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## County moves toward balance on Section 8 program

*"The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy."*

-- Martin Luther King Jr.

### By Supervisor Federal Glover



PUBLIC SERVICE IS a constant balancing act. As an elected official, I am charged with balancing the needs of all citizens.

As an elected official, I am also charged with protecting the rights of all citizens.

A problem arises when the "needs" of one group conflicts with the "rights" of another.

Whether the issue in question has been negligent landlords, careless renters or new approaches to code enforcement, I share the desire of Antioch residents to create lasting solutions. In the past six months, the county has acted on some of your concerns.

1. The decision to open a Housing Authority office in Antioch was our first step in addressing some of the concerns this community raised. This office has provided a point of contact for landlords, tenants, public officials and neighbors to raise questions, make suggestions and begin working cooperatively to solve the issues.

2. A soft real estate market means we have a higher than usual number of property owners approaching the Housing Authority and requesting to participate in the Section 8 program. We have conducted a workshop to assist landlords in understanding how the screening process works and to alert them of their rights and the recourses they may have if they encounter any difficulties.

3. We have partnered with the Antioch Police Department and City Code Enforcement to identify program participants who violate the rules. Our Housing Authority staff has been moving as quickly as possible to remove offenders from the program role.

On the flip side of the code enforcement effort, we have supported the city of Antioch's efforts to hold landlords accountable for maintaining their property to a standard acceptable to the community, a practice that is already in effect in the unincorporated parts of our county through our Renters' Ordinance.

The recent findings of an audit by HUD and the Inspector General's office are of grave concern to us. In dealing with a wide range of issues, we need to depend on staff to

provide us the information we need to address those issues. It is troubling when as an elected official you have been repeatedly assured by staff that procedures are in order when in actuality they are not.

Listening to staff may sometimes appear we are not paying attention.

We are paying attention. It is no longer business as usual for the Housing Authority.

The audit raises troubling questions and I am demanding answers and taking steps to assure that the problems pointed out by the audit are being addressed.

Many Section 8 voucher recipients move from communities that are vastly different from ours.

We don't know what it's like to fear for our kids' safety walking down the street, to be constantly looking over our shoulder or to have landlords who don't care if our apartment is falling apart. In turn, our new residents sometimes don't understand some of the basics of what it means to be a good neighbor, to have a front yard or have a nurturing school environment.

Thus, in addition to the mandated background checks, we are going to require all voucher recipients to participate in an orientation program that helps them to understand how to relate to their new neighbors.

There will be changes in the way the rental payments are evaluated.

Lastly, in conjunction with JFK University, we are planning a series of community meetings to come up with long-term solutions that will address the concerns facing Antioch's residents. The solutions that will come out of those meetings will need to go beyond simply correcting Section 8. The Section 8 issue in Antioch is only a symptom of what troubles Antioch.

I must remind you that if there are any changes in Antioch in regards to the way the County manages Section 8, those changes -- by law -- will be applied to the entire county. The rules might change a bit, but it will still be the same playing field. Kids will still be looking for something to do after school. Antioch will still have an excess of housing stock, there will still be landlords looking for tenants for their rental units and there will still be a long waiting list of housing voucher participants.

Compared with other communities, Antioch still looks inviting as a place to raise families, a city that offers safe neighborhoods and schools, beautiful views and beautiful homes. Together, we can satisfy both the needs and rights of the community.

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