

Brookline Housing Authority

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Board of Commissioners
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September 30, 2013

The Honorable Jamie B. Eldridge, Senate Chairman
Join Committee on Housing
State House, Room 413A
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Kevin G. Honan, Housing Chairman
Joint Committee on Housing
State House, Room 38
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairmen Eldridge and Honan,

We are pleased to submit the following written testimony for the hearing scheduled for October 1, 2013 on legislation regarding public housing.

The Governor has proposed legislation that would consolidate all 240 LHAs into six regional agencies. Massachusetts NAHRO has proposed legislation that would encourage collaboration among LHAs but not require extensive consolidation.

The Brookline Housing Authority believes that consolidation of small agencies into regional agencies, over a transition period of several years, would result in more efficient operations and improved housing and services for low income residents. Given that agencies generally do not seek to consolidate of their own volition, a combination of required consolidation and incentives to collaborate should be included in any legislation.

We urge the legislature to enact legislation in the current legislative cycle, to provide tools, resources, and timetables for improving the efficiency of state public housing in Massachusetts. Given the scarce resources available and the extreme needs of low-income people, it is important to take action right away.

Before recommending a few provisions for pending legislation, we note that DHCD, LHAs, and industry associations in recent years have established a variety of successful collaborations and efficiency programs. Common to all these approaches is that collaboration and shared resources save money and result in improved service delivery. These recent initiatives include:

- The consolidated Sec. 8 waiting list operated by Massachusetts NAHRO.
- Streamlined procedures for procurement of goods and services established by DHCD and other state agencies.
- Group insurance purchasing by LHAs.
- DHCD's programs that provide technical assistance and support for energy efficiency.
- The PowerOptions program for non-profits and public agencies to purchase utilities under low-cost, long-term contracts.
- DHCD's programs that provide "house doctor" architects, regional attorneys, and regional service coordinators.
- DHCD's recent initiatives to streamline architect selection for small projects.

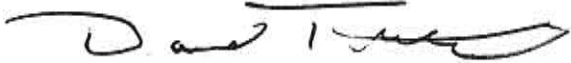
New initiatives in upcoming legislation should include:

- Strong incentives for regionalization and consolidation. Currently, there is no clear economic incentive for LHAs to consolidate. The legislature should offer encouragement for consolidation such as funding for regional computer networks, extra capital funds for regional approaches to capital planning, and funding to hire skilled professionals to run the larger construction and management organizations that will result from consolidation.
- A centralized public housing waiting list. We applaud DHCD for establishing a working group on this topic. The legislature should support this initiative. The waiting list should combine state and federal apartments as much as possible.
- Public housing accounting bureaus. Individual LHAs currently spend a lot on in-house bookkeepers and outside fee accountants. Given that most accounting tasks are similar across all LHAs, service bureaus with skilled staff and advanced technology should, over time, reduce operating costs statewide and improve the quality of financial reports.
- One or more organizations to provide technical support and training for LHAs to raise new sources of capital. Some state public housing developments need comprehensive rehabilitation. Funding for large scale repairs is available from tax exempt bonds and Tax Credits. These sources of funds are complex and not familiar to most LHAs.
- Funding for regional and multi-agency integrated social services case management.
- Expansion of the DHCD architect "house doctor", regional service coordinator, and regional attorney programs. Consider placing these specialized skills in a quasi-governmental organization outside of DHCD in order to deliver expertise more quickly and flexibly.

Development of innovative new programs will require strategic investment of funds and technology. Early investment will provide measurable paybacks, as evidenced by some of the innovative approaches already in place.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this urgent and important discussion.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David Trietsch". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

David Trietsch, Chairman
on behalf of the Commissioners