

FAAST Housing Facts

September 2004



News and Information about Affordable Accessible Housing for Persons with Disabilities in Florida.

FAAST is a non-profit organization whose mission is to enhance the quality of life for all Floridians with disabilities by promoting awareness of, access to and advocacy for Affordable Accessible Housing and Assistive Technology.

FUNDS AVAILABLE FOR HOME REPAIRS AFTER HURRICANES CHARLEY AND FRANCES

In the aftermath of Hurricanes Charley and Frances, Florida Housing Finance Corporation (FHFC) has filed an emergency rule relating to the State Housing Initiatives Partnership (SHIP) Program that will allow local governments that have been declared disaster areas to request immediate use of SHIP dollars from open fiscal years, including 2004/2005 dollars that have yet to be disbursed. Local governments in the impacted areas are encouraged to submit requests for disaster funding now. Requests for funding from counties that have been identified as areas having suffered the greatest damage will be given first priority.

FHFC is also expected to make \$15 million available through the HOME program for disaster relief including making home repair loans, mortgages, and tenant-based rental assistance.

The recent spate of hurricane activity has damaged or destroyed the homes and livelihoods of many Floridians and rebuilding homes and communities after a destructive storm is a daunting challenge. However, this time of rebuilding and reconstructing can also be an opportunity to build better homes and stronger communities than those that existed before the storms.

For many families, the availability of funds from FHFC can provide the resources necessary to make a home fully accessible for someone with a disability. If your home has been damaged by the recent storms, and you are eligible for SHIP or HOME funds, be sure to consider your home's accessibility needs when you develop a plan to repair or rehabilitate your home.

For a list of professionals who can perform accessibility assessments for your home, contact FAAST at faast@faast.org or 850-487-3278, ext. 105.

RENTAL UNITS AVAILABLE FOR DISPLACED INDIVIDUALS

As part of its emergency response to Hurricanes Charley and Frances, Florida Housing has also identified vacant units throughout the State that may immediately be available for rent to individuals and families displaced by the storms. This list of vacancies is available on Florida Housing's website at www.floridahousing.org and it provides a county-by-county listing of properties that have vacant units along with the addresses and telephone numbers of those properties. Because this vacancy information is likely to change frequently, individuals seeking housing should contact several developments in areas where they are interested in residing.

LAWSUIT SAYS GROUP HOME RULES TARGET DISABLED

A federal lawsuit claims that people with disabilities are being discriminated against by a Lincoln, Nebraska ordinance requiring group homes to be at least a half-mile apart and by the state fire code covering group homes.

Developmental Services of Nebraska Inc. has filed the suit in U.S. District Court, naming the City of Lincoln and State Fire Marshal Dennis Hohbein as defendants.

The suit alleges that the ordinance and fire code violate the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Fair Housing Act and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The fire code sets different standards for group homes than for other types of housing. The city ordinance restricts the placement of group homes for people with disabilities.

The Lincoln-based agency operates group homes in Omaha and Lincoln for people with developmental disabilities, mental illnesses and behavioral disorders. The lawsuit grew out of its yearlong attempt to add residents at three Lincoln homes. Each has three developmentally disabled residents, and the agency wanted to add a fourth resident at each. Although the homes met requirements with three residents, having a fourth would put them in the category of "group homes."

The city denied certificates of occupancy for two of the three homes because they were within a half-mile of another group home. The Lincoln Bureau of Fire Prevention, acting on behalf of the state fire marshal, denied certificates for all three because they didn't meet stricter safety codes for group homes.

FLORIDA HOUSING HOSTS SPECIAL NEEDS FORUM

Florida Housing Finance Corporation (FHFC) hosted a special needs forum on August 5th in Tallahassee to generate dialogue on improving homebuyer programs that more effectively serve persons with disabilities. Participants in the roundtable discussion included Jane Johnson and Scott Marcelais of FAAST, representatives from the Brain and Spinal Cord Injury Program, the Deaf Service Bureau, the Advocacy Center, Grove House, the Florida Independent Living Council, the ADA Working Group, the Florida DD Council, the Florida Housing Coalition and others.

FHFC is considering increasing down payment assistance for very-low income homebuyers with disabilities, offering low- or no-interest second mortgages to reduce the first mortgage, and offering a home modification financing program to assist with the cost of making a home accessible. FHFC is also working to increase awareness within the disability community of existing homeownership programs.

The discussion was very informative and productive, and will hopefully be the first step towards a solid partnership between FHFC and the disability community as we work together to create more affordable and accessible housing opportunities for Floridians with disabilities.

U.S. POVERTY ON THE RISE FOR THIRD STRAIGHT YEAR

On August 26, the U.S. Census Bureau released findings from its annual report on *Income, Poverty and Health Coverage in the United States*. For the third straight year, the overall poverty rate in the United States increased. The official poverty rate rose from 12.1 percent in 2002 to 12.5 percent in 2003 -- an increase of 1.3 million persons. Real median household income remained stagnant at \$43,318 and the percentage of the number of persons without health coverage rose by 1.4 million to a total of 45 million.

The non-metropolitan poverty rate remained unchanged from 2002 at 14.2 percent, which is 1.7 percentage points above the national poverty rate. Poverty rates among non-metro persons in single, women-headed households with children are astoundingly high at 43.4 percent. The report, *Income, Poverty, and Health Insurance Coverage in the United States: 2003*, is available on the Internet at www.census.gov/hhes/www/income.html.