

# If Democrats Controlled the House...

A Weekly Taste of Their Legislative Agenda

July 13, 2012



**Proposal:** H.R. 3564, Public Tenants Housing Respect Act

**Sponsor:** Rep. Charles B. Rangel (D-NY)

**Summary:** This proposed law would repeal the requirements that residents of public housing engage in community service and complete economic self-sufficiency programs.

**Problems with the Bill:** There have been many valid criticisms of U.S. federal public housing since its inception, not least of which is the suggestion that (especially when poorly managed) it can discourage economic growth and personal independence. However one bright spot in public housing law is that it can try to encourage personal responsibility by requiring either work or community service, and also the completion of economic self-sufficiency programs, as a condition of living in public housing. The requirement is not even particularly stringent—it requires eight hours of community service per month only for those adults who are under 62, are not employed for more than eight hours per month, are not blind or disabled, and do not have a child under 13 living in the home. In other words, this requirement asks workers who are not currently participating in work, but who are benefiting from the lower prices of public housing, to perform some amount of community service and put themselves on a track toward self-sufficiency.

The legislation cited here would seek to destroy this positive aspect, and instead would attempt to ensure that those receiving cheaper living costs thanks to public funds would not need to attempt to repay the public or take steps toward self-sufficiency. The outcome would be a program which grants artificially-cheap housing as a right, without these legitimate conditions and without a clear path toward self-improvement, resulting in incentives for a permanent rather than temporary slot in assisted living.

This bill would fundamentally change the purpose and outcome of already constitutionally questionable public housing from at least a societal exchange to nothing more than a permanent public grant. This proposal would remove the distinguishing feature which prevents the system from being simply a tool of implicit redistribution. It is already questionable to take money from our children in order to lower housing prices, but it is actively wrong to then ensure that those receiving the benefits do not need to provide anything in exchange, and also that they do not need to take a serious step toward making the situation a temporary rather than a permanent one. This law is wrong because it would remove the requirement that those receiving a public grant respond by providing a public service in return, and simultaneously would increase the likelihood that those in public housing remain in poverty.

In short, this bill would ultimately harm some of America's most vulnerable citizens and their surrounding communities by eroding the notion of personally earning success, and by insisting that they should be content with government-presented mediocrity instead.

**Reminder:** RSC staffers and interns are encouraged to send other examples of questionable legislation to [Rick.Eberstadt@mail.house.gov](mailto:Rick.Eberstadt@mail.house.gov).