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United States Senate
COMMITTEE ON BANKING, HOUSING, AND URBAN AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, DC 20510–6075

September 21, 2007

The Honorable Alphonso Jackson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street, SW
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Jackson:

I have been alerted that HUD plans to imminently issue approval for the demolition of four major public housing sites in the city of New Orleans. While I understand the need to quickly move forward with public housing demolition and redevelopment in order to help revitalize this important city, I have grave concerns about HUD moving forward with the demolition of pubic housing units without adequate plans to ensure that replacement housing is developed for low-income families.

As you know, prior to Hurricane Katrina's devastation in the Gulf Coast, there were over 7,000 units of public housing in New Orleans, of which 5,100 were occupied by low-income households including many children, people with disabilities, and seniors – our nation's most vulnerable citizens.

It is my understanding that HUD's redevelopment plans for these four major public housing sites only replace a fraction of the original units, making the current housing crisis in the city even worse. Affordable housing is sorely needed in New Orleans. In the year after Katrina, rents increased almost 40 percent. Fair market rents set by HUD increased from $676 in 2005 to $978 in 2007 for a modest 2-bedroom apartment. HUD's redevelopment plans will only serve to deepen this affordable housing crisis, especially for the families living at or below the poverty level in New Orleans.

I urge you to ensure that prior to any demolition, HUD adopts reasonable plans to replace and redevelop public housing as healthy, vibrant communities. As you know, I co-authored a bill with Senator Landrieu, S.1668, the Gulf Coast Housing Recovery Act, which ensures that public housing is replaced, but provides needed flexibility so that the housing authority and developers can create mixed-income communities.

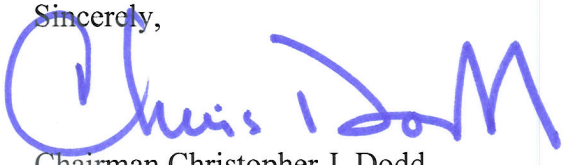
S. 1668 requires that all units occupied prior to the storm be replaced with public housing or other affordable housing units on- or off-site. In addition, the bill requires that unoccupied units be replaced with housing vouchers so there is no net loss of affordable housing in the city. This bill ensures that public housing in the city is not rebuilt using

the same failed model of the past. Under our plan, affordable housing is created in a way that deconcentrates poverty, builds mixed-income and healthy communities, and preserves the affordable housing in New Orleans. The redevelopment plan that HUD has adopted for Lafitte, in partnership with Enterprise and Providence Community Housing, adopts these principles, and should be used as the model for other redevelopment. The plan provides residents with an opportunity to return; one for one replacement of subsidized units integrated in mixed-income communities on-and off-site; and resident participation in planning and developing of the new community. HUD should ensure that all public housing development proceeds in this way.

I urge you to only move forward with demolition if you can meet these replacement housing requirements.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this serious matter.

Sincerely,



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