

National American Indian Housing Council

Briefing Paper on the BIA's Housing Improvement Program

February 12, 2008

HOUSING IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) is an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior (DoI). In 1965 the Housing Improvement Program (HIP) was established pursuant to the Snyder Act of 1924 (25 U.S.C. §13) to provide grants of modest amounts (often not more than \$1,500) for home rehabilitation, renovation and repair. It is estimated that 200,000 housing units are needed immediately in Indian communities, with some 90,000 Indian families homeless or under-housed. As the waiting lists for new homes continue to grow and housing stock becomes older and dilapidated, the HIP program strives to ensure that existing housing stock remain safe, healthy and habitable. According to the BIA, HIP assists 375 Indian families annually.

PRESIDENT'S FY 2009 BUDGET REQUEST

As part of the DoI's Fiscal Year 2009 budget request, the HIP is zeroed out. Similarly, in Fiscal Year 2008, HIP was zeroed out but restored by Congress in the amount of \$13.8 million. Congress appropriated \$19 million in Fiscal Years 2005-2007. The rationale for requesting no funding for the HIP is that the programs are viewed by the Administration as being "duplicative" of housing programs administered by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. In fact, the HIP is not duplicative and serves a valuable role in keeping existing housing stock in habitable conditions for the neediest within the Indian communities: Indian elders and low-income people.

NATIVE AMERICAN HOUSING ASSISTANCE AND SELF-DETERMINATION ACT

Bipartisan efforts lead to the enactment in 1996 of the Native American Housing Assistance and Self-Determination Act (NAHASDA). This Act revolutionized and improved the way in which Indian tribes design, construct, and manage new housing units using Federal housing and related community development funds. Because NAHASDA shifted decision-making from Washington D.C. to the tribes themselves, there has been a significant increase in tribal capacity and managerial acumen in addressing housing, infrastructure, and increasingly other related challenges facing tribal governments. The NAHASDA approach is built upon the Indian Housing Block Grant --- the lifeblood for new housing development, construction, infrastructure and home repair in Indian communities. Steadily rising prices for energy, transportation, lumber, and other home building supplies and materials have caused the unit price of housing construction in these communities to increase substantially. These rising costs, coupled with significant and increasing demand for housing, are forcing a greater reliance on the HIP program.

NAIHC is the only national organization that promotes, supports, and encourages Indian tribes and tribally-designated housing entities (TDHEs) in their efforts to provide culturally-relevant, decent, safe, sanitary, and affordable housing for American Indians and Alaska Natives. NAIHC boasts a membership of nearly 460 Indian tribes and TDHEs and provides its members with training, technical assistance, research, communications and advocacy.