



SMOKY MOUNTAIN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

June 23, 2021

Scott Farmer, Executive Director
NC Housing Finance Agency
3508 Bush Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27609

Mr. Farmer,

Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership, the affordable housing division of Mountain Projects, Inc. greatly appreciates all the efforts of the North Carolina Housing Finance Agency (the NCHFA) to assist the people of North Carolina with their housing needs. We value our partners and are committed to your efforts.

While serving areas outside of the targeted marketing area I would urge fewer burdens for qualifications. Many families in the rural areas have less means and services available to assist with housing related expenses, especially those related to home ownership. The housing crisis not only reflects the diversity of the housing spectrum; it also reflects geographic and community diversity. The other impact of the COVID-19 pandemic could be an increase in blighted and abandoned properties. These create a tremendous strain for communities because they face the difficult and expensive choice of tearing them down or rehabilitating them.

We cannot forget about the rural communities and small cities that face their own unique housing challenges such as, aging population, lack of easy to develop land and high cost of construction, regional and national market impacts, lack of high paying jobs, tourism, second homes and vacation rentals. By lessening the burden for qualifications residents of rural areas will have more opportunities to apply and receive funding.

Additionally as a HUD certified housing counseling agency, I would like to stress the importance of education for these households to support long-term success. As mentioned in the comment submitted 6/23/2021 by Prosperity Unlimited, Inc. "Housing Counseling Agencies have demonstrated their ability to mobilize and positively impact client outcomes during emergency and crisis situations and have a successful track record in working with federally funded and emergency management programs. The NC's Homeowner Assistance Fund is an opportunity to help strengthen the HUD approved counseling agencies network and provide assistance to homeowners who have been impacted. The aforementioned housing programs were successful as a result of the HUD approved housing counseling agencies participation. Housing counseling agencies collaborate with federal, state and local

SMOKY MOUNTAIN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

The Affordable Housing Division of Mountain Projects, Inc.

2177 Asheville Rd., Waynesville, NC 28786

Phone: (828) 452-1447 • smokymountainhousing.org • Facebook: Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership



SMOKY MOUNTAIN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

stakeholders in the housing industry. By utilizing an innovative triage approach which fully leverages funding and maximizes staff efficiency, these agencies are positioned to better serve those facing a financial crisis. Housing Counseling agencies help prevent foreclosures, stabilize neighborhoods, and effectuate systemic changes within the housing industry. These agencies are a valuable resource and offer long term sustainability for distressed families in North Carolina. Therefore, they should be specifically mentioned and have a major role in the overall design of the program and service delivery.”

In order to support the demand of increased needs for counseling and workshops it is imperative that the North Carolina’s Housing Assistance Plan includes funding for staff capacity building and program related expenses. Currently North Carolina has 54 housing counseling agencies that have met the requirement to have a certified counselor (75%). With the plan to dedicate at least \$232,336,660 even if every household received the maximum allotted assistance of \$35,000.00 that is over 6,600 households. Staffing is critical, along with program expenses and training.

In order to further the funding for future programs these funds should be provided as a silent second 0% loan. Restrictions could mirror the CPLP program with stipulations of payback after the first mortgage is settled or from sale proceeds. Recapture of these funds could be set aside to support a housing trust fund to continue to strengthen our communities.

While priority should be to remain in the home we encourage funding to be available for health and safety repairs with no additional restrictions. ESFR and URP have been amazing however the waitlist are far greater than the means to repair and priority levels disqualify many households, due to age, mobile homes, and/ or rented lots. Again these programs do not come with much “soft cost” built in. In order to provide the services and help our communities, staffing will need to be increased.

We also recommend to allow little to no restrictions on leveraging funding to assist with repairs so that more household can be assisted and provide the ability to offset some of the rising construction costs that have made previous eligible URP, ESFR, USDA 504 clients ineligible due to the limited funding available.

Thank you for considering our responses, and we look forward to working with NCHFA to better serve our communities.

Kindest Regards,

Heather Boyd

Executive Director

SMOKY MOUNTAIN HOUSING PARTNERSHIP

The Affordable Housing Division of Mountain Projects, Inc.

2177 Asheville Rd., Waynesville, NC 28786

Phone: (828) 452-1447 • smokymountainhousing.org • Facebook: Smoky Mountain Housing Partnership