



Housing Assistance Council  
HAC News

information on rural low-income housing issues

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## **MEMBERS OF CONGRESS QUESTION VILSACK ABOUT PROPOSED CUTS IN SECTIONS 502 AND 523.**

USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack was the only witness at a March 13 House Appropriations Subcommittee on Agriculture hearing on the Administration's FY15 budget request. House Appropriations Committee Chair Hal Rogers (R-KY) criticized the proposed cuts in Section 502 direct loans and Section 523 self-help grants, saying this approach "shows a disrespect for our rural communities." Subcommittee Chair Robert Aderholt (R-AL) also asserted support for the rural housing programs. When Rep. David Valadao (R-CA) asked the Secretary why the reductions were proposed, Vilsack replied that "difficult choices" had to be made.

## **USDA PUBLISHES MORE DETAILS ABOUT BUDGET REQUESTS, HAC RESPONDS TO RENTAL PROPOSALS.**

In its Congressional Justification explaining the FY15 budget, USDA tells how it calculates the amount it would expect to collect if a \$50 monthly minimum rent were imposed, and how it might use the discretion it wants with respect to renewals of Section 521 Rental Assistance contracts. HAC board and staff critique the ideas in posts on the Rooflines blog: "No, Minimum Rents Do Not 'Encourage Financial Responsibility'" and "Rural Rental Assistance Needs USDA's Support to Survive."

## **SENATORS PROPOSE HOUSING FINANCE REFORM DEAL.**

Senators Tim Johnson (D-SD) and Mike Crapo (R-ID), the Chair and Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs, have released a discussion draft of a bipartisan housing finance reform bill based on S. 1217, the Corker-Warner bill introduced in June 2013. Like the earlier bill, it would create a new Federal Mortgage Insurance Corporation to replace Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac and would eliminate affordable housing goals. It does include other mechanisms to encourage affordable housing development.

## **DEADLINES COMING UP FOR ASSETS FOR INDEPENDENCE.**

The next deadlines are May 7 and July 14, and applications are accepted on a rolling basis. This program makes grants to nonprofits and government agencies that establish individual development accounts for low-income participants. Contact the AFI Resource Center, 1-866-778-6037.

## **USDA TO HOLD CONFERENCE CALLS ON MULTIFAMILY PROGRAMS.**

Calls with stakeholders will be scheduled at least quarterly during 2014. To register, contact Timothy James, RD, 919-873-2056. Those who have previously registered do not need to register again.

## **COMMENTS SOUGHT ON NATIVE ASSET BUILDING INITIATIVE.**

The Administration for Children and Families at the Department of Health and Human Services proposes policy changes to be used in the FY14 NOFA for NABI, which funds Individual Development Accounts and related services. Comments are due April 7. Contact Carmelia Strickland, HHS, 877-922-9262.

## **USDA RD EXPLAINS IMPLEMENTATION OF RURAL DEFINITION CHANGES.**

Administrative Notice 4748 explains that the grandfathering provisions adopted in the Farm Bill and the FY14 appropriations act will be implemented in two stages. The February 5, 2014 HAC News stated erroneously that the new 35,000 population limit for growing areas would not take effect until October 1; instead, RD expects to implement it around May 6. No currently eligible places will become ineligible until October 1, when currently eligible places will become ineligible if their populations exceed 35,000 or they are no longer rural in character.

## **NEW DATA ON USDA TENANTS RELEASED.**

The annual occupancy report shows that the total number of properties in USDA's rental portfolio fell by 2.48% from April 2012 to September 2013, a decrease of 346 Section 515 properties and 34 Section 514 properties, representing about 5,092 apartments (1.14% of total units). This report is the first to include demographic data on Section 521

Rental Assistance households, and they appear generally similar to tenants in Section 515 properties. The average annual income of Section 515 residents has increased slightly to \$11,747. For 515 tenants with RA, average income is \$9,828.

**REPORT EXAMINES INCOME INEQUALITY IN STATES.** The Economic Analysis and Research Network calculated changes in income from 1917 to 2011 and found that in every state the incomes of the top 1% have grown faster than those of the other 99%, although the extent of the gap differs among states. *The Increasingly Unequal States of America*, published by the Economic Policy Institute, is accompanied by an interactive feature that provides figures and graphics for each state.

**HAC BLOGS ON RURAL SENIORS.** “Keeping Rural Seniors in Their Homes” describes home and community based care as a way to allow rural seniors to age in place.

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