

Mr. Speaker, this will be one of the most important issues on which this House will vote this year, and I ask that this very thoughtful letter by this broad range of groups be printed here for the benefit of the Members who will have to vote on this.

March 22, 2004.

Hon. C. W. BILL YOUNG,  
Chairman, Committee on Appropriations, Washington, DC.

DEAR CHAIRMAN YOUNG: The undersigned groups are writing to express our strong opposition to the severe cut to the Section 8 voucher program in the HUD Fiscal Year 2005 budget. The President's request for the voucher program is more than \$1.6 billion short of fully funding all vouchers in use. At this funding level, approximately 250,000 low income families with children, senior citizens, and people with disabilities could lose their vouchers.

This shortfall comes at a time when a recent analysis of the American Housing Survey reveals 31 percent of all households had housing problems in 2001. Now is not the time to cut the funding for a housing program that has served as the "linchpin" of our federal housing policy for the last two decades.

We also urge you to oppose the proposed Flexible Voucher Program that would make significant changes in the program's structure. The proposed changes would create a block grant program and eliminate many of the long-standing rules that benefit low income families. Under the proposed block grant, PHAs would receive a lump sum that would not be adequate to serve all current voucher holders. The elimination of statutory requirements including targeting the program to the lowest income families and ending the requirement that tenants pay no more than 30 percent of their income for their rent could have a devastating effect on families across the nation.

The Administration has expressed concern about the growth in costs of the voucher program. This increase was largely the result of rising utilization rates, expansion of the voucher program by Congress, and the widening gap between rental housing costs and family incomes in recent years. However, a recent study by CBO projects that the growth rate of Section 8 expenditures will slow to 1.8 percent in fiscal year 2005. They also project the costs to continue to level off because of the cooling of the housing market as well as increases in wages as the economy recovers.

The Section 8 voucher program is an effective and critical resource. Housing assistance is needed by the many low income families with children, elderly, people with disabilities, and victims of domestic violence who would not have safe, decent, and affordable housing without it. Housing authorities cannot be expected to do more with inadequate resources. We respectfully urge you to provide the necessary funding for all existing vouchers and reject HUD's plan to dismantle the housing voucher program.

Sincerely,

- ACORN
- Alliance for Children and Families
- Alliance for Healthy Homes
- Alliance for Retired Americans
- American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging
- American Association of People with Disabilities
- American Association on Mental Retardation
- American Baptist Churches USA
- American Friends Service Committee
- American Network of Community Options and Resources
- American Society on Aging

- Association for Gerontology and Human Development in Historical Black Colleges and Universities
- Association of University Centers on Disabilities
- Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
- Brain Injury Association of America
- Catholic Health Association
- Child Welfare League of America
- Children's Defense Fund
- Church Women United
- Corporation for Supportive Housing
- Evangelical Lutheran Church in America
- Families USA
- Generation United
- Gray Panthers
- International Union, UAW
- Jewish Council for Public Affairs
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation
- Lutheran Services in America
- National Advocacy Center of The Sisters of the Good Shepherd
- National Affordable Housing Management Association
- National AIDS Housing Coalition
- National Alliance for The Mentally Ill
- National Alliance to End Homelessness
- National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth
- National Association of Housing Cooperatives
- National Association of Long-Term Care Ombudsman Programs
- National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers
- National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems
- National Coalition for Homeless Veterans
- National Coalition for the Homeless
- National Council for Community Behavioral Healthcare
- National Council of Jewish Women
- National Council on Independent Living
- National Council on the Aging
- National Health Care for the Homeless Council
- National Housing Conference
- National Housing Trust
- National Low Income Housing Coalition
- National Mental Health Association
- National Network to End Domestic Violence
- National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness
- National Rural Housing Coalition
- National Student Campaign Against Hunger and Homelessness
- Network, A National Catholic Social Justice Lobby
- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
- Sargent Shriver National Center on Poverty and Law
- The Arc of the United States
- The Coalition on Human Needs
- The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Housing Task Force
- The Enterprise Foundation
- The Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
- Union For Reform Judaism
- United Cerebral Palsy
- United Spinal Association (formerly Eastern Paralyzed Veterans Association)
- United Way of America
- U.S. Jesuit Conference
- Volunteers of America

FREEDOM FOR VICTOR ROLANDO ARROYO CARMONA

HON. LINCOLN DIAZ-BALART

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 25, 2004

Mr. DIAZ-BALART of Florida. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak about Victor Rolando Ar-

royo Carmona, a prisoner of conscience in totalitarian Cuba.

Mr. Arroyo is vice-president of the group Forum for Reform as well as a member of the Union of Independent Cuban Journalists and Writers. Mr. Arroyo is a leading pro-democracy activist and has been a constant target of the totalitarian regime. Because of his peaceful activism for freedom and democracy, Mr. Arroyo has been harassed, beaten, and imprisoned in Castro's abhorrent gulag.

According to Human Rights Watch, in January 1995, Mr. Arroyo was beaten and thrown in prison for nine days after organizing a ceremony to commemorate the birth of José Martí. In 1996, he was sentenced to eighteen months in the totalitarian gulag and held in a "tapiada" cell—a narrow, dark and extremely humid cell—for "disrespecting" the government. In January 2000, Mr. Arroyo was charged with "hoarding" and sentenced to eighteen months in the gulag for organizing a toy drive and distributing toys to needy Cuban children. In October 2000, he was beaten by the dictatorship's goons on three separate occasions. In October 2001, rocks and bottles containing flammable chemicals were thrown at the home where Mr. Arroyo lives with his wife and children.

Despite these horrifically repressive intimidation tactics, despite being locked in the totalitarian gulag for distributing toys to needy children, Mr. Arroyo has never stopped demanding freedom and democracy for the Cuban people. Even with first hand knowledge of the brutal, inhumane, consequences of depicting the true reality of the totalitarian regime, Mr. Arroyo has bravely continued to write the truth about Castro's nightmarish oppression.

In 2002, Human Rights Watch awarded Mr. Arroyo a Hellman-Hammet grant in recognition of his courage in the face of political persecution. This prestigious grant is awarded annually to writers around the world who have been targets of political persecution.

On March 18, 2003, as part of the tyrant's brutal March 2003 crackdown on peaceful pro-democracy activists, Mr. Arroyo was arrested by Castro's agents of repression. After a sham trial, Mr. Arroyo was sentenced to 26 years in the totalitarian gulag.

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Arroyo supports basic human rights for all Cubans. Despite being beaten, harassed, and now, once again, languishing in the grotesque, totalitarian, squalor of Castro's gulag, he is fervently committed to the cause of freedom. My Colleagues, we must demand the immediate release of Victor Rolando Arroyo Carmona and every prisoner of conscience suffering in the totalitarian gulags of the nightmare called the Castro regime.

INTRODUCTION OF H.R. 4032, THE VETERANS FIDUCIARY ACT OF 2004

HON. SUSAN A. DAVIS

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 25, 2004

Mrs. DAVIS of California. Mr. Speaker, during the first session of this Congress, the Subcommittee on Benefits of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs held a hearing concerning the Department of Veterans Affairs