



Primer on New Orleans Public Housing

- Fourteen months after Hurricane Katrina, more than 4,000 families have not returned to New Orleans because most public housing remains closed. Instead of paying for repairs, HUD and HANO boarded up units and left them to deteriorate. Public housing residents demand that their homes be re-opened and that they be allowed to return as soon as possible.
- For more than ten years, HANO and HUD have been downsizing public housing. In 1996, there were more than 13,500 public housing units. In August 2005, just before Katrina, there were 7,100 units but nearly 2,000 were vacant, waiting to be demolished. There were 5,146 families living in public housing. Today, only about 1,000 families have returned. Now HUD plans to demolish 5,000 units with no clear plan or timeline for bringing back these families. The following large public housing developments are affected: Lafitte, B.W. Cooper, C.J. Peete, and St. Bernard. These units comprise a major source of affordable housing in New Orleans.
- In June, HUD announced it would demolish 5,000 public housing units but many of these units can be saved. Families could move back into their affordable housing units, get back to work, and help rebuild their lives, their communities, and their city. Instead, HUD's plan further contributes to the dearth of affordable housing in New Orleans, and keeps these families displaced and scattered across the country with no hope of returning.
- The lawsuit filed by public housing residents seeks to bring these families back to New Orleans as soon as possible. These families have a right to return to their homes and a right to be consulted about the demolition plan. HUD's plan unnecessarily depletes a major source of affordable housing for those who need it most, in direct contravention of its mission.
- Public housing residents want to return and to rebuild their city and their lives. If we are serious about the slogan "Bring New Orleans Back," HUD and HANO must re-open public housing and make repairs, where necessary. Everyone should be permitted to return—not just the rich. To do so, the existing affordable housing stock must be preserved.
- Demolishing habitable housing during a critical shortage is nonsensical. New Orleans' affordable housing stock took a huge hit from Hurricane Katrina. Of

New Orleans' 142,000 units that were damaged or lost, 112,000—79 percent—were affordable to low income households. In addition, while 32 percent of renters in New Orleans paid less than \$500 per month pre-Katrina, average rents have increased more than 70 percent from slightly under \$800 to \$1,357 a month. Meanwhile, HUD has directed HANO to increase the Fair Market Rate by only 35 percent. Therefore, without access to their units, public housing residents, many of whom lived in New Orleans all of their lives and contributed to the rich culture and history of the city, will be locked out permanently.

- Congress mandated that HUD and HANO preserve affordable housing in hurricane damaged areas. Yet HUD and HANO seek to demolish perfectly habitable units to redevelop them. Any attempts to redevelop housing should happen after residents are back home in New Orleans so they may have input. In addition, one-for-one replacement of units is imperative.
- HUD plans to demolish habitable units to use New Orleans as an experiment in the development of mixed-income communities. The plan is similar to what has happened before to New Orleans' public housing stock. In 2000, St. Thomas, a development housing 900 low-income families, was demolished. Using HOPE VI funding, the new community, River Gardens, was rebuilt with only about 200 units for low-income families. Approximately 700 families were displaced to make way for this experiment.
- HANO's newest proposals for redevelopment of C.J. Peete, B.W. Cooper, and St. Bernard would cause the loss of approximately 3,200 units of public housing for extremely poor families. This plan will not only lead to continued displacement of pre-Katrina residents but will also fail to accommodate the almost 18,000 families that are on HANO's waiting list (6,500 for public housing and 10,900 for Section 8.)
- Residents want to come home to be closer to their families and neighbors, to return to jobs or get new jobs in the reconstruction industry, and to be closer to their doctors. Residents are living in far away places, many without transportation and jobs. In September 2006, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimated that the unemployment rate for Hurricane Katrina evacuees who remain displaced is triple that of those who have returned.
- Plaintiffs have presented evidence to the court that the buildings could be easily repaired. C.J. Peete, for example, was not flooded at all and thus only needs to be cleaned and repairs made due to vandalism. Lafitte and B.W. Cooper had minor flooding (1-3 inches) and thus only need flooring and baseboards replaced on the first floors. The second and third floor units need only be cleaned. St. Bernard can also be similarly repaired. In fact, HANO's own insurance company estimated that twenty of the buildings at C.J. Peete would cost less than \$5,000 each to repair and only three would cost more than \$10,000. With regard to

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Lafitte, the company determined that 28 of the buildings would cost less than \$10,000 each to repair. Clearly, these minor repairs should not stand in the way of the right to return.

- These public housing developments are some of the most durable housing in New Orleans. Given the solid infrastructure of these buildings and the minor damage incurred, it is clear that renovation is more cost-effective than demolition. Demolition of these homes will cost \$450 million more than repairing them and \$174 million more than modernizing them.
- *Anderson v. Jackson*, was filed in federal court for the Eastern District of Louisiana on June 27, 2006 by Advancement Project, Bill Quigley, Tracie Washington and the law firm of Jenner & Block LLP against HUD and HANO on behalf of public housing residents. The lawsuit is before Judge Ivan Lemelle.