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My name is Richard Wheelock, and I am the housing supervisory attorney at the Legal Assistance Foundation of Metropolitan Chicago. LAF is a legal aid program that provides no-cost civil legal assistance to low-income families in the City of Chicago and the Cook County suburbs. We serve close to 30,000 indigent clients every year. I have more than twenty-five years of experience in the area of public and subsidized housing and have served as LAF's housing supervisor since 1996.

In the fall of 1999, the Chicago Housing Authority first proposed as part of its Plan for Transformation to demolish fifty-one high-rises, including those at Cabrini-Green, Robert Taylor and Stateway Gardens, for a total demolition of 22,000 public housing units. The plan is to replace these high-rise public housing developments with mixed-income communities, but with only 30% of the units set aside for public housing families.

As part of this plan for transformation, the CHA has purposely steered away from its original mission to provide affordable housing for very low-income families, *i.e.*, families earning less than 50% of area median income. Under federal law and the CHA's Moving To Work agreement with U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 75% of the families the CHA serves must be very low-income.¹

¹ See Section 204(c)(3)(A) of the Public Housing/Section 8 Moving to Work Demonstration (P.L. 104-134, April 26, 1996); CHA's MTW Agreement, Section 2(D); and 42 U.S.C. § 1437n(b)(1).

Instead, the CHA has focused on filling its public housing units with higher income families, at a time when a severe housing mismatch exists for very low-income families, *i.e.*, the supply of affordable housing simply does not come close to meeting the housing needs of the poorest of our society. And at a time when the unemployment rate is at a 27-year record high.² There are 256,000 more very low-income families than affordable units in the City of Chicago, according to the UIC's Voorhees Center on Neighborhood and Community Improvement.³ Whereas, for families making between 51% – 80% of area median income – the upper income group eligible for public housing – there is only a 50,000 unit deficit, according to that same report. *Id.*

CHA is dramatically shifting its focus toward these higher income families in a number of ways:

1. In the mixed-income communities that have replaced the CHA high-rise developments, their admissions policies, which include a mandatory work requirement and rigorous credit check, effectively screen out the poorest applicants.
2. The CHA Admissions policy for its traditional public housing developments also mandates a work requirement as a condition for occupancy, the violation of which means eviction.

² On March 16, 2010, Crain's Chicago reported that "Unemployment in metropolitan Chicago jumped to 11.6% in January, the highest in almost 27 years."

³ See Affordable Housing Conditions and Outlook In Chicago: An Early Warning Intervention for Intervention, Natalie V. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement (March 2006)
http://www.uic.edu/cuppa/voorheesctr/Publications/vnc_woodsrap_0706.pdf

3. But even more significantly, this admissions policy mandates that up to one half of the units be set aside for higher income families, specifically families making no less than \$22, 650 and up to \$60,400 annually for a family of four.
4. With respect to CHA's Housing Choice Voucher Program, the CHA has just proposed the creation of a preference for working families for admission into the program. So those families will go to the head of the line in front of the unemployed.
5. In the next year or so, CHA plans to impose a working requirement for all its voucher participants. Again, failure to comply would mean termination of assistance and homelessness for these voucher participants.
6. And finally, CHA has just proposed to eliminate asset ceilings which means that you can have as much money in the bank as you want and that will have no effect on your eligibility to have a housing choice voucher.

The Chicago Housing Authority has declared that it is no longer the housing of last resort. Well, if not the CHA, then who? Who will provide for the housing needs for the poorest of our society? The right to housing as a human right will be meaningless if we, as a society, continue in this direction.