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Advocates for low-income housing often find themselves caught between homeowners in need and looming government budget cuts.

Public and subsidized housing programs remain at risk with budget cuts still looming in the nation's capital.

Public housing authority experts appeared before the House Financial Services Committee Wednesday to defend the Moving-to-Work program (MTW), which focuses on expanding education opportunities while increasing housing choices for low-income families.

"MTW is the only program that allows for innovative approaches to preserve these valuable affordable housing assets while encouraging the economic advancement of the families who live there," said Gregory Russ, executive director of the **Cambridge Housing Authority**.

However, the MTW program has met with mixed reviews.

In 2012, the **Government Accountability Office** recommended the **Department of Housing and Urban Development** improve its guidance to MTW authorities for reporting performance data.

Matthew Scire, director of financial markets and community investment for the GAO, noted HUD has partially agreed with these recommendations and has since issued new guidance to MTW agencies.

The current issue at hand is if the Moving-to-Work program should be expanded and if it offers enough benefits for households to continue tapping into HUD's Section 8 funds.

Section 8 is consuming a larger part of HUD's budget due to more people participating in the program. The increasing consumption of HUD resources by the Section 8 program has raised concerns among the program's critics and supporters.

Unless Section 8 is reformed or the MTW program is expanded to provide greater flexibility, many fear Section 8 will either drain HUD resources from other programs or require Congress to appropriate new funding for the program, subcommittee members suggested.

HUD and some stakeholders believe an expansion of public housing authorities to use the MTW program could provide more information on the effectiveness of the program and allow more authorities to test innovative ideas, according to the GAO.

"Until more complete information on the program's effectiveness and the extent to which agencies adhered to program requirements is available, it would be difficult for Congress to know whether an expanded MTW would benefit additional agencies and the residents they serve," Scire explained.

Public housing authority members have a different view and firmly believe the MTW program has transformed their agencies by setting higher standards.

For instance, Daniel Nackerman, executive director of the **San Bernardino County Housing Authority**, said his agency executed 22 innovative initiatives using the MTW program since 2008.

"For any future legislation that proposes the expansion of MTW, existing sites would like to have current contracts that expire in 2018 made permanent if any future bill does not reflect the current MTW program we operate today – or at least have protections to allow them to continue existing activities," Nackerman explained.

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