



Statement by Charles W. Gould, National President, Volunteers of America

Volunteers of America is a national, nonprofit, spiritually based organization. As one of this country's largest nonprofit providers of quality affordable housing, we have been extremely supportive of provisions in H.R. 1461, the Federal Housing Finance Reform Act of 2005, that would create an "Affordable Housing Fund." With resources from the Fund, Volunteers of America would be able to take major steps towards ensuring that our most vulnerable citizens have a safe place to live, moving our nation closer to the goal of ending homelessness.

We are particularly pleased with a proposed change to H.R. 1461 that would target Fund resources to displaced residents and areas destroyed by Hurricane Katrina. Volunteers of America has provided housing and social services to residents of the Gulf Coast for over 100 years, and we are committed to supporting both short and long term recovery in that region.

However, we understand that in order to bring H.R. 1461 to the House floor for a vote, the bill's sponsors have agreed to another amendment – one of great concern to us. This provision would prohibit nonprofits that register voters or assist voters in going to the polls, with their own non-federal funds, from applying for and receiving grants from the "Affordable Housing Fund."

Volunteers of America operates housing and human services programs all over the country. In many of those programs our staff members assist elderly and disabled residents in registering to vote, and transport them to the polls on Election Day. These are non-partisan activities, undertaken in order to assist people in exercising their constitutional right to vote. We are troubled that the proposed amendment might be interpreted to prevent Volunteers of America and other nonprofits from leveraging affordable housing grants unless we no longer help our clients in these common sense ways.

Consequently, we call on Members of the House to maintain their support for the "Affordable Housing Fund" provisions of H.R. 1461, while opposing this amendment that would prevent seniors and persons with disabilities from exercising their right to vote. Surely, the House cannot intend to prevent America's leading nonprofit affordable housing providers from using the "Affordable Housing Fund" to provide permanent homes for our country's most vulnerable citizens.

There are no limits to caring.[™]

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