

**OPENING STATEMENT OF  
CONGRESSMAN EMANUEL CLEAVER, II**

**COMMITTEE ON FINANCIAL SERVICES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

**HEARING ON H.R. 1999, THE STATE AND LOCAL HOUSING FLEXIBILITY  
ACT OF 2005**

Chairman Ney and Ranking Member Waters, thank you for convening this hearing today on H.R. 1999, the so called "State and Local Housing Flexibility Act of 2005." I look forward to the testimony of the distinguished panelists on what I believe is a severely flawed piece of legislation.

Although this is my first term in Congress, I am very familiar with public housing. As a child and teenager I lived in public housing with my family for 7 years. We lived in public housing not because my parents we were lazy as my father worked two jobs. Neither did my parents have some casual desire for a handout but because of necessity we live in public housing. You see Mr. Chairman, prior to moving into public housing my family lived in what was once a slave shanty. This shanty had no electricity, plumbing or running water and was located in an alley. My father and mother moved me and my three sisters to public housing because it provided a more decent and environmentally safe place to live.

As the richest, most technologically advanced, and militarily powerful nation in the history of the world, I believe the United States government has a responsibility to make sure that its citizens are not homeless or living in squalor. Particularly for those individuals who are struggling to get out of poverty. Thus, I am vehemently opposed to legislation that runs counter to this belief and I am greatly offended by this Administration's latest attempt to attack the nation's most vulnerable under the guise of budgetary deficits while proposing a budget for FY2006, which includes billions of dollars in tax breaks for the wealthiest 3% of Americans.

My opposition to H.R. 1999 is drawn from this philosophy and my personal experience in public housing. Among the many flawed provisions in this bill, are those that greatly relax the statutory income targeting and rent affordability requirements. In addition, the bill would eliminate the Brooke

Amendment, which limits public housing tenant payments to 30% of their income. As a result, H.R. 1999 would have the most devastating impact on the poorest Americans.

For example, under current law 75% of new vouchers must go to “extremely low-income families” or those who earn less than 30% on the median income. This legislation would replace that requirement so that 90% of new vouchers go to families below 60% of the median income. The median income in many parts of my district is \$68, 400. Thus, the targeting cut off under current law is \$20, 520. Under the bill, the targeting cut off would almost double to \$41,040. Despite proposing to broaden the income targeting requirement, which in effect expands the number of individuals eligible for new vouchers, the Administration has failed to demonstrate a commitment to increase funding for vouchers to provide for this expansion of eligible recipients. Therefore, the logical result is that fewer families who are “extremely low-income” will receive vouchers than they would under current law. Now my point is not to belittle the struggle faced by those earning approximately \$40,000, but it is to highlight that it is markedly different than those earning under \$20,000.

In addition, the bill allows housing agencies to set a minimum rent for voucher holders and public housing residents, without any cap on the amount. The bill eliminates authority to provide enhanced voucher assistance to a tenant after one year which may make units unaffordable for tenants thus pushing many of them out on the streets. The bill jeopardizes the portability of vouchers because it only provides for voluntary agreements among housing agencies within a state or “region” to administer portable vouchers and appears to prohibit portability to other states outside a region.

Taken as a whole, this legislation appears to have been drafted without the slightest consideration for our nation’s most vulnerable families. At the end of the day, this legislation will put families out on the street and punish children who like me only wanted a decent place to live.

Mr. Chairman, H.R. 1999 is a bad bill. It is not bad because the Leadership told me it is bad or because I read that it was bad. It is bad because experientially I recognize badness when I see it and I yield back the balance of my time.