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April 9, 2012

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Mr. Don Hutchinson & Board of Directors
Louisiana Housing Corporation
2415 Quail Drive
Baton Rouge, LA 70808

RE: Housing for Veterans in Louisiana

To the Board of Directors of the Louisiana Housing Corporation:

As part of the public hearing process for the development of the 2013 Qualified Allocation Plan, we are requesting that the LHC establish a set aside pool with a minimum of \$2 million in tax credits, to fund housing projects serving homeless and disabled veterans. In addition, we request that the LHC assign additional points under the QAP scoring in support of housing for homeless and disabled veterans within the general pool.

The plight of Louisiana's Veterans, their need for support for the transition from frontline service in Iraq and Afghanistan to civilian life and struggle to cope with service connected disabilities including physical injuries, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, depression and other issues, has been identified as a pressing need by Volunteers of America.

Volunteers of America Greater New Orleans has taken a leadership role in addressing the problem of homelessness in the New Orleans area for over 20 years, and has collaborated with the Veterans Administration Medical Center of New Orleans for over 15 years to ensure the needs of our community's homeless veterans are met. Prior to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, we operated 32 emergency and transitional housing units for homeless veterans funded, in part, by the VA Per Diem Only Program. These units were destroyed in Katrina. With tremendous support from our local Veterans Administration, however, we secured a VA Grant and Per Diem award in 2007 to re-establish and expand to a total of 56 transitional housing units for New Orleans homeless veterans. In 2009, we enhanced the impact the VA grant could have by applying for and receiving a highly competitive grant from the Department of Labor (DOL) to implement a Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program (HVRP). In 2011, we continued to enhance the supportive services provided to veterans by receiving an additional highly competitive grant from the Veterans Administration to provide Supportive Services to Veteran Families (SSVF) residing in the State of Louisiana. The

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goal of the SSVF program is to enhance housing stability of homeless and at-risk Veterans and their families with very low income. The cornerstone of these programs is intensive case management through which we ensure the provision of essential supportive services, including substance abuse/mental health treatment, medical /dental health care, life skills training, peer mentoring and permanent housing counseling, vocational and rehabilitation counseling, educational assistance, employment training and placement, health care services, assistance with obtaining VA benefits, daily living services, personal financial planning, transportation, legal counseling, fiduciary and representative payee services, and etc.

The need for affordable housing for veterans in Louisiana is acute. The 2009 VA CHALENG report estimates the number of homeless veterans in the New Orleans area to be 500, with an additional 350 homeless veterans in Shreveport and Alexandria, Louisiana. What we know about the Veteran population according to the Southeast Louisiana Veterans Healthcare System's (SLVHCS) Homeless Coalition Committee is the following:

- Estimated number of Veterans in the Greater New Orleans area (Orleans, Jefferson, St. Bernard & Plaquemine Parish) is 42,082 or 3.1 % of the total population
- Estimate of 2800 homeless Veterans in SLVHCS 23 Parish catchment area
- 1200 Homeless Veterans treated by SLVHCS Homeless Program in Fiscal Year 2011 thus far, a 500% increase in VA enrollment since Katrina
- 465 HUD/VASH vouchers in Southeast Louisiana, a 272% increase from Pre-Katrina
- 288 Grant & Per Diem Beds (Transitional Beds), a 91.5% increase from Pre Katrina

The number of available VASH vouchers is further indication of the number of homeless veteran families. According to VA's 2011 data, a conservative estimate of the number of very low-income veteran families occupying permanent housing is 309 based on 240 VASH vouchers being used in the New Orleans area and 69 in North and Central Louisiana.

Based on Volunteers of America's local and national work with homeless and disabled veterans, we believe that the following project design components should be incorporated into a statewide priority for veteran housing:

1. Support from local VA Medical Centers: Successful projects will depend on health care and social service support for homeless and disabled tenants by the local VA Medical Centers. Projects should be required to have written support from VA Medical Centers.
2. Owners experienced working with VA Medical Centers: Given the complexities of working with the VA, developers must have previous experience working in collaboration with VA and serving the needs of homeless and disabled veterans. Owners, with over a 50% ownership stake, should be required to have a minimum of three years' experience working with VA funded programs targeting support for homeless and disabled veterans. Additional points should also be awarded to Owners currently operating transitional housing programs for homeless and disabled veterans funded by the VA.
3. Location: Projects located within one mile of a VA Medical Center or clinic, and/or are easily accessible by public transportation and/or the developer will provide private bus service to, should be prioritized.
4. Building Type: Use of new construction permits a project design which meets all tenant needs for social services space, common spaces and security within a development and should not be ranked lower than rehabilitation or adaptive re-use projects.
5. Architectural Design: Highly ranked projects should include numerous offices for delivery of social services to tenants, classroom space, group meeting rooms and outdoor recreational areas. Sponsors must demonstrate that proposed on-site services and programs fit the proposed common space design.

Projects should be no smaller than 25 units, to take advantage of social service and security efficiencies required for this type of housing.
6. Rental Subsidies: A commitment for Project Based Vouchers or other project based rental subsidies should be required for all units serving homeless and disabled veterans.
7. Percentage of Units Set Aside for Homeless and Disabled Veterans: Congregating veterans together has been shown to have a positive impact with veterans struggling with service connected disabilities. We recommend that projects prioritize a minimum of 50% of units for homeless and disabled veterans, with additional points for projects serving higher percentages.

8. Housing Prioritized for Chronically Homeless Veterans: We recommend that state resources target the neediest group of homeless and disabled veterans, those families and individuals meeting HUD's chronically homeless definition. That definition includes persons with disabilities who have either experienced homelessness for a year or more, or who have been homeless four or more times over the past three years. Projects should be required to reserve a minimum of 25% total units for the chronically homeless.

Utilizing these, or similar criteria, will allow LHC selection of high quality, permanent housing projects required to meet the many needs of homeless veterans.

We look forward to the LHC becoming a leader in support of Louisiana's veterans in need. Thank you for your consideration of these issues. If you have any questions, please contact me at 504-486-8661.

Sincerely,



James M. LeBlanc
President/CEO