



Department of Social Development and World Peace

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October 3, 2005

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

I write as Chairman of the Domestic Policy Committee of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) to urge you to retain the Affordable Housing Fund as part of the *Federal Housing Finance Reform Act of 2005* (H.R. 1461) and bring the bill to a vote forthwith. The Catholic Bishops have historically urged the federal government to help meet our nation's promise of a decent home for every American family, especially those families with extremely low incomes.

As I noted in my June 10 letter to the House of Representatives, the Catholic Community—through our Charities agencies, dioceses, and parishes—serves tens of thousands of men, women, and children who struggle to maintain adequate housing. Besides sheltering homeless people who turn to us for help, we have built, and continue to maintain, thousands of affordable housing units. All of these experiences have demonstrated to us how inadequate, substandard housing hurts human life, undermines families, destroys communities, and weakens the social fabric of our nation. Despite our efforts—and the efforts of so many others—there just is not enough affordable housing available.

Proposals that would limit eligible recipients to organizations that have as their primary purpose the provision of affordable housing would effectively prevent Catholic dioceses, parishes and Catholic Charities agencies from participating in Affordable Housing Fund programs. Similarly, proposals that would prohibit recipients from engaging in voter registration and lobbying activities with their own funds during the period they are utilizing affordable housing funds would force Catholic agencies to choose between participating in Affordable Housing Fund programs or engaging in constitutionally protected voter registration and lobbying activities with their own funds. I urge you to oppose inclusion of these kinds of unnecessary limitations and prohibitions in H.R. 1461 as it moves to the House floor for a vote. There are ample ways to write safeguards into the legislation to prevent the diversion of affordable housing funds to uses other than what they are intended without requiring recipients to forego their constitutionally protected rights as a condition for participating in Affordable Housing Fund programs.

The Bishops' statement, *Putting Children and Families First*, notes: "Many families cannot find or afford decent housing, or must spend so much of their income for shelter that they forego other necessities, such as food and medicine.... [The Catholic bishops] support housing policies which seek to preserve and increase the supply of affordable housing and help families pay for it." We must put in place a sustainable source of funds to build affordable housing and this new fund would do that.

As I said in my June letter, this legislation presents Congress with a genuine opportunity to make the shelter needs of extremely low-income families a national priority. I believe that such families who need housing the most should be targeted to receive these limited funds.

With every best wish, I am,

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Nicholas DiMarzio". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Most Rev. Nicholas DiMarzio, PhD, DD
Bishop of Brooklyn
Chairman, Domestic Policy Committee
United States Conference of Catholic Bishops