

Putting fairness back in Section 8 housing law (Rep. Elton Gallegly)

By Rep. Elton Gallegly (R-Calif.) - 10/23/09 09:30 AM ET

When the Quality of Housing & Work Responsibility Act became law in 1999, it rightly prohibited public housing authorities from lowering the rent for Section 8 recipients who commit welfare fraud or refuse to participate in self-sufficiency programs.

It did not, however, prohibit private providers from lowering their share of the rent, which in turn, increases their government subsidy, while honest, hardworking low-income families cannot even qualify for benefits under the Section 8 program.

When Karen Steinbaum with the Affordable Housing Management Association of the Pacific Southwest brought this loophole to my attention earlier this month, my response was to introduce H.R.3897, the Removing Reward for Section 8 Housing Fraud Act of 2009.

Section 8 housing subsidies are based on a family's net income. The lower the income, the higher the subsidy and the lower the rent for the family. If a person commits welfare fraud or refuses to participate in a self-sufficiency program, they are ordered to repay the government, thereby lowering their monthly net income.

What my bill does is ensures an equal penalty for Section 8 recipients who commit fraud or do not comply with the requirements of their benefits. I see it as a matter of fairness.

As an example: Two Section 8 recipients live next door in a private housing complex. Tenant A was convicted of welfare fraud. As a result, his welfare subsidies have been lowered to pay an imposed fine. Because his subsidies are lower, his rent also has been reduced.

Tenant B next door is working part time, raising two children, and makes sure she is fully involved in a self-sufficiency program. She looks at Tenant A and wonders why she's working so hard when obviously crime pays. This is not right.

Specifically, H.R.3897 would amend current law so privately owned Section 8 properties must not lower the share of their rent for any household whose (1) welfare benefits are

reduced because the welfare agency has determined and verified that a family has committed welfare fraud; and (2) the family's welfare benefits are reduced because the welfare agency has determined and verified in writing that an enforced sanction is a result of noncompliance with a requirement to participate in an economic self-sufficiency program.

People who defraud the government should not be rewarded for their crimes. My bill rectifies that.

<http://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/civil-rights/64479-putting-fairness-back-in-section-8-housing-law-rep-elton-gallegly>