



**Tacoma
Housing
Authority**

Executive Director
Michael Mirra

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February 28, 2021

By email: amanda.wyma-bradley@mail.house.gov

Congressman Adam Smith
United States Congress
2264 Rayburn Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Support for COVID-19 Housing Choice Rental Assistance Bill

Dear Congressman Smith:

I understand that you will shortly introduce for Congressional consideration a bill to provide supplemental Housing Choice Vouchers to help low-income households, and landlords, manage the housing disaster resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. For the same purpose, the bill extends important waivers that the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) granted to give its programs a necessary flexibility to work better in the pandemic.

I write to convey the strong support of the Tacoma Housing Authority for this bill. The bill is a smart and essential part of the nation's effective response to the housing disaster resulting from the pandemic, for many reasons. Here are five of them:

- **The urgency:** The COVID-19 pandemic, and the resulting economic shut-down, has threatened the mass eviction of households who cannot pay their rent and the ruin of small landlords. At some point, the various eviction moratoria will end. If the various projections of what will happen next turn out to only half true, this nation will see an unprecedented measure of displacement and homelessness, and when small landlords sell out, a loss of rental inventory.
- **One-time payment of rental assistance is not enough either for tenants or landlords:** Your bill recognizes that the one-time payment of term rental assistance offered to date, while valuable, is not enough. It still leaves households at high risk for eviction. It still leaves landlords with the need to evict. The bill recognizes what the nation has already learned: the rental assistance of a Housing Choice Voucher is the best way to offer both a tenant and the landlord the necessary longer-term security both need.

The most effective use of the bill's Housing Choice Vouchers would be before those eviction moratoria end. Let us use the voucher to keep families in their home. This would be less expensive and less traumatic than offering the assistance only after an eviction to help a family find their next landlord.

- **The bill allows a necessary flexibility:** The bill acknowledges that the pandemic's housing challenges are new. So housing authorities need a flexibility to respond. For example, the bill allows them to use the assistance, not only to pay rent, but also to pay rent arrears. This can be an essential way to avoid eviction.
- **The bill uses the existing delivery system:** The nation already has a well-established system to deliver rental assistance in every community: the public housing authorities. They have what such a delivery system needs to put such funds to effective use: the trained staff, the relationships with landlords, the software, the inspectors, and the regulatory apparatus for an auditable use of funds. The bill takes advantage of this system by using it for what it is built to do.
- **Extends HUD waivers:** HUD has waived many of its normal program rules for federal housing programs so they can work better in a pandemic. The bill extends these waivers. The bill also shows the smart insight that we are learning whether any of these waived rules are unnecessary even in normal times. Accordingly, it directs HUD to consider what waivers should become permanent.

In all these ways, the bill is a smart response to an unprecedented housing emergency. The nation has invested billions in one-time housing assistance payments during the pandemic. Doing that has been a vital effort to forestall disaster for millions of households. Yet, if the only benefit the nation gets from that enormous investment is a modest reduction in rent arrearages and perhaps a short-term delay in eviction, then we must count that as a policy and financial defeat, as well as an unrelieved disaster for the most vulnerable victims of the pandemic. In contrast, your bill recognizes the value of a Housing Choice Voucher. A voucher helps a family, and a landlord, not only to avoid disaster, but also to recover a measure of stability. That stability will, in turn, allow them to regain a measure of prosperity. That is what builds families, builds neighborhoods, and promotes a housing market that works better for all.

The Tacoma Housing Authority is grateful to you.

Cordially,

TACOMA HOUSING AUTHORITY



Michael Mirra
Executive Director

Cc: Emily Warren, CLPHA
Stephen Norman, KCHA and CLPHA
THA Board of Commissioners