

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 14, 2007

The Honorable George W. Bush  
President  
The White House  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to request an immediate 60-day moratorium on the demolition of New Orleans' public housing developments: C.J. Peete, St. Bernard, Lafitte, and B.W. Cooper. The Housing Authority of New Orleans (HANO), currently under the control of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), is demolishing these homes under executive authority. Although a temporary restraining order has delayed the demolition of these units to next week or possibly longer, we believe that additional time is needed in order to resolve several outstanding issues surrounding the City's affordable housing needs, including the need for a comprehensive plan for replacement of any demolished public housing units.

We believe that New Orleans' recovery requires a viable plan for its affordable housing needs. We are committed to working with you and the Department to execute such a plan for replacing affordable housing currently scheduled for demolition. The entire New Orleans metropolitan region is in dire need of the kind of affordable housing that will allow citizens to return and grow the workforce. The Department's premature push for complete demolition impedes this goal. Given the poor condition of New Orleans' rental housing stock, the rising levels of homelessness in the City, and the sound construction of some of these developments, these housing resources should not be demolished without a viable full replacement plan in place.

As you know, the area is still recovering from Hurricanes Katrina and Rita and the Federal levee breaks, which destroyed 67 percent of the housing stock in Orleans Parish and almost 100 percent in neighboring St. Bernard Parish. Much of this housing has yet to be rebuilt. The shortage of housing has pushed rents in the City, and surrounding metropolitan area, well above their normal levels, with rents rising 45 percent since the storm.

The lack of available and affordable housing is being felt acutely across the City and region. According to a January 2007 study by UNITY of New Orleans, since January of 2005, the number of homeless in the City has more than doubled to almost 12,000 individuals. Many of these homeless residents are living under Interstate

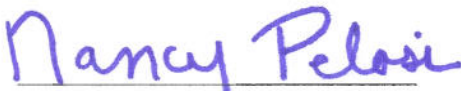
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10 or in Duncan Plaza, next to New Orleans City Hall. Experts at the Brookings Institution cite a net 9,000 unit decrease in affordable housing for the City of New Orleans. According to an August study by the Louisiana Family Recovery Corps, 50 percent of families wanting to return to the City earn less than \$20,000 a year. It is clear that affordable housing, including public housing, is essential for these families.

Given the City's housing needs and the current availability of these affordable housing resources, we are extremely disappointed by the Department's insistence on moving ahead with this demolition despite insufficient resources to make up the clear loss of affordable housing. For the Federal government to reduce affordable housing units at a time when the City is desperate for this very type of housing is a misuse of taxpayer funds and runs counter to the mission of the Department, not to mention the core values that we share. Additionally, HANO has not completed a promised survey of displaced residents and has indicated that this important document now will not be ready until late January at the earliest. HANO has also not provided meaningful opportunity for residents to collect their belongings. The additional sixty days would allow for the resolution of these and other essential issues, including the completion of a comprehensive plan for HANO redevelopment of all affordable units, and replacement of any units proposed for demolition.

As many in the country prepare to spend the holiday season at home with their families, we urge you to consider these New Orleans families and their homes. We strongly urge you to halt the demolition of these units.

Sincerely,



NANCY PELOSI  
Speaker of the House



HARRY REID  
Senate Majority Leader