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PBCHA
PALM BEACH COUNTY HOUSING AUTHORITY

January 7, 2022

Florida Housing Finance Corporation
c/o Zach Summerlin
227 North Bronough Street, Suite 5000
Tallahassee, FL 32301

RE: HOME ARP Comments

Dear Zach,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the HOME ARP amendment FHFC will submit to HUD. The Palm Beach County Housing Authority (PBCHA) serves 3443 residents of Palm Beach County by providing housing units, rental vouchers, project based-rental vouchers deployed through our landlord and developer partners as well as in our five public housing communities. In addition to the traditional roles of housing authorities, the PBCHA has processed 520 Emergency Housing Vouchers to assist Palm Beach County in serving its homeless residents. PBCHA also serves youth aging out of foster care with 24 FYI vouchers and can apply for more as needed.

Statistics suggest a bleak future for many of the 800-1000 teens who age-out of Florida's foster care system each year, 75-90 in Palm Beach County alone. The cost to society for the negative outcomes among this highly vulnerable population is incalculable.

Without intervention and support:

- Less than 50 percent of Florida's Foster Children Graduate from High School
- 30 percent are more likely to be Substance Abusers
- 50 percent are more likely to have a History of Domestic Violence
- Up to 85 percent of kids in foster care have Mental Health problems
- 25 percent Experience Homelessness within One Year
- 75 percent Experience Unemployment
- 40 percent Become Parents within 2 years
- 25 percent of Males and 10 percent of Females are Incarcerated within 18 months
- Only 1 in 6 are Completely Self-Supporting

PBCHA serves 85 veterans with the VASH voucher program. An overwhelming effort to provide emergency shelter and transitional housing for our veterans has been a focus in Palm Beach County. However, due to many challenges faced by this population which tends to require unique supportive services, permanent housing is in high demand and low supply.

The resources dedicated to helping homeless households are heavily weighted towards shelter housing and transitional housing. The transitional housing options aims to be a steppingstone between homelessness or shelter housing to independent housing stability. Once residents are ready to leave the supportive service environment the expectation is that with proper support, they can enter the regular rental housing market.

The reality is that residents exiting these programs still face huge hurdles in finding rental housing. Many formerly homeless individuals have criminal records, they have short or unstable work histories, and gaps in their housing history. They usually also have deficiencies in their credit reports. Most private landlords have lookback periods that are longer than the time these households have stability. A two-year stable housing, employment, criminal, and credit record does not meet the requirements of landlords that have 3-, 5-, and 7-year look-back periods on their background and other checks.

For a variety of reasons private landlords are unable to waive those requirements. In our experience, this causes a huge bottleneck in Palm Beach County. Residents who are ready to leave the transitional housing cannot find a rental unit they can qualify for, extending their residency in the transitional housing occupying a unit that otherwise would be available for a new client. The shelters then continue to be overcrowded and more funding is made available for transitional housing.

Affordable housing programs at both the statewide and local levels have largely focused on workforce housing serving people with incomes from 80%-140% of AMI. This population has options which are not available to families with incomes from 30% to 50% of AMI. Housing authorities serve this vulnerable extremely low-income group with waiting lists into the thousands. The families sometimes wait years for housing they can afford. For-profit developers do not generally provide housing opportunities for this population because it is difficult to successfully operate properties long term without subsidies to cover operating expenses and debt. PBCHA has not been able to increase public housing units or other opportunities for this segment of the population for over the last 39 years although the need is increasing every year.

We cannot stress how big of a need there is in our community and we suspect this situation is seen in many other areas around the state. We urge FHFC to consider making the HOME-ARP funding available to entities, such as public housing authorities, that naturally serve vulnerable populations and can commit to providing longer term housing solutions, specifically permanent housing options for families graduating from transitional housing with supportive services. Additionally, public housing authorities are best equipped to serve low and extremely low-income families. FHFC should also consider directing some HOME-ARP funds to public housing authorities targeted to this population.

This would allow Florida Housing to fill what we know is a gap in the current housing options for homeless, formerly homeless and those at risk of becoming homeless individuals and families.

Secondly, we acknowledge that certain Participating Jurisdictions have received HOME allocations directly under the ARP. FHFC should deploy its statewide funding primarily based on needs. We have reviewed the homelessness needs numbers FHFC is using, and we fear that the data for Palm Beach County may be inaccurate and may be downplaying the needs for housing for the homeless in Palm Beach County, particularly in relation to our county's population. The data FHFC is using is primarily based on a one-time county of people physically without a roof. It does not take into account the great need in Palm Beach County from households sleeping in motels, staying with families, or facing impending homelessness.

We believe that these suggestions meet the requirements for the use of the HOME-ARP funds and prioritize the goal of substantially reducing homelessness. Engaging the public housing authorities as partners ensures the long-term success of any units created and facilitates the quickest deployment of the funds.

Sincerely Yours,



Carol Jones-Gilbert
Executive Director