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**TESTIMONY OF CITIZENS PLANNING AND HOUSING ASSOCIATION
ON THE DRAFT FY 2010 MOVING TO WORK PLAN AND ANNUAL PLAN
FOR THE HOUSING AUTHORITY OF BALTIMORE CITY**

May 4, 2009

We at the Citizens Planning and Housing Association (CPHA) appreciate the opportunity to testify today. CPHA is a nonprofit organization that for more than 67 year has advocated for housing opportunities in our City and metropolitan area that support the dignity of our citizens the well-being of our families and neighborhoods.

We continue to be deeply disappointed in the annual plan put forth by the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC). Moving to Work is supposed to provide a degree of regulatory flexibility to among other things “increase housing choices for low-income families,” and yet it is difficult to see those increased housing choices in this plan.

In fact, housing for families appears to have been substantially reduced in recent years, with HABC’s total inventory of public housing units and Housing Choice Vouchers shrinking by more than 2,000 since the end of FY 2005, when HABC began its Moving to Work demonstration program. Unfortunately, in FY 2010, HABC’s plan for replacement housing for families is to complete only 53 rehabilitation projects and develop 90 Thompson court ordered housing units.

The lack of creativity and ambition in this plan is even more disappointing given the City’s adoption in 2008 of the impressive Ten-Year Plan to End Homelessness. HABC should be playing a more substantial role in making sure that Baltimore’s extremely low-income households – including families with children – have a decent place to live and a chance to advance themselves economically.

While we recognize that HABC faces federal funding constraints, there is more it could and should be doing to carry out its mission to provide public housing to the extremely low income families of Baltimore in a way that increases opportunity for those families and increases quality of life in Baltimore and in the metropolitan area. We urge HABC to take two major actions in the next year:

First, HABC should adopt the one-for-one replacement policy for units demolished that was recently approved by the Resident Advisory Board. Adoption of such a policy would embody a commitment to HABC’s mission, would serve as a guide for use of HABC’s resources, and would begin to alleviate the tremendous waiting list for the City’s housing vouchers.

Second, HABC should adopt a more aggressive regional approach to replacement public housing. The experience of families who have been able to move to low-poverty communities under the Thompson partial consent decree has been remarkably positive in terms of feeling safe in their new communities, sending their children to high-quality schools, and accessing suburban employment. But HABC's FY10 plan does not envision pursuing this strategy any more than is required by the consent decree.

The consent decree provides a model for how families who want to improve their circumstances can apply to a program with rigorous standards and, as a result, have a chance to live in a safer community with good schools near relevant employment. HABC should be creative in looking for ways – particularly during the current economic downturn when scarce resources will go farther – to acquire or build new public housing units not just in Baltimore City, but in areas with low poverty around the metropolitan area. HABC can also use vouchers, with appropriate counseling, toward the same ends.

Over the past two years, with funding from The Annie E. Casey Foundation, CPHA has worked with like-minded organizations in a network called the Baltimore Regional Housing Campaign (BRHC), to supplement mobility counseling services with employment and job readiness services with impressive results for 75 Thompson partial consent decree families. We would be glad to work with HABC to see how our experience could help inform a more creative public-sector regional approach to providing effective housing choices for all families.

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