

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Financial Services
2129 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

June 15, 2009

The Honorable Shaun Donovan
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 Seventh Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Mr. Secretary:

We write to request your assistance in preserving our nation's affordable public housing stock. We believe the \$4 billion for the Capital Fund included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act signals a renewed commitment to funding and preserving our public housing stock. Given this commitment and the overwhelming need for decent and safe public housing, we strongly urge the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to impose a one-year moratorium on the approval of applications for the demolition or disposition of public housing units. We believe now is the time to preserve this vital asset before more affordable homes are lost forever.

As you well know, in the last ten years, over 120,000 units of public housing have been demolished or disposed with only a portion being replaced by hard units. Public Housing serves a wide variety of low- to extremely low-income families, 43 percent of whom are elderly and disabled. A further decline in the number of public housing units will only exacerbate the affordable housing needs of our most vulnerable populations and may force them into substandard or unsafe housing situations or homelessness.

Although families who have been displaced by a demolition or disposition receive housing choice vouchers, a voucher cannot perform the same role in a community as a public housing unit. While housing choice vouchers are an important component of our national affordable housing policy, vouchers are not a substitute for the permanent replacement of hard public housing units, which represent a permanent commitment to providing affordable housing and services within a community.

Until such time as housing authorities are required to replace demolished or disposed units on a one-for-one basis, we risk losing the crucial investment and significant asset these units represent. Therefore, we respectfully request that you implement this moratorium to allow us to work with HUD, as well as industry and tenant advocacy organizations, to develop the necessary tools and resources to preserve public housing and ensure that families in need continue to have access to decent, safe and affordable housing in their communities.

We look forward to working with you on this important issue.


BARNEY FRANK
Chairman


MAXINE WATERS
Chairwoman
Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity