



HOUSTON
HOUSING AUTHORITY

Transforming Lives & Communities

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February 14, 2024

Mayor John Whitmire
City of Houston
901 Bagby
Houston, TX 77002

RE: ISSUANCE OF VOUCHERS

Dear Mayor Whitmire:

I hope this letter finds you well. I am writing to bring urgent attention to the pressing issue of affordable housing in our city, particularly in light of recent developments regarding the issuance of vouchers under our rental assistance programs.

As you are aware, our agencies have been engaged in ongoing dialogue regarding voucher program funding trends and the availability of HHA vouchers for those in need. Despite efforts to mitigate potential shortfalls and continue voucher issuances to the thousands of general waiting list applicants, including special program referrals for veterans, persons with disabilities, and special preference referrals (such as those eligible for the homeless preference), our analysis has revealed a critical situation: we are currently over 100% of the use of budget authority and our HUD-held reserves. This is due to the increased per unit cost to assist voucher participants, which is a characteristic found across industry housing markets. Regrettably, this necessitates an immediate cessation of voucher issuances in accordance with our Administrative Plan.

The implications of this decision are profound, especially considering the dire state of affordable housing in Houston. Recent data underscores the severity of the housing crisis, with renters facing unsustainable financial burdens and prospective homeowners encountering soaring costs that outpace income growth. The disparities in homeownership rates among different racial groups highlight systemic inequalities that persist in our communities.

The staggering demand for public housing, as evidenced by the overwhelming response to recent waitlist openings, underscores the urgency of action. In confronting this challenge, we must adopt a multifaceted approach that prioritizes equity and social mobility. Initiatives such as mixed-income housing developments and workforce housing programs represent tangible steps toward addressing housing inequities and fostering inclusive communities. By leveraging tax incentives and partnering with nonprofit organizations, we can expand access to affordable housing and mitigate the adverse effects of rising rent prices.

One such initiative, [Affordable Housing Houston](#) (AHH), a platform dedicated to providing affordable housing solutions to residents in the Houston area, offers access and insight into housing options that align with our vision for equitable communities (an accompanying flyer details the current program and offerings).

Still, our efforts to advance affordable housing are hindered by entrenched opposition and misinformation propagated by a vocal minority. The anti-affordable housing movement, fueled by unfounded fears, obstructs progress. It is imperative that we confront these challenges head-on and advocate for policies that promote inclusive, equitable communities. As elected officials, we are grateful you play a pivotal role in championing policies that prioritize affordable housing and address the needs of our most vulnerable residents. I urge you to support initiatives that expand access to affordable housing and dismantle systemic barriers to homeownership. Together, we can build a future where every Houstonian has a place to call home.

Thank you for your attention to this critical issue. We look forward to continued collaboration as we work to ensure a brighter, more equitable future for all residents of our city. If you have any questions and/or suggestions, please contact Kenneth Coles, VP of Voucher Programs, at KColes@housingforhouston.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "David A. Northern, Sr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

David A. Northern, Sr.
President & CEO
Houston Housing Authority

Cc: Mr. Chris Newport, Chief of Staff
Mr. Steven David, Deputy Chief of Staff