

Oral Statement of Ms. Nancy R. Eldridge, Executive Director
Cathedral Square Corporation

Testifying on behalf of the
American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging

“The Administration’s Proposal to Revitalize Severely Distressed Public and Assisted Housing:
The Choice Neighborhoods Initiative”

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

*Good morning Chairman **Frank**, Chairwoman **Waters**, Ranking Member **Bachus**, Ranking Member **Capito** and members of the Committee.*

My name is Nancy Eldridge and I am the Executive Director of Vermont’s Cathedral Square Corporation. As a native Bostonian it is an honor to testify before Chairman Frank. And despite the fact that I live in one of the countries most rural states, I vividly recall the needs of low income residents in the Los Angeles area when I served as a VISTA volunteer at Legal Aid – many years ago!

*I am pleased to be here today, representing the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging. **AAHSA** members serve as many as **two million** people every day through mission-driven, not-for-profit organizations dedicated to providing the services people need, when they need them, **in the place they call home**. Our **5,700 members** offer adult day services, home health, community services, senior housing, assisted living residences, continuing care retirement communities, and nursing homes.*

I’m here to talk about Choice Neighborhoods and how it responds to the needs of the fastest growing segment of our neighborhoods: the elderly.

For the past decade Cathedral Square has been testing every imaginable type of housing model in anticipation of large numbers of seniors – with very significant health needs – living in our communities.

We have tried HUD assisted living, co-location of adult day programs, shared housing, and housing based wellness clinics. We have concluded that none of these individual models offers a

comprehensive solution because none of these approaches – on their own – assures that seniors can remain in our affordable housing with a varied and ever changing mix of health and mental health needs.

Since CNI is intended to be a 20 year solution, we believe that it should implement strategies that:

- *anticipate a neighborhood's demographics in twenty years*
- *anticipates the technologies that will transform communities for young and old*
- *and prepare for the budget environment that is likely to shape public education for children, health care for seniors and tax bases for municipalities.*

20 years from now the elderly population is expected to double!!

In rural communities in particular, there is a growing senior population. By the year 2030, nearly all of the top ten “oldest states” will be rural with the exception of the number one ranked state, Florida. Ms. Capito –West VA is included among the top ten. In my state, one third of all Vermonters will be 55 by the year 2017.

*We believe that the unmet health care needs of residents in senior housing is the **biggest threat** to the preservation of public and assisted housing. The level of unmet need is very troubling, invisible, and the cause of many unintended consequences with serious budget ramifications.*

*We believe that the only way the needs of seniors will be met is through **service networks developed at the neighborhood level**, networks that are fully integrated with a neighborhood's employment strategies and education reforms. We call our approach SASH - Seniors Aging Safely At Home. It's a population based approach to meeting the needs of seniors by utilizing the assets of the community. It's a place based approach as well, much like Choice Neighborhoods.*

*AAHSA believes that Choice Neighborhoods should and could provide opportunities to advance aging in place strategies like SASH – but it does require that we **change the way services are delivered** and that we move away from **funding silos** and look at how HUD resources matched*

with Medicaid and Medicare dollars can bend the cost curve in health care and long term care spending while extending the value of HUD dollars invested in housing preservation.

We applaud Choice Neighborhoods as a logical and welcome successor to the HOPE VI program.

*We are excited that for the first time we will have an opportunity to participate in broad revitalization efforts in our neighborhoods and communities instead of just tackling the preservation of our properties **one by one**.*

*In many of our communities, there are concentrations of seniors whose **demand for city and health services** is an indicator of economic distress in much the same way as crime, joblessness, and poor education can be indicators of distress. Demand on emergency services is growing in direct proportion to “aging in place”. Care coordination AT HOME can reduce that burden on cities. And multi-family housing can be a hub for providing that coordination throughout a neighborhood.*

(If Ms. Velasquez is at the hearing) CNI offers an opportunity to create jobs and meet the supportive service needs of seniors. We would respectfully recommend that Congresswoman Velasquez’ bill, HR 4224, Together We Care Act, be integrated into the Choice Neighborhoods Initiatives Act.

*In closing, as **proposed CNI fails to recognize the significant needs of the elderly – a shortcoming of HOPE VI that we should not repeat.***

We offer the following recommendations to better serve all generations:

- ***Neighborhoods where there are concentrations of seniors should be specifically identified as eligible neighborhoods.***
- ***We would encourage the Congress to require that any application for assistance be submitted by a partnership including the housing owner and the local government.***

- *Health and supportive services programs developed in partnership with housing providers and local aging services providers should be required.*
- *We support the goal of one for one replacement but want to be sure it allows for the conversion of studios into one bedroom apartments.*
- *Project based rental assistance should be guaranteed in “housing with services” because it provides the financial stability essential to taking on the financial risks associated with services.*
- *To achieve the ambitious goals of CNI, the resources of HUD, CMS, USDA and other federal agencies should be bundled for grantees.*

Thank you for supporting ALL generations in Choice Neighborhoods.