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## State Legislature's Committee on Housing Advances Public Housing Innovations Bill

*Legislation would create ten pilots to encourage efficiency and help modernize state public housing*

*Boston, MA, June 7, 2011* –Legislation filed by Representative Jeffrey Sánchez (D-Boston) and Senator Harriette Chandler (D-Worcester) to revitalize state public housing was advanced favorably by the Joint Committee on Housing.

“Resources for state-assisted public housing are inadequate for the low-income residents, including seniors and the disabled, in need of affordable housing. This legislation provides public housing authorities greater creativity to develop innovative solutions to preserve units,” said Representative Sánchez.

“This bill will enable our local housing authorities to continue their exceptional work providing vibrant communities to our seniors and low income working families” said Representative Kevin Honan (D-Boston), the Housing Committee Co-Chair. “By providing housing authorities with new and innovative tools, we can rebuild our outdated housing stock into communities that can thrive for years to come.”

“Our state’s public housing needs and challenges have changed over time, but in some cases our laws haven’t kept up. This legislation will provide housing authorities with greater flexibility and encourage the development of new approaches and new ways of meeting our communities’ affordable housing needs. As a result, these programs will be able to grow and change as the needs of the time grow and change, using our limited housing resources as efficiently as possible,” said Senator Jamie Eldridge (D-Acton), Co-Chair of the Housing Committee.

“The Public Housing Innovations Act would provide local housing authorities with the ability to maximize resources available for the rehabilitation and maintenance of public housing, reduce and streamline public housing authority regulatory requirements, and encourage innovative designs to secure the long-term preservation of this precious public resource,” said Chandler.

Boston has 2,554 units of state public housing. Statewide, there are over 49,000 units of state-assisted public housing, one of only four states nationwide that provides state public housing for its residents. 32,000 of these units are reserved for elders and persons for disabilities. 234 local housing authorities manage state public housing, providing important affordable housing opportunities for residents with modest incomes across the Commonwealth.

“State public housing is a critical resource that needs to be preserved”, said Sean Caron, CHAPA Director of Public Policy. “This bill creates a framework for innovative public housing finance tools, more efficient energy contracts, opportunities to provide workforce training and services for tenants, and other new models to better manage and rehabilitate housing developments.”

H. 0375/S582 was drafted by Representative Sanchez and Senator Chandler in collaboration with CHAPA, Massachusetts-NAHRO, Boston Housing Authority representatives, the Patrick/Murray Administration, legal services attorneys and many other tenant advocates. It would do the following:

- Provide flexibility to ten housing authorities to develop alternative approaches and new innovations to serve tenants and the community according to an Annual Plan approved by the Department of Housing and Community Development.
- Allow ten public housing authorities to direct available funding to the most pressing local needs in the community, by permitting operating funds, rental subsidy funds, and to the extent permissible, modernization funds, to be used flexibly to implement the innovations plan.
- Reduce the burden on tenants and the housing authority by simplifying regulatory requirements in such areas as rent calculation based upon personal tenant information regarding income and exclusions, rent policy, and tenant selection.
- Provide for tenant participation in development of innovative policies and maintain tenant protections regarding evictions, leases, grievances, relocation, and the right of return.
- Authorize long-term energy procurement contracts.
- Provide for a data-driven yearly evaluation on innovation program outcomes to explore these innovations statewide.