

**Written Testimony**  
**Cynthia K. Ring, Executive Director for the Allen Metropolitan Housing Authority**  
**for a hearing regarding**  
**Housing and Economic Policy in the State of Ohio**  
**before the**  
**Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity**

July 29, 2003

Chairman Ney, Ranking Member Waters, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify about housing policies in the State of Ohio. My name is Cindi Ring and I am the Executive Director of the Allen Metropolitan Housing Authority (AMHA), located in Lima, Allen County, Ohio. I am also Past-President and a current member of the Ohio Housing Authorities Conference (OHAC) that represents 75 Housing Authorities in the State of Ohio. These Public Housing Authorities administer assistance to approximately 85,000 families under the Section 8 tenant-based assistance called the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP).

AMHA has proudly served our community for thirty years by providing decent and affordable housing. We are a high performer under the Public Housing Assessment System (PHAS) and a standard performer under the Section Eight Management Assessment Program (SEMAP). I apologize for not being able to provide my written testimony to you earlier. I just returned from National Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) Summer Conference where AMHA received an award for program innovation for our Landlord Training Program. This program is a cooperative effort between AMHA, the City of Lima, local law enforcement agencies and the Lima-Allen County Housing Consortium. This free training benefits any local property manager or landlord. Landlords who are better informed and knowledgeable about State Laws can improve the profitability of their businesses and be more prepared to be a positive influence in our neighborhoods. This is important to the City of Lima because approximately fifty percent of the housing stock is rental housing.

AMHA has a highly trained staff of twenty-nine that provide housing services to the most needy populations; senior citizens, handicapped and disabled individuals, the homeless and families with children. The families we serve are someone's grandparent, mother or father, sister or brother, child or perhaps grandchild. We are able to provide excellent services to those in our communities because we live in our counties and are often the most familiar with the needs of our residents. We are the front line staff delivering something very precious to families – the opportunity to live in a decent home.

We have sold sixteen homes to former public housing residents and continue to prepare others to accomplish the same. Last month HUD recognized our PHA during National Homeownership Month when another resident successfully bought her home through the 5(h) Program we administer. In addition, we have recently begun a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Homeownership Program that will enable many more families to realize the American Dream. We also provide counseling under a Family Self-Sufficiency Program that will eventually enable participating families to be free of any type of public assistance.

AMHA assists over one thousand six hundred (1,600) families monthly through some form of Section 8 rental subsidy. Because Allen MHA is surrounded by rural counties that have no housing authority, we often administer are the only place to administer a housing choice voucher for someone wishing to live in another jurisdiction. The portability feature of the voucher is not difficult to administer as alluded to by Assistant Secretary of HUD, Michael Liu. Other Housing Authorities have similar successes. Later this week, Morrow Housing Authority, located in central Ohio will be recognized when their first Section 8 family purchases a home.

As I hope you can tell, I believe very strongly in our mission. I also want you to know that PHAs in the State of Ohio need additional resources. For example, AMHA currently has over 700 families on our waiting lists and many more would apply if all of our waiting lists were open. (It is not unusual to close the waiting list if we anticipate the wait to exceed one year) We could use more affordable housing in our community as illustrated by the fact that we were 15% over-leased last fiscal year. This happened because we were meeting HUD's program requirements for lease-up and then the local economy declined significantly. The turnover rate dropped to much less than the typical 20% we have been accustomed to in recent years.

I commend you for listening to the stakeholders of these programs as you try to determine if H.R. 1841 is an appropriate way to administer HUD's largest program by block granting the funding to each State. Let me remind you that during his testimony to your committee in May, Assistant Secretary for Public and Indian Housing Michael Liu stated that the basic Section 8 Program concept is sound but the program is over-regulated. I certainly can't agree more with him. However, I must disagree with his logic on the HANF approach. I question why HUD is willing to lessen the burdensome regulations for the states but for PHAs. I'm also puzzled as to how the program efficiency can be increased by adding another layer of bureaucracy through block granting the program to each State. PHAs are local administrators and are already permitted some local discretion. Our policies are made by a local Board of Commissioners, who have been appointed by our Mayors, County Commissioners and Judges. Transitioning a program this large would be costly and most of all, confusing to our residents.

Our clients need more than a toll-free number. They need face to face counseling in order to make good housing and sometimes life choices, as well as simple landlord referrals that can only be known by local involvement. I also believe that taxpayers deserve some guarantee that funds are used appropriately. This is more likely to happen where fraud is more likely to be discovered and there is more local program oversight.

In closing I urge you to review the FY 2004 Appropriations amendment provision for Section 8 Administrative Fees and Fee Reserves closely. Additional study is necessary to develop a fair and equitable system for administrative fees, not a "one size" fits all approach that does not take into account local housing markets. In the past, admin fees have been used to assist worthwhile programs determined at the local level, such as assisting voucher holders in successfully leasing up, offering family self-sufficiency services, conducting fraud investigations, and funding security deposit loans to homeless families. The cap on PHA reserves punishes housing authorities for good fiscal management practices and does nothing to reward PHAs who efficiently or effectively use their funds. Reserves were earned in the past by conservative spending and the foresight to save for future needs. These reserves were intended to allow Housing Authorities to be flexible in meeting their individual community's needs so long as they were for housing related purposes.

I hope this information will assist you in making informed decisions and I want to thank you again for allowing me the opportunity to present my views.