



Saving Section 8 Housing

By Martha Yager

Just when we think housing problems in New Hampshire can't get worse... they do. On April 22 the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) announced it was changing the way it reimbursed local and state housing authorities for Section 8 vouchers. For New Hampshire, this meant that the NH Housing Finance Authority (NHHFA), which manages 3217 of the state's 9127 vouchers, and which had a fiscal year ending June 30, faced a \$1.8 million shortfall—and only two months left in which to figure out how to make up that difference.

The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program is the HUD program that allows people who can't afford market rate housing to rent an apartment where they choose. The tenants pay 30% of their income (sometimes more) and the government pays the rest, up to a certain limit. This program was begun 30 years ago during the Nixon administration and modified under Reagan so that what the government paid was more closely related to local market rate rents. About one-third of Section 8 tenants are elderly or disabled and 61% are families with children. Since the demise of HUD efforts to build large amounts of affordable housing, this program has been the main way households get help with housing.

In addition to putting tenants directly at risk, the funding crisis may well make landlords less interested in leasing to potential tenants that have Section 8 vouchers. And it may make lenders (banks and tax credit investors) question the viability of new construction projects that intend to rent to voucher holders.



National Low Income Housing Coalition rallies outside HUD

Fortunately HUD timed its announcement with the arrival in Washington DC—at a hotel literally in the shadow of HUD—of 500 housing advocates for the National Low Income Housing Coalition's annual conference. Most of us already had meetings scheduled with our

Congressional delegations on April 27. NLIHC staff quickly set up a meeting with the director of the voucher program at HUD—and scheduled a demonstration outside.

After a month of advocacy, which included unprecedented bipartisan efforts from the local level, NH State Senate and by our Congressional delegation, HUD announced that it will release some money that it owed to NHHFA from 2003, which



Marie Luz, who works in a Nicaraguan clothing factory, met with an AFSC-NH delegation in March.

AFSC Opposes CAFTA

On 28 May 2004, representatives of the US and five Central American countries signed the United States—Central American Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), which will do more than just eliminate tariffs and trade barriers between those countries. Pushed by powerful corporate interests, this agreement was crafted in

secret. CAFTA is based on the seriously flawed North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and it extends and amplifies the harmful aspects of NAFTA in the following ways...

1. CAFTA would hurt workers in the US and in Central America.

◆ CAFTA would “legalize” sweatshops by only requiring countries to enforce their own labor laws, even though many fall far below international labor standards. Fines for labor violations would be paid by the country to itself...NOT by the violating company!

◆ Competition will continue to move jobs out of the US and push wages lower throughout the region.

2. CAFTA would especially harm those who are most vulnerable.

◆ CAFTA, like NAFTA has done in Mexico, would pit poor Central American farmers against highly subsidized US agribusiness. Grain prices would drop dramatically in Central America, forcing small producers off their farms and into overcrowded cities where unemployment is already high.

◆ CAFTA would limit generic drug production by preventing open access to necessary medical test data, preventing the poor from receiving life-saving medications.

3. CAFTA stifles democracy.

◆ The CAFTA text was not made available to the public until after negotiations were complete. Little public comment or

CAFTA- Bad for Central America, Bad for USA [from page 1]

input was solicited.

◆ Fast Track Authority forces Congress to vote Yes or No on trade deals – preventing our representatives from responding to constituents and influencing or amending the agreement.

4. CAFTA prevents governments from protecting the welfare of their people.

◆ CAFTA could be used to promote privatization and deregulation of essential services, such as health, education, and water, resulting in prohibitive price increases, reduced access, and compromised quality.

◆ CAFTA would prevent governments from giving preferences to local firms and from promoting gender equity, social justice, and respect for human rights when granting contracts.

◆ CAFTA will lead to further outsourcing of jobs, including those related to government services.

5. CAFTA would prevent local communities from protecting their natural resources.

◆ CAFTA will be used to weaken national and international environmental standards. Companies would have the right to sue any government that obstructs their capacity for profit with environmental regulations.

◆ Multinational corporations would be given patents on plants that would take away farmers' traditional rights to save their own seeds.

Fair trade agreements are possible. They MUST, however, be developed democratically and with the aim to foster a more just, sustainable, and prosperous human society.

Thanks to AFSC Summer Intern David Beck for his work on this CAFTA fact sheet, and an upcoming briefing paper on CAFTA and water. For more information on CAFTA, go to: www.afsc.org/trade.



Natalia Plodnikova and Amanda Hardy, students at New England College, met Ada Luz on the AFSC spring delegation to Managua, Nicaragua. The group visited a blue jeans factory in the Free Trade Zone, a sewing cooperative, union and anti-privatization activists, and a local school and clinic. They also helped Women In Action build their new community building in La Primavera, a poor neighborhood near Lake Managua. Members of Women In Action will visit New Hampshire this fall with Compas de Nicaragua.

Get Registered, Get Informed, Get Out and Vote

As the election approaches AFSC-NH will be working to increase civic participation in the elections process and in voting. We are developing resources to take door-to-door in low income neighborhoods, to religious congregations, and to public events to encourage people to register and vote.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

* Sign up to help get people in faith communities registered to vote. * Sign up to take fliers to public events. * Sign up to go door-knocking to encourage people to get involved in the election. * Go to campaign

events to bird-dog candidates on housing, peace, jobs, and trade policy. Go to www.afsc.org/vote for suggested questions to ask candidates and to get more information.

Contact Martha at the AFSC office to volunteer.



Saving Section 8 [from page 1]

mostly covers the deficit.

The immediate crisis was relieved, but NHHFA will have to operate with reduced funding through September. Several housing authorities in the state have closed their waiting lists, which were already 2-3 years long. Households newly entering financial crisis due to illness or job loss will not be able to get assistance and will have to turn to local welfare offices (which rely on local property taxes) for help.

Prospects Worse for 2005

In addition to this gloomy picture, the proposed funding for fiscal year 2005 is worse. Not only does HUD's proposal not provide enough funds to meet the needs of existing voucher holders, it also proposed changing the program to a block grant and removing regulations that target assistance to those with the most meager incomes. Ironically, HUD said that doing so will allow it to serve more people. Less money can only serve more people if the grants it gives are smaller, which means either that current voucher holders will have to pay more of their income for housing or that new voucher holders will not be as poor and therefore not need as much assistance. Calculations by the Center for Budget and Policy Priorities estimate that under the proposed block grant funding formula, New Hampshire would lose funding for 2655 vouchers by 2009.

This proposal comes from the same administration that has declared it intends to end chronic homelessness. The NH Interagency Council on Homelessness is considering joining with several other states to challenge HUD to address this inconsistency and to fully fund the voucher program.

For more information and ideas on what you can do, contact Martha Yager, myager@afsc.org, or (603) 224-2407, or visit: www.nlhc.org.

AFSC and Immigrant Activists Challenge Discriminatory DMV Policy

Legal Action Likely

Permanent rules that require non-citizens from all over New Hampshire to come to the Concord office of the Division of Motor Vehicles instead of their local substations went into effect in June, following several months of efforts by immigrants, AFSC, and other organizations to stop the discriminatory practice.

For nearly three years, the DMV requirement that non-citizens use only its Concord office for license renewals and new license applications has caused hardship for immigrants, especially those without the ability to drive. It is not unusual to hear of a non-citizen going to her local DMV office, only to be told she has to go to Concord instead. After she finds a friend or family member to take time off from work to drive her there, she might wait in line for an hour, only to be told she brought the wrong documents, and must repeat the process over again.



Eva Castillo

The DMV policy is not only inconvenient, it is also an unconstitutional denial of equal rights, say several lawyers who have looked into the issue.

With members of a wide range of groups, including the Immigrant Rights Task Force, the Arab American Forum, the NH African Initiative, and the Granite State Organizing Project, the AFSC tried to persuade the DMV to change its policy. Efforts included two meetings with high level DMV and Department of Safety officials, oral and written testimony in the DMV's rule-making process, and attendance at three meetings of the Joint Legislative Committee on Administrative Rules (JLCAR), a legislative committee with oversight over administrative rules.

On June 18, the JLCAR refused to block the DMV rules, despite advice from its own legal counsel that the rules are unconstitutional under federal and state law.

Eva Castillo, a Manchester resident and member of the AFSC-NH Support Committee, said "we will not stand for back-of-the-bus treatment."

Elliott Berry, an attorney for New Hampshire Legal Assistance, called the action "a disgrace," and said his agency will consider legal action to stop the DMV practice. AFSC's next step will be to encourage all non-citizens who have been sent to the Concord office or otherwise been treated unfairly by the DMV to contact NH Legal Assistance.

To reach the NH Legal Assistance lawyers, call 1-800-921-1115, ext. 214.

Remembering Lionel Johnson

By Arnie Alpert

Manchester's first Martin Luther King Day Celebration was held in the basement of Brookside Church in 1983 during a fierce blizzard. It was there that I first met Lionel Johnson, one of the event's key organizers.

Lionel stayed at the center of Manchester's celebrations of Martin Luther King Day right up until his death, June 5, at the age of 81. As one of the founders of Manchester's NAACP branch in 1964, Lionel was also at the center of local and statewide civil rights activism. And as one of the leaders of the Greater Manchester Black Scholarship Foundation from its founding in 1974, Lionel was a staunch supporter of access to higher education.

In 1989, Lionel resigned as Manchester NAACP president to run for State Representative, where he intended to devote his considerable energy to efforts to win passage of a state holiday honoring Dr. King. He could not have known how long it would take, but no one was surprised that Lionel remained at the center of that struggle, too, until its successful conclusion in 1999.

Others knew Lionel as a father of 5 daughters, as the owner of Fashion Cleaners, as a neighbor. For me, Lionel was someone I looked forward to seeing at monthly meetings of the Martin Luther King Coalition for twenty years. Whenever he was absent, I missed his ideas, his smile, and his spirit.

It's hard to imagine Martin Luther King Day without him. But I take comfort in remembering what Lionel told me in 1988, when the Coalition gave him a special award "You only have so much time on earth to live," he said. "If you don't produce something for humanity, what are you here for?"

Lionel made the most of his time on earth. He set example for the rest of us.

Contributions in Lionel's honor may be sent to the Greater Manchester Black Scholarship Foundation, PO Box 534, Manchester NH 03105.

AFSC-NH Fundraising Update

Thanks to many people, we are most of the way towards our fundraising goal for this fiscal year, which ends Sept. 30. If you have not yet given to AFSC-NH this year, please consider sending a donation now. We are grateful for grants from the NH Charitable Foundation, the Clowes Foundation, Haymarket People's Fund, Anne Slade Frey Charitable Trust, and the NH Endowment for Health. We also thank the NH Housing Finance Authority for a technology grant.

Quaker Witness is a publication of the New Hampshire Office of the American Friends Service Committee. In its work for social justice and peace, the AFSC expresses a Quaker belief in the dignity and promise of every person and a faith in the power of love and nonviolence to bring about change. Arnie Alpert is AFSC's New Hampshire Program Coordinator. Martha Yager coordinates the Housing and Community Development Project. Liana Foxvog is the Youth Organizer. Contributions to AFSC are deductible for federal income tax purposes.

Boston Social Forum - July 23 to 25

What may be the most important gathering of the year will take place in Boston this summer. In the tradition of the World Social Forums held in Porto Alegre, Brazil and Mumbai, India, the Boston Social Forum is being organized to bring together progressive community-based activists and organizations to answer some very basic questions: What kind of future do we want for our region? For our nation? For the world? What is our vision of a better society?

Through hundreds of workshops, cultural events, plenary sessions, and giant convocations of the entire forum held on the Boston campus of the University of Massachusetts, it will bring people together to present their best analysis of the present, and their best ideas for the future, across the breadth of politics, economics, science and technology, culture and faith - in the context of the wars that are raging and corporate globalization. The BSF will provide a venue for social movements to exchange information, network with one another, form new alliances, and push our movements forward. Held just before the Democratic National Convention, the Social Forum will put cutting edge movements and creative projects in a national and international spotlight.

AFSC is actively involved in planning several conferences, known as "tracks," within the larger Forum. These include:



Water for Life, Not for Profit – Sponsored by the Water Allies Network, which includes AFSC-NH and Save Our Groundwater, the "water track" will focus attention on movements to keep water accessible, affordable, safe, and under democratic rather than private control. Info: watertrack@bostonsocialforum.org.

A World Working Together for Peace – Sponsored by AFSC and the European Network for Peace and Human Rights, this event will combine conferences on "US Hegemony and Pre-emptive War," "Dangers of Nuclear War and the Imperative of Abolition," and "The World Says No to War!" Prominent speakers from Asia, Europe, Africa, and the United States will be featured. Info: www.afsc.org/pes.htm.

Active Arts – Organized by AFSC's Critical Breakdown Youth Program and others, Active Arts is designed to inspire, educate and mobilize the Hip Hop Generation toward social action.

Criminal Justice – Workshops will explore alternatives to mass imprisonment, death penalty abolition, and other issues.

Immigration – Workshops on human rights of immigrants in the post 9-11 environment, with organizers from several immigrant communities.

For more information about the Boston Social Forum, and to pre-register, go to: www.bostonsocialforum.org, or call 617-338-9966.



Nicaraguan Dancers at AFSC Benefit Oct. 2

A troupe of traditional Nicaraguan dancers, all members of the grassroots group, Women In Action, will perform at an AFSC benefit Saturday evening, Oct. 2, in Concord. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend.

The women are all from the neighborhood where AFSC-NH has taken groups for the past 3 years.

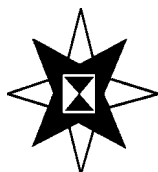
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