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## Tarnished Voucher Concept Revived

A plan for Section 8 housing voucher overhaul unveiled and debunked in 2010 is being revived in a much subtler form by its original backers. And this time, the concept of putting all HUD subsidized rental housing under a single-payer platform is gaining some acceptance.

A hearing by the House Housing & Insurance Subcommittee on the portability of housing vouchers illustrates that enhancing such voucher mobility would help voucher holders achieve economic self-sufficiency by providing better job, housing and education opportunities. The hearing was the ninth since January 2015 on “The Future of Housing in America.”

But the concept is largely a resurrection of HUD’s initial voucher plan called “Transforming Rental Assistance.” The plan, developed early in the Obama administration, would have been funded in FY 2011 with \$350 million to put Section 8 on a path to a single-payer platform for all of the nation’s subsidized rental housing.

While TRA was touted as a protector of rapidly disappearing low-income housing, its ultimate goal was to wrest control of the Section 8 administration from public housing authorities and put it in the hands of nonprofit groups and local community organizations.

The TRA was primarily the brainchild of Barbara Sard, who was brought into the administration from a key post at the left-leaning Center on Budget & Policy Priorities. The proposal was trounced by key members of Congress, primarily Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA), who chaired the House Financial Services Committee at the time.

Lawmakers were convinced that TRA would dilute local political power bases centered around public housing clusters. Opponents pointed to the Atlanta model as the culprit, where public housing was largely wiped out in favor of mixed income communities. The city’s traditional poverty power bases all but disappeared in the process.

PHAs are again the target in the resurrected concept and Subcommittee Chair Blaine Luetkemeyer (R-MO) indicated his acceptance of the idea although it is unlikely to get past the scrutiny of Financial Services Chairman Jeb Hensarling (R-TX) if he continues to chair the panel following the November elections.

‘Too often, the regulatory regime surrounding PHAs has the ultimate effect of stifling



opportunity for tenants,” says Luetkemeyer. “Rules preventing flexibility and modernization for PHAs mean more work and fewer served.

“Archaic rules surrounding housing vouchers limit the ability of residents to pursue financial independence,” Luetkemeyer continues. “All of this, combined with a budget situation that’s not improving, means we need to think differently about the way we administer housing programs.”

Sard, who was eased out of HUD to prevent an all-out flap between the administration and Congress over TRA, was back in full form at the hearing representing the CBPP as vice president for housing policy.

“The result is a complex network of program administration, where multiple agencies, both large and small, often administer vouchers in the same metro areas, sometimes with overlapping jurisdictions,” Sard tells the lawmakers. “The complexity and redundancy of program administration is inefficient, increases program costs, makes federal oversight more difficult, and reduces housing opportunities for families.”

The hearing also focused on persuading lawmakers to include HUD’s call for a new Housing Choice Voucher Mobility Counseling Demonstration program with \$15 million of new funding and a \$3 million set-aside to evaluate the program’s effectiveness. The proposal is unlikely to be included in the final FY 2017 spending authorization.

**Info:** See the TRA goals at [www.cdpublications.com/docs/8981](http://www.cdpublications.com/docs/8981)

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