

Submitted by:

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Good morning, my name is Ron Field, Vice President of Public Policy for Volunteers of America. I wish to thank Assistant Secretary Carbonell, Dr. McGee, and the members of the Policy Committee for allowing me this opportunity to present our ideas and recommendations for the policy considerations at the forthcoming 2005 White House Conference on Aging.

By way of further introduction, let me add that Volunteers of America is a national nonprofit spiritually based organization providing local human service programs and opportunities for individual and community involvement. We have been providing services for seniors as part of our continuing legacy for over 100 years. It is our mission to help the most vulnerable and under-served people achieve their full potential as a basic principle of social justice. Our continuum of senior services includes affordable housing, assisted living, adult day services, nursing homes, home health services, protective services, transportation, home delivered and congregate meals, specialized care for Alzheimer's Disease and senior citizens centers. In fact, Volunteers of America is the largest recipient of HUD 202 funds, which provide capital advances to finance the construction and rehabilitation of affordable housing with supportive services for the elderly. In 2002, Volunteers of America programs and services assisted about 182,000 seniors nationwide. I mention this as background for my remarks, so that you will understand the large base of operational experience that Volunteers of America has in the areas of housing and services--- two areas that figure most prominently in providing our nation's seniors with the quality of life and quality of care they desire and deserve.

We understand that a main focus of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging will be on the development of policies that will prepare our nation for the coming retirement of the Baby Boom retirement generation. As such, it will be critical for Conference delegates to examine the interrelationship of housing and services and develop policies that will promote a seamless system that will serve not only the coming wave of young retirees, but the current population of frail and vulnerable seniors, including aging individuals with developmental disabilities. Eliminating barriers that hinder the connection between services and shelter possible, as well as expanding or strengthening existing linkages, is a critical part of a process designed to put the consumer in control of a network of services from which he or she can decide will best serve his or her needs in a residential setting of their choosing. It is this essence of choice and control over housing and services that fosters independence and dignity and empowers seniors to live their lives in ways

that reflect their personal values of what is most important to them and will contribute most directly to their quality of life and care.

One further item of note on this subject, is that last year, Volunteers of America convened a Roundtable on Assisted Living that brought together policy experts from government and the public and private sectors to discuss the key issues surrounding the provision of affordable supportive housing for seniors and to formulate policy recommendations. The policy recommendations that came out of our Roundtable dealing with housing and supportive services are very consistent with recommendations that were presented to Congress in 2002 by the *Commission on Affordable Housing and Health Facility Needs for Seniors in the 21st Century*. Our recommendations for policy development at the 2005 White House Conference on Aging are informed by the reports that resulted from both of these initiatives.

Recommendations for Policy Consideration and Development

In order to promote, build and strengthen a seamless linkage between housing and supportive services, WHCoA should develop policy recommendations that will:

- Support expansion of the HUD service coordinator grant program. We know from first hand experience how service coordination helps the elderly remain independent by assisting them in obtaining support services to meet their needs, and how it can prevent premature institutionalization.
- Require more coordination between HUD and HHS at the federal level. For too long, the housing and service needs of seniors have traditionally been addressed in disparate and uncoordinated programs administered by HUD and HHS. The resulting fragmentation and conflicting eligibility requirements for housing and service subsidies simply compounds an already difficult task to address complex needs in a comprehensive and coordinated fashion.
- Call for a clear federal directive that subsidies received for housing or services are not to be counted as income in determining eligibility for Medicaid eligibility or other housing or service programs.

- Outline the parameters for HUD, Rural Housing Service, and State Housing Finance Agencies to revise their regulations that will permit or encourage 202s and other affordable senior housing projects to use additional service space in seniors rental housing, sufficient to allow some assisted living service delivery, as appropriate.
- Urge Congress to authorize HUD to revise regulations governing the Assisted Living Conversion Program (ALCP) to better facilitate its use by housing sponsors. The ALCP program provides grants to non-profit providers of project serving seniors, which are receiving federal HUD federal assistance.
- Urge Congress to provide greater flexibility in the use of Low Income Housing Tax Credits in the development of affordable assisted living facilities. At present, there is regulatory confusion as to whether assisted living is an eligible use of tax credits. Policy guidance is needed that will help state and federal officials, as well as investors, to clearly understand the type, and limits, of supportive services that will be allowed in LIHTC financed senior housing projects.

The scope of issues related to housing and supportive services is very broad and complex. I have selected just a few of what we feel are among the more pressing issues that could benefit from a strong policy discussion at the 2005 White House Conference on Aging. Volunteers of America is ready to work with federal and state governments, the not-for-profit sector, the religious community, business, labor and families to work toward a cohesive public policy that will in the end allow seniors to live in the place of their choice, with access to the services they prefer, at a cost that is affordable to the individual and the government.

Thank you again for this opportunity to present our thoughts and recommendations. We look forward to working with the Policy Committee in the months ahead to ensure the success of the 2005 White House Conference on Aging.