



From the left: Corey Mathews, FAHRO; Ellen Ramsey, Jacksonville Housing Authority; Michael Davis, Florida Housing Coalition; Jaimie Ross, Florida Housing Coalition; Charles Elssesser, Florida Legal Services; Mitch Ritchie, Jacksonville Legal Aid; and Greg Mellowe, Florida Coalition for the Homeless.

Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Funding Saga Continues Through FY 2005 and FY 2006 Budgets

BY CHARLES ELSSESER

The struggle by Public Housing Authorities and affordable housing advocates to maintain funding for Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, described in the last issue of this journal, continues into the new year as HUD implements the FY 2005 budget and Congress begins consideration of the proposed FY 2006 HUD budget. Public Housing Authorities and other advocates closed out last year's advocacy believing that Congress had "fully funded" the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program in the FY 2005 HUD budget. They had hoped that, while the program would not expand, the FY 2005 budget would at



least result in sufficient funds to renew all of the outstanding Section 8 housing subsidy contracts.

Unfortunately, HUD's recently announced implementation of the FY 2005 budget included an additional across the board reduction in every Housing Authority's Section 8 funding, as well as, in many cases, a further reduction caused by HUD's failure to fully pay for the increase in Section 8 voucher subsidies. While

the bases for these calculations are hidden in the obscure HUD budgeting process, the resulting loss of affordable housing will be obvious and draconian. The Washington,



November 2004 meeting of advocates for full funding of the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher program.

D.C. based Center for Budget and Policy Priorities calculates that Public Housing Authorities in Florida will lose funding for over 6,000 Section 8 Housing Choice vouchers this year. To put that number in perspective, it is only slightly less than the total number of rental units created each year by the Florida Sadowski Act SAIL rental unit production program. And the SAIL units, as valuable as they are, cannot reach households at the level of poverty served by the Section 8 vouchers.

Many public housing authorities have undertaken superhuman efforts to deflect the impact of these cuts on their constituency. These housing authorities are struggling to maintain their core mission of serving the very lowest income households, despite enormous financial and policy pressures by HUD to shift their focus to a higher income clientele. In November 2004, in an unprecedented advocacy effort, FAHRO, the Florida Public Housing Authority organization, convened a meeting with the Florida Housing Coalition, the Florida Homeless Coalition and legal services advocates to explore a common effort to demonstrate to the public and Congress that full funding of the Section 8 Housing Vouchers is, to use the President's recent phrase, an example of "taxpayer dollars... spent wisely."

The attention of these advocates must now turn to the President's proposed FY 2006 HUD Budget, released on



February 7, 2005. While the budget does not specifically target the Section 8 Housing Choice voucher program for significant cuts, HUD's funding overall was cut by more than 11 percent. Thus, in the ensuing budget discussions, Section 8 vouchers, as well as many other important HUD housing programs, will likely be in play. Moreover, the budget indicates that the administration will be proposing significant substantive changes in the Section 8 program to lessen its focus on the poorest households. Given the enormous pressures on the budget as a whole, and on discretionary spending in particular, affordable housing advocates have their work cut out for them.



Charles Elseser is an attorney with Florida Legal Services, specializing in affordable housing litigation and policy advocacy. His work is focused on protecting low income homeowners and tenants against displacement and protecting existing affordable housing from loss through the expiration of rent restrictions, the loss of subsidy contracts or demolition. Charles serves on the board of the National Low-Income Housing Coalition and the Advisory Council for the Florida Housing Coalition.