

MEMORANDUM

TO: TOM FREEDMAN, MARY L. SMITH

FROM: DREW HANSEN

RE: ALLOCATION OF PUBLIC HOUSING RESOURCES

DATE: AUGUST 15, 1997

PROBLEM

Public housing resources in America are often not allocated in a way that promotes the creation of stable low-income communities. Only about 20% of persons receiving housing assistance live in married-couple families. About half of families in public housing are on welfare. Families receiving subsidies pay 30% of their income in rent, which means that they have less incentive to earn more because their rent expenses will increase proportionate to earnings. Current housing policy does not provide incentives for married couples and families with an employed member to live in public housing.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

- Set aside 15% of public housing units for families headed by two individuals who are legally married. Ensure that current residents are not displaced by meeting the goal through a preference as vacancies gradually open (Empower America).
- Put families with a full-time worker to the head of the waiting list for a public housing subsidy, and set rent for these families at 25% rather than 30% of income (Christopher Jencks).
- Give residents of public housing a choice between paying 30% of their income or a flat rate set by their local housing authority (Rep. Lazio (R-NY), H.R. 2).
- Set aside additional Section 8 vouchers for single mothers who are not working, to ensure that they are not cut off from housing by the above reforms (Christopher Jencks).

Police in Housing

CITY OF ALEXANDRIA
PATRICIA S. TICER, MAYOR

Residential Police Officer Program:

The Alexandria Police Department introduced the Residential Police Officer (RPO) Program in 1992 as a pilot program aimed at reducing serious crime in one of the City's most vulnerable neighborhoods. The program is now in its third year of operation with four Police Officers residing in housing provided by the Alexandria Redevelopment and Housing Authority. In 1994, the Virginia Municipal League selected the RPO Program for its Achievement Award, and the National Center for Public Productivity at Rutgers University honored the program with its Exemplary State and Local Award.

The Residential Police Officer Program has had a marked impact on crime. Serious crime in the RPO Districts is on the decline. Community acceptance of the program is very high. While serious crime (homicide, rape, robbery, assault, burglary, larceny, and auto theft) increased by 10.3% in the city as a whole in 1993, serious crime in the first three RPO districts declined by as much as 30% during the same 12 months of 1993. This trend continued into 1994, when reported serious crime declined by 5% over the same period in 1993 and violent crime declined by 18.1%. Reductions in serious crime in each of the first three RPO districts demonstrate the program's effectiveness and the efficient use of police resources. The cost to operate the program is approximately \$260,000 per year (four RPOs), excluding public housing units (\$185 per month) provided by the Housing Authority. By comparison, the cost to staff one patrol officer position on a 24-hour basis is \$372,656.

In the fall of 1992, the City assigned Officer Michael Mason, the City's first Resident Police Officer, to a 12-square-block area (RPO District 1) containing 269 public housing units and 702 residents, over half under the age of 19. The pilot program proved so effective in reducing crime that it was expanded to a second neighborhood. In the spring of 1993, Officer David Ray took up residence in RPO District 2, a four-square-block area that was the site of a 1989 drug-related hostage incident in which one Police Officer was killed and another seriously wounded. The RPO Program was expanded again in the fall of 1993, when Officer Teri Mucci-Rector moved into Arlandria, a community with a fast-growing Latino population, many of whom reside in publicly assisted rental housing. In the fall of 1994, City Council approved a fourth Residential Police Officer, and Officer Reginald Sheffey moved into the Housing Authority's Andrew Adkins Homes community.

Under the RPO Program, a veteran Police Officer moves into a selected public housing community or other crime-vulnerable neighborhood, which becomes the Residential Police Officer's patrol "beat." Besides patrolling the neighborhood on foot, the Officer is on duty 24 hours a day and is responsible for enlisting residents in an organized effort to reduce crime and solve community problems.

The RPO Program is unique in that it decentralizes authority and allows the Residential Police Officers the flexibility to design traditional and non-traditional law enforcement strategies. Their work schedules are designed to meet specific community objectives. Residents of the RPO Districts are encouraged to organize into community associations and together to take charge of their neighborhoods. RPOs work with the residents to set goals and priorities for the neighborhood and to secure needed City services.

Contact: Lennis George, (703) 838-4700

POLICE OFFICERS LIVE IN PUBLIC HOUSING RENT-FREE

WISCONSIN

Milwaukee Has Had Pilot Program Since 1994. Since 1994, the city of Milwaukee has had a pilot program to encourage 20 police officers to live for \$1 a month in the city's public housing projects. [Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, 11/11/96]

Milwaukee Residents & Community Organizers Criticize Plan To Scale Back Program.

Milwaukee is scaling back the program to only 10 officers because of a 10,000 person waiting list for the residences and raising the rent to \$25 a month to comply with federal guidelines. Some residents, police officers and community organizers are criticizing the city Housing Authority's proposal to scale back this program. [Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, 11/6/96]

Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel Says Program Makes Projects Safer. The Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel wrote, "Still, there is no question that the 20 officers who live in the projects do provide a subtle but reassuring sense of police presence for other residents, ostensibly making the projects safer." [Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel, 11/11/96]

OHIO

In 1996 Ohio Passed Law To Allow Free Rent For Officers Who Live In Public Housing.

In 1996, Ohio passed a law that allows metropolitan housing authorities to give free rent and utilities to police officers willing to live in urban housing complexes. The measure passed the Ohio House unanimously. Rep. Jackie O'Brien (R-Cincinnati) said, "I hope it really catches on now because this is just a great idea." [Cincinnati Inquirer, 5/16/96]

Cincinnati Housing Authority Director Praises Program. Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority director Donald Troendle said, "Incentives for encouraging law-enforcement officers to reside in public housing is one important tool which helps to weave the safety net for low-income residents... My experience in turning around troubled housing agencies has proven over and over again that in order to effectively service public housing clients, the agency must use a variety of tools to instill a sense of safety and security among public housing residents." Troendle said the program is being tried in New Orleans, Washington, Baltimore, Milwaukee and other cities and that the program helps to reduce the stigma often associated with living in public housing. [Cincinnati Inquirer, 4/25/96]

ILLINOIS

Chicago Housing Authority Allows Officers To Live In The ABLA Homes. The Chicago Housing Authority allows two officers to live rent-free in a police substation on the first floor of a high-rise in Chicago's ABLA Homes. The officers work around-the-clock to protect residents of the project. The building was selected because of its drug trafficking. Officer David Hickman said of the drug dealers, "We'd run them off for eight hours. We leave, and they return..." [Associated Press, 10/31/96]

Resident Of ABLA Homes Credits Program With Reducing Crime. The ABLA homes complex has one of the worst crime rates of any project in Chicago. However, Eddie Marzette, who has lived at the complex for 2-1/2 years, said things have changed since the officers moved in. "You don't see all the little kids ripping around... Gang problems have slowed down. I come here at night, and you don't see nobody standing around, talking, drinking." [Associated Press, 10/31/96]

SECTION: News Pg. 10

LENGTH: 399 words

HEADLINE: Useful steps to fine-tune housing plan

BYLINE: RESLER

BODY:

Milwaukee's 2-year-old program to encourage a small group of police officers to live virtually free in the city's public housing projects has proved to be more than just law-and-order window dressing.

As Ricardo Diaz, city Housing Authority executive director, makes clear, the purpose of the program was not to have police officers out patrolling the projects while off-duty. Still, there is no question that the 20 officers who live in the projects do provide a subtle but reassuring sense of police presence for other residents, ostensibly making the projects safer.

Many of the officers also have done exactly what Diaz and other city officials hoped they would do by providing community service to their neighbors, taking seniors shopping or working with Boy Scout groups, for instance.

On the surface, the Housing Authority's decision last week to scale back the program beginning Jan. 1 may give the impression that the agency is displeased with the way things have turned out. But that would not be a fair assessment.

The biggest change to cut back the number of housing openings for officers from 20 to 10 reflects the tremendous demand for public housing, Diaz said. About 10,000 people now are on a waiting list for the projects, which house about 12,000 to 13,000 people.

Similarly, a decision to raise the officers' rent from \$1 a month to \$25 was made to comply with federal requirements.

But under the changes approved last week, it is likely that more than 10 officers will remain in the projects. Here's how:

To encourage new officers to get involved, the Housing Authority excluded the officers currently living in the projects from applying for the 10 new openings. They will be permitted to stay, although they would have to pay dearly for that right 30% of their salaries a month in rent, the same as other residents.

The important distinction is that housing development managers will be given the option to offer officers they believe are providing exceptional community service and some officers already are doing exactly that reduced rents of roughly \$350 to \$400 a month. The 10 new officers also would have to provide community service with youth groups in the projects.

None of these changes some of which amount to fine-tuning should really diminish this worthy program. If anything, they show that it is indeed working.

SECTION: News Pg. 3

LENGTH: 453 words

HEADLINE: Police officer housing program cut back But changes will allow some law enforcers to stay under exceptions

BYLINE: JESSICA MCBRIDE

SOURCE: Journal Sentinel staff

BODY:

The city's Housing Authority on Wednesday approved a plan scaling back the number of police officers living virtually free in public housing projects, but will allow a few officers who performed exceptional community service to stay under a special rent agreement.

For the past two years, under a pilot program, 20 police officers have been allowed to live in Milwaukee public housing projects for \$1 a month, provided they performed community service.

The idea behind the program was to increase safety and have officers forge relationships with residents.

Under the changes, the rent increases to \$25 a month and will be available to only 10 officers. None of the officers now in the program may apply for those 10 spots. Officials say they wanted to open some of those housing units to the thousands of low-income people on waiting lists and to allow other officers the program's opportunity.

To stay in their apartments, the current officers would have to pay 30% of their salaries a month the same percentage as other residents. That, because of their salaries, would mean rents of about \$1,000.

But the Housing Authority agreed Wednesday to allow the housing development managers to offer the officers they believe perform exceptional community service a special rent ceiling.

"It's an opportunity for new officers to come in," said Ricardo Diaz, the Housing Authority executive director, of the changes.

"However, if exceptional work is being done, we can accommodate those officers through ceiling rents," Diaz said.

The ceiling rent is calculated to equal average area rents. The special rent is being paid by 18 other project residents and is used to encourage residents to seek work and allow for working role models in the developments, Diaz said.

Bradley DeBraska, president of the Milwaukee Police Association, opposed the changes.

"When you change the status quo of something good, you better have extraordinary rationale," DeBraska told Housing Authority commissioners.

DeBraska produced a memorandum signed by Police Chief Philip Arreola in 1994 informing officers of the \$1 rent, which DeBraska maintained was a contract. It says the agreement for a \$1 rent would end upon termination from the police force.

But Diaz said the officers signed leases with the Housing Authority, not Arreola.

The changes, which must be approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, also require officers paying the \$25 monthly to perform community service with project youth programs.

The four housing projects are: Hillside Terrace, 1545 N. 7th St., Lapham Park, 1901 N. 6th St.; Parklawn, 4435 W. Marion St.; Westlawn, 6301 W. Sheridan Ave.

LOAD-DATE: November 8, 1996

SECTION: News Pg. 1

LENGTH: 751 words

HEADLINE: Some residents want officers to stay Having police live in public housing provides valuable volunteers, insist those who oppose cuts

BYLINE: JESSICA MCBRIDE and JULIO V. CANO, Meg Jones of the Journal Sentinel staff contributed to this report

SOURCE: Journal Sentinel staff

BODY:

Some residents, police officers and community organizers are criticizing a city Housing Authority proposal to scale back a program that encourages police officers to live in public housing projects.

The program's backers say it has made a positive impact and should not be changed, pointing to officers like William Robinson, who volunteers 30 hours a month at the Westlawn Housing Development taking senior citizens to dinner and grocery shopping, running Boy Scouts groups and setting up job fairs.

Others said Tuesday that there is too much demand for the housing units to rent 20 of them to officers for next to nothing.

Ricardo Diaz, Housing Authority executive director, said the 20 officers knew when they signed up for the program that they would have to move out by the end of this year. The program is being cut back from 20 to 10 slots for officers because the waiting list for public housing in Milwaukee has 10,000 names on it.

Diaz said criticism directed at the housing authority made it "appear that we were kicking out these 20 police officers. In reality, this was a two-year agreement between the officers and the housing authority.

"We're just trying to give 10 new officers the same opportunity the other 20 had," Diaz said.

The Housing Authority votes today on the proposal to restructure the two-year-old pilot program by cutting the number of officers given a special rent break from 20 to 10 and raising that rent from \$1 to \$25 a month. The meeting is at 1 p.m. in the first-floor boardroom of 809 N. Broadway.

The rent increase reflects the minimum rent boost that went into effect several months ago for all public housing units. Diaz said residents were concerned that if the minimum rent was raised for them, it should also increase for officers.

The proposed changes also would require that the 10 hours of monthly community work the officers must do must be done in the development where the officer resides.

Officers were sent a notice earlier this week saying they would have 60 days to move if the program were restructured. The 20 officers, including Robinson, who live in four Milwaukee housing projects would not be eligible to reapply for the special rent.

To remain in their apartments, the officers would have to pay what everyone else does 30% of their salary each month. Because of their salaries, that would mean monthly rents of up to \$1,000. Officers staying under this arrangement would not have to perform any community service.

"Our hope is that if they want to stay, they're certainly welcome, but it would be no different than the residents who have jobs and pay 30% of their salary or residents on Social Security who pay 30% of their income," Diaz said.

The program was designed to encourage officers to move into the Hillside Terrace, Westlawn, Parklawn and Lapham Park developments, to develop rapport with residents and to improve safety.

Some residents interviewed Tuesday said they had come to count on the officers.

"I think it's wrong," said Harriett Kussman, 77, a Westlawn resident. "I hate to lose our officer (Robinson). We look forward to him. We're elderly and we're alone. Who else would do that for us? Why not have the ones who have experience? We feel safer."

Robinson, 50, a 19-year officer, has lived in Westlawn Housing Development, 4435 W. Marion St., for 11/2 years.

"It was a low blow," Robinson said. "In my opinion, if someone's productive they should be allowed to stay. I sacrifice a lot of my time."

Gloria Wyatt, a community organizer at Westlawn, said officers made an impact by working as mentors with at-risk youths and in Big Brother/Big Sister programs.

"I know they've had an impact on the kids just by observing the changes," she said.

Because almost 50 officers were interested in the program when it was launched two years ago, Diaz said he expects many will apply this time around.

"Turnover is necessary," said Ald. Don Richards, a Housing Authority Board member. "The Housing Authority wants to get new officers in."

"The police officers do not have to live in public housing, they are paid a good salary and can live somewhere else. We decided to reduce it from 20 to 10 given the need of houses for people who don't have options the police officers do."

And some residents agree.

Frances Garland, 40, a Westlawn resident, said she is behind in her rent and facing eviction.

"I think it's unfair to have them pay \$1," she said.

LOAD-DATE: November 7, 1996

The Cincinnati Enquirer, May 16, 1996

May 16, 1996, Thursday

SECTION: METRO, Pg. C12

LENGTH: 348 words

HEADLINE: Police could live rent-free in urban public housing

BYLINE: CHRISTOPHER DAVEY

SOURCE: Enquirer Columbus Bureau

DATELINE: COLUMBUS

BODY:

By the end of summer, Cincinnati could take a step toward increasing police - citizen partnerships, under a bill passed by the legislature Wednesday.

The Ohio House unanimously passed a measure that would allow metropolitan housing authorities to give free rent and utilities to police officers willing to live in urban housing complexes.

"I hope it really catches on now because this is just a great idea," said Rep. Jackie O'Brien, R-Cincinnati, who pushed for the bill in the House.

Sponsored by Sen. Richard Finan, R-Evening, the bill already passed the Senate. It now goes to Gov. George Voinovich, who is expected to sign it into law.

That could allow the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority (CMHA) by the end of the summer to move forward with long-awaited plans to offer police a rent-free incentive to live in the communities they patrol, said CMHA Director Donald Troendle.

The idea is to foster respect and understanding between police and members of the community, while reducing crime and giving role models to the youngsters who live in CMHA's 7,000 housing units.

It also can reduce the stigma often associated with living in public housing, Mr. Troendle said.

But some cautioned against thinking free rent to a few police officers would go far to reduce crime and improve police -citizen relations.

"This is a well-intentioned, quick-fix, drop-in-the-bucket bill," said Cincinnati Councilman Tyrone Yates.

"The more difficult problem is how to reverse the trend of letting officers live outside the municipalities where they patrol. A longer-term answer to urban crime comes from promoting officers living in the city," he said.

Mr. Troendle said the program is being tried in New Orleans, Washington, Baltimore, Milwaukee and other cities.

The law changes conflict-of-interest laws that prohibit police from accepting more than their regular pay for doing anything related to their jobs. The bill also permits officers to obtain low-interest loans to buy after they have lived in a public housing complex for at least five years.

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LOAD-DATE: May 20, 1996

SECTION: METRO, Pg. B06

LENGTH: 382 words

HEADLINE: Police could live rent-free in projects

BYLINE: CHRISTOPHER DAVEY

SOURCE: Enquirer Columbus Bureau

DATELINE: COLUMBUS, Ohio

BODY:

Some Cincinnati police officers may soon be giving new meaning to the idea of taking your work home with you.

State and local Cincinnati officials have united in an effort to start a program to give free rent to police officers willing to live in urban housing projects.

The idea is to foster respect and understanding between police and members of the community, while giving role models to youngsters and reducing crime.

The director of the Cincinnati Metropolitan Housing Authority, Donald Troendle, on Wednesday testified to an Ohio House committee that is considering a bill that would allow the program to move forward. The bill would change state laws barring conflict of interest to exempt free rent for police officers in housing projects.

Mr. Troendle said such programs in other cities, from Washington, D.C., to Milwaukee, have met with enthusiasm from both residents and police.

"Incentives for encouraging law-enforcement officers to reside in public housing is one important tool which helps to weave the safety net for low-income residents," Mr. Troendle said.

"My experience in turning around troubled housing agencies has proven over and over again that in order to effectively service public housing clients, the agency must use a variety of tools to instill a sense of safety and security among public housing residents."

Mr. Troendle came to Cincinnati in 1994 from the Toledo housing authority, which he was widely credited with turning around. He brought a reputation for tough management.

The Senate has passed the bill, and the chair of the House Housing and Urban Affairs Committee, Rep. Jackie O'Brien, R-Cincinnati, said passing it in the House and making it law by the summer is a top priority.

Efforts to pass the bill started in early 1994 when Cincinnati City Councilman Nick Vehr told Sen. Richard Finan, R-Evendale, that state law stood in the way of starting the program and asked him to introduce a bill.

The bill passed the Senate, only to die in the House that year.

Mr. Finan reintroduced it in 1995, and he said he is confident this time it will become law.

Cincinnati City Council has passed a resolution supporting the program, as well as lobbied the legislature for the needed change in the law to carry it through.

LOAD-DATE: April 28, 1996

SECTION: Domestic, non- Washington, general news item

LENGTH: 747 words

HEADLINE: Chicago Cops Move Into Project

BYLINE: HILLARY CHURA

DATELINE: CHICAGO

BODY:

An eight-hour shift wasn't enough for two police officers who patrol one of the city's most crime-ridden housing projects. So they moved in.

Residents say it's already quieter and drug dealers have moved away from the 16-story building with shattered windows and graffiti-covered walls and Jimmy Boyd and David Hickman arrived just two weeks ago.

"It takes more than eight hours to understand what really goes on here," Boyd said. "By living here, we have a better understanding of what goes on who the key players are in causing all the trouble."

The Chicago Housing Authority officers are among more than 30 officers around the country who have moved into public housing units, and federal officials are urging more to do so, said Elizabeth Cocke, a spokeswoman for the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Boyd and Hickman, who live rent-free in a police substation on the first floor of a high-rise in the ABLA Homes, are working round-the-clock to protect residents they now call neighbors.

"These officers, by being there for 24 hours a day, will present a feeling they are truly a part of the community and whatever happens in that community be it good or bad," said Housing Authority Police Chief George Murray.

The officers, both bachelors, moved into their own specially renovated apartments with iron window guards, bulletproof glass and a heavy metal security door. Their new homes have two bedrooms, but are spartan within the police substation's white cinder-block walls.

Boyd, 33, and Hickman, 32, have patrolled the complex's 10 high-rises and scattered low-rises for five years. At community meetings, they heard some of the 6,500 residents complain of loud music, drug deals and vandalism most of which happened after Boyd and Hickman clocked out in the evening.

Hickman said they selected the building because of its drug trafficking. "We'd run them off for eight hours. We leave, and they return," he said.

The complex has one of the worst crime rates of any city project. From 1993 to 1995, its 47 arsons were the most. It ranked second for robberies, burglaries, thefts, assaults and batteries and aggravated assaults.

Eddie Marzette, who has lived at the complex for 21/2 years, said things have changed since the

officers moved in.

"You don't see all the little kids ripping around," said Marzette, 37. "Gang problems have slowed down. I come here at night, and you don't see nobody standing around, talking, drinking."

No one has been arrested since Boyd and Hickman moved in, but they said their mission is not to fill jails. They want to tutor children and start a network of residents to do the same, and help adults reclaim their buildings from gang members, drug dealers and vandals who tear out light fixtures and write graffiti on walls.

They plan to return to their homes after one year. Boyd says it will take at least that long to change things at the project.

"It's over a generation of criminal activity that's been going on, so we don't expect to get here Thursday and next week it's going to be all hunky-dory," Boyd said.

LANGUAGE: ENGLISH

LOAD-DATE: October 31, 1996

Working-class ethic made public housing proud; it could again

By Samuel G. Freedman

On a frigid morning in January 1948, about 500 people lined up, shivering but stoic, to apply for apartments in the first low-income-housing project to be built in New Rochelle, N.Y. War veterans still bunking with relatives, Italian laborers barely recovered from the Depression, blacks working as maids or drivers for the affluent — all had been waiting years for this chance.

None of them saw residence in the Robert Hartley Houses as anything but a privilege, and a privilege that connoted responsibilities. They had to produce wedding licenses and military-discharge papers; they had to submit to a virtual white-glove evaluation of their housekeeping skills.

And for 240 families who passed muster, there was the rule book. The rule book specified the week each tenant was required to sweep the stairwell and the type of ship-in acceptable hanging pictures. It dictated fines for a child who walked across the grass. Where the rule book left off, the building superintendents picked up.

Who has lost, after all, in the failure of public housing? In a political sense, liberals have. But day by day, the poor have.

Individually, the court cases that undermined public housing seemed reasonable enough. They won the rights of various types of people, from political

enforcing an unofficial curfew for teenagers with 11 p.m. knocks on the door.

The social compact established in the Hartley Houses and scores of similar developments made public housing one of New Deal liberalism's greatest successes for a time. Hartley was integrated by race and religion and animated by the ethics of hard work and upward mobility. As late as 1964, a single mugging in the complex of five buildings was rare enough to make news.

Just about that time, however, two devastating changes were taking place. The first generation of Hartley residents, having climbed into the working class, moved out, partly because their incomes exceeded the project's upward

limit for tenants. Simultaneously, the wave of litigation that came to be known as the "rights revolution" began destroying the honorable bargain between the taxpayers who funded the welfare state and the tenants who enjoyed its benefits.

Individually, the court cases that undermined public housing seemed reasonable enough. They won the rights of various types of people, from political

radicals to single parents to welfare clients, to be permitted into public housing and to stave off eviction from it.

Collectively, however, these cases taught the managers of public-housing projects — whether run by the federal government or, like the Hartley Houses, by state and local agencies — that screening current or prospective tenants invited costly litigation. The doors of public housing swung open as long as one was poor enough to qualify.

By the early 1980s, then, the Hartley Houses had gone from a stepladder for the working

poor to a sinkhole of the welfare poor, with 85% of the households headed by a single parent and relying on public aid. The local housing authority defaulted on loan payments to the state. An \$11 million program of repairs had to be halted due to rampant vandalism. Drug use and violent crime grew so brazen that in 1990 the tenants themselves asked the city to declare a state of emergency in the project.

Sadly, there is nothing new in the saga of the Hartley Houses. It is the story of the Robert Taylor Homes in Chicago, a vast project known locally as

"the world's biggest mistake," and of the Flag Houses in Baltimore, which will be razed in 2000. One of its predecessors in demolition, the Columbus Houses in Newark, N.J., had been pronounced by a federal inspector unfit even for animals. And who has lost, after all, in the failure of public housing? In a political sense, liberals have. But day by day, the poor have. They are the ones isolated and beleaguered; they are the ones left to beg for martial law.

So liberals and Democrats, including President Clinton, should not be so quick to dis-

miss the public-housing bill recently passed by the House of Representatives and headed for the Senate simply because it is the handiwork of the same conservative Republicans who designed the punitive welfare-reform law. The lesson of that law, in fact, is that when liberals refuse to reform failed social programs, they leave correction, by default, to the right.

The housing bill has its flaws, particularly in its intention to alter the Section 8 program that already succeeds in using market incentives with private landlords to distribute poor tenants throughout metropolitan areas rather than concentrating them in bleak, high-rise projects. But in direct ways, the measure would restore public housing to its original ideal of placing the fabric of community above the rights of the individual. Among its provisions, the bill would streamline the eviction of dangerous tenants, refuse housing to those with proven histories of sexual violence or substance abuse, and give housing officials unprecedented access to national criminal records in screening applicants.

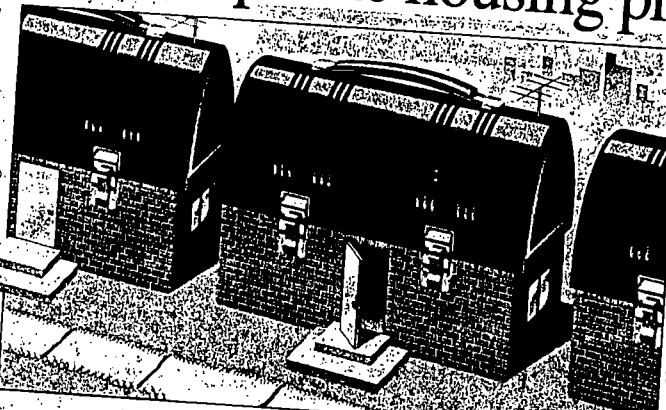
Most importantly of all, moderate-income tenants would be permitted to rent apartments at market rates alongside the poor. In the heyday of public housing, it was working-class families that es-

tablished the value system places like the Hartley Houses. Their return can again be a critical mass of stability and work ethic.

There is a reason many middle-aged blacks almost wistfully about the segregated neighborhoods of their childhood. Those neighborhoods, walled in by white racism, contained all the social classes from the hod carrier to the teacher to the dentist. With fair housing laws came black flight transforming ghetto into slum.

If some of the workers still in the central cities can be enticed by decent rents to live in public housing, then no one will benefit from their presence more than their impoverished neighbors. It is not sufficient to say, as opponents of the housing bill have, that the neediest people stand to lose. There already are huge waiting lists for public housing, and the federal government has gotten out of the business of building low-income projects. To leave the current system intact is only to punish the poor in the name of protecting them.

Samuel G. Freedman, author of *The Inheritance: How Three Families and America Moved from Roosevelt to Reagan and Beyond*, a finalist for the 1997 Pulitzer Prize, is a member of USA TODAY's board of contributors.



By Gary Vagstad, USA TODAY