



Autism Society San Francisco Bay Area
PO Box 249
San Mateo, CA 94401

Kathy Espinoza-Howard, Chair
Board of Commissioners
Housing Authority of the County of Santa Clara
505 West Julian Street
San Jose, CA 95110

May 16, 2014

Re: May 20, 2014 meeting—Request for staff report on potential to create pool of rental vouchers for growing population of Santa Clara County adults at serious risk of institutionalization due to incapacitating developmental disability

Dear Ms. Espinoza-Howard,

Autism Society San Francisco Bay Area represents the interests of Bay Area families affected by autism and similar developmental disabilities, including those residing in Santa Clara County. Housing Choices Coalition is a Santa Clara County nonprofit devoted to helping the developmentally disabled (DD) find affordable housing.

Our community is deeply concerned that in the current reality — in spite of a firm commitment by the State of California to house adults with developmental disabilities in their communities instead of in institutions — **it has become virtually impossible to create new community-based developmental disability housing opportunities within our county**, due to soaring costs, surging DD population, and the lack of state or federal DD housing programs except as directed toward the few exiting Agnews Developmental Center pursuant to the state's Community Placement Plan.

Part of the pressure to create new housing has arisen from skyrocketing autism rates: up more than 2,000% in past 25 years. There are now more than 4,100 Santa Clara County residents with substantially disabling autism served by the San Andreas Regional Center, up from just a few hundred 25 years ago. Virtually none of these people are capable of earning a living or paying market rents, or caring for themselves. They are unequivocally at risk for institutionalization absent robust community-based alternatives.

May 20, 2014 meeting—Request for referral to staff re rental vouchers for Santa Clara County adults at serious risk of institutionalization due to developmental disability

Pursuant to HUD Guidance, Notice PIH-2012-31 (HA) issued June 29, 2012, **which provides that Public Housing Authorities have discretion to give priority to residents deemed to be at serious risk of institutionalization**, we respectfully ask the Board of Commissioners to direct HACSC staff to prepare a report on the feasibility of preferences for at-risk DD residents. In particular, the report should address:

- How many **portable vouchers** may be awarded each year to adults at serious risk of institutionalization.
- How many **project-based vouchers** may be awarded each year for projects, at least in part, explicitly addressing housing for those with profound developmental disabilities. While the notice states that the “PHA must ensure that units occupied by persons with disabilities are not clustered in a particular building, floor or within certain sections within a larger development,” those with severe developmental disabilities often require certain amenities and protections not offered in scattered allocations. Indeed, an ever-increasing proportion of the autism population have intensive needs, including severe behavioral challenges, severe cognitive impairments, frequent elopement, property damage and acoustical outbursts. Because of the nature of many institution-eligible disabilities, customized and tailored properties must enter the mix of project-based options funded with HA funds. Otherwise, unintended discrimination against the most severely disabled and dependent persons within our community results.
- Any other preferences that may be provided for this vulnerable population, whether through **HUD 811** or any other means.
- People with severe DDs almost always have no income apart from SSI and, ironically, are **ineligible for most low-income housing programs**. Staff should address how vouchers, which have no minimum income requirement, can address this unintended exclusion of people with DDs.

Thank you for your work providing housing opportunities for the neediest in our County. We look forward to hearing back from you and collaborating ongoingly on this important work. Please contact us at any time with questions about this request for a staff report.

Very truly yours,

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