHAs to pay security deposits using housing assistance funds will be particularly helpful for expanding access and choice for people who were recently experiencing homelessness or for people with disabilities who are seeking accessible homes. In addition, Congress should allow PHAs to use HAP funds for holding fees, up to a month's worth of rent, to help encourage landlord participation by minimizing the risk of income loss during the period before voucher subsidy payments start. Both of these approaches have been used effectively in the EHV program.

We hope that you can support these important funding and policy proposals in the upcoming FY 2023 THUD funding bill. Thank you for considering these recommendations.

Sincerely,

American Association on Health and Disability
Autism Society of America
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
Autistic Women & Nonbinary Network
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Center on Budget and Policy Priorities
Center for Disability Rights
Church World Service
Coalition on Human Needs
Compass Working Capital
Corporation for Supportive Housing
Council of Large Public Housing Agencies
Council of State Community Development Agencies
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
Enterprise Community Partners
Epilepsy Foundation
Fundors Together to End Homelessness
Institute of Real Estate Management
Housing Assistance Council
The Kelsey
Lakeshore Foundation
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
LeadingAge
Local Initiatives Support Corporation

NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF)
National Affordable Housing Management Association
National Alliance to End Homelessness
National Apartment Association
National Association for County Community and Economic Development
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials
National Association of Housing Cooperatives
National Association of Local Housing Finance Agencies
National Association of Realtors
National Coalition for the Homeless
National Council of State Housing Agencies
National Disability Rights Network
National Health Care for the Homeless Council
National Homelessness Law Center
National Housing Law Project
National Housing Resource Center
National Housing Trust
National Leased Housing Association
National Low Income Housing Coalition
National Multifamily Housing Council
National NeighborWorks Association
National Network to End Domestic Violence
National Women's Law Center
Opportunity Starts at Home Campaign
Poverty & Race Research Action Council
RESULTS
Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future
StriveTogether
The Salvation Army, National Headquarters