



INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH  
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The Honorable Christopher J. Dodd  
The Honorable Richard C. Shelby  
US Senate Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs  
534 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Re: S.1619 Livable Communities Act 2009

Dear Chairman Dodd and Ranking Member Shelby,

The Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities, and societies.

IWPR has conducted a four-year study in New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Houston concerning the circumstances of families displaced from public housing in New Orleans after the flooding that followed the 2005 hurricanes and the subsequent demolition of public housing. We hope you will find our research with the former residents—the majority of whom are women and African-American—helpful in your deliberations of S.1619 Livable Communities Act 2009.

IWPR's analysis of women's access to services, networks, forms of transportation, and other supports both prior to and after displacement indicates a need for better infrastructure to access resources, such as improved broadband or affordable transportation options that link women and their families with where they live, work, and go to school. Limited and inconsistent access to support services contributes to keeping some women and their families extremely vulnerable. Many still retain a sense of victimization well past the trauma of disaster. Conversely, other women and families among former residents have found new or expanded opportunities in new spaces of the city and the nation: better infrastructure to access resources appears critical to their success.

The project report for the study is forthcoming later this year. Our other reports relevant to this topic are available at our website ([www.iwpr.org](http://www.iwpr.org)). For more information on our research in this area, please contact IWPR Study Director Jane Henrici, Ph.D., or Barbara Gault, Ph.D., Executive Director, or myself.

Based on our analyses, we offer the following suggestions:

1. Include Schools and Education as Hubs within Livable Communities

A need to continue and improve education and training is critical for all generations within low-income communities and those affected by displacement and disasters in particular. We know that for each generation and population different types and levels of education might be needed. This study and other research conducted by IWPR suggest that educational services are critical to families moving forward past disaster recovery and toward economic self-sufficiency. Community colleges, particularly if combined with childcare centers, can act as hubs, a critical

element of our community infrastructure, to connect students with other services and information they need beyond classroom activities.

2. Include Improvements to Broadband Infrastructure

A gap in access to information is a common theme throughout our research. Improvement to broadband infrastructure could not only improve the livability of a community but is also a key part of economic development which is one of the six livability principles of the Sustainable Communities Initiative, "Enhance Economic Competitiveness." Improving the broadband infrastructure also falls under "Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investments." The FCC introduced a National Broadband Plan in March to improve access across the United States.

3. Explicitly Include a Focus on Women in the Creation of a Livable Community and in Data Collection and Evaluation

Finally, explicit acknowledgement of gendered differences in care-giving, transportation needs, and wage work expectations and opportunities is needed. Data collection for evaluation also should be detailed by demographic characteristics of gender, income level, age, race, ethnicity, sexuality, and disability status, so that as the agencies involved in the Act's implementation improve infrastructure throughout the United States, changes can be tracked as they affect the lives of all individuals and communities.

Information hubs and internet access enable poorer women and their families displaced by post-Katrina flooding and public housing transitions to: find homes, employment, medical information, and educational funding; create resumes and do school work; and locate and stay in touch with now scattered family and friends. Acknowledgement of some of the specific needs of women, particularly those in poverty, and improved tracking of data about them, will improve the Livable Communities Act.

Thank you for your work on S.1619 Livable Communities Act of 2009. We appreciate your consideration of our suggestions and look forward to continuing our work on this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact me for more information about our work in this area.

Cordially Yours,



Heidi Hartmann, Ph.D.  
President