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## **House hearing on HUD's Moving-to-Work program highlights public housing challenges**

*by Liza Getsinger, National Housing Conference*

Yesterday the House Financial Services Subcommittee on Housing and Insurance brought together a panel of public housing authority (PHA) directors and the director of Financial Markets and Community Investment from U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) to discuss “Evaluating How HUD’s Moving-to-Work Program Benefits Public and Assisted Housing Residents.” The hearing, chaired by Rep. Blaine Luetkemeyer (R-Tenn.), emphasized potential program expansion. Currently the Moving-to-Work (MTW) demonstration—implemented in 39 PHAs around the country—grants statutory and regulatory waivers and establishes more funding flexibilities for agencies that administer the public housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs.

The committee heard testimony from Mr. Daniel Nackerman from the San Bernardino County Housing Authority and Mr. Gregory Russ from the Cambridge Housing Authority, both directing MTW-designated PHAs, who explained that they believe the MTW program has helped their agencies increase efficiency and effectiveness by allowing them to take innovative approaches to help residents work towards self-sufficiency. PHA directors without the MTW designation urged Congress to expand the program and allow their agencies the opportunity to benefit from greater regulatory and financial flexibility. Mr. Mathew Scire from GAO cautioned that in the absence of performance data or benchmarks, the recent GAO study could not draw conclusions about program performance. He added that without this information, “it would be difficult for Congress to know whether an expanded MTW would benefit additional agencies and the residents they serve.”

Members on both sides of the aisle asked questions that seemed in general to support MTW expansion. Ranking Member Rep. Michael Capuano (D-Mass.), while voicing his support for MTW expansion, did raise concerns about funding reductions. He asked panelists if additional funding would increase the number of people assisted and reduce waiting lists. All PHA directors answered affirmatively, and MTW PHA directors acknowledged that even with program designation there is more demand for housing assistance than they can meet.

Rep. Capuano’s implied point goes well beyond the topic of the hearing. Housing need exceeds available assistance by approximately four to one. Years of funding reductions, particularly for public housing, have created deep challenges that are not easily solved. For example, a 2010 study commissioned by HUD estimated the public housing capital backlog at roughly \$26 billion and the accrual need at \$3.4 billion per year. The deteriorating housing stock combined with a growing need for housing assistance will need to be part of a broader conversation on public and assisted housing reform—a conversation that will need to include stakeholders outside of the public housing community.