

February 7, 2005

Pres. George W. Bush The White House Washington, DC 20500	Sen. Barack Obama Dirksen Senate Office Building SD-B40 Washington, D.C. 20510	Washington, DC 20515 Rep. Mark Kirk Illinois-10th, Republican 1717 Longworth HOB Washington, DC 20515-1310
Sen. Richard Durbin 332 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510	Rep. Jan Schakowsky Illinois-9th, Democrat 515 Cannon House Office Building	

Dear President Bush, Senators Durbin and Obama, and U. S. House Representatives Schakowsky and Kirk:

The Interfaith Housing Center of the Northern Suburbs, a 32-year-old fair housing organization serving Chicago's northern suburbs, strongly urges you not to cut existing programs designed to stop unfair and unlawful real estate practices and discrimination in housing, as well as the spatial deconcentration of low- and moderate-income households. The President's proposed budget would cut the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program by 40% and the Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) by 20%. **These cuts are unconscionable and must not be allowed to move forward.**

The CDBG program was created by President Nixon in 1974 to fight poverty. As a block grant program, it has permitted local jurisdictions the flexibility to provide affordable housing and new jobs as they see fit. As HUD's web site indicates:

“The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program works largely without fanfare or recognition to ensure decent affordable housing for all, and to provide services to the most vulnerable in our communities, to create jobs and expand business opportunities. CDBG is an important tool in helping local governments tackle the most serious challenges facing their communities. The CDBG program has made a difference in the lives of millions of people living in communities all across this Nation.”

It has also been a key source of funding for affirmatively furthering fair housing. Many of our private fair housing agencies depend on CDBG funding to investigate discrimination complaints and provide education and outreach to local governments, real estate professionals, and home seekers about fair housing. ***This is the largest source of fair housing funding in the nation.***

CDBG funding has also been used to counsel tenants facing homelessness; to assist first-time homebuyers; and to provide appropriate housing referrals to older adults, persons with disabilities, and victims of domestic violence. **Cutting CDBG funding will, in fact, militate against President Bush's own stated goal of "ending chronic homelessness." And for this reason as well, we oppose moving the CDBG Program to the Department of Commerce. This completely eviscerates the civil rights and affordable housing missions of CDBG.**

The Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) is also a major source of funding for all fair housing activities by private enforcement agencies throughout the nation. Our agencies are enforcing **our** Federal fair housing laws. **Ironically, as we work to bring democracy and human rights to Iraq and rebuild its infrastructure, we are eliminating our own ability to safeguard civil rights and maintain our infrastructure here at home, especially in our low- and moderate-income communities.**

To cut fair housing funding in so drastic a manner makes a mockery of America's promise to its own people, which has been to ensure equal protection under the law. Interfaith relies **solely** on Cook County CDBG, Evanston CDBG, and FHIP funding for fair housing activities, including anti-predatory lending work. In the Chicago area, historically high levels of racial segregation – which have actually shown signs of abating, albeit slowly – will only worsen once more with these proposed cuts.

I would be happy to share with you examples of successful uses of CDBG and FHIP funds to enforce fair housing, and to quantify for you the benefits of these programs. Feel free to call me at (847) 501-5762, ext. 406. We look forward to further dialogue with you to save these important programs.

Sincerely,

Gail Schechter
Executive Director