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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

JERROLD NADLER
10TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

REPLY TO:

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
2110 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-5635

DISTRICT OFFICE:
201 VARICK STREET
SUITE 669
NEW YORK, NY 10014
(212) 367-7350

DISTRICT OFFICE:
6605 FT. HAMILTON PARKWAY
BROOKLYN, NY 11219
(718) 373-3198

Web: <http://nadler.house.gov>

September 4, 2013

Mathew Wambua
Commissioner
New York City Department of Housing Preservation & Development
100 Gold St.
New York, NY, 10038

Dear Commissioner Wambua:

We are concerned about recent changes to the administration of the New York City Department of Housing Preservation & Development's (HPD) Section 8 Housing Voucher Program. Recently, thousands of Section 8 voucher holders received a letter from HPD, dated July 22, 2013, informing them of policy changes to the agency's Section 8 program. HPD explained in the letter that it implemented the changes as a result of funding cuts caused by the Federal Budget Control Act of 2011. We urge the agency to carefully consider all other available alternatives before implementing these changes.

We certainly recognize the serious fiscal challenges agencies like HPD are facing as the sequester imposes relentless, draconian budgets cuts and places unprecedented constraints on Section 8 and many other essential programs that serve vulnerable residents. HPD and other agencies across the country are grappling with how to do more with less, while facing the possibility of having to terminate participating families. We commend HPD for taking steps to ensure that that no one currently in the program will lose their home due to budget cuts. However, we remain concerned that the specific changes HPD has chosen to implement to its Section 8 payment and subsidy standards will create a serious burden for needy families.

While HPD is correct to pursue cost-saving reforms in the face of significant budget cuts, these changes ask those with the least to sacrifice the most. The families that will be impacted by these changes are our poorest and most vulnerable, including seniors, people with disabilities, and families with children, many of whom are on low or fixed incomes. By reducing HPD's subsidy and payment standards, some families will experience a significant increase in their monthly rent share, forcing them to choose between putting food on the table and paying their rent. In addition, HPD's decision to reduce the subsidy standard based on the number of people living in a home will require many families to move placing additional costs and burdens on those already struggling to get by. While we understand the agency must look for ways to save, we urge you to explore options other than cutting subsidies to residents who are closest to the poverty line. Furthermore, it is unclear exactly how much HPD will save as a result of these new policies. We

urge HPD to re-examine these changes and consider alternatives that minimize the impact on our most vulnerable families and ensure there are no evictions of people currently receiving Section 8 vouchers.

We are also concerned with how HPD informed our constituents and our offices of these policy changes. HPD did not provide advanced notice to tenants' groups, community organizations or elected officials about the changes, causing a great deal of confusion for tenants. In addition, the July 22nd letter to tenants failed to clarify which policies would impact Enhanced Voucher recipients and which would impact Regular Section 8 Voucher recipients, leaving tenants, community leaders, and elected officials with many unanswered questions. We ask that in the future, HPD reach out to the communities affected by major policy changes before they are implemented to avoid such confusion.

In Congress, we will continue to fight against further cuts and push for much-needed additional funding for Section 8 as the FY2014 congressional budget and appropriations process moves forward. Thank you for your attention to this matter and your commitment to providing safe, decent affordable housing for low-income New Yorkers.

Sincerely,

Arnold Nadler

Yvette D. Clarke

Joe E. Alwan

Eliot L. Engel

Mark Fern

Joseph P. ...

Stephanie ...

Andrew B. ...

John ...

Richard ...

cc: Laurie LoPrimo, Assistant Commissioner, HPD