Obama's budget calls for restrictions on public housing recipients

Nick Barrickman
9 May 2013

Buried in President Barack Obama's 2014 Fiscal Year budget proposal in regards to housing is a recommendation for the expansion of the "Moving to Work" program. Founded by the Clinton administration as a part of his so-called welfare reform in 1996, the program's intent is to limit the amount of time individuals can receive vouchers for public housing assistance, otherwise known as Section 8. The program also requires those receiving benefits to hold a job or be actively searching for one in order to remain in public housing.

The proposal comes amidst the worst jobs crisis since the Great Depression and the continued assault on the living standards of the working class under the Obama administration. Under the current laws, very few national housing districts have the authority to enact such stringent restrictions upon its residents. The new expansion will allow for a much freer application of means tests to residents who seek to obtain public housing vouchers. Currently vouchers are available to individuals with incomes stated as being at 50 percent of their area's median income level, and who are forced to pay at least 30 percent of their earnings on housing.

Several cities have instituted time limits and/or work requirements for their housing programs already. The Housing Authority of Houston, Texas recently planned to implement work requirements when it found that 83,000 people were applying for vouchers in 2012, up from 29,000 in 2006. Similarly, in California, the city of San Bernardino had instituted a strict five-year time limit on stays in housing, when officials discovered that the average stays in public homes were nearly eight years, with thousands more waiting. Other cities in Texas, Alaska, and California are also planning to introduce time limits to their housing districts. Federal and local governments have cynically attempted to couch efforts to eliminate assistance by citing long waiting periods and limited available units.

"We've got these waiting lists that in some cases you practically get through a generation before you get a shot at a unit," said Tony Perez, executive housing director for the city of Milwaukee to the *Wall Street Journal*. "If you want to change this, you have to change the way you go about business."

Referring to the impact of the recession on residents, assistant secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Sandra Henriquez said that "in the last five years, we see a little bit of a creep [in times of occupancy] that is moving up to eight and nine years."

The *WSJ* was quick to mention that the President's proposal has garnered bipartisan support as it makes its way through Congress, although there is some discrepancy as to how strict the new stipulations should be. As with the limiting of cash benefits for welfare recipients under Clinton's Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996, enacted in order to "end welfare as we know it," the new stipulations imposed on public housing residents will be used as a means to deny recipients of access to a decent home in the name of "reducing the deficit," which Democrats as much as Republicans are in support of.

The plans have been criticized by advocates for low-income housing who say that rather than helping families get on their feet, the program will simply hassle those already needing assistance. "You are just cycling these families back to the end of these waiting lists," said Linda Couch of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, adding that "[t]he answer is more affordable housing… not moving the deck chairs on the Titanic.

© World Socialist Web Site

”The President’s FY2014 proposal also takes aim at other programs, including Social Security and Medicare, both of which would see billions of dollars slashed from their budgets. The President’s budget proposal is a part of the ongoing attack on social programs by both big business political parties who are in essential agreement that the main task facing their constituency is the foisting of costs suffered in the 2008 financial collapse onto the backs of the working class.

In order to gain a larger sense of the crisis facing the population, a recent report by the *Center for Budget Policy and Priorities* (CBPP) showed that as of 2010 over 43 percent of vouchers for public housing went to “nondisabled, nonelderly” individuals, meaning that more than ever, healthy and young individuals are being forced as a last resort to seek out assistance.

Likewise, a report by HUD released in February showed that over 8.5 million low-income individuals who were not receiving federal assistance had been forced to dedicate as much as 50 percent of their paychecks to rent. The number of people in this category had climbed from about 7.1 million in 2009, the report said.

HUD’s federal budget has been under constant attack in the recent past. Another report by the CBPP stated that the recently-imposed federal sequester which went into effect last March would likely be responsible for slashing as many as 140,000 people from assisted housing, knocking the program back to levels not seen since 2010. Furloughs are also planned for the department, amounting to up to seven days of unpaid work for 9,000 HUD employees in the coming months. Revealing the cynicism behind the claims of concern for those currently awaiting housing, it was stated that those first affected by the cuts would be those receiving housing vouchers, which would see a 6 percent cut to its program.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site