

Coburn Amendment #1755 – Eliminate special treatment for public housing authorities (PHAs) in Los Angeles County, Alaska, Mississippi, and Iowa

The nearly 4,000 public housing authorities (PHAs) nationwide manage section 8 programs and publicly owned housing (sometimes known as “projects”). Because of their role in the lives of millions of residents, federal law requires PHAs to have at least one resident on their boards of directors. There are limited exceptions to the rule, including if a state requires its PHAs to have full-time, salaried board members.

This amendment would eliminate a carve-out exemption for PHAs in several states and one county that has been in appropriations bills for several years.

Los Angeles County, Alaska, Iowa, and Mississippi have received an exception from the law for years. Special treatment has applied to the three states since at least 2006, and Los Angeles County was added to the list in a 2007 appropriations bill.¹ This current appropriations bill (S.1243) would continue this earmark.

One Wisconsin PHA has also considered asking for the exemption. According to its 5-year plan filed in 2013, “WHEDA intends to ask a member of our Congressional delegation to add a provision to the next annual HUD appropriations act that will exempt us from the requirements of [existing law]. This will follow the lead of the public housing agencies in Alaska, Iowa, Mississippi and Los Angeles.”²

Though PHAs under the exemption must each have resident advisory boards, such bodies do not have the same oversight and involvement as a board member. In fact, they may complement the work of a resident board member.

Such a trend of exemptions should be ended and the law applied equally to all.

¹ See the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, and the Transportation, Treasury, Housing and Urban Development, the Judiciary, the District of Columbia, and Independent Agencies Appropriations Act, 2006.

² Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority 5-Year and Annual Plan, Submitted to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development April 17, 2013. Available at http://www.wheda.com/root/uploadedFiles/Website/Rental_Resources/Proposed%20Submission_2013.pdf, accessed July 22, 2013.