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NEWS RELEASE GREATER NEW ORLEANS FAIR HOUSING ACTION CENTER

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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FAIR HOUSING CENTER OPPOSES LOUISIANA HOUSE BILL 223; CALLS ON CITIZENS TO TAKE A STAND

The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC) strongly opposes House Bill 223. If passed, the Bill's effect would be to limit affordable rental housing opportunities across Louisiana. The Bill has the potential to stymie attempts to provide housing opportunities for people with disabilities, the elderly and minorities. GNOFHAC calls on all citizens and advocates to contact Louisiana legislators and state their opposition to the Bill.

Specifically, the Bill yields to the "not in my backyard" sentiment previously expressed by the Jefferson Parish council and requires the Louisiana Housing Finance Agency to obtain parish governing body approval prior to approving applications for low-income housing tax credits or other "housing programs."

There are five major arguments against the Bill:

1. **Limits the construction of affordable housing:** Passage of HB 223 will make it even more difficult for developers to utilize the low-income housing tax credit program in constructing multi-family housing developments. If developers shy away from the program, the result will be a net loss in affordable housing production for the State.
2. **Limits housing for people with disabilities and minorities:** Research indicates that people with disabilities and minorities rely disproportionately on low-income tax credit housing. As such, any effort to limit tax credit housing will limit housing opportunities for people with disabilities and minorities. Thus, the consequences of HB 223 are a likely violation of the Fair Housing Act as it will likely have a disparate discriminatory effect on protected class members like people with disabilities, African-Americans, and Latinos.
3. **Endangers federal funding:** The Bill has the potential to endanger federal funding for Louisiana. Under the requirements of the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) Program being used by State officials to fund the Road Home and most other Rebuilding Programs, the State must affirmatively further fair housing in all its actions. A Bill that would limit housing opportunities for people with disabilities and minorities would indicate a failure to meet the affirmatively further requirement and possibly cause the state to lose some or all of its CDBG funding.

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4. **Sends a bad message nationally:** The Bill sends a bad message to Congress and the rest of the United States. In Louisiana's time of need and under the leadership of Louisiana's Congressional delegation, Congress awarded a record number of low-income tax credits to Louisiana to stimulate the replacement of the affordable housing stock destroyed in Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Passage of HB 223 limiting the use of the tax credits would communicate to Congress and the Nation that Louisiana is playing games with rebuilding funds and failing to take the aid American tax-payers have chosen to provide.
5. **The Bill is duplicative:** The Bill is duplicative in nature. Builders are already required to get city/parish approval through the basic permitting process that exists in every city and parish. Without this approval, builders can't begin construction on any project. As such, city and parish governments already have input in the process.

GNOFHAC calls on citizens to act quickly and aggressively, by informing Representative Toomy and the members of the Municipal, Parochial and Cultural Affairs Committee (the Committee charged with considering the Bill) that HB 223 must be terminated. Here is a list of actions advocates can take:

1. **Contact the author of HB 223:** Call or send a letter or email to Representative Toomy, the author of HB 223 (a sample letter can be located at this link): larep085@legis.state.la.us, (504)361-6013, (504)361-6687 (Fax), P. O. Box 157, Gretna, LA 70054.
2. **Contact the Committee Considering HB 223:** Call or send a letter or email to the members of the Municipal, Parochial and Cultural Affairs Committee. A sample letter can be located at this link and the contact information for each of the members of the Committee can be located at this link.
3. **Testify against HB 223:** Testify in opposition to the Bill at the Municipal, Parochial and Cultural Affairs Committee hearing. Contact Committee Staff to arrange testimony (Valerie Banks, 225-342-2401 or banksv@legis.state.la.us).

The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center (GNOFHAC) is a private non-profit organization. The Center was established by a group of concerned New Orleanians in 1995 with the help of the National Fair Housing Alliance and a grant from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development. GNOFHAC is dedicated to eliminating housing discrimination and furthering equal housing opportunities through education, outreach, advocacy, and enforcement of fair housing laws across the metro New Orleans and Baton Rouge areas.

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