

**Over 60 National Organizations Oppose
Punishing Non-Profits Working to Advance
Democracy in the U.S.A.**

October 21, 2005

Dear Colleague:

Attached you will find a letter signed by over 60 national organizations sent to the Speaker of the House earlier this week regarding a provision, in the form of a manager's amendment to H.R. 1461, the *Federal Housing Finance Reform Act*. The provision would disqualify nonprofit organizations from receiving affordable housing grants if they have engaged in voter registration and other nonpartisan voter activities, lobbying, or produced electioneering communications, with their private funds. Most troubling is that under the proposed provision a nonprofit organization would be disqualified from receiving affordable housing funds if it has affiliated with an entity that has engaged in any of the restricted activities.

The letter raises many of the same concerns outlined above. For example, the letter states that the proposed "affiliation" language is "blatantly undemocratic" and possibly unconstitutional. The letter also rightly states that the language in the manager's amendment is "intended for no other purpose than to reduce access to voting by low income people." The letter - signed by numerous faith-based, civil rights and housing groups - raises serious objections, and I urge all Members to review it carefully.

Sincerely,

/s/

Betty McCollum
Member of Congress

**NATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OPPOSED TO VOTER RESTRICTIONS IN
H.R. 1461**

*c/o National Low Income Housing Coalition
727 15th St., NW, 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20005
202-662-1530*

October 19, 2005

The Honorable Dennis Hastert
Speaker
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. Speaker,

The undersigned national organizations have learned that the compromise reached by House Leadership on H.R. 1461, the Federal Housing Finance Reform Act of 2005, includes provisions that would restrict the ability of American citizens to engage in our democratic process. We urge that these provisions be removed before the bill comes to the House floor for a vote probably during the week of October 24.

Specifically, we object to the restrictions on non-profit organizations that apply for grants through the Affordable Housing Fund established in H.R. 1461. The egregious provisions, which we strongly oppose, disqualify any nonprofit organization that has engaged in voter registration, voter identification, get-out-the-vote, and other nonpartisan voter participation activities in the 12 months prior to application from eligibility for the Affordable Housing Fund grants. It further prohibits non-profit organizations that receive grant funds from engaging in these activities.

These grants are to be used solely to produce and preserve housing that is affordable to extremely low and very low income families. For the first two years, the funds will be prioritized to rebuild housing in the areas devastated by Hurricane Katrina. The anti-democratic provisions do not just prohibit the use of Affordable Housing Fund dollars from being used for these purposes. The prohibition applies to any resources of a grantee, including funds specifically for civic engagement activities.

Moreover, even if a particular non-profit organization does not itself engage in any of these activities itself, "affiliation" with an organization that does would disqualify the nonprofit from applying for Affordable Housing Fund grants. Notably, for-profit companies are exempt from these restrictions.

These provisions are blatantly undemocratic and raise substantial constitutional questions in the attempt to limit the rights of affiliation. They are intended for no other purpose than to reduce access to voting by low income people. People of color are overrepresented in the low income population, making this a civil rights issue. Moreover, these provisions have serious implications for the broader nonprofit community by setting a very dangerous precedent.

The low income housing community has worked tirelessly to establish the Affordable Housing Fund in H.R. 1461, because we know the dire need for funds to increase the nation's affordable housing stock. But nothing is worth compromising the right of all Americans to participate in our precious democracy.

Sincerely,

- Alliance for Healthy Homes
- Alliance for Justice
- American Counseling Association

- American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
- American Network of Community Options and Resources
- Americans for Democratic Action
- Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN)
- Campaign for America's Future
- Center for Community Change
- Center for Law and Social Policy
- Child Welfare League of America
- Children's Defense Fund
- Cities for Progress at the Institute for Policy Studies
- Coalition on Human Needs
- Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities
- Corporation for Supportive Housing
- Enterprise Foundation
- Environmental Working Group
- Episcopal Church
- Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law
- Leadership Conference on Civil Rights
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation
- Lutheran Services in America
- Mercy Housing
- National AIDS Housing Coalition
- National Alliance of HUD Tenants
- National Alliance on Mental Illness
- National Alliance to End Homelessness
- National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)
- National Association of Housing Cooperatives
- National Coalition for the Homeless
- National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy
- National Community Reinvestment Coalition
- National Council on the Aging
- National Council of Nonprofit Associations
- National Council on Independent Living
- National Fair Housing Alliance
- National Head Start Association
- National Health Care for the Homeless Council
- National Housing Conference
- National Housing Law Project
- National Housing Trust
- National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty
- National Low Income Housing Coalition
- National Neighborhood Coalition
- National Policy and Advocacy Council on Homelessness
- National Urban League
- OMB Watch
- Poverty and Race Research Action Council

- Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Washington Office
- Public Housing Authorities Directors Association (PHADA)
- RESULTS
- Smart Growth America
- Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future
- Technical Assistance Collaborative
- The Arc of the U.S.
- U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG), National Association of State PIRGs
- United Cerebral Palsy
- United Church of Christ Justice and Witness Ministries
- Women's Committee of 100
- YWCA USA