



Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development

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March 7, 2012

The Honorable Spencer Bachus, Chairman
Committee on Financial Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Barney Frank, Ranking Member
Committee on Financial Services
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Bachus and Ranking Member Frank:

On behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, I write regarding the Affordable Housing and Self-Sufficiency Improvement Act, which would modernize many public housing programs that poor and vulnerable people and families rely on to live in dignity.

As bishops and pastors, we see the effects of the broken economy in our parishes and communities. For many families, especially those who qualify as “extremely low income,” safe and affordable housing is increasingly scarce. I commend you for your renewed commitment to improving programs that increase the amount of affordable housing available to poor and vulnerable families. However, I also wish to express concerns with certain provisions of the legislation that could harm the poorest residents and possibly decrease the availability of affordable housing.

A provision to increase the minimum amount of rent that can be charged to tenants of public housing could harm their precarious financial security. As you know, minimum rent provisions affect the poorest and most vulnerable families--those for whom the fight to live in dignity is the toughest. According to a recent analysis, this provision would increase monthly rent payments for almost 500,000 of the lowest income households. Increasing the burden on the most vulnerable households would be morally unjust.

A second provision would expand the Moving to Work program, which could amount to a block-granting of public housing and voucher programs. The bishops are not opposed in principle to block grants, but there are concerns that these proposed changes could leave more poor and vulnerable people and their families without the access to safe and affordable housing. Expanding the Moving to Work program offers states more flexibility, but could also have the unintended consequence of forcing them to make painful cuts in the future to services to poor and vulnerable households.

The Catholic bishops of the United States have long believed that safe and decent housing is a human right, and the government has a proper role to play in ensuring that right. In *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship*, we note, “The lack of safe, affordable housing requires a renewed commitment to increase the supply of quality housing and to preserve, maintain, and improve existing housing through public/private partnerships, especially with religious groups and community organizations.”

As you continue your work on the Affordable Housing and Self-Sufficiency Improvement Act, I urge you to address provisions that would increase the burden on the poorest households or have the potential to drastically reduce the amount of affordable housing opportunities available to low income Americans.

Sincerely,

Most Reverend Stephen E. Blaire
Chairman
Committee on Domestic Justice and Human
Development