



**Housing Education Resource Center**

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TO: Committee on Human Services

Submitted By: Susan Harkett-Turley, Executive Director  
Housing Education Resource Center

I am sending this to urge your support for Raised Bill #1146: An Act Concerning the Reservation of Security Deposit Guarantees to Assist Participants in the Section 8 Housing Choice Program and the Rental Assistance Program with Mobility Moves.

I am the Executive Director of the Housing Education Resource Center (HERC). Our mission is to promote and provide equal, affordable and expanded housing opportunities through the provision of direct counseling, information, education and assistance services. Services are provided to those seeking answers to their housing questions, solutions to their housing problems, information about their housing rights and responsibilities and guidance on how to protect their rights and meet their responsibilities.

HERC has been a DSS contractor providing services through the Mobility Counseling and Search Assistance Program since 2002. Through this program we provide tenant education, support services and housing search assistance to those receiving state-administered Rental Assistance Program (RAP) certificates or Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers. A primary goal of the program is to help subsidy holders relocate from high-to low-poverty neighborhoods. From 2002 through 2009 we assisted 540 households explore their housing options and opportunities and facilitated the relocation of 349 households to 118 census tracts within 28 communities.

This program was not in operation from June through December, 2009. Services resumed in January, 2010 and it became immediately apparent that the lack of Security Deposit Guarantees for our clients was going to negatively impact their ability to relocate to low poverty neighborhoods. These clients are of extremely low income and are not able to save money for security deposits, or anything else. It has also become very difficult to negotiate with landlords, as we have been able to do in the past, to enable clients to pay security deposits in installments.

The following are some of the negative results we have experienced because of clients not having security deposit guarantees available:

- 1) Clients returning their vouchers/certificates because they could not locate a unit with a security deposit they could afford.
- 2) Clients remaining in units in high-poverty neighborhoods because they did not have to pay a new deposit.
- 3) Clients selecting units in high-poverty neighborhoods because landlords in these areas offer "special deals" on security deposits – either allowing installment payments or reducing them to affordable levels (much less than the 2 months' rent allowed by law).
- 4) Clients returning their vouchers/certificates because they decided to remain in their current unit to avoid having to pay a security deposit but the subsidy could not be used for their current unit because the unit was substandard.

In each of these scenarios, the availability of a security deposit guarantee would have enabled clients to at least have a choice of where they lived.

In addition to the fact that the lack of security deposit assistance denies those of extremely low income the opportunity to use subsidies that would enable them to improve their living situations, this also has the potential to negatively impact the State's ability to secure future Section 8 funding from the Federal Government. Another goal of our program is to increase the utilization of vouchers so that the State can demonstrate the need for them. If vouchers are not used, the State will have a difficult time when seeking additional allocations.

For all of the reasons cited here, I urge the passage of this bill so that security deposit guarantees will be available to those with rental subsidies seeking to move from high-poverty to low-poverty areas.