

# Cutbacks to Section 8 program could increase homelessness

By Charlene Muhammad  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

LOS ANGELES (NNPA) - The government's proposed five-year 40 percent cut to federal housing has propelled single mothers, low-income families and homeless activists into a campaign to save Section 8, a rental assistance housing program, which, if dismantled, they say, could launch families nationwide into homelessness—35,000 of them next year in this city alone.

"It's just going to make things far more complicated ... if you can't take care of people on Section 8, how are you going to get these people off the streets," stated veteran homeless activist Ted Hayes, founder of the Dome Village, which is a former

encampment site which uses dome-shaped lodgings as non-threatening affordable transitional housing to the chronically homeless person and the community.

In its 2005 budget report, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) introduced the Flexible Voucher Program (FVP) reforms to help low-income families become self-sufficient.

Currently, there are no incentives toward independence from Section 8 for the 1.9 million families it currently serves, according to HUD.

However, the Los Angeles Coalition to End Hunger and Homelessness (LACEHH) reports that the minimum wages earned by

many holding Section 8 vouchers, or on the waiting list for them, are too low to secure rental rates in L.A. County without assistance.

Under Section 8, implemented in L.A. in 1975, tenants pay about 30 percent of their income for rent, while the rest of it is paid with federal money.

The FVP program would still provide direct funding from HUD based on dollars, not on the number of units a community receives, however.

"Today, families must wait years to receive a voucher," said HUD Assistant Secretary Michael Liu in a statement released by HUD. "Our reforms are intended to create innovative solutions for those Americans in need

of housing assistance."

But many believe that the reforms are achieving just the opposite.

Recently, the Housing Authority of the City of Los Angeles (HACLA) notified 1,500 families, many of them homeless and in shelters, that their subsidy vouchers would not be honored.

According to LACEHH, 3,600 additional families may have their housing contracts terminated.

While housing cuts pose the loss of permanent shelter to many, Housing and Urban Development Secretary Alphonso Jackson announced last month a \$6.5 million award to help house people with long-term or chronic homelessness within 13 communities nationwide.

Funding housing on one end, and cutting it on another is indicative of HUD's wanting it both ways, LACEHH stated.

For Hayes, the housing and homeless problem is not one of money alone, and even if there was money to build houses, he stated, there is just not enough land to accommodate the multitudes. In addition, he added, people who are not ready for routine housing would destroy property without a proper transitioning process.

"We need people on the ground with folks on a daily specific basis until these poor people learn to live responsibly in a routine fashion. When you keep throwing money out there with no responsibility, that money is wasted," Hayes

continued.

Blacks are disproportionately represented among the homeless population in L.A. with estimates ranging from 17-50 percent compared to 10 percent with the total population, according to a March 2004 study by the Institute for the Study of Homelessness and Poverty.

Now, with Section 8 cutbacks, activists believe the figures will worsen.

"Many of these folks will be dead or in prison, and it's because of the direction of the economy. We're in very serious trouble, and if we allow this to continue, it is going to get all of us," stated Hayes on the future of housing and homelessness.

Charlene Muhammad writes for the Final Call.

## Kerry

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vention on Thursday. "Throughout the primary process, we've had a very diverse campaign. Now we are building a general election system that is diverse," he said.

Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., the Black caucus chairman, said he was satisfied with the access minorities had to Kerry, noting that he and fellow Democratic Reps. Jim Clyburn of South Carolina and Harold Ford of Tennessee are among House members asked to play key roles in the campaign.

"I believe the door is open and we are present and accounted for," Cummings

said. "I really believe in my heart that those trying to judge Kerry early in the campaign are a bit premature in regards to diversity."

The campaign noted that Kerry has enjoyed strong support from minorities during the primaries. Exit polling conducted for The Associated Press in 18 states that have held Democratic primaries this year found Kerry easily winning support among Whites, Blacks, Hispanics and Asians.

Cahill invited anyone concerned with diversity to visit campaign headquarters in Washington. "In every office in the campaign, we are looking to have people with dif-

ferent backgrounds and experiences and different approaches to the campaign," she said.

Blacks and Hispanics typically vote overwhelmingly Democratic, though Republicans are making efforts to capture a larger share of support from Hispanics.

President Clinton won 83 percent of the Black vote in 1992, and 84 percent in 1996. Four years later, Democrat Al Gore received 90 percent of that vote.

Among Hispanics, 61 percent voted for Clinton in 1992, followed by 72 percent in 1996. Gore captured about 62 percent of the Hispanic vote in 2000.

A campaign staff's makeup suggests what the White House staff could look like if the candidate wins, said Lisa Navarette, a vice president of the National Council of La Raza, a non-partisan Hispanic advocacy group.

The average voter may not focus on this, she said, "but for people concerned about

the strength of the commitment to diversity, you would have to be concerned."

Census Bureau estimates show that in 2002, 81 percent of Massachusetts residents were White, 7 percent were Hispanic and 5 percent were Black. Nationally, the population is about 68 percent White, 14 percent Hispanic and 12 percent Black.

"The Kerry campaign certainly at the top definitely needs some African-Americans, needs Hispanics, it needs to be more diverse," said David Bositis, a political scientist at the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies, a think tank focused on Black issues.

"But he's got plenty of time to address this."

## Cummings

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made similar predictions four years ago and still lost to the GOP.

The Senate has no Black members, but that could also change. Rep. Majette of Georgia and Illinois State Sen. Barack Obama are running for Senate seats. Obama has already clinched his party's nomination and Majette is a long-shot candidate.

"I believe that African-Americans are poised to play a major role in this presidential election cycle because they understand the fundamental issues and what's at stake in this election," says Georgetown University Political Science Professor Donna Brazile, 2000 campaign manager for Al Gore.

"But, like all other Americans, they must be given adequate resources and materials to not only inform their vote, but also to secure their vote and to make sure that their votes are counted."

Republicans are not standing by waiting to see what happens. They aim to win at least 30 percent of the Black vote in November and are creating activities to establish rapport.

U. S. Rep. Kay Bailey Hutchison (R-Texas) last week met in Washington with some 500 African-Americans from around the country in a two-day event billed as an "African-American Summit."

"This summit was a unique opportunity to have a productive dialogue about the most pressing issues facing African-Americans across the country," Sen. Hutchison said in a press release. "As we move forward, I am confident that leaders in Washington will be better prepared to adopt policies that benefit all Americans."

But it has been the Bush policies that have caused current inequities in economics and health care for African-Americans, Cummings says.

"When compared with White Americans, African-Americans are more than twice as likely to be unemployed; twice as likely to be denied home financing, and twice as likely to die from accidents or disease at every stage of their lives," Cummings says.

"Will American voters—especially Americans of color—vote in numbers that are sufficient to overcome all of the advantages of incumbency and money held by the other side and change the direction of our country?" he asks.

"No one has a complete answer to this question. However, I can tell you that millions of Americans, and especially African-Americans, are very concerned about the condition of our country—and for some very good reasons."

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