

# Section 4 Funding for Community Revitalization Is at Risk

**W**ith the housing crisis chipping away at the stability of many Virginia communities, why could a program long responsible for revitalizing distressed neighborhoods be zeroed out of the proposed federal budget?

It seems counterintuitive, yet that is the situation now facing the Section 4 Capacity Building program. This little-known resource has helped ensure critical community assets such as affordable housing, retail, job training, employment opportunities, and quality schools are available in low-income areas, just as they are in more affluent communities.

All across the country, in large urban neighborhoods and small rural towns, its impact has been clear. Simply put: It works. Though it taps just 40 million of the \$3.1 trillion federal budget, Section 4 has a reach that is broad and deep. It has been underpinning widespread community revitalization for 15 years.

Consider some of the things it's done right here in Richmond. Winchester Greens, for example, was once a crime-ridden community characterized by small, dilapidated, barrack-like structures that offered little sense of home, security, or opportunity to its residents. Not so today. With the help of Section 4 funding, the nonprofit Better Housing Coalition has transformed Winchester Greens into a mixed-income, mixed-use neighborhood characterized by townhomes, senior housing, a child care center, recreational space, new retail offerings, and office space. Important services like after-school and job-training programs have helped residents become more independent. Crime has been reduced by more than 75 percent, and the overall climate in this community has taken a dramatic turn for the better. That's what the right resources in the right hands can do. That's what Section 4 can support.

VIRGINIA Supportive Housing, another local nonprofit, has taken a different tack, utilizing Section 4 to focus on the needs of the disabled. All too often, those with physical disabilities can't af-

ford an accessible apartment, even when they have the necessary independent living skills to be on their own.

With Section 4 as seed money — and with the many private-sector funders to leverage with Section 4 in hand — Virginia Supportive Housing has developed a number of properties that are offering high-quality, affordable homes to low-income disabled residents, including disabled homeless veterans. Their efforts have been life-changing.

In short, Section 4 is local in its application but national in its impact. It has touched communities in every state. It has been scored highly by the Office of Management and Budget as effective. It enjoys broad bipartisan support in Congress. Mayors and governors consistently applaud its merit.

Since the program's inception, the three national nonprofit organizations that administer the funds on behalf of the Department of Housing and Urban Development — Local Initiatives Support Corp. (LISC), Enterprise Community Partners, and Habitat for Humanity International — have directed \$335 million in Section 4 resources to nonprofit developers in more than 2,000 communities nationwide. In addition, they have used Section 4 funding to attract an additional \$1.9 billion in private investment and philanthropic contributions that have helped transform distressed neighborhoods into healthy, vibrant communities.

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virtually no opposition, it could be eliminated. At a time when affordable housing and community-based organizations are scrambling to help struggling families and neighborhoods, they can't afford to lose one of their most valuable tools. Virginia needs Section 4 if we are to build and rehab more affordable housing, energize commercial corridors, better educate our children, and improve the health and welfare of our citizens. It just makes sense to preserve this important program.

As we move forward in this election year, let's make sure we include distressed communities in the conversation about our national direction. We can't continue to push development efforts further and further beyond our boundaries. We need a commitment to restoring our existing neighborhoods so they have a chance to flourish. Section 4 gives us the chance to choose progress and opportunity over stagnation and disinvestment. It should be fully funded in the 2009 budget.

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**BUT, IN THE convoluted balancing act that is the federal budget, Section 4 is at risk. Even though the program has a strong track record of success and**



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