

TheEpochTimes

Super Committee Urged to Spare City's Housing Programs

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Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez speaks to the press outside the City Hall on Wednesday. (Ivan Pentchoukov/The Epoch Times)

NEW YORK—New York politicians on the local, state, and federal level are campaigning to save the city's housing programs from the list of budget cuts expected from the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction. Also known as the "Super Committee," the 12-member panel was formed to find \$1.5 trillion in debt savings over the next decade. The first round of proposals from the committee is not due until Nov. 23. Fearing the worst, officials are pushing the issue early.

"Decisions made by this Super Committee will impact housing assistance programs for decades. Now is not the time to cut back on housing assistance," said Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez. "Millions of working families are struggling to cope with the loss of their jobs."

The Appropriations Committee announced \$1.4 billion, or 20 percent, in cuts to federal housing programs on Sept. 8.

“We now have a Super Committee. This Super Committee is charged with the responsibility of cutting. This is unheard of in legislative circles,” said Congressman Jose Serrano, member of the Appropriations Committee.

“They must not devastate the programs that help the poor and working class and moderate income people in this country.”

All of the city’s housing programs are funded by Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), a federal agency. The city has over 180,000 public housing units (the most in the nation), over 115,000 Section 8 voucher units, over 75,000 HUD subsidized private apartments, and over 75,000 low income tax credit units.

“An attack on these units and their supports means that it will implode on the people of New York and not only the poor,” said David Jones, president and CEO of Community Services Society of New York. “This fight must go to Congress. We have our back against the wall.”

The city’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development is also funded on the federal level. Cuts to that program could threaten the agency’s ability to respond to complaints over heat and hot water and landlords, said Judith Goldiner, attorney in charge at the Legal Aid Society.

“The best approach to this whole problem is to get the American economy growing at 3.5 percent instead of 1 percent. I’d much rather see all of this effort in Washington focused on trade reform with China, which is the source of our slow growth and lack of revenues, rather than taking an axe or a scalpel to social welfare programs,” said Peter Navarro, professor of economics and public policy at the University of California in Irvine.

“For me, the whole exercise begins with a false assumption that you balance the budget by raising taxes and cutting spending when in fact the best way to do it would be trade reform with China,” said Navarro.

The housing cuts proposed on Sept. 8 follow a decade of decline in federal funding for housing programs, according to a report from the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities.