



August 2009

Assisting the Aging Population Living in Public and Federally Assisted Living – House Bill to be introduced in Congress

A New York City field hearing hosted by Rep. Nydia M. Velázquez (D-N.Y.) on July 20, 2009, spotlighted the Together We Can Act, a soon-to-be-introduced bill to train residents in home health care careers to assist the burgeoning aging population living in public and federally assisted housing.

The day after the hearing, AAHSA President and CEO Larry Minnix sent a [letter](#) of support for the Together We Can Act to the full House Financial Services Committee, noting that more than “300,000 seniors live in Section 202 elderly housing communities, and seniors comprise a growing percentage of the public housing population.”

Velázquez’s Together We Can Act would create a pilot competitive grant program to address twin AAHSA goals of helping seniors age in place by providing services at home where they need them and addressing workforce shortages that impact care and quality of life for seniors. A 2004 report from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the letter notes, found that home health aides make up one-third of the home health care services industry and one-fourth of the paraprofessional staff in residential care communities.

“Congresswoman Velázquez’s legislation presents an opportunity for eligible public housing residents to develop skills in a growing, vital and indispensable field,” Minnix wrote to House Financial Services Committee Chairman Barney Frank (D-Mass.).

At the House Subcommittee on Housing and Community Opportunity field hearing, chaired by Rep. Maxine Waters (D-Calif.), federal, state and local officials and advocates testified on the act and on another Velázquez proposal to strengthen the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s (HUD) Section 3 requirements to expand job opportunities to public housing residents.

Sandra Henriquez, HUD assistant secretary for public and Indian housing, told the panel convened at city hall that for elderly and disabled residents on fixed incomes, public or assisted



housing is often their only housing option. As seniors age, they need help with daily living activities, but in-home personal care, which she said “can be a vital and sustained step between independent living and full nursing home care,” is often unaffordable.

Henriquez said the Together We Can Act should ensure that it allows joint applications by multiple service sectors — such as public housing authorities and home health aide training programs — to leverage existing local services. Henriquez also recommended that state agencies be brought in as partners to determine if residents’ incomes mean that they could qualify for in-home personal care services under Medicaid.

John B. Rhea, chairman of the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), also testified in support of the ACT, saying that more than 35 percent of NYCHA households are headed by an individual more than 62 years old and that the number of seniors living alone in public housing is on the rise.

“The need for trained and licensed home health care workers is great and is growing,” Rhea testified. “We therefore applaud this proposed program because it recognizes not only the needs of our aging and disabled population, but it targets a growth industry where there is a pressing need for trained paraprofessionals.”

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