

Statement for the Record  
Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez  
FSC Hearing on The State and Local Housing Flexibility Act  
May 11, 2005

We are here today to discuss yet another proposal to gut the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program – a program that enables more than 2 million low-income families find safe, decent, affordable housing in what has become our nation’s prohibitively expensive housing market. The Administration obviously thought strategically in naming the proposal before us, calling it “The State and Local Housing Flexibility Act”. After all, what public housing authorities would argue against flexibility? Yet I think there is a more appropriate name for the legislation – “The Tenant Protection Evisceration Act”. This would more aptly describe the President’s attack on the low-income families that rely on the Section 8 program for safe, affordable housing.

It’s difficult to hone in on one particular area of concern with this bill because there are so many egregious provisions that would have a devastating affect on families across the country. From doing away with income targeting that has been in place for decades to reducing the protections offered families through enhanced vouchers, from removing rent calculations that ensure affordability to allowing time limits, there seems to be no consideration of the so-called “compassionate conservatism” that Administration and Republican leadership tout.

The federal investment in housing is little more than 1 percent of the overall budget, yet the President continues to put forth proposals to rein in what he perceives as the “spiraling costs” of the voucher program. In reality, the program is growing in large part due to newly authorized incremental vouchers and expiring contracts as well as the further widening gap between wages and skyrocketing rents. Perhaps the President could put forth a proposal to increase the minimum wage or funding for job training and development rather than attacking the programs that support families struggling to make ends meet in a weak economy.

The State and Local Housing Flexibility Act would roll back decades of protections for low-income families. Not only would it affect Section 8 voucher recipients, but it would grant HUD the authority to waive virtually all of the rules protecting public housing tenants as well. The proposal also represents a huge shift away from policies that promote deconcentrating poverty in economically diverse communities. By allowing PHAs to turn down transfer applications, the Administration will be fostering the Not In My Backyard mentality that already segregates so many neighborhoods across the country.

Instead of acknowledging that family expenses have increased while income has deteriorated, Secretary Jackson has taken a swing at low-income families. He has stated that our nation’s poorest families are not working hard enough, and their housing benefits should be given to those who are “moving up the economic ladder.” The Secretary, who believes poverty is, “a state of mind”, also ignores that the vast majority of Section 8 recipients are in the workforce, and that workers are putting in longer hours while earning less.

I vehemently oppose this egregious proposal and I hope that my colleagues across the aisle will as well. And I hope that they will acknowledge that misrepresenting the facts is irresponsible and dismantling affordable housing programs is shortsighted and dangerous -- and that the impact on families across the country will be devastating and the affects long lasting.