

June 12, 2018

The Honorable Andy Barr
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

To Congressman Barr:

I write on behalf of the National Low Income Housing Coalition and our members to thank you for bringing much needed attention to the housing needs of individuals struggling with substance use disorders (SUDs) through your bills, the “*Transitional Housing for Recovery in Viable Environments (THRIVE) Demonstration Program Act*” (H.R. 5735) and the “*Comprehensive Addiction Recovery through Effective Employment and Reentry (CAREER) Act*” (H.R. 5736). While both bills have worthy aims, we are concerned that the THRIVE Act, as written, would divert scarce housing resources away from the lowest income seniors, people with disabilities, families with children, people experiencing homelessness, veterans, and other vulnerable individuals in need of housing assistance. The bill would impose arbitrary time limits that are counterproductive to the bill’s purpose, and it would make it difficult for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to provide sufficient oversight, reducing government accountability. For these primary reasons, we oppose the THRIVE Act, and we encourage you to amend the bill to address these concerns.

NLIHC is dedicated solely to achieving socially just public policy that assures people with the lowest incomes in the United States have affordable and decent homes. Our members include state and local housing coalitions, residents of public and assisted housing, nonprofit housing providers, homeless service providers, fair housing organizations, researchers, public housing agencies, private developers and property owners, local and state government agencies, faith-based organizations, and concerned citizens. While our members include the spectrum of housing interests, we do not represent any segment of the housing industry. Rather, we focus on policy and funding improvements for people who receive and those who are in need of federal housing assistance, especially extremely low income people.

Federal investments in affordable homes and rental assistance are significantly underfunded. As a result, three out of every four households eligible for housing benefits are turned away due to a lack of funding. Unlike the CAREER Act, which provides additional resources to address the housing needs of people struggling with SUDs, the THRIVE Act provides no new funding. Instead, the bill diverts 10,000

Housing Choice Vouchers away from other individuals in critical need of housing assistance. As such, we urge you to amend the THRIVE Act to provide additional funding to address this need, rather than reduce our nation's ability to serve all households in need by further dividing scarce, oversubscribed resources.

Under THRIVE Act, it would be extremely difficult for HUD to properly and effectively oversee the demonstration program. By administering the program through entities that provide drug treatment and job training services, and not the 3,800 public housing agencies (PHAs) that already administer housing vouchers, the THRIVE Act would significantly increase the need for oversight. This could lead to errors and wasted federal dollars. Moreover, HUD is not the appropriate federal agency to establish standards for substance use recovery. Rather, the Department of Health and Human Services should lead on this effort.

We are also concerned that the bill would allow service providers who participate in the demonstration to establish arbitrary time limits, which are counterproductive to the bill's goal of helping people recovering from SUDs. Imposing time limits will only cut people off from the very housing benefits that make it possible for them to maintain their sobriety post-treatment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Diane Yentel".

Diane Yentel
President and CEO
National Low Income Housing Coalition