

Public Housing Getting Shortchanged

November 9, 2003 Chicago Sun-Times

Is public housing in America about to become a thing of the past? HOPE VI -- the federal program that is the Chicago Housing Authority's major source of funding for its controversial Plan for Transformation -- has been zeroed out of President Bush's proposed 2004 budget. Although Congress has proposed temporarily extending the program, Senate and House committees have allocated only a fraction of the funds needed.

If the president's proposed budget is passed, tremendous hardship will befall thousands of public housing residents. According to a recent study, the total cost of funding the Plan for Transformation is close to \$3 billion, yet the CHA currently receives only \$1.5 billion from HUD. If HOPE VI is eliminated, Chicago will be left without the resources it needs to complete the Plan and provide services for among the most economically vulnerable Chicagoans.

As has been well-documented, under the Plan for Transformation, the number of units demolished to date has far exceeded the number of units being constructed or rehabbed. To date 13,702 units of public housing have been destroyed. However, only 990 units have been built or rehabbed.

At the same time, the current housing market in Chicago cannot absorb all of the residents displaced by the demolitions. To date there is a shortage of over 150,000 units of housing for households that make less than \$20,000 a year. The average public housing resident makes \$10,024. Yet, if federal funding runs out, the CHA is not required to follow through on its obligation to build. HOPE VI funds must continue to reach Chicago in order to see the plan through to its completion.

To address this potential funding crisis, on Monday morning public housing residents, scholars and community leaders will share their concerns about the federal HOPE VI program with

Chicago's federal elected officials. To date, Sen. Richard Durbin and Representatives Jesse Jackson Jr., Danny Davis, Bobby Rush, Luis Gutierrez and Jan Schakowsky have said they will attend to listen to these concerns and take the recommendations back to Washington. This hearing, which is open to the public, will provide recommendations to the federal elected officials about how to preserve and strengthen the HOPE VI program in order to benefit Chicago.

Carol Steele, president, Coalition to Protect Public Housing;

Jane Ramsey, executive director, Jewish Council on Urban Affairs;

Rev. Calvin Morris, executive director, Community Renewal Society;

John Donahue, executive director, Chicago Coalition for the Homeless