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CISNEROS SECONDS PRESIDENT'S CALL TO CRACK DOWN ON CRIMINALS IN FEDERALLY ASSISTED HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS

WASHINGTON-Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Secretary Henry G. Cisneros today called on all public housing tenants, public housing authorities, and owners of assisted housing to crack down on criminal activity. Cisneros also urged Congress to pass legislation to fight gangs and drugs in these areas.

"Public housing is a privilege, not a right," said Cisneros.

The following are ways in which Cisneros aims to strengthen anti-crime initiatives in public and assisted housing:

- toughen admissions standards;
- implement stringent screening processes;
- execute rigorous eviction rules to keep out people who engage in criminal activity;
- give public housing authorities access to the National Crime Information Center for purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement and eviction; and,
- dramatically expand the pilot program Operation Safe Home into a fully funded initiative.

Recently, Secretary Cisneros prepared a "one strike and you're out" provision, included in legislation now before Congress, to strengthen the ability of public housing managers to screen and evict criminals and drug users. "We firmly believe that scarce public resources should not be wasted on those who do not respect the law," said Cisneros.

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The proposed legislative changes would require public housing managers to exclude persons currently using illegal drugs, as well as those whose patterns of illegal drug use or alcohol abuse could interfere with other tenants' health, safety or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises.

"The President has challenged us to live up to our responsibilities no matter where we live," said Cisneros. "If an individual engages in illegal behavior in public and assisted housing, they will be kicked out. Violent behavior will not be tolerated."

Cisneros pledged to work with Congress and with local public housing authorities to pass tough anti-crime legislation. Many Public Housing Authorities have already started programs, such as in Portland, Oregon, where tenants of Columbia Village are pre-screened, are subject to strict security provisions, and can be evicted for serious criminal violations.

The "one strike and you're out" provision is one of several successful Clinton Administration initiatives to build safe communities for public and assisted housing residents.

HUD has already taken strong measures to crack down on crime, drugs and violence during the past two years:

Operation Safe Home is an effort by HUD's Office of Inspector General, Drug Enforcement Agency, FBI, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), state and local police officers as well as public housing security to combat gang and criminal activity in public housing.

The results of Operation Safe Home as of September 10, 1995:

- 6,826 arrests and service of 737 search warrants;
- seizure of 558 weapons, \$1,062,158 in cash, and drugs having a street value of \$2,854,172; and,
- relocation of 183 families who were witnesses to violent crime and were willing to testify in court.

Before Operation Safe Home, the lack of coordination among law enforcement agencies undermined effective crime prevention. Now there are more than 100 law enforcement task forces in operation at public and assisted housing sites throughout the country.

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These task forces engage in the full range of law enforcement activity, implementing community policing, staging covert operations to identify the membership and hierarchy of gangs, and conducting undercover operations to arrest drug dealers selling in and around public housing. Once criminals and gangs are rooted out, HUD and community agencies follow up with patrolling, youth programs and other measures to keep the peace.

Operation Safe Home has been successful in a number of communities across the country including Washington, D.C., where the HUD/OIG, the ATF, and the DC Metro Police culminated a 10-month investigation with the arrest of 16 members of the LeDroit Park Drug Crew, a drug gang that terrorized and intimidated residents of the Kelly Miller Housing Development.

In Los Angeles, in January 1996, FBI Agents arrested 10 members of the Grape Street Gang who were operating a drug ring and terrorizing residents of the Jordan Downs housing development. The arrests culminated a two year investigation into the drug operation and several murders in the complex.

An example of a successful local initiative is in Greensboro, North Carolina, where after years of resident silence in the face of drug-related shootings and violent crimes, the tenants organized into the Residents Against Drugs and helped create community policing sites at five public housing complexes - the Police Neighborhood Resource Centers (PNRC).

In addition to the police presence, the PNRC's perform an array of community and education services, including programs in drug awareness education and parenting skills training. In 1993, the first year of PNRC operation at Hampton Homes, violent crime decreased by more than 40 percent.

HUD's Drug Elimination Program operates as an important corollary to Operation Safe Home by creating prevention and education programs and providing a safe place for public housing youth to play and learn.

Last year, HUD used drug elimination money to fund a wide range of activities including the employment of security guards, the support of resident patrols, and the architectural redesign of housing to discourage crime and violence. HUD also sponsored youth sports activities to provide public housing youth with an opportunity to play in safe and healthy environments.

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In 25 of 28 public housing agencies recently evaluated, there was significant improvement in either the lowered incidence of reported crime or the increase of arrests for criminal activity. For example, in Augusta, Georgia, violent crimes have been cut 57 percent from 1991 to 1994. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, total crime for family complexes dropped 24.1 percent from 1992 to 1994, while incidences of homicide, rape, robbery and assault were cut from 514 in 1992 to 166 in 1994.

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January 23, 1996

ONE STRIKE AND YOU'RE OUT CREATING SAFER COMMUNITIES FOR PUBLIC HOUSING RESIDENTS

HUD's strategy to build safer communities for public housing residents has three primary components: 1. through Operation Safe Home mounting a coordinated and focused law enforcement effort to deter and arrest criminals operating at public housing sites; 2. through Drug Elimination programs taking a pro-active approach to prevent crime and provide public housing youth with safe alternatives to gang involvement and 3. through new legislation and stronger enforcement strengthening the ability of Public Housing Authorities to screen and evict criminals and drug users.

A. One Strike and You're Out

Public housing is a place to live, not a place to deal drugs; it is a privilege and cannot be taken for granted and abused. This scarce public resource should not be wasted on those that do not respect the law. Accordingly, HUD supports legislation that would strengthen the ability of managers of public housing to screen and evict criminals and drug users. HUD regulations presently require that all leases contain provisions that prohibit tenants, members of tenant households or guests from 1) taking actions that disturb the peaceful enjoyment of other residents; 2) engaging in criminal activity that threatens the health, safety, or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by other residents; and 3) participating in any drug-related criminal activity on or near public housing premises.

Proposed legislative changes would require public housing managers to exclude persons currently using illegal drugs or where there is reasonable cause to believe that a person's illegal use or pattern of illegal use of illegal drugs or abuse of alcohol could interfere with the health, safety or right to peaceful enjoyment of the premises by the tenants of the public housing authority. Public Housing Authorities would have access to the National Crime Information Center for purposes of applicant screening, lease enforcement and evictions.

This legislation builds on efforts like that of Columbia Villa complex in Portland Oregon where tenants are pre-screened and agree to strict security provisions. The residents appreciate the tough stance on drugs and crime that has helped turn their neighborhood around. Some PHAs are already cracking down on criminal activity. Through the new legislation and HUD's proactive stance in Operation Safe Home, HUD wants to universalize this approach. Combined with the increased vigilance and organization of residents and presence of law enforcement personnel, those who venture to engage in drug and criminal activity while living in public housing will be out on the first strike.

The Macon Housing Authority (MHA) considers applicant selection and screening half the battle in its comprehensive anti-drug program. Applicants' police, credit and prior landlord references are checked before the resident signs a lease that contains strict provisions for drug and criminal activity - eviction. Macon then developed a systematic method of enforcing these lease provisions: public arrest records are scanned daily and resident complaints are investigated within 24 hours. Residents who violate the anti-crime lease provisions are given the option of moving out or being evicted. The message these evictions sends is telling: there were 21 drug eviction cases in 1992, 10 in 1993, 8 in 1994 and 8 in 1995. The fear of crime and drugs had led to a vacancy rate of 9% in Macon Housing Authority (MHA) units in 1989, by 1994 Macon boasted a 1.1% vacancy rate.

B. Operation Safe Home

On February 4, 1994, the White House, joined by the Secretaries of HUD and Treasury, the Attorney General and the National Drug Control Policy Director announced Operation Safe Home as a collaborative demonstration effort to combat gang and criminal activity in the nation's public housing. The strategy behind Operation Safe Home is that the various law enforcement agencies having jurisdiction over public housing (e.g. HUD, DEA, FBI, ATF, state and local police officers and public housing security) would work together with the public housing residents and managers to increase the arrest and conviction of violent and drug-related criminal suspects and make public housing a safer place to live. Prior to Operation Safe Home the lack of coordination among these groups undermined effective crime prevention. Now there are over 100 law enforcement task forces in operation in public housing sites throughout the country.

These task forces engage in the full range of law enforcement activity, from the successful implementation of community policing -- in Sacramento the police have opened a substation in a public housing project where police involvement in mentorship programs has increased their rapport with resident youth -- to covert operations to identify the membership/hierarchy of gangs, to undercover operations to arrest and prosecute drug dealers selling in and around public housing. In addition, the task force can relocate witnesses to other HUD funded housing to encourage and protect residents who testify against drug dealers.

Operation Safe Home is working. The results as of September 30, 1995 include:

- 6,826 arrests and service of 737 search warrants
- seizure of 558 weapons, \$1,062,158 in cash, and drugs having a street value of \$2,854,172.

- relocation of 183 families who were witnesses to violent crime and were willing to testify in court.

What Do These Statistics Look Like At Public Housing Complexes

As two of the many examples of how Operation Safe Home works, in Washington, D.C. on May 25, 1995, the ATF, HUD/OIG and DC Metro Police culminated a 10-month investigation with the arrest of 16 members of the LeDroit Park Drug Crew, a drug gang that terrorized and intimidated residents of the KELLY MILLER complex of the DC Housing Authority. Upon clearing the residential complex of the drug gang, DC Housing initiated a coordinated intensive campaign to modernize and clean up the area, painting, installing new windows and enhancing security, as well as bring in other social service agencies to focus on the area. Local residents celebrated the "reclaiming" of their neighborhood with a block party.

The combined efforts of multiple federal, state and local law enforcement authorities resulted in the indictments of 38 members of the violent street gang, the Gangster Disciples. The joint operation focused on murder and drug activities within several developments of the Chicago Housing Authority, resulting in the indictment of what is essentially the command structure of the Gangster Disciples organization.

In 1996 HUD will take this demonstration initiative and expand it throughout the country. To better coordinate this effective law enforcement and post-enforcement approach to building safer communities, HUD will seek funding for the initiative and designate and train an Operation Safe Home coordinator in each District office to serve the program. Operation Safe Home taught us that crime at public housing can be fought and improvements made if there is a focused and coordinated attack.

C. Drug Elimination Programs

Arrests and convictions are not enough. An important corollary to Operation Safe Home's coordination of law enforcement activities is the creation of prevention and education programs to encourage residents to join together as a force against crime in their community and to provide a safe place for public housing youth to play and learn. Last year, HUD used drug elimination monies to fund a wide range of activities from the employment of security guards, to the support of resident patrols, to the architectural redesign of housing to create defensible space, to the creation of youth leadership activities as an alternative to the lure of gang involvement. HUD sponsored youth sports activities provide public housing youth with an opportunity to play in a safe place as well as learn leadership and life skills.

The Results:

An evaluation of the effectiveness of the Drug Elimination programs in selected cities demonstrates the wisdom of this approach. In 25 of the 28 public housing agencies recently evaluated, there was significant improvement measured in either the lowered incidence of reported crime or the increase of arrests on reported criminal activity. For example, in Augusta, Georgia, violent crimes have been cut 57 percent from 1991 to 1994. In Tulsa, Oklahoma, total crime for family complexes dropped 24.1% from 1992 to 1994, while incidences of homicide, rape, robbery and assault were cut from 514 in 1992 to 166 in 1994.

In Greensboro, NC after years of resident silence in the face of drug-related shootings and violent crimes, the tenants organized into the Residents Against Drugs and helped create the Police Neighborhood Resource Centers (PNRC) - community policing sites at five public housing complexes. In addition to the police presence the PNRC's perform an array of community and education services. More than 60 trained residents from the community provide services such as drug awareness education and parenting skills training. The result, in 1993 the first year the PRNC operated at Hampton Homes, one of the five PNRC sites, violent crime decreased more than 40 percent.

Despite the proven effectiveness of these programs, the House zeroed out the appropriation for HUD's Drug Elimination Programs for 1996. HUD lobbied to have the monies restored which is now reflected in the conference report.