

**Testimony of  
Kevin Marchman, Executive Director of the National Organization of  
African Americans in Housing (NOAAH)**

**The Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity**

Chairman Ney, ranking member Waters, members of the subcommittee, my name is Kevin Marchman and I am the executive director of NOAAH, the National Organization of African Americans in Housing. I want to thank you for the opportunity to comment on HR 1641. This bill would reauthorize the HOPE VI program for revitalization of severely distressed public housing and to provide financial assistance under such program for main street revitalization or redevelopment projects in smaller communities.

Mr. Chairman, members, NOAAH is a champion of affordable housing opportunities for all people, especially people of color. NOAAH's membership is a unique combination of public housing agencies, including executive staff, housing professionals, consultants, contractors, industry trade groups, resident groups and other advocates. Indeed, as a former public housing resident, public housing executive director, housing authority board chairman and HUD assistant secretary, I have the vast pleasure of leading an organization that has the diversity and the experience to look at issues, programs and legislative initiatives from many perspectives. And while the subcommittee is interested in NOAAH's views on the HOPE VI Program, I would like members to be aware that NOAAH's advocacy extends beyond simply those issues highlighted today and includes initiatives and programs targeting environmental and health issues, specifically lead, mold and pests, expanded home ownership for minorities, economic development for the low income, fair housing, especially increased penalties for predatory lending, and the aggressive disposition of the FHA portfolio. And while our members often find themselves on competing sides of the same issues, all are committed to expanding housing opportunities for African Americans and other disenfranchised minorities.

There are three points about the HOPE VI program I would like to make this afternoon; First, HUD has not had a more successful public housing program than the HOPE VI program, ever, period. In 1994, I had the privilege to establish what became the National Office for the HOPE VI program. From the very beginning, we saw the HOPE VI program as one of innovation, experimentation and yes, the total transformation of the public housing system. The fact is, prior to the initiation of the HOPE VI program, the new construction and renovation of the nation's public housing stock was based on a system that itself was as outdated as the buildings it sought to replace or fix. The key and the success of the HOPE VI program was and is an individualized and customized approach to each development, each community, and each public housing authority. We negotiated with agencies to produce flexible project agreements to ensure what was being proposed was actually going to fix what was wrong.

My second point. The HOPE VI program has always been more than a simple housing program. The program was designed to transform whole neighborhoods, entire communities. It asks the housing authority and its residents to think differently. The program structure insists that piecemeal approaches would not do. The program structure insists that every stakeholder from the elected official, the affected families, community groups, church organizations and many others must be informed and supportive. Indeed, even the application process for the grant mandates certified proof of meetings and efforts to include the community in the process. Furthermore, given the detailed nature of the development process, HUD rightfully asks applicants to line up, leverage and explore every source of financing available. This and other pre-development preparation is needed, as many mistakes in the almost now forgotten urban renewal programs wouldn't be repeated.

I mention this point in reaction to the accusation that the HOPE VI program fails because it is a slow spending program. It should be a slow spending program. It needs to be a carefully executed program. The HOPE VI program was and is designed to include residents, developers, bankers, community leaders, school districts, government officials and many others. All of this takes time. Good work takes time.

It was not long ago when city fathers alone made decisions on the financing and placement of public housing developments. Very little, if any public debate or involvement was had. We have seen the results of that sort of decision-making and it did not work. The HOPE VI program changed the way in which public housing is placed and why. The HOPE VI program is not your father's public housing program. Indeed, with the mixed-use, mixed financed nature and approach of the developments, it not even all public housing.

My third point. It has been asserted that the HOPE VI program encourages "re-gentrification." If this means that residents previously left behind and not involved in the new growth of their communities now participate and enjoy thriving neighborhoods, I guess that would be true. If the mix-use, mixed income development approach expands housing choice and opportunity is some how seen as the poor being "eased out" then some don't get the program.

I don't mention this lightly. I have been in more meetings, more informational sessions, and more community forums on the Hope VI program than most. Anytime you seek to change the location and nature of someone's home, it inspires concern, doubt and suspicion. Indeed, many programmatic changes in the HOPE VI program are informed by such concerns. And it would be wrong to say that HOPE VI is a perfect program with no flaws. But you simply need to look at what the HOPE VI program has done in the nation's cities. This program works.

In conclusion, NOAAH strongly supports the reauthorization of the HOPE VI program and look forward to working with you to make sure the progress we have made is not lost but strengthened by HR 1614.

As I said, NOAAH is a housing advocate for all people of color. Our members are assisting NOAAH staff with identifying, creating and developing programs to increase affordable housing stock in this nation. NOAAH's membership is constantly documenting best practices, designing initiatives using technology to improve the quality of life in identifying opportunities, public and private, for expanding availability of the affordable housing stock and improving the quality of life for the low and moderate income.