

From Housing to Homelessness: The Truth Behind the CHA's Plan for Transformation

What's happening to public housing in Chicago?

As a part of federal housing legislation, the Chicago Housing Authority and the United States Department of Housing have mechanistically destroyed 13,702 units of public housing since 1999. Not only does this undertaking uproot and dissolve established communities of neighbors and friends, but it also displaces more than 20,000 legal residents, primarily female-headed families with children, who are being forced from their homes against their will. For many, the outcome is utter homelessness. A recent report from the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless found that during a six-month period 172 families ended up in homeless shelters because of the CHA's plan. Before the plan took effect, there were four homeless shelters in the city. Now there are 14.

But most of those buildings are nasty and pretty much vacant. Shouldn't they be torn down?

In order to empty out residents, CHA has allowed mismanagement and building neglect. For instance, most residents live with rat infestation, flooding, broken elevators, and sewage overflow. As a result, many sites have vacancy rates upwards of 40%. Even though 55,000 families are on the waiting list for public housing in Chicago, CHA officials have refused to open up vacant units in buildings not currently slated for demolition, let alone make conditions safe and bearable for remaining residents. Due to the lack of low-income housing in Chicago, existing buildings should be properly maintained and rehabilitated, not torn down. Redevelop, don't displace!

Won't public housing residents be incorporated into new, mixed-income communities?

Only 24% of new units to be constructed will be in mixed-income communities. A recent HOPE VI report estimates that only 11.4% of public housing residents will be eligible to relocate into these developments. Although some residents will be allowed to return to new, mixed-income communities or rehabbed buildings, there will be a net loss of 13,629 units. More than halfway into the Plan for Transformation, only 1,200 family units have been built, and the source of funding to create more units is rapidly disappearing from the federal budget. For instance, of the 700 proposed public housing units in the 2,000 unit complex replacing Robert Taylor Homes, only 250 have been funded. Families should not be displaced when the money to rebuild new units is not established. Also, there is little empirical evidence that shows that mixed-income arrangements actually benefit public housing residents.

So they'll be provided for under the Section 8 Voucher program, right?

Even though there are 60,000 households on the waiting list for Section 8 vouchers in Chicago, the CHA seeks to relocate 6,000 residents through this program. As an outcome of poor social services, housing discrimination, and low vacancy rates, many voucher recipients are unable to find apartments in the private market. Of those who find housing, more than 90% wind up in low-income minority urban communities instead of moving to mixed-income communities. CHA and HUD decisions have the effect of being a policy of resegregation. In addition, many of these families are likely to be evicted within the first year for dubious reasons such as having too many children or making more noise than their neighbors. There is a distinct relationship between housing stability and a child's ability to learn. Families displaced by forced eviction from public housing have suffered, on average, a loss of 4-6 months of education progress each time a family moves.

Shouldn't people just go out and get a job for once?

Work responsibility is not the sole solution to eliminating poverty. Many working people cannot afford to live in Chicago. One in seven families in the city pay over 50% of their monthly income on housing. The

hourly wage needed to pay the average rent for a 2-bedroom apt in Chicago is \$18.00. Public housing residents and those coming off welfare earn on average \$8.00 per hour. A policy of work responsibility cannot be successfully implemented without a living wage.

How is this situation a Human Rights Crisis?

CHA and HUD's deliberate displacement and resegregation of public housing residents not only violates the Fair Housing Act, which mandates that every person has the right to safe, decent, and affordable housing, but also many international human rights treaties and other statements. For instance, The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, of which the United States was a principal drafter and has adopted, provides: "Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well being of himself and his family, including...housing." (Art. 25(1))

HOUSING SHOULD BE A RALLYING POINT FOR ACTION! Attend a Coalition to Protect Public Housing meeting to get involved:

Every Friday, 10:30AM, 900 N. Hudson. Call or email Deidre for more information: tel: (312) 280-2298, DEEANGEL204@aol.com <<mailto:DEEANGEL204@aol.com>>

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS:

The Coalition to Protect Public Housing
984 N. Hudson St. Chicago, IL 60610 tel: (312) 280-2298
<<http://www.chicagohomeless.org/>>

Chicago Coalition for the Homeless
www.chicagohomeless.org

Jewish Council on Urban Affairs
www.jcua.org <<http://www.jcua.org/>>
<<http://www.jcua.org/main.html>>

Community Renewal Society
www.crs-ucc.org/main.html <<http://www.crs-ucc.org/main.html>>

National Center on Poverty Law
www.povertylaw.org <<http://www.povertylaw.org/>>

National Low Income Housing Coalition
<<http://www.nlihc.org/>>

SOURCES:

"The Plan for Transformation and the Residential Movements of Public Housing Residents."
<<http://www.northwestern.edu/ipr/people/lewispapers.html>>

"Race, Class, and the Abuse of State Power: The Case of Public Housing in Chicago"
<<http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/voorheesctr/racepaper.htm>>

Implementing Chicago's Plan to Transform Public Housing
<<http://www.lafollette.wisc.edu/publications/otherpublications/2004/Berg-CHA-Plan.pdf>>

The HOPE VI Program- What About the Residents?
<<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=310593>>

CHA Relocation Counseling Assessment
<<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410549>>

Residents at Risk: A Profile of Ida B. Wells and Madden Park
<<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=310824>>

The HOPE VI Resident Tracking Study
<<http://www.urban.org/url.cfm?ID=410591>>

Testimony of William P. Wilen, Attorney. National Center on Poverty Law, prepared for the hearing on HOPE VI and the Low-Income Housing Crisis. Chicago, IL. November 10, 2003.

