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Oakland Housing Authority Responds to City Lawsuit

Severely Underfunded by Federal Government, OHA Is Forced to Defer Property Maintenance, Repairs

OAKLAND, CA. Thursday, February 15, 2007- Today the Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) reacted to news that the City of Oakland filed a lawsuit against the Authority. Although Authority representatives have not yet seen the lawsuit, they understand the complaints are about the physical conditions of properties and resident behavioral issues.

“It is unfortunate that the Oakland City Attorney has chosen to file this lawsuit against the Housing Authority,” said Jon Gresley, Oakland Housing Authority Executive Director. “It shouldn’t be necessary to spend precious City and Authority funds on a lawsuit over a disagreement arising out of Federal funding cuts.”

The Oakland Housing Authority operates a public housing and a Section 8 housing program. Both programs are funded by the federal government, via HUD and congressional appropriations. The Authority receives no operating subsidies from the City of Oakland, Alameda County or the State of California. For the past 30 years, these programs have been severely underfunded, with cuts to Oakland totaling \$40 million over just the past 13 years. The cuts went way beyond cutting fat years ago and have forced OHA to defer basic management and maintenance services. As a result, Authority properties have large amounts of deferred maintenance, far more properties are in need of rehabilitation than the Authority has resources to address, and response time to maintenance and management requests are delayed.

“Fighting a frivolous lawsuit may mean that property repairs are further delayed or worse yet, that needy Oakland residents are denied housing,” added Gresley. “We are in agreement with many of the City’s concerns. I welcome this opportunity to highlight the Authority’s great need for additional funding.”

Despite unprecedented levels of funding cuts, and operating at a funding level of 76 percent, OHA is vigorously stepping up activities addressing community concerns

regarding site maintenance and resident behaviors. The Authority has undertaken an accelerated schedule for property upgrades, painting and landscaping, and has established a Customer Assistance Center (CAC) to monitor, address and resolve community complaints. And although not required to, the Authority operates and funds its own police department at a cost of \$2.2 million per year. The Oakland Housing Authority is one of only seven (7) housing authorities out of 3200 across the country that has its own police force. The Oakland Housing Authority Police Department (OHAPD) covers not only the Authority's jurisdiction, but works closely with the Oakland police department to address citywide issues.

“Without adequate federal funding or a replacement source of funds, we cannot adequately address the maintenance, repair and management issues addressed in the City's lawsuit,” said Gresley. “We would prefer to work cooperatively with the City to find ways of improving our properties, and ultimately, the lives of Oakland's neediest residents.”

The Oakland Housing Authority (OHA) is the City of Oakland's state-chartered and federally funded agency to promote the availability of quality housing for low-income persons. OHA works to promote the civic involvement and economic self-sufficiency of its residents and to further the expansion of affordable housing within Oakland. The Authority is currently helping to house 14,000 of the city's lowest income families. (www.oakha.org)

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