

Combating an Affordable Rental Housing Crisis

Collaborative works with Congress to secure more funding for affordable housing across the nation



Eileen Fitzgerald

Stewards of Affordable Housing for the Future (SAHF) has been quietly working behind the scenes since 2003 to give low-income individuals and families a voice in front of the U.S. Congress and federal agencies.

The Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit organization is a collaborative of 12 housing nonprofits located throughout the country. Working closely with the federal government can be a painfully slow process, but SAHF has become skilled at effectively moving through the legislative and regulatory processes.

“[We are] exclusively focused on affordable multifamily rental homes,” says Eileen Fitzgerald, President and CEO of SAHF. “Our members apply their on-the-ground experience and knowledge-share to ensure they are providing residents with quality, service-enriched rental homes developed by high-capacity nonprofit owners for low-income residents.”

Focusing exclusively on multifamily rental housing makes SAHF a unique group among other organizations in the industry, which tend to operate in several different fields of the affordable housing sector.

SAHF’s members own and operate more than 118,000 affordable rental homes across the nation. But this housing of this successful collaborative would not be possible without assistance from the federal government.

WORKING WITH THE GOVERNMENT: HOTMA

The Housing Opportunity Through Modernization Act of 2016 (HOTMA) is a bipartisan bill passed in February that has been the focus of affordable housing advocates for a long time.

“Discussions on some parts of HOTMA have been going on for more than 10 years,” says Toby Halliday, Executive Vice President of SAHF. “It was a very long effort, but it eventually passed the House [of Representatives] and Senate without opposition, so this was really bipartisan legislation.

“HOTMA improves flexibility for using housing vouchers to serve target populations, such as seniors, veterans and the homeless,” Halliday says. “[The law] will encourage more housing authorities and affordable



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housing owners to work together to meet these needs through project-basing of vouchers.”

“[Under HOTMA], there are a lot of administrative things that help developers, like our members, avoid obstacles and focus on services and programs for residents,” Fitzgerald says.

RAD FOR PRAC

HOTMA is not the only legislation SAHF has focused on over the past several years. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Rental Assistance Demonstration (RAD) was created to give local and regional housing authorities a new tool to repair and preserve affordable housing throughout the nation.

Although a September 21 report from HUD highlights the success of RAD to date, there are still limitations on the types of HUD-assisted housing and the number of public housing apartments eligible for the program.

Enter Project Rental Assistance Contracts (PRACs), another HUD rental assistance program for low-income seniors and people living with disabilities.

SAHF worked with several organizations to explore ways to recapitalize the aging Section 202 PRAC portfolio, and late last year recommended making PRAC properties eligible for the RAD program.

Since 1990, HUD has developed more than 120,000 affordable senior living apartments to assist the growing number of individuals who have reached retirement age, but still have very low incomes. RAD for PRAC could go a long way in ensuring these communities remain viable, healthy and properly maintained.

“[RAD for PRAC] uses a proven strategy to leverage limited resources to attract private capital to serve low-income seniors,” Halliday says. “Our members hope to use RAD for PRAC to rehabilitate existing Section 202 PRAC properties. This proposal could also make it easier for owners of these properties to transfer properties to other owners to preserve the properties for low-income seniors.”

The language authorizing this RAD for PRAC is included in the Senate version of the FY 2017 appropriations bill that will be considered for conference or inclusion in an omnibus legislation in December.

The high demand for affordable housing across the country doesn't appear to be slowing down anytime soon. SAHF and its members will continue to press Congress to support housing assistance programs that create opportunity for people living in poverty and allow seniors and people with disabilities to live with dignity.

“[We are focused on] the issue of how we increase supply to deal with the rental crisis,” Fitzgerald says. “We will continue to highlight what is good and common sense public policy.” 



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